



ENGLISH INTEREST AND ANXIETY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Interest and anxiety towards a lesson directly affects the student's success in that course. This study examines secondary school students' interest and anxiety levels in English. The research was conducted in the survey type. 253 secondary school students from a randomly selected public school participated in the study. The research data collection tools are personal information form, English Lesson Interest Scale, and Foreign Language Course Anxiety Scale. Descriptive statistics, student t-test, and ANOVA were used in the data analysis. The analysis revealed that the students' English interest level was high, and their anxiety level was moderate. When the interest and anxiety levels of the students were examined according to their gender, it was found that there was no significant difference between female and male students. However, the total scores differed significantly in both score types according to the grade level. It was found that the English interest level of 5th-grade students is significantly higher than other grade levels, and their anxiety levels were lower than other grade levels. The results were discussed in light of related studies.

Keywords: English anxiety, English interest, secondary school students

1. Introduction

Thanks to rapidly developing technology, inter-communal communication has become more accessible and widespread, so foreign language education has become more critical than ever. Commercial and individual relations based on mutual communication and interaction, such as social media, internet friendships, job opportunities, and education, have increased awareness of knowing a foreign language. International communication

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and interaction have made it necessary to know at least one foreign language, and countries' education policies have begun to take shape in this direction (Ateş & Aytekin, 2020). With the understanding of the importance of foreign language education, it began to be given to students at an earlier age.

In Turkey, the importance of foreign language education is emphasized at all education levels, and foreign language education takes place at every level. However, studies show that foreign language education has not reached the desired level in the country; traditional language teaching habits, the inadequacy of methods and activities applied in foreign language teaching, lack of materials, and deficiencies in measurement and evaluation are stated as the reasons why foreign language teaching cannot reach the desired level (Çelebi, 2006; Gömleksiz & Elaldı, 2011; Işık, 2008). At the same time, it should not be ignored that there are also internal reasons for foreign language success from the student.

Ensuring the student's active participation in foreign language learning is not just a cognitive process; affective elements such as interest, fear, and anxiety also directly affect the learning-teaching environment. Interest is an essential variable in the student's understanding of the target subject in the educational setting. According to Dewey, the student must be physically and cognitively active to learn the subject. Interest enables the student to focus on learning the subject and actively participate in the learning process (Cano, 2006). Interest also effectively motivates students to learn, so motivation and interest mutually affect each other and are vital elements of the learning process. Motivation depends on how engaged students are in the subject they are learning; motivating students to learn enables them to participate in the learning process willingly (Rivera, 2006).

Anxiety is another critical variable affecting the student's understanding of the concepts related to the subject. Spielberger (1983) defines anxiety as "*an instinctive emotion awakening involuntarily, including stress, uneasiness, apprehension, and disquiet*" (p. 15). According to Arnold (1999), anxiety related to "*negative emotions such as irritation, discomfort, worry, stress, and self-doubt is probably the most common emotional factor that prevents the learning process*" (p. 8). Language anxiety is "*a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process*" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128). Learners' stress and anxiety levels negatively impact language learning (Russell, 2020). According to the affective filter hypothesis, when a language learner becomes anxious, a filter occurs in his mind that blocks linguistic input from entering (Krashen, 1981, 1982). At the same time, significant negative relationships were also found between language anxiety and performance (Chen & Chang, 2004; Doğan, 2008; Horwitz, 1986; Philips, 1992; Sellers, 2000; Zhao, Guo, & Dynia, 2013). The results of meta-analysis research also confirm the negative relationship between foreign language courses anxiety and academic achievement in foreign language courses (Botes, Dewaele & Greiff, 2020). Language anxiety has different negative effects; students with low levels of foreign language anxiety are more successful in language learning, and high levels of inhibitory anxiety cause avoidance of different grammatical structures in foreign language learning

(Ganschow & Sparks, 1996; Kleinmann, 1977). Besides, foreign language anxiety is related mainly to communication anxiety, which plays a role in interpersonal interaction (McCroskey, 1977). Because communication anxiety expresses the shyness felt when communicating with other people, and since foreign language learning requires communication with people, these two types of anxiety affect each other (Çimen, 2011).

