

Investigating Foreign Language Anxiety and Attitudes Among Secondary Students in Two English Curricula*

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between foreign language anxiety and attitudes of secondary school students studying in intensive English and standard English teaching programs. The correlational model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used. The universe of the study is the secondary school students studying within the borders of Maltepe district of Istanbul province in the academic year of 2018-2019; the sample consisted of a total of 899 students who were selected from the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades through cluster sampling, who were both studying in intensive English and standard English curriculum. The "Attitude Scale Towards Primary School English Course" and "Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale" were used in the data collection. The data were analyzed using t-test, correlation, and regression analysis techniques. The analysis results showed statistically significant differences between the students' English anxiety and their attitudes towards English, according to the English curriculum they are taught. It was also observed that there was a statistically significant relationship between students' English learning anxiety levels and their attitudes towards English lessons, and students' English anxiety levels predicted their attitudes towards English lessons.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), Foreign Language Anxiety, Foreign Language Attitude, Intensive EFL Curriculum, Secondary School English Curriculum.

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In a world where everything changes very quickly, for more effective communication, it has become essential to know and speak English fluently, which is accepted as the world language, to explain local developments correctly and follow global developments (Crystal, 2002). For this reason, it is imperative for countries that are in political, commercial, and cultural communication with many countries to intensively include English, which is accepted as the common language of communication worldwide, in their education programs (Işık, 2008).

With the “Primary Education and Education Law” that went into effect in 2013, compulsory education in Türkiye was determined as 12 years, 4+4+4, and English courses were included in the content of the curriculum at all levels from the second grade to the end of the twelfth grade. This new update to the curriculum aimed at teaching English with all language skills, especially listening and speaking skills (Ministry of National Education (MoNE), 2013a). Even though the importance given to English language teaching in Türkiye has been clearly shown with this innovation and despite all the resources spent on foreign language teaching, according to the results of the research conducted, it is seen that the desired level of foreign language teaching has not been reached throughout the country (Gömleksiz, 1993; Harman, 1999; Soner, 2007). Due to these problems observed in foreign language teaching, an update has been made regarding foreign language teaching. In line with the decision of the Ministry of National Education, foreign language-oriented classes have been established in secondary schools with suitable conditions and facilities since the 2014-2015 academic year, and students have been given an intensive English education of at least 10 hours per week starting from the fifth grade (MoNE, 2013b). In 2018, the Foreign Language-Intensive Fifth and Sixth Grade English Course Curriculum was published by the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Basic Education (MoNE, 2018). The Foreign Language-Intensive Fifth Grade English Course Curriculum foresees that students will be taught English at half of the B1 level (B1.1) determined in the “Common European Reference Text for Languages”. At the end of the sixth grade, it is aimed at students expanding their vocabulary, exchanging repertoires, and performing communicative functions appropriate to their developmental and age levels at the B1.2 level. (Council of Europe [CoE], 2001).

Within the scope of the Foreign Language-Intensive English Course Curriculum, the aim is to use basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) more intensively, and for students to be exposed to the language more by taking advantage of the necessary course materials. The curriculum's primary goal is to raise individuals with high English knowledge throughout Türkiye, who will strengthen our ties with other countries, and who can represent our country correctly (MoNE, 2018).

Foreign Language Anxiety

On the other hand, what is required in foreign language teaching is not only a specific plan or program. Undeniably, the cognitive characteristics of the person learning a language and their affective characteristics affect foreign language learning. It is thought that foreign language anxiety, which affects a person's effective learning of a foreign language, is among the most important of the affective characteristics mentioned (Gardner, 1985). When the literature is examined, it is seen that foreign language anxiety is characterized as a special type of psychological stress that a student experiences while learning a foreign language or doing an activity in that language (Aida, 1994; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Young, 1991). There are studies on various reasons for the occurrence of foreign language anxiety. According to Young (1991), foreign language anxiety may be caused by the

