



Self-Efficacy and Anxiety within an EFL Context

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Abstract

The current study is a quantitative research that aims to investigate the university students' self-efficacy levels and their relation to their anxiety within an EFL context. To do this, a quantitative research was conducted to scrutinize the self-efficacy and anxiety levels of students at a state university. The participants of the study were 150 first year students of the English Language Teaching Department. The gender of the students in addition to their parents' educational background were also incorporated into the study to detect the impact of students' individual and demographic differences on their levels of self-efficacy and anxiety. The results revealed a significant relationship between students' levels of self-efficacy and anxiety while indicating that the demographic differences may have a role in dealing with anxiety.

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1. Introduction

The significance of emotional dimensions in language learning and their positive or negative contribution to success have been studied by scholars in quest of reaching firm conclusions on factors influencing learning despite the elusive nature of psychological aspects. The necessity to work on affective factors is expressed by the American Psychologist Ernest Hilgard: 'purely cognitive theories of learning will be rejected unless a role is assigned to affectivity' (1963, p.267). Along with the introduction of psychological aspects to teaching and learning, many studies focused on the effect of motivation, self-efficacy and anxiety on learning. Motivation as the mostly studied affective factor is considered prominent with its positive influence on learning. It is commonly defined as inner drive, impulse, emotion or desire that moves one to a certain action. Another affective dimension that has been subject to a substantial amount of investigation is anxiety. Dissimilar to motivation, anxiety has negative associations. American Psychological Association in DSM-5 (2013) defines anxiety as a social disorder 'a persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny by others' (p.202). However, anxiety may be exhibited differently by individuals (McDonald, 2001). Scovel (1978) defines it as a vague fear which has an indirect relation with an object.

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Several tests have been developed to measure its characteristics; Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1991), Input Anxiety Scale, Processing Anxiety Scale and Output Anxiety Scale by MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) (as cited in Ellis, 2008). To facilitate higher levels of performance, Nitko (2001) argues teachers to be aware of the language learning anxiety factor, which can negatively impact the performances of students. Self-efficacy; on the other hand, is defined as a determinant factor in shaping how people feel, think and motivate themselves and behave. The current study resting on humanistic perspective seeks to explore the self-efficacy and anxiety levels of first year students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL from now on) context and find out whether there is a correlation between them with respect to their individual differences and their parents' demographic differences. The study comprises five parts as: review of literature, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

1.1. Literature review

Represented mainly in the works of Rogers (1961, 1980) and Maslow (1968), humanistic theory focuses on uniqueness of individuals. It is for the idea that human is a natural being and like other organisms they have internal tendency; that is, 'to develop their own potential to maintain and strengthen their organism' (Jingna,2012, p.32). According to Aloni (as cited in Khatip, Harem and Samidi, 2013) humanistic psychology emphasizes the notions of self-worth, importance of feelings as well as facts and personal development being as significant academic development. The receiver of education is first a human being, then a learner.

Wang (2005) basing on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, states that failing to meet physical needs causes failure in learning. In the humanistic tradition, individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions play a major role in human development. The followings are what the theory offers as essentials:

1. Each person is unique and is a whole at the same time
2. Each person has the innate potential for a fully developed self
3. Self is good
4. Each person intuitively knows what s/he needs for own growth
5. Each person has self-agency (determining own personal growth)

Humanistic theory also has implications on teaching and learning. It argues that learning is not externally controlled; rather internally driven. Therefore, it provides space for recognition of the affective dimension in learning which leads to personal change (Roberts, 1998). Dörnyei (2001) regards motivation as a key determinant of language learners' success or failure and defines motivation as learner's enthusiasm, commitment or persistence by which students can achieve a working knowledge of target language, regardless of their language aptitude. A large number of researchers working on the role of motivation in language teaching design motivational strategies to be used in the classroom. These strategies provide insight into the learners' different approaches to different tasks; in order words, individual differences among language learners (Noels, Pelletier, Clement & Vallerand, 2000). Similar to motivation, self-efficacy, which is one of the most influential psychological factors in people's life, plays a dominant role in identifying goals and accomplishing them. Nevertheless, for some people putting these plans into action is not so simple. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. According to Bandura (1994), people with a strong sense of self-efficacy feel that they can master challenging tasks, devote themselves to their interests and activities and digress easily from disappointments by heightening and sustaining their efforts in the face of failure. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal

