Preservice EFL teachers' online learning anxiety

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Abstract
With a prompt rise in the development of technology and with the advent of the internet in the 1990s, walls of classrooms have been demolished by the innovations of the current century. These developments also breathe new life into foreign language education and change the concept of the classroom while casting challenging roles for both learners and instructors, which ends up a new type of education on the stage of online education platforms. This brand-new way of foreign language learning has brought about extra anxiety in learners. In order to find out the reasons for foreign language anxiety, which affects learners' process of foreign language learning in the online world, a total number of 75 undergraduate foreign language learners (n=75) who are taking online oral communication courses in the English Language Teacher Education Program (the Spring of the academic year 2019-2020) at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Turkey are involved in this research voluntarily. This study aims to investigate what kind of effects online learning has on foreign language learners' anxiety in the process of online foreign language education, what the challenges are for online foreign language learners, how learners perceive online foreign language education, and what the learners' perceived reasons are for anxiety in an online foreign language learning environment through semi-structured interview forms. Certain significant factors which affect learners' foreign language learning anxiety in an online world context have been determined. Some certain suggestions are made to alleviate the foreign language anxiety levels of the learners in online foreign language learning contexts.

Introduction

With the progress in international integration under the name of globalization, a new era has been ushered in language education, and necessarily learning different languages has gained prominence, intending to sustain interaction among people around the world. Thanks to the Lingua Franca statute of English, learning this language has become a must for all world citizens. Numerous studies have been conducted to find out the most effective language learning ways and the factors which

influence the process of language learning to provide the best foreign language achievement. Considering previous literature, it has been revealed that learning a foreign language demands much more than the requirements provided by instructors, students, and materials provided in the classroom, where 'two plus two equals four' does not always work. It has been suggested that individual differences (IDs) are inseparable components of foreign language learning and play a key role in foreign language achievement. Scovel's (1978) review urged greater scientific and methodological rigor upon foreign language learning researchers, teacher educators, and teachers who investigate affective variables in second/foreign language learning; this interest has led to substantial, diverse, and exciting contributions to the literature in the field and in turn, IDs have been highlighted and started to be taken into consideration in foreign language learning research field since then. Approximately four decades ago, before IDs studies, learners were traditionally stigmatized as 'good and bad or smart and dull' considering their ups and downs in the process of foreign language achievement. Bearing the idea that foreign language learning is not experienced in isolated glass jars; therefore, it is prone to be affected by different factors and the complex nature of human learning, it would be safe to claim that there exists more than one factor not only affecting learners' feelings toward foreign language learning but also affecting each other in the foreign language learning process.

Among affective factors, since foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a knotty construct, it has consistently attracted the attention of second/foreign language learning researchers across the globe, and therefore, among these factors, the most extensively researched one is probably anxiety (Ay, 2010; Bekleyen, 2009; Chametzky, 2013; Gardner, Smythe, Clement & Gliksman, 1976; Liu, 2006; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Pichette, 2009; Rassaei, 2015; Woodrow, 2011; Zhang, 2013, Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017). Since FLA has been a well-researched topic, foreign language researchers and educators have a better insight into anxiety in foreign language classrooms and the consecutive stress which puts obstacles for foreign language learners along with its debilitative effects on the whole learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). While certain components of anxiety have been determined for a traditional learning environment, there is still a limited number of studies have

been conducted regarding online foreign language learning environments, which have become a center of interest in educational fields over the past three decades.

With a rapid rise in the development of technology and with the advent of the internet in the 1990s, walls of classrooms have been demolished by the innovations of the current century. Regarding the speed and scope of this development for the entire society, this development is labeled as the 'Internet Revolution' by Amichai-Hamburger (2002), referring to the massive impact of the 'Industrial Revolution' of the nineteenth century. The style in which learners in the 21st-century access to education has changed and has become entirely incompatible with the way learners in earlier generations learned (Salcado, 2010) because of the ever-expanding bandwidth and functionality of the internet (Chametzky & Shaw, 2009). These developments also breathe new life into foreign language education as well as changing the concept of the classroom while casting challenging roles for both learners and instructors, which ends up a new type of education on the stage of online education platforms. Along with all, difficulties and changes in methodologies so far have brought a question to mind:

1. What kind of effect does online learning have on foreign language learners' anxiety in the process of online foreign language education?

2. What are the challenges for online foreign language learners, and how do learners perceive online foreign language education?

3. What are learners' perceived reasons for anxiety in an online foreign language learning environment?

Just as Aslim-Yetiş and Çapan (2013) state, research on foreign language anxiety (FLA) in online education contexts are limited in number; components of anxiety and anxiety experiences of foreign language learners, who are educated online, are not clear enough because of scarce literature. Research about foreign language learning anxiety has primarily been conducted in traditional settings where-to-face education takes place. Consequently, this drove us as a researcher to conduct research on the impact of online education on FLA experiences of undergraduate students under the framework drawn in this study; certain major suggestions are to be presented.