student, the teacher, and the quality of education. The student's problems, communication problems, lack of self-confidence, fear of losing one's personality, excessive ambition, unrealistic thoughts, and expectations regarding learning cause anxiety. Some teachers' intimidation while trying to motivate students to learn and their strict attitude when correcting their mistakes are also factors that increase anxiety. Allwright and Bailey (1991) argue that the fact that students are forbidden from speaking their native language in the classroom and that they are compared to their peers causes students' foreign language anxiety levels to increase. As a result of foreign language anxiety, it has been determined that students have difficulty concentrating and have memory problems, are either late for class or frequently absent, do not prepare for class when they come to class, and even students who work hard cannot show any remarkable success (Horwitz et al., 1991). According to the study findings, foreign language anxiety explains 13% of the variance in L2 achievement scores, indicating that anxiety becomes a significant factor in second language learning (Teimouri et al., 2019, p.10). Learning a foreign language causes anxiety about learning a foreign language, regardless of which language is learned. A study conducted in Turkey revealed that individuals learning Turkish as a foreign language experience anxiety about not being able to speak, not being able to learn, making mistakes, being unsuccessful, and exam anxiety during the learning process. However, it was also determined that some participants did not show any signs of anxiety (Sügümlü & Çinpolat, 2023, p.2871). In another study, conducted with seventh-grade students in China, a significant and negative relationship was found between foreign language anxiety and second language learning success when delayed feedback was applied. Fu, M., & Li, S. (2022, p. 221). It is possible to reduce the foreign language anxiety that occurs. One of the tools that reduces foreign language anxiety is the use of technology. A study conducted with Chinese students determined that students' use of technology in learning a foreign language can reduce their anxiety (Bai, 2024, p.15). In summary, as stated by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), learning a second language is perceived by anxious students as an unpleasant experience.

Attitude Towards a Foreign Language

Another effective characteristic that affects a person's ability to learn and use a foreign language efficiently is the person's attitude towards that language. Gardner (1985) defines attitude as "the reaction of individuals to a specific object or concept". Eagly, Hendrickson, and Chaiken (1993) define attitude as the process of categorizing what an individual observes in their environment, influenced by their social environment. Attitude towards a foreign language can be defined as a psychological tendency that expresses an individual's positive or negative evaluations, feelings, and tendencies towards one or more foreign languages (Yanar, 2008). Al Noursi (2013) defines an attitude towards a foreign language as a form that includes students' perspectives, experiences, and beliefs about the language being learned.

Attitudes can be both learned and taught. For example, since no student is born with a positive or negative attitude towards a language, liking a foreign language can be acquired later. Attitudes can be generalized because they are situational. Therefore, a student with a negative attitude towards school, teachers, learning, and homework can generalize all these negative attitudes to the foreign language classroom. Based on this situation, students need positive attitudes to increase their efficiency in foreign language classes (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). When the literature is examined, it is seen that while many studies can be reached on

the foreign language anxiety of high school and university students (Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Duxbury & Ling-ling, 2010; Kanat & Kozikoğlu, 2018; Lu & Liu, 2011; Na, 2007; Wang, 2012) and their attitudes towards English courses (Acar, 2016; Anuradha & Rengaraj, 2017; Gajalakshmi, 2013; Munir & Rehman, 2015; Pineda, 2011; Sanchez, 2006; Yaşar & Yıldız, 2017), there are a limited number of studies on the Foreign Language Intensive English Course Curriculum (Yilmaz, 2019). In a study conducted in Türkiye with secondary school students, the students' attitudes towards learning English were positive (Ünsal, 2021, p. 348). Similarly, in the study of Arciaga and Lucas (2024, p. 671) with adults, it was reported that individuals who learned Japanese as a second language developed positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Regardless of age, attitudes towards learning a foreign language are generally considered positive. In another study conducted with primary school students, it was determined that one of the main reasons for foreign language anxiety is due to speaking anxiety (Şimşek, 2015, p.81). Regardless of the language, attitudes towards learning a foreign language can be positive. A study conducted in Turkey shows that the learning attitudes of those who learn Turkish as a foreign language are primarily positive. It was determined that the majority of the participants exhibited attitudes based on happiness, curiosity, desire, love, and self-confidence towards learning Turkish; on the negative side, only a limited number of individuals had a perception of difficulty and necessity (Süğümlü & Çinpolat, 2023, p.2871). In the age of technology natives, native speakers using different tools in teaching foreign languages can improve attitudes towards foreign languages. For example, technology can provide today's students with a positive attitude in this regard. Students' use of technology in learning a foreign language can improve their attitudes towards learning a foreign language (Bai, 2024, p.15)

