



WHAT FACTORS DO LEARNERS ATTRIBUTE TO THEIR SPEAKING ACHIEVEMENT?

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the factors affecting speaking achievement of language learners who were studying at an English preparatory school at the university level in Turkey. The study involved the participation of 131 language learners who had intermediate level of English proficiency. The participants were chosen using convenience sampling and took part in the study on a voluntary basis. The instrument used to collect data basically had two parts. The first part involved Language Achievement Attribution Scale (LAAS) developed by Hsieh (2004), which aimed to reveal the reasons which the participants attributed to their speaking scores. The second part included Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery questionnaire (on a 5-point Likert scale) developed by Gardner (1985), which revealed the participants' attitudes towards language learning, integrative and instrumental motivation, interest in foreign language and speaking anxiety. The data were analyzed on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and it was found that there was no statistically significant effect of motivation on language learners' speaking achievement, but speaking anxiety influenced it. In addition, the study showed that there were differences among the participants in the reasons they attributed to their speaking success depending on how motivated and anxious they were.

Keywords: attributions, speaking achievement, motivation, anxiety, language learning

Özet:

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de üniversite seviyesinde İngilizce hazırlık okulunda öğrenim gören öğrencilerin konuşma başarılarını etkileyen faktörleri ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlar. Çalışma, İngilizce yeterliği orta düzey olan 131 dil öğrencisinin katılımını içermektedir. Katılımcılar uygun örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak seçilmiştir ve çalışmada gönüllülük esasına bağlı olarak yer almışlardır. Veri toplamak için kullanılan araç temelde iki kısımdan oluşmaktadır. İlk kısım, katılımcıların konuşma puanlarına atfettikleri nedenleri ortaya çıkarmak için Hsieh (2004) tarafından geliştirilen Language

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Achievement Attribution Scale (LAAS) kullanımını içermiştir. İkinci kısım, katılımcıların dil öğrenmeye karşı tutumlarını, bütüncü ve araç güdülenmesini, yabancı dile ilgilerini ve konuşma kaygılarını ortaya çıkaran Gardner (1985) tarafından geliştirilmiş Attitude/Motivation Test Battery anketi (5'li likert ölçeği üzerinde) kullanımını içermektedir. Veri Sosyal Bilimler İstatistik Programında (SPSS) analiz edilmiştir ve motivasyonun öğrencilerin konuşma başarısı üzerinde istatistiki önem tesiri olmadığı, fakat konuşma kaygısının konuşma başarısını etkilediği bulunmuştur. Ek olarak, çalışma katılımcıları arasında ne kadar motive ve kaygılı olduklarına bağlı olarak konuşma başarılarına atfettikleri nedenler bakımında farklar olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: atıflar, konuşma başarısı, motivasyon, kaygı, dil öğrenme

1. Introduction

It is evident in the literature that motivation has a central role for an individual to start and maintain an action to reach his/her aim. Therefore, it is essentially important to help learners to increase their motivation. However, learning a foreign language poses some challenges to the language learners who are hardly exposed to authentic input outside the classroom. Hence, necessary motivation cannot be generated, and learning process turns out to be failure for learners. As Dörnyei (2001) explains motivation has a complex nature which is attempted to be explained with a number of theories and models. Due to the key importance of motivation in learning, the learners are required to be helped to gain their motivation.

Another factor which affects learners' language learning process is anxiety. Anxiety has been widely investigated in language learning and it has been noted that anxiety affects a language learners' performance negatively and thereby decreases learners' motivation to learn that language. Foreign language anxiety refers to fear which is experienced in a situation in which a learner is required to perform in a foreign language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). The condition of being anxious may change over time as a result of the learners or situation specific or related to other reasons such as individuals' linguistic abilities, relationships with other people and the atmosphere in a setting (MacIntyre, 2017). Language anxiety may arise in situations such as while speaking, listening and being assessed, and may result in feelings of nervousness, or fear that the learner will not be able to perform well.