1.1 The Aim of the Research

As well as the elements such as curriculum, learning environment, and instructive originated variables, many other personal features, such as the students' cognitive capacity, interests, and affective characteristics, also influence foreign language teaching. It has been found that interest and anxiety are among the factors that negatively affect success in foreign language teaching. The first-factor affecting student success negatively in this process is the lack of interest (Özer & Korkmaz, 2016). Therefore, this research mainly focuses on students' interests and anxiety in foreign language lessons and aims to examine the interest and anxiety levels of secondary school 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade students toward the English lesson. The sub-problems of the research are as follows:

- 1) What is the secondary school students' English interest level?
- 2) Do secondary school students' English interest scores differ significantly according to their gender?
- 3) Do secondary school students' English interest scores differ significantly according to their grade level?
- 4) What is the secondary school students' English anxiety level?
- 5) Do secondary school students' English anxiety scores differ significantly according to their gender?
- 6) Do secondary school students' English anxiety scores differ significantly according to their grade level?

2. Method

Since this research aimed to examine the secondary school students' English interest and anxiety levels, it was conducted in a survey type. Survey models are suitable for research that aims to describe a past or present situation as it exists (Karasar, 2006).

2.1 Participants

Participants were 253 students (107 boys, 146 girls) in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 from a public secondary school in Samsun, Turkey. The school was selected through a random sampling method. The socioeconomic status of the school was largely middle-class. The mean age of the students was 12.30.

2.2 Data Collection Tools

The research data collection tools are personal information form, English Lesson Interest Scale, and Foreign Language Course Anxiety Scale. The personal information form was used to determine the gender and grade levels of the students.

English Lesson Interest Scale consists of the "Interest" sub-dimension of the Foreign Language Attitude Scale developed by Kartal and Özbek (2014). While developing the Foreign Language Attitude scale, an item pool was created and presented to the expert opinion. Afterward, the obtained questionnaire was applied to 718 students. 36 missing data were removed, and analyzes were made on 682 data. As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, a four-dimensional scale structure was obtained that explained 52% of the total variance. These sub-dimensions are anxiety, liking, interest, and boredom. This study used 14 items of the Interest sub-dimension of the Foreign Language Attitude Scale to determine the students' English interest levels. Since all the items contain English expressions, the Interest sub-dimension was named the English Lesson Interest Scale in the study. An example interest item in the scale is "*I want to learn English.*" The items were applied with a triple rating of agree (3), undecided (2) and disagree (1). The min-max score range that can be obtained from the scale varies between 14 and 42 points. Items containing negative statements in the scale were reverse-scored in the data analysis. The internal consistency coefficient of the Interest sub-dimension was found to be 0.89 by Kartal and Özbek (2014). In this study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the Interest sub-dimension was found to be 0.91.

The Foreign Language Course Anxiety Scale was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and measured the anxiety of students experience while learning English. The scale includes 33 items and is in a five-point Likert type. Items are measured with ratings ranging from "1-strongly disagree" to "5-strongly agree". The lowest-highest score range of the scale is 33-165 points. The high score obtained from the scale indicates a high level of anxiety about the English lesson. The reverse items were scored inversely in the analyses. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Aydın (1999). The internal consistency of the Foreign Language Course Anxiety Scale was found to be 0.93 in the study in which it was developed (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale in this study was calculated as 0.95.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were first examined in terms of the extreme values, and five were deleted. The remaining 248 data were analyzed. The descriptive statistics of the students' English interest and anxiety total scores were examined. When the Kurtosis and Skewness values are between -1.5 and +1.5, the data are considered within the limits that can be accepted as a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Therefore, it was determined that the interest and anxiety total scores were in the normal distribution range. Student t-test, ANOVA, and Scheffe were used for data analysis. Data analysis was executed in SPSS 17.00 program.