No study has been found that evaluates the Regular English Course Curriculum and the Foreign Language Intensive English Course Curriculum regarding foreign language anxiety and attitudes towards English courses. Therefore, the study aimed to examine the relationship between foreign language anxiety and middle school students' attitudes in English-intensive and standard English curricula. It is hoped that the study results will help English teachers in both program types to know their students more comprehensively and process the course more efficiently by considering cognitive and affective needs. Within the framework of the decision the Board of Education took, implementing the Foreign Language-Intensive English Curriculum was left to the educational administrators and the means of the schools. From time to time, educational administrators may be reluctant to implement the Foreign Language-Intensive English Curriculum due to the inadequacy of English teacher staff and the deficiencies in the financial and physical conditions of the schools. In light of the results obtained from the study, it is hoped that more educational administrators will realize the benefits of the Foreign Language-Intensive English Curriculum for students and that the study will contribute to the spread of this program nationwide. Since the Foreign Language-Intensive English Curriculum has just started to be implemented, a widespread standard education throughout the country has not yet been provided, and its needs are constantly changing. According to the literature, students' anxiety decreases significantly as they are exposed to English. Since the foreign language intensive class application in secondary schools was put into practice in Türkiye in the 2014-2015 academic year, no research has been found in the literature examining the type of English program in secondary schools and anxiety together. For this reason, the study is thought to fill the gap in this area and shed light on the literature. It has been observed that there is a significant difference between the students' attitude scale scores towards the English course according to the English program they study.

Therefore, research is important in guiding other researchers, teachers, students, administrators, and parents in this field.

Considering these objectives, the following questions were tried to be answered in the research:

1. Do the English anxiety levels of secondary school students show a significant difference according to the type of English course curriculum they study?
2. Do the attitudes of secondary school students towards the English course differ according to the type of English course curriculum they study?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the English anxiety levels of secondary school students and their attitudes towards the English course?
4. Do the English anxiety levels of secondary school students predict their attitudes towards the English course?

Method

Research Model

This research aims to reveal the relationship between the English anxiety levels and attitudes of middle school students receiving foreign language-based education and those receiving regular English program education towards English lessons. The “correlational model” was used as a quantitative research method. The correlational model is a method that aims to describe a situation that happened in the past or is still ongoing, to determine the relationship between variables related to this situation, or to estimate another variable with the help of some variables (Karasar, 2015).

Universe-Sample

The universe of the research consists of middle school students studying within the borders of the Maltepe district of Istanbul province in the 2018-2019 academic year, and the sample consists of 899 students selected from the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades using the cluster sampling method. In the cluster sampling method, the universe of the study consists of clusters with various elements gathered around similar purposes (Karasar, 2015). The study sample consists of 899 students studying in three Imam Hatip Middle Schools and one normal Middle School in Maltepe district, receiving intensive foreign language education and following a standard English program.

Data Collection Tools

The “Attitude Scale Towards Primary School English Course” developed by Başı (2012) and the “Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale” developed by Başı (2013) were used with the necessary permissions in collecting the data.

Attitude Scale Towards Primary School English Course

Attitude Scale Towards Primary School English Course is a five-point Likert-type scale comprising 27 items. Fifteen of these items are positive and 10 are negative. The scale has a total of five dimensions, namely sensitivity, consciousness, importance, method, material, language, and culture. It is graded in decreasing order as 5-4-3-2-1. Five (5) corresponds to the degrees of Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Undecided, 2 Disagree, and 1 Strongly Disagree. The maximum score that can be obtained from the scale is 135, and the minimum score is 27. The

high score means that the attitude towards English is high. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was determined to be 0.92. In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.93. This level indicates a high reliability level on the scale (Baş, 2012).

Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale

The Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale is a five-point Likert-type scale with 27 items. Seventeen of these items are positive and 10 are reverse items. The scale has three dimensions, namely personality, communication, and evaluation, and is graded in decreasing order as 5-4-3-2-1. Five (5) corresponds to the degrees of Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Undecided, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree. The maximum score that can be obtained from the scale is 135, and the minimum score is 27. A high score means that foreign language anxiety is high. In addition, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the total scale was determined as 0.93, and in this study, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.91. This level indicates the scale's high reliability (Baş, 2013).