The literature is rich in the studies exploring how anxiety and motivation affect language learners' learning based on the differences in variables such as gender, educational background, and proficiency level. However, the literature does not involve the research regarding the reasons which the motivated and anxious learners attribute to their speaking achievement. Therefore, the current study intends to contribute to the field revealing the differences among motivated and anxious learners with high or low speaking scores with respect to the reasons that the learners attribute to their speaking achievement scores.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motivation and Anxiety in Foreign Language Classroom

Motivation has key importance for the initiation of language learning, keeping the long and exhausting learning process active all the time (Dörnyei, 1998). Dörnyei (1998) expounds that L2 motivation is “*multi-faceted*” since as different from any other subjects, learning a second language also entails developing “*L2 identity*” together with the cultural elements from the target language (p. 118).

A number of factors might affect an individuals’ motivation in learning process. Individuals’ personal traits, their past experiences, rewards, goals, beliefs, other people, the environment, fear, anxiety, culture, age, gender and so on. Dörnyei explains besides the “*environmental and cognitive factors in educational psychology*”, L2 motivation is additionally under the influence of the personal and social factors (1998, p. 118).

Brown (2000) sorts motivation into two types as integrative and instrumental motivation. The first involves learning a language for personal development or successful integration to the society where the target language is taught, whereas the instrumental motivation encompasses some external reasons to learn a language. Dörnyei (1998) adds that motivation can be extrinsic and intrinsic. An individual is considered to be extrinsically motivated when she/he engages in a task for example not for an award but for a feeling of competence; however, a person who has extrinsic motivation is in the anticipation of an external reward.

The previous research shows the positive influence of motivation on language learning. For instance, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) unveiled that compared to the extrinsically motivated learners, intrinsically motivated learners were found to be more successful in developing their reading skills. Hu and McGeown (2020) explored a relationship between primary school Chinese learners’ foreign language motivation and success. The researchers noted that some variables such as gender and age affect motivation. Accordingly, female students are more motivated than males and the motivation and age have negative correlation as the motivation decreases as age increases. Additionally, Hu and McGeown’s study revealed that learners’ motivation decreases by the year of study (2020). The authors suggest engaging learners to cooperative language activities so as to increase the learners’ confidence and feeling of success, thereby increasing learners’ motivation.

While motivation has been explored to have a positive influence in learners’ language learning, anxiety conversely affects learning process. Foreign language anxiety refers to a negative feeling arising while learning a language other than an individual’s mother language and causes tension, worry or nervousness related to language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). As explained by Tóth (2010), there are two approaches of anxiety in language learning: Anxiety transfer and unique anxiety. Anxiety transfer involves the idea that learners who experience anxiety in most situations perform anxious behavior also while they are learning language. On the other hand, the unique anxiety refers to the anxiety which arises in language learning process and does not entail being anxious in general, rather specific to language learning context.

MacIntyre (2017) explains the effects of the language anxiety in three groups: academic, cognitive and social. The author discusses that the effects on the learners' academic life are experienced with poor performance in the exams and low scores. Regarding the cognitive effects, the author explains that the learners possess thoughts of worry about their performance. Also, language anxiety is involved in the stages of cognitive performance, which are explained as input, processing and output. To illustrate, anxiety prevents acquiring information at the input step functioning like a filter and at the processing step, it affects the speed and accuracy of learning. Finally, at the output step, because of the difficulties in retrieving the information, the anxiety negatively acts. As for the social effects of anxiety, language learners with anxiety will have self-confidence problems related to linguistics and have communication problems compared to the relaxed learners.