accomplishments, reduces stress and lowers vulnerability to depression. Bandura states four sources of self-efficacy as; achieving progress in a task, seeing people similar to oneself succeeded by effort, being encouraged by others in a positive way to overcome self-doubt and emotional states and physical reactions as well as stress levels. People who judge themselves as efficacious in managing potential threats neither fear nor shun them. However, if people's reaction to a challenging task is not adequately strong to overcome its negative impact, it may weaken self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989). When people are dissatisfied with their personal efficacy, they quickly abandon the skills they have been taught. They view threats anxiously and avoid them. Those who lack confidence in their academic skills envision a low grade before they even begin an exam or enroll in a course, which is critical especially at the high school and university levels (Pajares, 2005). Although a considerable amount of research focused on the role of self-efficacy in different areas of learning, fewer studies were conducted in the context of EFL. Nevertheless, there has been a rising interest in self-efficacy beliefs of both parties: students and teachers in the field of EFL. The research studies have examined self-efficacy in relation to students' achievement (Anyadubalu, 2010; Barrows, Dunn and Lloyd, 2013; Hsieh and Kang, 2010; Hsieh and Schallert, 2008; Moghari et al., 2011; Rahimpour and Nariman-Jahan, 2010; Tılfarlıoğlu and Çiftçi, 2011; Wang, Spencer and Xing, 2009), learning strategies (Khajavi and Ketabi, 2012; Magogwe and Oliver, 2007; Shang, 2010; Wang and Li, 2010) and language anxiety (Anyadubalu, 2010; Erkan and Saban, 2011; Mills, Pajares and Herron, 2006).

Another variable which is aimed to explore in the current study is anxiety. In general terms, anxiety is an affective aspect in language learning which is associated with the feeling of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and worry and said to have a negative effect on foreign language learning. At the global level, trait anxiety is defined as individual's being anxious generally and predictably. Dörnyei (2005) points out two dimensions to comprehend anxiety: beneficial/facilitating inhibitory/debilitating anxiety and trait versus state anxiety. Beneficial versus facilitating dichotomy refers to whether anxiety affects learning in a positive or negative way. Trait versus state anxiety dichotomy is whether anxiety is continuous or momentary. Individuals with high trait anxiety are inclined to perceive a wide range of situations as dangerous or threatening and to respond to those situations with increased anxiety. In the current study, the researcher conducted a survey of students' English language self-efficacy and global anxiety levels and investigated to find out whether there existed a relationship between them. Whether or not the degree of self-efficacy and anxiety displayed differences with regard to demographic variables was further investigated.

1.2. Research questions

The present study identified the following research questions:

1. What are the self-efficacy and anxiety levels of first year students of EFL?
2. Is there a correlation between students' self-efficacy and anxiety levels?
3. Do the degree of self-efficacy and anxiety differ concerning gender and parents' educational background?

2. Method

The current study adopts a quantitative methodology that aims to explore the English language self-efficacy and global anxiety levels, their relationship and the role of students' individual differences and their parents' educational background. Thus, after a 14 week Advanced Reading and Writing Course the first year students of English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT) Department of

Necmettin Erbakan University were distributed a questionnaire comprising a multi-dimensional scale. The role of the questionnaire was to investigate the self-efficacy levels of the students as far as foreign language learning is concerned. As a secondary objective of the study the global anxiety levels of the students were also investigated. Finally, both the self-efficacy and anxiety levels of the students were examined through statistical procedures to determine whether there exists any correlation in between these two variables in terms of students' individual differences and their parents' educational background.

2.1. Sample / Participants

The study was conducted at the ELT Department of Necmettin Erbakan University in Konya, Turkey. The number of the participants was 150. They were first year students whose ages ranged from 17 to 24. As the majority of the English Language Teaching Department are usually female students, the female students constituted the population of the study. The students of the department took the national exam which verifies them to be satisfactory enough to enroll in the university program prepared by the Higher Education Council. Therefore, despite being non-native, the participants were supposed to be almost at the same proficiency level acknowledged according to the centralized entrance exam.

2.2. Data collection procedures

The data of the present study were gathered using a multi-dimensional scale comprising two Likert-type scales: English Language Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (0= Never do; 7 = Certainly do) that consists of 35 items and Anxiety Scale (1=Hardly Ever and 4=Almost always) that consists of 20 items. During the measurement of the results attained from the questionnaires both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to determine any possible associations with their gender and their parents' educational background.