Ethical Procedures and Process

Research procedures were designed in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki on research on human participants. Informed consent was prepared to inform participants about the research and ethical issues, and data were collected from those who agreed. In addition, since the study was conducted with children under the age of 18, the necessary legal permissions were obtained from the district governorships of the schools in the region where the study was conducted.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data obtained from the research was done with the SPSS 23 package program. First, the collected data's normality distribution was checked, and the Skewness and Kurtosis values were examined. The Kurtosis and Skewness values provided are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Skewness and Kurtosis Analysis

	Skewness	Kurtosis
Anxiety Towards English Class	.12	-.51
Attitude Towards English Class	-.95	.60

When Table 1 was examined, it was seen that the kurtosis and skewness values of the data remained between -1 and +1, and it was concluded that the data showed a normal distribution. Since the data showed a normal distribution, parametric tests were performed. The data were analyzed using t-tests, correlation, and regression tests.

Findings

Findings For the English Anxiety Levels of Secondary School Students Show a Significant Difference According to The Type of English Course Curriculum They Study

Table 2 shows the t-test results conducted to determine whether the anxiety levels of secondary school students towards learning English differ according to the type of English curriculum they study.

Table 2

t-test Results for Anxiety Levels of Secondary School Students Towards Learning English According to the Type of English Course Curriculum They Study

	Curriculum	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t-test		
						t	df	p
Anxiety About Learning English	Standard	455	74,22	20,28	,95	4,779	897	,000
	Intensive	444	67,84	19,71	,94			

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the English course curriculum type variable in students' anxiety levels towards learning English creates a significant difference at the level of .05 in favor of students studying in the foreign language-intensive English course curriculum. Accordingly, the anxiety towards learning English of students studying in the regular program is significantly higher than the anxiety of students studying in the intensive curriculum [$t(879) = 4.779, p < .001$].

Findings For the Attitudes of Secondary School Students Towards The English Course Differ According To The Type of English Course Curriculum They Study

Table 3 shows the t-test results conducted to determine whether middle school students' attitudes towards the English course differ according to the type of English course curriculum they study.

Table 3

t-Test Results for Attitudes of Secondary School Students Towards English Course According to the Type of English Course Curriculum They Study

	Curriculum	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t-test		
						t	df	p
Attitude Towards English Lesson	Standard	455	101.44	21.97	1.03	-6,275	879	,000
	Intensive	444	109.94	18.53	0.88			

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the students' attitudes towards the English course create a significant difference in favor of the students studying in the foreign language-oriented program at the total scale level of .01 according to the English program type variable [$t(879) = -6.275, p < .001$].

Findings For the Relationship Between the English Anxiety Levels of Secondary School Students and Their Attitudes Towards the English Course

Table 4 shows the results of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between the English anxiety levels of middle school students and their attitudes toward the English course.

Table 4

Correlation Between Secondary School Students' Attitude Towards Learning English Scale and Anxiety Towards Learning English Scale Scores

Variable (N=899)	English Learning Anxiety Scale
Attitude Scale Towards Learning English	$r = -.559^{**}$

$** p < .001$

When Table 4 is examined, it is determined that there is a statistically moderate and significant negative relationship between the total test scores of attitudes towards English courses and total test scores of foreign language learning anxiety ($r = -.558; p < .001$).

Findings For the English Anxiety Levels of Secondary School Students Predict Their Attitudes Towards the English Course

Table 5 shows the regression analysis results on predicting middle school students' attitudes towards learning English by their English anxiety levels.

Table 5

Regression Analysis Results Regarding the Prediction Level of Secondary School Students' English Anxiety Levels on Their Attitudes Towards Learning English

Independent	Dependent	B	SE	β	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
English Learning Anxiety	Attitude Towards Learning English	.57	.02	-.56	-20.170	.000	.558	.312	406.81	.000

As seen in Table 5, as a result of the regression analysis, it is seen that the English anxiety level positively predicts the attitude towards learning English ($R^2=.312$; $p<.01$). The English anxiety level explains 31% of the total variance in the students' attitudes towards learning English.