Literature Review

Evidence emphasizing anxiety as an affective factor experienced by learners in online education environments has been based on both research methods, which are qualitative and quantitative; they have mostly dwelled upon isolated learning situations rather than community learning environments. Quantitative methods have primarily employed conducting self-reports to scale anxiety considering various online education activities; using computers (Saadé & Kira, 2009), using worldwide web connections (Thatcher et al., 2007), computer-generated intercommunication (Brown et al., 2004), while qualitative and mixed methods have been employed to shine a light learners' anxiety experiences, and other affective factors in online education environments. Such research have generally aimed to investigate specific affective factors (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012), affecting experiences (Zembylas, 2008) or shared experiences (Donelan & Kear, 2018) existing in online education settings**.**

Foreign Language Anxiety

Classrooms are realized to be more than a room in which a class of students is taught; therefore, the existence of a myriad of affective factors, which are emotional factors influencing learning in either facilitative or debilitative ways, such as FLA, has become a central issue among achievement influencing factors in a learning setting (Chastain, 1988). FLA, nevertheless, as a special kind of anxiety, is not identified until the middle of the 1980s. Horwitz et al. (1986) realize the existence of FLA and define it as not trait-specific but case-specific anxiety. FLA is incompatible with the other academic subjects' types of anxiety due to the fact that other fields do not demand self-conception and self-expression to the extent that language study does. For the time being, the influence of FLA has been considered to be employed within the complex network of factors having impaction on the level of success of foreign language achievement in such a way that it is infrequent to encounter studies in English as a foreign language (EFL) context dwelling upon either IDs or affective factors that do not touch on FLA.

Moreover, once scholars consider IDs in foreign language learning, anxiety is generally the first concern to be discussed (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Arnold and Brown (1999) have ascertained the importance of FLA by claiming that it is the most influential affective factor 'obstructing the learning process'. Accordingly, there exist multitudinous definitions of FLA in the literature. In their recently produced

paper on learner characteristics, Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) have defined FLA as the distress and adversely affecting reaction when learning and performing a second/ foreign language, and it is particularly pertinent to a classroom and using a foreign language where self-expression takes part. Anxiety has also been identified as an inner feeling of nervousness, apprehension, pressure, and uneasiness in connection with the incentive of the instinctive nervous center (Talebinejad & Nekouei, 2013). Horwitz et al. (1986) believe that FLA is not an isolated factor but an amalgam of complex subjective and affective traits, such as self-concepts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. Inverse correlations between anxiety and foreign language learning have been revealed in some studies (Aida, 1994; Bekleyen, 2009; Horwitz, 1986; Woodrow, 2011; Zhang, 2013). It is clearly seen that there exists a strong relationship between FLA and language learners' performances. There have been many attempts to identify the sources of FLA, but as Horwitz (2001) states, it is rocket science to determine anxiety or other factors that interfere with the language learning process. In online settings, different aspects of investigating language learner anxiety also come about for the reason that the technology factor has been highly affected learners' learning process.

While six causes of anxiety are identified by Zhang and Rahimi (2014) as; personal or interpersonal problems, the interaction between student and instructor, processes in the classroom, the assessment of language, the instructors' and learners' attitudes towards learning. In an online environment, Chametzky (2013) adds three more possible sources of anxiety; the experience background of learners in an online education environment; having technophobia; the complex online education environment due to the fact that the increasing educational responsibilities found on learners (Oguz & Bahar, 2008) and the technical necessities required for online education is different and complex.

Online Education and Foreign Language Anxiety

Reviewing the relevant literature, one encounters several different terms used for online education, such as distance learning, online learning, or e-learning (Moore et al., 2011); however, distance learning is the broadest of these three, and online learning refers to a synchronized environment while e-learning is synchronized setting (Simonson & Schlosser, 2009). All in all, online education refers to different

kinds of environments where learners and educators are not physically in the exact location (Blake, 2008).

To turn our face again to Chametzky's (2013) anxiety sources identification, it can be claimed that learner experiences in online education have a significant role on foreign language anxiety; furthermore, Hurd (2007) and Xiao (2012) state that in online foreign language education settings, it may be more demanding to determine students with anxiety by some scholars. Blake (2008) notes that the prominent issue in this sense as that instructors and educational theoreticians have overlooked the experiences of online learners and the potential impacts that technology might have on them in undergraduate online foreign language education settings. Due to this lack of awareness (Egberg et al., 2009), instructors put learners into severe sociological (Nsomewe-a-nfunkwa, 2010), cultural (Drewelow & Theobald, 2007), and psychological (Pino, 2008) problems which possibly enhance their anxiety level. The mismatch between learners' expectations and experiences also causes anxiety in this sense (Kiliç-Çakmak et al., 2009). Old-school expectations that grow out of traditional class experiences of learners cannot be met in an online foreign language learning environment, which also causes learner anxiety resulting from misalignment between expectations and experiences. Another point to consider is the length of online instruction experienced by learners. In his study, Pichette (2009) reveals that learners who have more online education experience demonstrate less anxiety than the ones who have less online education experience, while there could not be found such a relationship in traditional classes in his study in which beginners and advanced language learners have been figured out to have the same level of anxiety in traditional classes.

The second factor concerns the effects of technophobia experienced by language learners in an online education context. Some learners feel serious hesitation in using technology and show signs of technophobia due to a lack of experience or bad experience in the context of the online education environment encountered before (Anderson & Williams, 2011; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). According to Hesser and Kontos (1997), a successful course methodology of online delivery help learners with weak or no technical skills to perform in an increasingly positive way throughout online education. According to Day and Lloyd (2010), the previous reciprocal interrelation between the learner and technology has essential role in the learning