The first instrument used in the study was English as a Foreign Language Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (EFL-SEQ), which was adapted from a study by Pajares (2006). It was originally designed for a French course as an 8-point Likert-type scale including 40 items. While the first 35 questions were used to determine students' certainty on performing a particular task in English the last five questions were concerned with global self-efficacy so they were extracted from the questionnaire. The items of the scale were scored from 0 to 7 and the total scores turned out to range between 0 and 280. The scale items employed in the study were translated and validated by Tilfarlıoğlu and Cinkara (2007).

The second scale of the questionnaire was the State/Trait Anxiety Inventory developed by Charles D. Spielberger (1983) which includes 20 items with either direct or reverse statements. The direct statements reflect negative emotions while reverse statements represent positive emotions. In order to calculate the anxiety score, the scores obtained from direct statements were subtracted from the score of reverse statements and a previously determined value-35- was added to the score. The relatively high scores reflect high levels of anxiety.

Since the focal point of the current study is to determine the levels of both self-efficacy and global anxiety, the study did not necessitate any experimental procedure during the course selected. Instead, a questionnaire comprising a multi-dimensional scale was distributed to the participants of the study. Therefore, following the permission procedures of Necmettin Erbakan University the students were directly handed in 150 questionnaires. All the questionnaires were returned back to the researcher without any loss.

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis of the current study was realized using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 15. Independent samples T-test, one-way ANOVA and bi-variate correlation were used to analyze the data.

The results of the multidimensional scale of the questionnaire that represent the students' levels of self-efficacy and global anxiety, and the correlation between these two in terms of their gender and parents' demographic background are all submitted in the tables with the abbreviations: number of the participants with (N), mean with (Mean), standard deviation with (Std. Deviation), degrees of freedom with (df), F statistics with (F), Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Pearson Cor).

3. Results

Research Question 1. What are the self-efficacy and anxiety levels of first year students of EFL?

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation scores of the participants regarding their self-efficacy and anxiety levels. The mean score of the students' attitudes for the self-efficacy is 183 and for the anxiety is 43. Also, the standard deviation scores are 29 and 10 respectively.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations concerning the students' EFL Self-efficacy and Anxiety Levels

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---------------|-------|----------------|-----|
| Self-efficacy | 183,1 | 29, 6 | 150 |
| Anxiety | 43,0 | 10,0 | 150 |

Research Question 2: Is there a correlation between students' self-efficacy and anxiety levels?

Table 2 represents the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient which was implemented to determine any correlation between EFL Self-efficacy and Anxiety Levels. A significant ($p < .05$) negative correlation ($r = -.19$) was detected between self-efficacy and anxiety, which means the level of EFL self-efficacy stands to be high when the anxiety appears to be low.

Table 2. Correlation between EFL Self-efficacy and Anxiety Levels

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Self-efficacy | Pearson Cor | 1 | -,19 (*) |
| | p | | ,02 |
| | n | 150 | 150 |
| Anxiety | Pearson Cor | -, 19 (*) | 1 |
| | p | ,02 | |
| | | 150 | 150 |

Research question 3: Do the degrees of self-efficacy and anxiety differ in terms of individual differences and parents' educational background?

In order to investigate whether students' gender had an effect on their levels of EFL self-efficacy and anxiety, a T-test was conducted, results of which are displayed in Table 3 below. As seen on Table 3 it was found out that there was a significant difference between the self-efficacy mean scores of females and males (Mean =179 for females and Mean =190 for males). Thus, males appear to have a higher level of self-efficacy belief compared to females. Furthermore, the level of anxiety among females is again higher than the level of anxiety among males (Mean = 44 for females and Mean = 39 for males).

Table 3. T-test results for the students' EFL self-efficacy and anxiety levels in terms of gender

| | Gender | n | Mean | Std. Deviation | df | t | p |
|---------------|--------|----|---------|----------------|-----|------|-------|
| Self-efficacy | female | 95 | *179,66 | 28,88 | 146 | 2.10 | .03* |
| | male | 53 | *190,41 | 30,28 | | | |
| Anxiety | female | 95 | *44,91 | 9,95 | 146 | 3.33 | .001* |
| | male | 53 | *39,41 | 9,18 | | | |

Table 4 shows means and standard deviations concerning the students' fathers' educational background. It is apparent from Table 4 that the standard deviation scores for the students' fathers' educational background reveal higher results for the EFL self-efficacy levels (35.2, 33, 27, 22.5, 30) than the anxiety levels (4.5, 9.8, 9, 9.7, 10.7), which would make the statistical model for the anxiety (mean) more meaningful and homogeneous. Also, when compared to the primary school graduates (N = 61), the number of the fathers graduated from university is slightly above 50% of the primary school graduates (N = 34).