Students' interest and anxiety levels were interpreted according to the scales' minimum and maximum score ranges. The point intervals for the English Lesson Interest Scale are as follows: 14,0-23,3 points low level, 23,4-32,7 points moderate level, 32,8-42,0 points high level. The point intervals for the Foreign Language Course Anxiety Scale are as follows: 33,0-77,0 points low level, 77,1-121,0 points moderate, and 121,1-165,0 points as high level.

3. Results

The data were analyzed and presented within the framework of the research questions.

3.1 English Interest Level of the Secondary School Students

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of English interest scores

	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
English Interest Scores	248	36,41	5,89	19,00	42,00	-,986	-,014

As seen in Table 1, the mean of the secondary school students English interest scores is 36,41 points (M=36,41; SD=5,89). Considering the point intervals of the English Lesson Interest Scale, this score is high.

3.2 Examination of the Students' English Interest Scores According to Gender

Table 2: Examination of English interest scores by gender - student t-test results

		N	M	SD	t	df	p
English Interest Scores	Female	143	36,85	5,77	1,371	246	,172
	Male	105	35,81	6,03			

The students' English interest scores were examined according to their gender, and the results in Table 2 were obtained. The table shows that, the difference between the female and male students' English interest scores is insignificant ($t=1,371$; $p>,05$).

3.3 Examination of the Students' English Interest Scores According to Grade Level

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of English interest scores by grade level

		N	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
English Interest Scores	5. grade	84	38,94	4,08	25,00	42,00	,263	,520
	6. grade	54	35,31	6,42	23,00	42,00	-,601	-1,074
	7. grade	63	34,88	6,33	20,00	42,00	-,759	-,491
	8. grade	47	35,17	6,08	19,00	42,00	-,807	,067

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the English interest scores according to the students' grade levels. When the mean scores were examined, it was seen that the 5th grade was at the highest level (M=38,94). It can be stated that the mean scores of the 6th-grade (M=35,31) and 8th-grade (M=35,17) students are very close to each other, while the 7th-grade students are lower (M=34,88).

Table 4: Examination of English interest scores by grade level – ANOVA results

	Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffe results
English Interest Scores	Between groups	820,656	3	273,552	8,602	,000	5-6. grades
	Within groups	7759,211	244	31,800			5-7. grades
	Total	8579,867	247				5-8. grades

As seen in Table 4, the difference between the groups was significant ($F=8,602$; $p<,05$). Scheffe test results showed significant differences between the scores of the 5-6, 5-7, and 5-8th grade levels. In this case, the 5th-grade students with the highest average score have a significantly higher English interest than the 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade students.

3.4 English Anxiety Level of the Secondary School Students

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of English anxiety scores

	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
English Anxiety Scores	248	93,17	28,10	37,00	161,00	,003	-,727

The mean scores in Table 5 show that it is close to the moderate level ($M=93,17$; $SD=28,10$) according to the point intervals of the Foreign Language Course Anxiety Scale. Therefore, it can be concluded that secondary school students have moderate English anxiety.

3.5 Examination of the Students' English Anxiety Scores According to Gender

Table 6: Examination of English anxiety scores by gender - student t-test results

		N	M	SD	t	df	p
English Anxiety Scores	Female	143	93,89	28,76	,471	246	,638
	Male	105	92,19	27,28			

Table 6 shows that the students' English anxiety scores do not differ significantly according to their gender ($t=,471$; $p>,05$). Although the mean score of female students ($M=93,89$; $SD=28,76$) was higher than that of male students ($M=92,19$; $SD=27,28$), the difference in the mean scores is not significant.