experience. Hamilton (2009) puts forward that there is a strong relationship between having good experience with technology and a positive attitude toward learning. Analyzing the data from certain studies have confirmed findings (Conrad, 2002; Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Swan & Shih, 2005) that with the aim of extinguishing negative affections involved in online foreign language education procedure, the learners are required to get acquainted with technology in advance to maintain quality communication with other learners and educators besides becoming good at knowledge organization and time management. Peng et al. (2006) state that technical skills which are required for using computers and web-based tools stem from learners' functioning in online foreign language education settings; in the same way, learners' insights of the internet form learners' online behaviors and approach towards online education (Tsai & Lin, 2004). The media naturalness theory explains this by considering the only affective factor which causes negative emotions resulting from the technology use of learners. Kock (2011), considering media naturalness theory, claims that synchronous interaction often presents significant difficulties and impediments to learners for the reason that learners experience an immediate growth in mental work, interaction ambiguity, and a decline in enthusiasm. Therefore, learners who are familiar with current multi-media applications and developing technology and educators who can link up such acquaintances to make the knowledge easier to achieve make less effort than those who do not get acquainted with technology in online education. Such a challenge may not seem possible for some researchers considering today's learners, who are regarded as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) of online education because of the fact that they are around their 20s. They are born into technology, so they feel comfortable with using technology in every phase of their lives (Wijekumar et al., 2006).

Due to the complexity of online language learning settings where the use of technology is a must, cognitive load limitation is one of the concerns regarding the complexity of online environments, which may lead language learners to be anxious (de Jong, 2010; I-Jung & Chi-Cheng, 2009). However, when uncertainty comes about, individuals incline to keep up with the change and integrate themselves into present thinking styles to avoid anxiety and confusion (Malkki, 2010; Mezirow, 2000). To this end, even if the system adopted for online education is complex,

learners might find a way to overcome this complexity. It has been seen that the roles of learners and educators changed, and learners' roles are upgraded in online environments because technological development has turned learners into suppliers (Blake, 2008) rather than only demanders (Coole & Watts, 2009) of information. Jashapara and Tai (2011) relate learners' expectations and the roles by stating that if a learner expects not to be active as s/he does in a traditional education setting, s/he will probably show great anxiety because of the fact that being active is a prerequisite in online education settings, along with all, the online environment offers many opportunities to users, by offering a number of technological devices, learners have a chance to hide behind the screens when they feel anxiety. In an online setting, such opportunities may down the level of anxiety learners' experience when they are required to speak before fellow learners and educators (Salcedo, 2010). Therefore, speechmaking in an online setting is possibly less anxiety-provoking than in traditional learning settings. The physical distance between educators and learners or between learners in online education settings makes learners feel more relaxed in such situations that oral effort is required (McBrien et al., 2009).

Although online education provides many opportunities, it has still been seen as a complex construct due to the extent of the burden on the learners' shoulders (Eldred, 1984; Knowles, 1984). In an online undergraduate educational setting, learners are required to have a proactive stance in the process of learning through managing their language learning (Coole & Watts, 2009; Eldred, 1984) and sustain their organization while doing their work in isolation (Mezirow, 2000). Some scholars support the idea that online learning environments are much more demanding than traditional settings due to the high educational responsibility imposed upon learners (Eldred, 1984; Knowles,1980; Oguz & Bahar, 2008) and the technological demands needed for online education, the online setting is viewed as a knotty construct for education. In their studies, Sun (2014) and Kostina (2013) have conducted research on online foreign language classes dwelling upon the challenges encountered by online language learners. Sun (2014) has identified these challenges as follows: assigned schedule, socialization, and engagement, participation, and collaboration problems, along with motivational and self-directed learning problems which online learners encounter in the process of online education. Kostina (2013) has also highlighted that, on the one hand, technological challenges, accelerate the tempo of

online education classes, and over-workload debilitatingly influence language learners; on the other hand, the comfort and resilience of the online foreign language classes provide learners with overall pleasure over their online education experience. Furthermore, Zhang and Cui (2010) have examined the feedback effect in online foreign language education setting, and they have discovered that insufficient feedback from educators and poor communication between educators and learners or between learners are determined as important challenges encountered by online language learners through the path of their language learning. All in all, it is safe to put forward that challenges experienced in online foreign language learning settings are included in the nature of online education.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study is among a few to offer a better understanding of the field in EFL contexts by providing qualitative data; this enables researchers to examine a more extensive representation of students' FLA experiences than that could be revealed by quantitative sources. Qualitative research is described as an approach for scrutinizing the significance that participants attributed to a problem (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative research design is employed for its holistic account feature that identifies the complex picture under the study. However, the research is proceeded in a natural setting by the researcher as a key instrument.

A narrative type of research is preferred in the study within a qualitative continuum for its expressive power. A semi-structured interview mode is adopted in which the researcher is comprehensively in control to enhance practice. The qualitative data are gathered via semi-structured online interview forms, which aim to obtain views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2014) in order to achieve a better insight into the constructs being investigated in this study.

Setting and Participants

A total number of 75 undergraduate students (n=75) have been enrolled in this study of their own free will. Eligibility criteria required individuals to have been taking an oral communication skills course, which has been offered fully online since March

23, 2020, via online platforms (Google Meet and Google Classroom) by the English Language Teacher Education Program in the course of data collection (the Spring of the academic year 2019-2020) at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Turkey. Out of 75 learners, 57 of them are female (n=57), while 18 of them are male. 92 % of the learners' ages are between 18-25. Seventy-five (n=75) of the learners, fifty-one of whom are female (n=51/ 68%), while twenty-four of them are male (n=24/ 32%), have been participated in the study by considering voluntariness constraints. Of the learners, fifty-nine (n=59/ 78.67%) of them are freshmen while the rest are determined as sophomore (n=6/ 8%), junior (n=3/ 4%), senior (n=7/ 9.33%) learners. Out of seventy-five learners, five of them (n=5/ 6.67%) are international students.

Instruments

Two semi-structured online interview forms are adopted as research tools in the present qualitative study.