Table 4. Means and standard deviations concerning the students' fathers' educational background

| Fathers' Educational Background | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------|----------------|
| Anxiety | No schooling | 4 | 47,0 |
| | Primary school | 61 | 43,7 |
| | Secondary school | 18 | 43,2 |
| | High School | 33 | 45,2 |
| | University | 34 | 39,0 |
| | Total | 150 | 43,0 |
| Eng.self-efficacy | No schooling | 4 | 204,2 |
| | Primary school | 61 | 178,6 |
| | Secondary school | 18 | 188,1 |
| | High School | 33 | 183,7 |
| | University | 34 | 185,6 |
| | Total | 150 | 183,1 |

Table 5 displays the results of One-Way ANOVA regarding the correlation between the levels of EFL self-efficacy and the anxiety and the students' fathers' educational background, which was conducted to decide whether the EFL self-efficacy and the anxiety levels of the students show diversity in regard to their fathers' educational background. It is clear from Table 5 that there is not a significant difference in the EFL self-efficacy and anxiety levels of the students ($p > .05$). Nevertheless, when the means related to the anxiety level of the students are concerned, the numbers indicate that the anxiety level of the students decrease as their fathers' educational levels increase.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA results for the correlation between the levels of anxiety, the EFL self-efficacy and the students' fathers' educational background.

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Anxiety | Between Groups | 805,61 | 4 | 201,40 | 2,07 | ,08 |
| | Within Groups | 14110,36 | 145 | 97,31 | | |
| | Total | 14915,97 | 149 | | | |
| Self-efficacy | Between Groups | 3702,8 | 4 | 925,70 | 1,05 | ,38 |
| | Within Groups | 127603,3 | 145 | 880,02 | | |
| | Total | 131306,1 | 149 | | | |

Table 6 displays the means and the standard deviations concerning students' mothers' educational background. It is clear from Table 6 that the standard deviation scores for the students' mothers' educational background reveal higher results for the EFL self-efficacy levels (27.77, 31.64, 28.21, 23.85, 21.86) than the anxiety levels (10.23, 9.82, 9.55, 10.46, 10.22,). This situation would make the statistical model for the anxiety (mean) more meaningful and homogeneous. Also, when compared to the primary school graduates ($N = 91$), the number of the mothers graduated from university is rather low (11).

Table 6. Means and standard deviations concerning the students' mothers' educational background

| Mothers' Educational Background | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----|--------|----------------|
| Anxiety | No schooling | 12 | 41,91 | 10,23 |
| | Primary School | 91 | 43,23 | 9,82 |
| | Secondary School | 11 | 47,81 | 9,55 |
| | High School | 25 | 42,56 | 10,46 |
| | University | 11 | 38,63 | 10,22 |
| | Total | 150 | 43,01 | 10,00 |
| EFL Self-efficacy | No schooling | 12 | 198,58 | 27,77 |
| | Primary School | 91 | 179,75 | 31,64 |
| | Secondary School | 11 | 190,54 | 28,21 |
| | High School | 25 | 189,04 | 23,85 |
| | University | 11 | 174,00 | 21,86 |
| | Total | 150 | 183,18 | 29,68 |

Table 7 denotes the results of One-Way ANOVA regarding the correlation between the EFL self-efficacy, and the anxiety levels and the students' mothers' educational background, which was conducted to decide whether the EFL self-efficacy and the anxiety levels of the students show diversity in regard to their mothers' educational background. Overtly, Table 7 shows no significant difference ($p > .05$) between the EFL self-efficacy and the anxiety levels of the students in regard to their mothers' educational background.

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA results for the correlation between the levels of anxiety, the EFL self-efficacy and the students' mothers' educational background.