Students are likely to experience an anxiety problem related to different aspects of language such as writing, reading, grammar or speaking. Among them all, speaking anxiety in foreign language classroom is prominent (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018). Sadighi and Dastpak (2017) explain that language learners' speaking skill is affected by the speaking anxiety in foreign language learning. The authors state that anxiety derives from fear of making mistakes and the authors underscore the importance of teachers' role to help language learners overcome this fear providing learners with more opportunities to practice the target language. For this purpose, learning requires to be planned taking the learner to the center and with the integration of role-play activities, group discussion and problem solving activities into the language learning programs (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017). Similarly, Fang-Peng and Don (2010) examined the factors affecting the Chinese college students' English speaking anxiety and suggested encouraging students to speak more making them listen and think in English and speak English in order to decrease their speaking anxiety.

There may be various reasons for language anxiety such as pronunciation errors, being unaware of self-competences, teachers' intimidating error correction in class and test methods (MacIntyre, 2017). Also, cognitive reasons such as fear of losing identity, tendentious belief of proficiency, personality characteristics such as shyness or low self-confidence (MacIntyre, 2017). MacIntyre (2017) maintains that some social factors may also lead to language anxiety. The author exemplifies as the fear of being humiliated, not having a good quality of accent, and fear of making culture related gaffes.

Previous research indicates that language learners' anxiety change depending on the differences in reasons such as gender, age, proficiency level. To illustrate, it was revealed in the previous studies that male and female students differ from each other in terms of their anxiety (Hismanoğlu, 2013; Karataş, Alci, Bademoğlu & Ergin, 2016). Accordingly, female learners were found to have higher language anxiety than male students. Additionally, Hismanoğlu (2013) unveiled that age may be a factor affecting learners' anxiety. The author explains that the old learners in his study showed lower anxiety than the younger groups. Also, the literature shows that language learners' proficiency level and grade levels are likely to influence the learners' anxiety. Language learners with upper level English had higher anxiety than the participants whose

language proficiency was lower (Karataş et al., 2016), which is explained with the higher pressure to perform better in English. Despite the differences between the participants in their anxiety depending on their age and language proficiency levels, no differences were found regarding whether they had English preparatory training or depending on the school they graduated (Karataş et al., 2016). Also, some research investigated the relationship between the speaking anxiety and achievement, yet no significant correlation was found between them (Tridinanti, 2018).

2.2. Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, a cognitive theory of motivation, involves the study of students' interpretations of their own learning and their thoughts and beliefs influencing their motivation. The theory is based on the assumption that people want to understand and learn the environment, which involves understanding the incentive motives of their and other people's behaviors. In educational contexts, the students try to understand their success and thus, they attribute their achievement and failure to certain reasons (Heinzmann, 2013).

Bernard Weiner is the most known proponent of this theory. According to Weiner, there are four main reasons of success and failure to be attributes. These are ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. Besides, interest, teacher competence, mood and so on are identified as potential motives of success and failure in later studies. In fact, the reasons explaining an individual's success or failure are boundless. However, all the reasons are grouped under three basic titles: "*locus, stability and controllability*" (Heinzmann, 2013, p. 32). These three dimensions determine how individuals interpret their success or failure.

The reason attributed to success or failure may be *internal* or *external*. The locus dimension deals with to what extent a motive can be considered to be internal or external. For example, when the learner attributes his/her success to himself/herself, the attribution is internal. However, when the learner attributes his/her success or failure in an ability or task to the difficulty or luck, for instance, then the attribution is external (Heinzmann, 2013). Similarly, the cause of attribution may be *stable* and *unstable*. The stability dimension involves the notion that a cause can be perceived as a characteristic of the person or situational aspect of the person. To illustrate, an individual's ability is unlikely to change continuously, it is stable, but the effort which an individual makes may change depending on the situations, it is unstable (Heinzmann, 2013). Finally, the controllability dimension tells about how much a cause is controllable: more or less. For example, people may have control over effort, but ability is less controllable (Heinzmann, 2013).