Semi-structured Online Interviews

Two semi-structured online interview forms are used in the current study. The first one is created by the researcher regarding subdivisions of the Online World Language Anxiety Scale, which Chametzky adapts with permission from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) with the aim of determining the extent and level of foreign language learning anxiety experienced in the online world, and expert opinions. The interview form consists of a total of 18 questions, the first three questions of which concern demographics; the last two questions target the effect of COVID- 19 pandemics while the rest 13 regards online foreign language learning experiences of the undergraduate learners in online speaking skills courses. The second online interview form is designed considering the first data collection prompts. In this online interview form, learners are asked 13 questions offered in the form. Learners are given options about the language they would use (English / Turkish); therefore, two sets of surveys are available online while responding to questions to make them feel more comfortable. While responding to these 18-item and 13- item interview forms, learners are supposed to read and contribute with a written answer to each question carefully to go on with the next question.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The two qualitative data-gathering instruments are distributed online (Google Survey) to allow learners to fill in the semi-structured interview forms by sharing invitations

containing a link to it on virtual classrooms' (Google Classroom) notice boards. For the data collection, the invitation including the link shortly describes the study. After reading the explanation, including the research scope and objectives, learners are required to decide whether to contribute to this study or not. Given that they desire to respond by clicking on the link, learners are directed to a consent letter; following this, they are directed to the questionnaire, which has an introduction in which the aim of the study is again elucidated with an explanatory and plain language while asserting their data's confidentiality and requirements for volunteering. After responding to some demographic questions, the learners are directed to the first semi-structured interview form. After one week, a reminder is shared pursuant to the aforementioned procedure. After two weeks, learners are delivered the second Semi-structured Online Interview Form, and the same procedures are performed as in the first phase of the study. The use of interviews in the first and second phases helped for data comparison and triangulation with quantitative results (Bryman, 2016). Following all these processes enhance the reliability and validity of the findings that have been reported.

Quantitative data are analyzed and presented respectively regarding the 12 main categories included in the OWLAS (Chametzky, 2019). The data analysis from the semi-structured online interview forms includes the following phases of content analysis: transcribing, organizing, coding, interrelating, interpreting the data, and building theories from it (Creswell, 2014). The data are coded according to the traditional approach, which allows emerging in the course of data analysis. To this end, applying all the procedures for analyzing the qualitative data gathered, the themes of language learners' experiences are winnowed, and the underlying rationale for the language learners' online foreign language anxiety is determined. In this study, the data have been presented by considering the questions and variables with the aim of interpreting the obtained data for the reader in an understandable way.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are determined to be presented considering categories revealed in the codes as a result of the content analysis and the present online foreign language education conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic: 1) demographic variables, 2)

comfort, 3) distress resulting in extra anxiety, 4) concerns experienced in the online FL learning environment, 5) requesting help, 6) experience interference, 7) listening anxiety, 8) inadequacies in the process of FL learning, 9) speaking anxiety, 10) feeling the need to practice work before submission, 11) enhancing positivity,12) feeling of inferiority 13) COVID-19 effect. All the categories are analyzed and presented accordingly.

Demographic Variables

Initial questions of the instruments are designed to investigate the demographic variables of the study. Nearly 95% of the learners have online education for the first time, while the rest of them have more than a year of online education experience. Almost half of them claim that they are good with technology while the nearly other half are not sure about it. Out of 75 learners, 40 of them prefer using a computer, while the rest prefer smartphones as a mediating tool for online education. Approximately 70% of the learners are suffering from poor internet connection problems while they are taking online education.

Comfort

Taking the complex online education environment into consideration, it seems clear that almost half of the participants feel comfortable in the technically demanding nature of online education, there are still a significant number of learners who do not have positive feelings towards technology use. Regarding the interview responses about learners' comfort while using technology, it is discovered that learners' level of comfort is generally affected by external technological factors. There exist a number of learners who associate technological tool use skills with their comfort. This finding confirms a set of previous research (Anderson & Williams, 2011; Kostina, 2013; Nsomwe-a-nfunkwa, 2010; Rogerson- Revell, 2007; Sun, 2014) which claim that there exists a relationship between anxiety and technology use. It seems possible that these results stem from the lack of technology use skills of learners.

To go on with the debilitating factors which make learners uncomfortable during online classes, some of the learners point out that they are not feeling comfortable just because of poor internet connection or lack of the required technology devices rather than their lack of skills in technology use because some learners are not well equipped with the demanded technology for taking online FL

education, which poses a significant problem. These results agree with the findings of other studies in which opportunities and challenges of distance education are researched by Layng (2008).

In accordance with the responses, it can be inferred that learners do not want to take any other online foreign language class. The reasons behind this are delved into, and it is figured out that learners primarily relate their online education experiences with sharing comfort zone, course instructors, or the course itself and the workload assigned to them.

Using a webcam during the course is determined as an anxiety-provoking factor because of its sharing feature. This finding is in agreement with Kozar's (2015) findings which show perceptions of teachers and learners about webcam use in the context of computer-assisted foreign language learning as well as studies of Burger (2013) and Telles (2010), although these results differ from some published studies (Jauregi et al., 2012; Marcelli et al., 2005) which report the engaging and motivating effects of using webcam in the process of online foreign language learning. More than half of learners also state that they feel more uncomfortable when they are supposed to turn their webcams on, while some indicate that they feel more comfortable even if they are required to turn on their webcams compared to traditional class experiences. In other words, learners favor the face-saving environment of online education, and most of them put that they feel more comfortable behind the screens. There have been similarities between the attitudes expressed by present learners in our study and those described by Salcado (2010), who supports the view that giving learners the opportunity to hide behind the screen has a facilitative impact on their anxiety in the process of foreign language learning. A possible explanation for this might be that learners feel comfortable hiding not to feel anxious when they happen to make mistakes, which result from human beings' nature due to the instinctive desire to hide when something goes wrong.