3.6 Examination of the Students' English Anxiety Scores According to Grade Level

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of English anxiety scores by grade level

		N	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
English Anxiety Scores	5. grade	84	85,16	25,61	39,00	127,00	-,098	-1,238
	6. grade	54	99,55	29,32	42,00	151,00	-,039	-,869
	7. grade	63	98,34	29,09	37,00	161,00	-,073	-,366
	8. grade	47	93,17	26,89	44,00	148,00	-,062	-,830

The descriptive statistics of the secondary school students' English anxiety scores in Table 7 show that the 6th-grade students ($M=99,55$) have the highest average score. Then, 7th grade ($M=98,34$) and 8th grade ($M=93,17$) students have higher averages, respectively. It can be stated that the anxiety scores of the 5th-grade students are at the lowest level ($M=85,16$).

Table 8: Examination of English anxiety scores by grade level – ANOVA results

	Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffe results
English Anxiety Scores	Between groups	9272,355	3	3090,785	4,060	,008	5-6. grades
	Within groups	185769,190	244	761,349			5-7. grades
	Total	195041,544	247				

In Table 8, it is seen that there is a significant difference between the groups ($F=4,060$; $p<,05$). Scheffe test results showed significant differences between the grades 5-6 and 5-7. These results show that the English anxiety levels of the 5th-grade students are significantly lower than those of the 6th and 7th grades.

4. Discussion

Students' interest and anxiety levels in a course are important variables that determine their understanding and success of that course. Because these two affective variables also affect the students' motivation and desire to study and learn. This study examined secondary school students' English interest and anxiety levels regarding different variables. The research results revealed that the students' English interest levels were high, and their English anxiety levels were moderate. The results are similar to the other studies' results in terms of showing that other students also experience a certain level of English anxiety (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019; Okul, Hafı & ncer ivici, 2017). The high English interest level of the students can be interpreted as a positive result because it shows that secondary school students like English lessons. This result reflects their foreign language learning performance and academic success. Another positive result is that the students' anxiety levels are moderate and not high. Because students with low foreign language anxiety are more successful in language learning (Ganschow & Sparks, 1996), and schools with high English anxiety levels have lower English success levels (Doan, 2008). Similar results were obtained in another study. zkan (2009) found a significant difference between students' language proficiency and foreign language anxiety levels. He reported that their success rate decreases as students' anxiety level increases. In this respect, positive student beliefs about language learning can reduce their anxiety and increase their confidence in language learning (Aslan & Thompson, 2021).

The other result of the study is that the students' English interest and anxiety scores do not differ significantly according to their gender. Therefore, it is impossible to say that there is a significant difference between male and female students in terms of English interest and anxiety levels. Similar results were also reported in the literature, the effect of gender on language anxiety was investigated, and it was concluded that students' anxiety levels were not affected by the gender variable (ermik, 2015; Doan, 2008; Sarıgl, 2000; Zhao, Guo, & Dynia, 2013). Similarly, zkan (2019) showed that gender had no positive or negative effects on foreign language anxiety levels. A different finding on this issue was found by imen (2011) who reported that the gender of the students caused statistically significant differences in their English anxiety.

The study also concluded that students' interests and anxiety toward English lessons differed significantly according to their grade level. This result is compatible with the literature; a similar result was found by Zhao, Guo, and Dynia (2013). As a result of the study, it was determined that the interest levels of the 5th-grade students were significantly higher than the other grade levels, and the anxiety levels of the 5th-grade students were significantly lower than the 6th and 7th-grade students. These results show that English education in secondary schools needs to meet the expectations of 5th-grade students. It can be interpreted that although they come to secondary school with high interest and low anxiety, their interest levels decrease, and their anxiety levels increase as the grade level increases. A similar research was conducted by Aydın and Kurt (2022). They showed significant relationships between foreign language interest and foreign language anxiety, and interest in foreign language significantly predicts foreign language anxiety (Aydın & Kurt, 2022). Besides, a multiple regression analysis showed that learner-intrinsic variables predict foreign language classroom anxiety (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

5. Recommendations

The findings indicate that the relationship between foreign language interest and anxiety needs further investigation in additional research. Studies to be carried out in different samples and experimental studies to reduce students' English anxiety and increase their interest will be guided to the literature.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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