The way people behave, and their persistence of motivation are influenced by their attributions about the causes of an ability or activity. For example, when a learner perceives the reason of his/her failure as lack of ability, which is uncontrollable and internal, s/he may develop the sense that no matter how much s/he tries, s/he will fail and thus, this will cause the student's lack of motivation (Beltrams, 2008). On the other hand, when the learner attributes the cause to a controllable factor which can change across the situations (unstable), the student is likely to believe that she/he will succeed in the task in the future and his/her motivation will be kept at high levels (Beltrams, 2008).

Haider (2014) underscores that individuals do not perceive attributions similarly. For example, an internal, stable factor can be motivational effect on an individual while it is motivating for the other. The researcher gives the example of a student who has a difficult task and believes the task is too difficult to do; his motivation to do the task will be very little. However, a student who believes when she/he works hard and persists will have higher motivation to do the task.

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) draw attention to the teachers' reaction and feedback for the development of students' attributions and expectancy. The researchers state that the feedback should be correct and based on sensible reasoning. If the students are not provided with accurate and valid feedback, they may be disappointed. To illustrate, were the student to try hard to do a task, but were the teacher to give the feedback that the student needs to study harder, the student would get frustrated and refuse to get more feedback from the teacher. In a different example, a student who does the task correctly may get the feedback that the task is actually too simple and she/he may conclude that she/he has low ability to do the task (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). As can be understood from the examples here, it is evident that the teacher has a predominant role to help students develop attributions of success and failure.

3. Material and Methods

The study is based on quantitative research methods. The details regarding the participants, the data collection and analysis procedures are given in this section.

3.1. Participants

In the selection of the participants, convenience sampling was employed. In total 131 English as a foreign language (EFL) students (59 males and 72 females) who had intermediate proficiency level of English and were studying at the English preparatory school of a university were involved in the study based on a voluntary basis.

3.2. Data Collection

The data collection involved the participants' filling out a questionnaire, the details of which are explained below.

3.2.1. Instrument

In order to collect data, a questionnaire which includes three parts was used. The first part of the questionnaire included items to find out demographic information of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire involved Language Achievement Attribution Scale (LAAS) developed by Hsieh (2004). On the scale, the students firstly indicated their latest scores in the speaking exam. After that, the students marked if they were satisfied with their scores or not on the scale from 1 (Very Unsatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). Later, the students were asked six more questions to explore the reasons (ability, effort, difficulty, mood, luck or the assessor-teacher) they attributed to their success or failure in the speaking exam. The third part of the questionnaire attempted to

explore the participants' motivation (involving subcategories of attitudes towards language learning, integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, and interest in foreign languages) and speaking anxiety. For this purpose, the third part of the questionnaire included 28 items taken from Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery developed by Gardner (1985) and the participants were requested to give their opinions on a 5-point-likert-scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Since all the participants in the study were Turkish EFL learners, the questionnaire was translated into Turkish using translation-back translation methods to check whether or not there is any loss in the originality of the translated sentences (Erten, 2015). The questionnaire items which were translated were checked in terms of internal reliability on the SPSS. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scale were 0.84 for motivation and 0.88 for speaking anxiety, suggesting good internal consistency reliability for the scale used in the study.

3.3. Data Analysis

In aligned with the research purposes of the current study, certain statistical tests were performed on the SPSS in order to analyze the collected data. Specifically, descriptive tests, Pearson Correlation coefficients, MANOVA and ANOVA were performed in order to find an answer for the following research questions.

4. Results

The research questions (RQs) addressed in this study are as follows:

RQ1: Is there a relation between the participants' motivation to learn English, speaking anxiety and speaking scores?

RQ2: What reasons do the participants attribute to their speaking scores?

RQ2.1: Do the reasons the participants attribute to their speaking scores vary depending on the differences in their scores?

RQ2.2: How does the participants' motivation affect the causes they attribute to their speaking success?

RQ2.3: How does the participants' speaking anxiety affect the causes they attribute to their speaking success?

The results of the statistical tests performed on the SPSS are presented below in aligned with the research questions.