Conclusion and Discussion

Foreign language anxiety affects foreign language success. The fact that foreign language anxiety explains 13% of the variance in L2 success scores once again reveals the decisive effect of this affective factor on the second language learning process (Teimouri et al.,2019, p.10). The fact that foreign language anxiety affects success also raises the possibility of affecting attitudes towards foreign languages. It has been observed that there is a significant difference in students' anxiety towards learning English according to the English program they study. It has been determined that students studying in the regular English program have higher anxiety toward learning English than students studying in the foreign language intensive program. This situation shows that students who receive intensive English education and use English more in the classroom have lower anxiety levels toward learning a foreign language. Wang (2012) investigated the foreign language anxiety of students learning English as a foreign language in England in his study supporting the current findings.

It has been determined that students studying in a foreign language-intensive program have higher attitudes toward English than students studying in a regular English program. This situation shows that students who receive intensive English education and have more contact with English develop a more positive perspective towards English. Since the foreign language-intensive class application was implemented in our country in the 2014-2015 academic year, there is very limited research on the type of English program in the literature. However, Yilmaz (2019) reached a similar conclusion in his study examining the academic success, attitude, and self-efficacy beliefs of students studying in a foreign language-intensive English teaching program regarding the English course. According to the research findings, as can be understood from the pre-test and post-test results, it was observed that the "Foreign Language-Intensive English Teaching Program" caused an increase in the students' academic success, attitude, and self-efficacy belief levels regarding the English course over time.

In line with the findings presented in the theoretical framework, it is understood that anxiety is a critical variable affecting the foreign language learning process. In this context, a comprehensive research area on anxiety and foreign language learning has emerged. In the literature, in addition to studies that draw attention to the facilitating and motivation-enhancing functions of anxiety in the learning process, some studies emphasize its adverse

effects on learning performance and its hindering aspects. Therefore, the effect of anxiety on the language learning process can occur in both positive and negative ways (İlhan & Tutkun, 2020, p.386). Similarly, in the study of Arciaga and Lucas (2024, p. 671) with adults, it was reported that individuals who learned Japanese as a second language developed positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language. A statistically significant difference exists between students' English anxiety and their attitudes towards learning English. In this context, students with low English anxiety exhibit a more positive attitude towards English, while students with high English anxiety exhibit a more negative attitude. When the literature is examined, studies examining the relationship between foreign language anxiety and attitudes towards English are found. For example, Çelebi (2009) concluded that students with high English anxiety levels show various symptoms such as embarrassment, shyness, unhappiness, avoiding eye contact with the teacher during lessons, and not doing their homework regularly. However, students with low English anxiety levels want to participate in activities enthusiastically and are more willing and interested in English lessons.

As a result of the analyses conducted on whether the English anxiety levels of secondary school students predict their attitudes towards learning English, it has been seen that the English anxiety levels of students predict their attitudes towards learning English. Students' English anxiety levels are important to their attitudes towards learning English. As the anxiety level decreases, the attitude level towards learning English increases. In other words, as the anxiety level increases, the attitude level towards learning English decreases. When the existing literature is examined, no study other than Çelebi (2009) has been found based on secondary school students' foreign language anxiety as a predictor of their attitudes toward learning English. Çelebi (2009) emphasized in his study that a high anxiety level negatively affects attitudes towards English. In this context, the current study is supported.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Practitioners

The spread of the foreign language-oriented program implemented by the Ministry of National Education in secondary schools to all secondary schools across the country can significantly decrease students' anxiety towards English and increase their success in English. Different teaching techniques, such as reverse design and the Boray technique, can be applied to reduce students' high English anxiety levels and increase their attitudes towards English. To reduce students' high English anxiety levels and increase their attitudes towards English, they can be made much more aware of the importance of English. Teachers who teach English as a foreign language can be supported by receiving training according to the students' levels. Findings from a study conducted in Chile revealed that primary school students whose teachers received training in teaching English and who used multisensory and audiovisual materials effectively had significantly more positive attitudes (Inostroza et al.,2024, p.15).

Suggestions for Researchers

The research was conducted only on secondary school students in the Maltepe district of Istanbul. The universe and sample can be expanded in future stages. The factors that cause students to have high anxiety and low attitudes towards English can be investigated, and their effects on students can be reduced. This research conducted a quantitative study on anxiety

and attitude to reveal the current situation. Similar qualitative and mixed-method studies can be conducted to examine students' anxiety and attitudes in more depth.

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