Furthermore, almost half of the learners also note that they are feeling more comfortable because of being at home compared to traditional FL classless, even if they are required to open their webcams. However, family interruptions that occur during the courses have been ascertained to be another concern for learners to make them feel uncomfortable. These results match those found in an earlier study that

investigates interruptions in online education and their effects on learners' learning by Federman (2019). These rather contradictory references about webcam use may be due to learners' different lifestyles, including different problems, such as: having mentally disabled people at home or inconvenient conditions of the place where they sustain their lives; they simply do not want to share the atmosphere of their homes to save their face against their instructors and peers.

To go on with the course instructor factor affecting learners' comfort, some learners associate their feeling of discomfort with the manners of course instructors by referencing their experiences both in online and traditional FL classes. The present results demonstrate that ill-manners of instructors are prominent factors that have an effect on learners' comfort as well as their level of anxiety in accordance with previous studies (Drewelow & Theobald, 2007; Egberg, el al., 2009; Nsomewe-a-nfunkwa, 2010).The present findings seem to be consistent with other research conducted by Pino (2008), which finds that educators place learners at a psychological disadvantage in distance education context by ignoring possible effects that technology might have on them as also stated by Blake (2008). This finding agrees with the findings of another study conducted by Beebe et al. (2010). When instructors experience a poor transition to online education, it has been revealed that adverse consequences exist for learners during online education. Therefore, it may be inferred that instructors' feelings of anxiety due to the swift transition from a traditional setting to an online setting, which they are not familiar with before, and the second cause may be due to inexperience of instructors to manage online foreign language learning process; therefore, they do nothing but expect learners to keep up with all the assignments or tasks given flawlessly.

Along with the course instructor factor, learners are frequently expected to multitask with the aim of accomplishing tasks, and this workload (assignments, homework, etc.) in online classes is determined as another discomforting factor. This finding further supports the ideas of Chametzky (2013), who claims that the complex setting of online foreign language education, which requires multitasking, has an effect on learners' anxiety and comfort. A possible explanation for these results may be the lack of adequate practice in an online language learning environment which includes multitasking in its nature. Considering pandemic, it is also noticed that assigning too much homework and strict manners of instructors are basic challenges

that affect learners' psychology along with COVID-19 affected social environment, which causes unfortunate deaths around them. First, considering the workload, the findings of the current study are consistent with those of Bollinger (2017), who examines foreign language anxiety in distance learning foreign language classrooms and finds out that there exists a positive correlation between the number of assignments and anxiety of learners, and Kostina (2013), who investigates learner autonomy and student satisfaction in online Russian language courses reveals that high workload negatively affects learners. Learners are generally found crushed under the workload assigned to them, which increases the effectiveness of the depression caused by the pandemic in this process of online foreign language education.

Considering comfort factors in both written and oral exams, findings differ in terms of learners' level of confidence and anxiety. In written exams, almost all of the learners feel more confident and less anxious, while in oral exams, they feel less confident and more anxious; this anxiety has been mostly established to be related to poor speaking skills and feelings of embarrassment.

What has been obtained so far turns out that the speaking skills sufficiency of the learners affects their anxiety level in online classes' oral exams. Almost two-third of the learners state that they mostly feel anxious when oral communication is a necessity, and they associate this anxiety with insufficient language skills they have together with test anxiety. According to the data gathered through interview forms, one of the other factors that make learners feel uncomfortable during online education is when they are supposed to speak, especially when family members are at home. The data also implicate that learners feel more anxious when they are supposed to speak in the target language than when they are expected to write in a foreign language. These responses become understandable when it is considered that these two media differ in terms of temporality. In an oral communication context, there is rather limited time to think about the wide range of grammatical structures which suit best for an understandable response. In writing, though, one has an opportunity to revise their work before submitting it. If seen from this perspective, then writing would appear to be simpler than speaking; however, submitting written assignments is also anxiety enhancing activity for some learners regarding no chance of error correction after appointments. The findings observed in this study mirror those in the

previous studies (Chametzky, 2013; 2019), which examine the effects of oral and written exams on learners' anxiety; however, the reasons behind the anxiety experienced during exams are offered in detail in this study, such as being at home with family, it is because learners are concerned about being interrupted by any family member during oral exams. Therefore, living with family could be a significant factor, if not the only one, causing anxiety during oral exams that require sharing a comfort zone.

It is realized that comfortable learners associate their comfort with their language skills proficiency and online learning experience, assigned topics considering their familiarity with the subject matter, and technological skills. The time spent on online education is found as an affective factor in online foreign language education because some learners state that they are feeling more comfortable with multitasking as time passes. In other words, poor language skills that learners have is determined as a factor affecting learners' comfort that increases learners' level of anxiety, which is also asserted by Horwitz et al. (1986) years ago; however, the feeling of not being able to express ideas properly through online platform is counted as one of the factors which are also found in the study of Symeonides and Childs (2015), who investigate personal experiences of language learners in online settings. This result may be explained by the fact that learners are not acquainted with the online education environment and have a fear of being misinterpreted by anyone in the language learning setting due to their poor language skills.