RQ1: Is there a relation between the participants' motivation, anxiety and speaking achievement?

Whether there was a relationship between the participants' speaking scores and their anxiety and motivation to learn English or not was investigated using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (See Table 1).

Table 1: Correlations among speaking score, motivation and speaking anxiety

	1	2	3
1. Total speaking score	1	-.02	-.45**
2. Motivation		1	-.01
3. Speaking anxiety			1

The results indicated that there was no correlation between the participants speaking scores and their motivation to learn English, which suggests that the participants' motivation to learn English is not a predictor of their speaking scores in the exam. However, a medium negative correlation was found between the speaking scores and the participants' anxiety, $r = -.45$, $n = 127$, $p = .00$. The results here indicated that there was an increase in the participants' speaking scores only when was their speaking anxiety low.

RQ2: The mostly attributed reasons affecting speaking scores

A descriptive statistics test was performed on LAAS items in the questionnaire on SPSS version 17 and the results showed that of all the reasons given on the LAAS, *mood* ($M = 3.9$; $SD = 1.1$) is the reason which the participants mostly attributed to their speaking score in the exam. Thus, it might be concluded that the participants mostly related the score they took in the exam to the way they felt on the exam day. The descriptive statistics showed that after *mood*, the participants attributed their speaking scores to the *difficulty* of the exam ($M = 3.5$; $SD = 1.1$), to the *assessor* who conducted the exam ($M = 3.4$; $SD = 1.3$), their own *ability* to learn a foreign language ($M = 3.3$; $SD = 1.2$), *luck* ($M = 2.9$; $SD = 1.4$) and finally to the amount of *effort* which they put into studying for the exam ($M = 2.7$; $SD = 1.3$). As it is evident in the results, the participants thought their effort to prepare for the exam was the last reason they attributed to their speaking score.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of LAAS items

	M	SD
Mood	3.9	1.1
Difficulty	3.5	1.1
Assessor-Teacher	3.4	1.3
Ability	3.3	1.2
Luck	2.9	1.4
Effort	2.7	1.3

So as to reveal whether there were any differences in the factors the participants attributed to their speaking achievement depending on their scores, motivation and anxiety, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) tests were performed on the SPSS. Below are the results which belong to the differences in the participants' attributions of success and failure depending on the speaking scores, motivation and anxiety presented respectively.

RQ2.1: Do the reasons the participants attribute to their speaking scores vary depending on the differences in their scores?

In the questionnaire, the participants were requested to indicate their speaking scores in the last speaking exam they took. In the exam, the students performed individually giving a speech on the topic they chose without prior preparation and their exam performance was assessed with a score out of 15 by an assessor. The analysis of the collected data showed that the participants' speaking scores ranged from 4 to 15. The scores were categorized in three groups. Accordingly, the scores ranging from 0 to 5 were labeled as weak ($n=9$, % 6.8); from 6 to 10 as fair ($n=70$, % 53); and from 11 to 15 as good ($n=50$, % 38.7). In order to explore whether there was a difference between the participants whose scores were weak, fair or good in terms of the reasons they attributed to their scores, a MANOVA test was performed on the SPSS. Preliminary assumption testing was carried out to check for normality and multivariate outliers on the SPSS and the analyses showed no serious violations. Since MANOVA results can easily be affected by outliers (Pallant, 2007), the outliers in the data set used in the present study were checked. The results showed that the maximum value for Mahalanobis distance (16.05) was less than the critical value 16.27 (Pallant, 2007), suggesting that there were no substantial multivariate outliers.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the participants according to their speaking scores on the dependent variables, $F(12, 240) = 1.9$, $p = .04$; Wilks Lambda = .84; partial eta squared = .09. The separate analysis of the dependent variables using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.17 indicated the only difference to reach statistical significance was the participants' attribution to *ability*, $F(2, 125) = 6.3$, $p = .02$; partial eta squared = .09, and to the *assessor* $F(2, 125) = 3.6$, $p = .03$; partial eta squared = .05, as a reason to their speaking scores. It was revealed that the participants whose speaking scores were labeled as good ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.2$) attributed their speaking scores to *ability* more than the participants whose scores were labeled as weak ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.3$) and fair ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.1$). Regarding *assessor* as an attribution to the speaking score, it was revealed that the participants whose speaking scores were labeled as weak ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1$) attributed their speaking scores to the *assessor* more than the participants whose scores were labeled as fair ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.2$) and good ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.4$).