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Anxiety | Between Groups | 488,56 | 4 | 122,14 | 1,22 | ,30 |
| | Within Groups | 14427,41 | 145 | 99,49 | | |
| | Total | 14915,97 | 149 | | | |
| English Self-efficacy | Between Groups | 6294,85 | 4 | 1573,71 | 1,82 | ,12 |
| | Within Groups | 125011,28 | 145 | 862,14 | | |
| | Total | 131306,14 | 149 | | | |

4. Discussion

Bandura (1994) has found that an individual's self-efficacy plays a major role in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached. Within the context of EFL, a great majority of the studies focused on the effect of self-efficacy and anxiety on student academic achievement (Anyadubalu, 2010; Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Davis et al., 2008). There is a limited number of studies investigating the relationship between students' perception of EFL self-efficacy and trait anxiety. The anxiety and self-efficacy levels are found to be exceptionally uncorrelated in studies by Cubukcu (2008) and Güngör and Yaylı (2012) in Turkish EFL context. In the current study, however, it was found out that there is a negative relationship between students' self-efficacy and trait anxiety, which is in line with Anyadubalu (2010), Erkan and Saban (2011), MacIntyre & Gardner (1995), Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006).

Concerning the variables of gender and the students' parents' educational background, the results indicate that the male students have a higher level of self-efficacy beliefs compared to the females. This situation contradicts with Senemoglu et al.'s (2009) study revealing no significant difference between the EFL self-efficacy scores and the gender of the participants. Nonetheless, the current study supports Güngör and Yaylı's (2012) study in that there is a difference between the EFL students' self-efficacy, and the anxiety scores with regard to their gender and parents' educational background. The level of anxiety among females appeared to be higher than the level of anxiety among males. When the means related to anxiety level of the students are concerned, the numbers indicate that the anxiety level of the students decreased as their fathers' educational levels increased. On the other hand, it was found that there is not a significant difference regarding the self-efficacy and anxiety scores when the mentioned variables were considered.

5. Conclusions

The present study should be evaluated within its limitations. The first limitation is associated with the statistical aspect of the study since it hardly provides generalizable results due to its limited number of participants. Second, it is necessary to evaluate the current study in terms of EFL context in conformity with its context-specific research design. Hence, the findings of the study may show diversity in ESL environment as more or less effective and beneficial, especially taking EFL self-efficacy into consideration. Third, the study is based on self-reported data. Therefore, the validity of the results relies to some extent on the participants' honesty. What is more, as correlation studies monitor only the relation between the variables, they do not display the cause-effect relationship between the self-efficacy, and the anxiety or other variables. After all, similar to the other studies in the literature, the current study did not examine the students' self-efficacy beliefs over a long period of time. Thus, the students' beliefs and perceptions may change in the course of the time.

Ultimately, the following conclusions can be stated based on the findings of the study: First, the study indicated that there was a negative relationship between the self-efficacy scores and the anxiety scores of the participants, which indicates that the more self-efficacy the students have the less anxiety they feel. Second, the individual differences such as gender and their fathers' educational background displayed diversity, which seems to be a further case of socio-cultural study since the family cultural structure in Turkey is a patriarchal one. Consequently, further research seems to be necessary to probe self-efficacy, anxiety and individual differences in EFL context through qualitative, quantitative or quasi-experimental methods to determine the place of cultural elements between self-efficacy, anxiety scores and their relation to individual differences.

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Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğretimi Ortamında Özyeterlik ve Kaygı Durumları

Öz

Bu çalışma İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiđi bir üniversite ortamında öğrencilerin özyeterlik ve kaygı durumlarını ve ikisi arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlayan nicel bir araştırmadır. Çalışmada, bir devlet üniversitesindeki öğrencilerin özyeterlik ve kaygı durumlarını incelemek için nicel yöntemler kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın evrenini İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümünden 150 birinci sınıf öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Öğrencilerin bireysel ve demografik farklılıklarının özyeterlik ve kaygı durumlarına etkisini ortaya çıkarmak için katılımcıların cinsiyeti ve ebeveynlerinin eğitim geçmişi de çalışmaya katılmıştır. Çalışmadaki bulgular öğrencilerin özyeterlik ve kaygı durumları arasında kayda değer bir ilişki olduğunu ve cinsiyet ve demografik farklılıkların da özyeterlik ve kaygı durumlarında bir rolü olabileceğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: özyeterlik; yabancı dil olarak İngilizce; kaygı

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