Distress Resulting in Extra Anxiety

The interview questions are prepared with the aim of revealing stress-provoking reasons in the online education environment. Reviewing the related responses to the interview questions, the underlying reasons behind learners' anxiety generally result from four main issues, which are educator attitude, social pressure, fear of low-grading, and web-based problems.

According to the findings, participants experience embarrassment in oral practice. In this study, there are almost two-thirds of the learners who strongly associate their speaking anxiety directly with the attitudes of instructors, while the other one-third of them relate comfy in making mistakes in the course of oral

production with the instructor. It is revealed that learners are feeling less anxious with a considerate instructor compared to inconsiderate ones, according to them. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Balemir (2009), who investigates the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety not online but in traditional undergraduate foreign language classes. These findings, though preliminary, suggest that the role of instructors does not significantly change based on foreign language learning settings, as well.

Social pressure is encountered very frequently in environments when oral production is required to be experienced either in a small group or large communities. However, it is encountered in an online foreign language education environment. Furthermore, some learners claim that they are affected by other learners' high language proficiency skills and have hesitations about peer criticism considering their relative standing in the classroom. According to the findings, having concerns about peer criticism along with fear of inferiority negatively affect learners' anxiety. It is encouraging to compare these findings with the ones obtained by McConnell (2005), who ground that peer views can decrease or increase the anxiety level of language learners in a learning setting. Furthermore, the present findings show a perfect match with the studies conducted by Duncan et al. (2013) as well as Symeonides and Childs (2015).

Being aware of the situation while you are being graded is an anxiety-increasing factor in any learning environment, including a foreign language learning environment, too. More than half of the learners report the spring of their anxiety as the fear of not receiving recompense for their works. The finding is in agreement with the ideas of Lazarus (2000), who investigates the effects of assessment on language learners' anxiety levels due to ambiguity, and unknown and unfamiliar assessment methods in the context of online foreign language education. Additionally, these findings support the results presented in the study conducted by Hillard et al. (2020), who reveal that anxiety is commonly experienced because of fear of negative evaluation. The findings may show that learners need to be informed beforehand about assessment criteria and methods. One of the issues that emerge from these findings is that learners are anxious about the online delivery of exams because of ambiguity and unfair grading.

Web-based problems constitute poor internet connection; almost half of the learners hold poor internet connection or tech-based difficulties, such as insufficient technological infrastructure, responsible for their anxiety in online foreign language education, as also stated in the study conducted by Coke (2009), as one of the factors for digital natives to hate technology.

Concerns Experienced in the Online FL Learning Environment

The swift transition from a traditional setting to an online environment in foreign language education directly affects learners' feelings toward foreign language classes. The data reveal that learners have concerns about failing in their online FL classes, exams, and being comfortable about following online classes. Furthermore, some learners indicate a lack of rapport between them and the instructors, referring to the instructors' manners as if learners try to cheat all the time. This finding may result from differences in styles of lecturing and communication, as is given in a previous study conducted by Capdeferro and Romero (2012).

Comparing the degree of anxiety experienced in between traditional and online classes, the data extracted from interview forms reveal that learners' anxiety in the traditional setting outperformed online foreign language anxiety. It is found that the primary source of anxiety in an online setting, especially for online oral communication examination, is technical problems that may be encountered during the examination. Although there are several possible explanations for this result, one is the face-saving effect of online learning, which allows learners to hide behind their screens. However, learners who do not feel more or less nervous comparing traditional and online foreign language education contexts highlight the reason as the similarity of the subjects and curriculum both in online and traditional FL education.

Learners' over nervousness in foreign language classes compared to other classes may be associated with an anxiety-provoking amalgam of foreign language learning and online environments' demanding nature, which have different effects on learners' anxiety. To find out the distinctively different experiences of the learners in an online education context, interview questions are designed to figure out learners' experiences by making them compare traditional and online foreign language class settings' effects on their anxiety, especially in the event of speaking. Learners express that they suffer from forgetfulness which comes around in the course of

speaking in an online setting. However, there are numerous grammatical rules which are required considering foreign language speaking that's why learners are feeling overwhelmed in online foreign language classes in comparison with other classes. The following two reasons have been established to better understand this overwhelm: the number and complexity of grammar rules, and the existence of unmatched grammar rules in the mother tongue. Nearly one third of the learners feel overwhelmed by various grammatical rules they are required to figure out to speak a foreign language effectively. This also accords with the study conducted by Chametzky (2019). It is also ascertained that some learners who are ambivalent about their feelings do not care about grammatical rules at all. Although some learners do not feel overwhelmed, on the contrary, they enjoy and find it beneficial to learn them for speaking.

Not only giving oral responses or recording a video but also submitting a written work makes learners feel anxious, and they relate this anxiety with having a limited opportunity for error correction along with tech-based difficulties. Although it has been discovered that even if they feel anxious, they still favor writing rather than speaking because they have a chance to check what they have done properly before submitting their work. The present findings seem to be consistent with other research conducted by Chametzky (2019), who reveals that language learners taking foreign language courses online experience anxiety in this sense due to misinterpretation of their written or oral responses. A possible explanation for this might be previous negative experiences of learners about misinterpretations of their responses by instructors.

Requesting Help

Asking for help constitutes a significant part of foreign language learning. When it comes to asking the instructor a question, between asking for help publicly or privately, nearly half of the learners prefer asking for help from the educator in question privately rather than asking on a discussion board. The responses show that learners tend to hide their ignorance in public; they want to save their faces from their classmates. Reviewing the responses to the related interview questions, the reasons behind learners' preferences of asking for help mostly from their peers have been mainly found as follows: getting a quick response from peers and having concerns

about being labeled as ignorant by the instructors. The impatience of 21st century learners may be counted as such factors in previous literature (Meister & Willyerd, 2010; Prensky, 2001). The second reason may be related to Mendelson's (2010) ideas which suggest that asking for help from peers does not stimulate as much stress as the interaction between the teacher and the learner. Almost half of the learners make their preferences about asking for help, whether from the course instructor or classmates, depending on the subject matter, while others prefer to ask for help from instructors rather than peers because they find instructors more reliable, and they have concerns about being underestimated by their peers. The responses show that learners tend to hide their ignorance in public; they want to save face from their classmates. These findings corroborate the ideas of Symeonides and Childs (2015), who conclude that asking questions publicly on an open discussion board and judgment from peers are anxiety-provoking activities in the online collaborative learning environment. The present findings also seem consistent with other research (Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2011; Ahmadi & Sadeghi, 2016), which suggest that educators may cause more significant anxiety when they are asked for help because of differentials in power relationships. The findings also corroborate the ideas of Martin and Valdivia (2017), who suggest that educators have a critical role in online environments while answering questions and giving feedback. These findings may indicate that not only instructors but also peers are counted among the factors which increase anxiety.

Experience Interference

The place of previously experienced language learning adventures cannot be denied in foreign language learning not only in traditional settings but also in an online foreign language learning environment. It is not absurd to expect words and ideas learned in former experiences to come out when studying a new language.

Regarding the interviews, except for two learners, the rest have not taken any online foreign language classes before. They highlight the facilitative effect of being experienced in online foreign language education, such as being more confident in online platforms without hesitation of doing something wrong. This accords with an earlier study (Pichette, 2009), which shows that more experienced learners demonstrate less anxiety than beginners in an online foreign language learning setting. These findings may help us understand that earlier online foreign language

class experiences have a facilitative effect on subsequent online foreign language classes.

Listening Anxiety

According to the findings, the learners' listening anxiety stems from three main causes: time limitation given for the task, poor internet connection, and weak listening skills. Those who are not feeling anxious state that their listening courses are not different from a traditional classroom, so they are not feeling anxious.

In the listening skills exam context, learners feel anxious about the time limit given for the listening exam. This may result from the unfamiliar nature of online learning settings, which require commitments and dealing with difficulties with time management compared to traditional language learning settings, as suggested by Brindley et al. (2009) because the unfamiliar nature of the online learning setting may be counted as a prominent source for anxiety rather than listening anxiety.

Inadequacies in the Process of FL Learning

There are various factors affecting learners' anxiety in online foreign language classes, just as in traditional language classes. Three main factors are handled in this part of the questionnaire. The data indicate that nearly two-third of the learners cannot take advantage of online foreign language classes due to certain reasons: personal inadequacies, professional inadequacies, and technical inadequacies. When personal inadequacies are considered, it is stated that learners do not regard themselves as adequate for an online FL education. While some learners support the idea that instructors are responsible for learners' failure considering their lack of knowledge to use online education platforms, many learners find technological problems guilty of their feeling of unsuccessfulness. These findings may be related only to the inexperience of anyone responsible in the online education process due to the swift transition from traditional to online education.

Speaking Anxiety

The interview items' focal point is oral production. Learners feel anxious when they are required to speak in the target language. According to responses, obviously, many learners are found anxious when they are required to speak or record themselves while giving a speech in a foreign language. When the participants are asked whether

they are taking advantage of being given time before giving an oral response or not. Considering interviews, more than half of the learners express that they have an opportunity and enough time before giving an oral response in online classes. When online classes and traditional classes are compared in having preparation time for getting ready to respond opportunities, learners report that there may not be any difference in having an opportunity to respond orally between online classes and traditional classes. Most of the learners complain about technological problems, such as poor internet connection or device-related problems, rather than getting ready to respond.

Feeling the Need to Practice Work before Submission

The role of confidence is a well-known and well-investigated issue in FLA studies; the data gathered for the related items reveal that learners are encountered to be in need of being aware of the fact that mistakes are expected to certainly happen in nature foreign language learning environments where flawlessness is a fantastic dream. Considering the data collected, it might be safe to conclude that an association may be available between the need to practice what will be said and the desire to save face in front of peers and instructors, and not to be embarrassed. Naturally, anyone does not want to feel embarrassed in front of their classmates. Except for a few, most of the learners state that they prefer to make some preparations beforehand, and they mostly have time for it. When online classes and traditional classes are compared in this case, learners do not differentiate between online learning and traditional learning, considering the preparation part before speaking. Some learners express that they need to write just because they have generally no idea about the topic assigned to them to feel more relaxed in the course of oral production. This may result from feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-belief, or lack of self-confidence, which are also confirmed by the findings of Harnett's (2015) study. It is also consistent with Hamouda's (2012) study, which shows that in non-English speaking learning settings, learners tend to show hesitation in speaking no matter how proficient they are in English. It is difficult to explain this result because there may be several reasons when speaking is considered. Still, it might be simply related to the nature of foreign language speaking anxiety and online foreign language education settings.

Enhancing Positivity

Learners mostly practice positive thinking or try to be optimistic about decreasing the anxiety and stress that results from the online foreign language class. It is reached that based on their actions, a significant number of learners feel anxious and try to decrease their anxiety level. It cannot be extracted from the data whether positive thinking and reinforcement are the only ways learners alleviate anxiety. Learners are asked what they do to feel relaxed and think positively, and we get various responses. It is revealed that learners prefer to have a conversation with their classmates to take advantage of peer support. This finding corroborates the ideas of McConell (2005), who suggests that peers could evoke enthusiasm and decrease FL learning anxiety.

Along with peer support, learners prefer to do positive self-talk or make themselves busy with hobbies to forget about their anxiety. It is also found that some learners do not believe in the anxiety decreasing effect of positive thinking and just keep practicing in order to feel less anxious. This study has produced results that corroborate the findings of Hauck and Hurd's (2005) study, which is confirmed by the work of Hurd (2006) in terms of anxiety alleviating strategies produced by language learners in the online FL education environment. There are, however, other possible explanations but personal preferences mainly determine the strategy to be used by the learners themselves.

Feeling of Inferiority

The feeling of inferiority or superiority inhibits language learning in foreign language learning contexts. Considering the results, it might be indicated that learners are not able to or do not see their classmates in a superior position than they at all. It would be safe to claim that if learners feel that "other learners [were] doing better in the class", then their anxiety levels would have existed and even increased. The ones who report that they are affected by their classmates' success during courses express that they may be affected either positively or negatively, or both ways. It is uncovered that learners have been affected by each other's successes or failures either positively or negatively, although they generally do not feel down compared to their classmates. It has also been found that the classmates' failure also affects each other either positively or negatively, while there are some learners who express that they are not affected by anyone's success or failure around them. In other words, findings indicate

that this situation changes from learner to learner. At the same time, some become happy and motivated when they see their classmates' success; others get sad and feel demotivated, finding themselves less successful than their classmates. It seems safe to conclude that creating a cooperative learning environment may be a solution for such situations. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by current participants in this study and those described by Donelan and Kear (2018), who reveal that learners' performances and attitudes could be affected by others in the same online learning setting. This result may be explained by the competitiveness that exists in the traditional language learning environment, which still keeps its seat in online language learning education.

COVID-19 Effect

With the World Health Organization declaration of COVID-19 as a global health pandemic, universities across the globe have closed their doors as a temporary measure. Most of them have immediately adopted online learning practices to prevent the spread of the virus. The unexpected global shift to online classes has been a widespread change in language learning education, too. The COVID- 19 Effect is included in the study because there is ambiguity about what will happen next, which influences learners' psychological states, and therefore their anxiety. Depending on the findings of Lazarus' (2000) study, it has been suggested that feelings of anxiousness are aroused under the conditions of ambiguity, unknown or unfamiliar methods of research and assessment brought by a significant change in lifestyles. Learners' opinions are obtained considering two aspects: their attitudes and psychology. Therefore, learners are asked how they have been affected in this educational transition and asked about their attitude towards online foreign language classes considering the changes brought by COVID-19. It is revealed that there exists no consensus among learners' attitudes. While nearly thirty percent of the learners imply that their attitudes would be different while around another thirty percent of them state there would be no difference if COVID-19 never exists. The learners who consider their attitudes would be different make statements grounding on several reasons which are generally based on stress resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and lack-of-sociability which are also determined in the study conducted by Chametzky (2019) as anxiety increasing factors in an online education setting.

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The learners who think that there would be no difference considering their attitudes toward online foreign language classes generally support the idea that they are responsible for their way of thinking which cannot be affected by any other factor; however, they are strict minded about online classes as well. At the same time, some directly relate their FL anxiety to only the pandemic.

Although there has been no specific study on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and online foreign language education before, in accordance with the responses, a possible explanation for this might be that feelings of ambiguity and survival issues have a significant impact on learners' general anxiety, and consequently their FL anxiety to some extent.

Conclusion

This study aims to find answers to the following questions: What kind of effect does online learning have on foreign language learners' anxiety in the process of online foreign language education? Also, what are the challenges for online foreign language learners? What are learners' perceived reasons for anxiety in an online foreign language learning environment? In this sense, our study yields certain significant results.

In accordance with the findings, it seems safe to infer that learners mostly experience foreign language anxiety in online language education. Considering the findings extracted from the data collected, seventeen factors affecting learners' foreign language learning anxiety in the online world context can be listed as follows:

1. Insufficiency in technology use skills

2. Poor internet connection

3. Sharing comfort zone via webcams

4. Ill-manners of instructors

5. Multitasking requirements of online foreign language education

6. Social-pressure / Peer-pressure

7. Poor language skills for the skill courses

8. Intransparency of the assessment process

9. Fear of unfair grading

10. Asking for help publicly from instructors

11. Previously experienced foreign language learning adventures

12. Overload of responsibility of their learning

13. Feeling of inferiority

14. Unknown and unfamiliar methods of study

15. Conditions of ambiguity

16. Lack of sociability

17. Depression caused by the pandemic

Suggestions for Future Studies

The sample of this study is limited to students of only one state university in Turkey due to feasibility and focus reasons. It is suggested that similar studies be carried out in other universities. However, in their future studies, researchers should take not only the views and expectations of the students, who are taking only speaking courses at the time of the study but also faculty to reach more conclusive results in their studies.

To this end, certain major suggestions to be offered can be as follows:

1. Faculty and learners should be informed about the process of assessment and assignments as well as the methodology of courses in advance.

2. Faculty should be made aware of the possible challenges brought by technology use during online education so that they create a relaxed teaching environment both for themselves and learners.

3. Learners and faculty should be contemporaneously given extra tech-based and motivating education in line with the courses to take more advantage of online foreign language education.

4. When foreign language anxiety and technology use anxiety co-occurs, the level of anxiety might be doubled, which should not be underestimated in the process of online foreign language education by instructors.

5. Faculty should be offered workshops to be trained about online assessments to understand better the requirements of the online foreign language evaluation process.

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