RQ2.2: How does the participants' motivation affect the causes they attribute to their speaking success?

Depending on the results from the questionnaire, the participants were sorted in three groups with respect to their motivation as the participants with low ($n = 39$, % 30.5), moderate ($n = 49$, % 39.1) and high motivation ($n = 39$, % 30.5). A one-way between group analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of motivation on the causes the participants attributed to their speaking achievement. The test showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in *ability*, $F(2, 124) = 3.8$, $p = .03$, and *luck*, $F(2, 124) = 5.1$; $p = .007$, as a cause of the participants' speaking scores. According to Cohen (1988), the actual difference in mean scores was found to be medium and large for *ability* and *luck* respectively. The effect size, which was calculated using eta squared, was

.05 for *ability* and .07 for *luck*. Post-hoc comparisons using Turkey HSD test indicated that the participants with high motivation ($M=3.47$; $SD= 1.22$) statistically differed from the participants with low motivation ($M= 2.79$; $SD= 1.14$) in how they thought about the *ability* as a reason for their speaking achievement. Accordingly, the participants with high motivation attributed the *ability* as a reason for their speaking success than the participants with low motivation.

Similarly, to reveal how groups differed from each other with respect to the *luck* to attribute as a reason for speaking success, post-hoc comparisons were performed and it was found that the mean score of highly motivated participants ($M= 2.42$; $SD= 1.29$) differed from the participants with low motivation ($M= 3.32$; $SD= 1.54$) and moderate motivation ($M= 3.14$; $SD= 1.29$). The results suggest that the participants whose motivation to learn English is grouped as moderate and low attributed *luck* to their success more than the participants with high motivation.

RQ2.3: How does the participants' speaking anxiety affect the causes they attribute to their speaking success?

The speaking anxiety of the participants was analyzed using an ANOVA test on the SPSS. As similarly to the motivation, three groups of participants were formed as the participants whose level of anxiety was defined as low ($n= 30$, % 23.6), moderate ($n= 72$, % 56,7) and high ($n= 25$, % 19,7). Of all the reasons given in the study, it was found that the participants differed from each other statistically significantly, $F(2, 12) = 4.4$, $p= .01$ with a large size effect (.07) only in *mood*. The post-hoc comparisons revealed that the participants with high anxiety ($M= 4.12$; $SD= 1.13$) attributed their speaking achievement to their mood on the exam day compared to the participants with low ($M= 3.37$; $SD= 1.27$) or moderate anxiety levels ($M= 4.04$; $SD= 1.05$). On the other hand, the results did show that there were no statistically significant differences among the participants depending on their anxiety levels in the attributions of *ability*, *effort*, *difficulty*, *luck* or *assessor-teacher*, $p> .005$.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed at revealing the factors that affect the speaking achievement of the EFL learners. For this purpose, based on a quantitative research design, the research investigated a) the relationship between the motivation, speaking anxiety and speaking achievement of the language learners, and b) the differences between the learners based on their scores, motivation and anxiety with regard to the reasons they attributed to their speaking success.

The statistical tests indicated that motivation is not a predictor of speaking achievement, but speaking anxiety has a moderate negative relation with the speaking achievement. The literature shows that motivation has an important influence on language learning. The learners with keen interest in the target language or the society for integrative or instrumental reasons are prone to learn a foreign language. With regard to this, motivation is considered to have a positive influence on language learning

process, and this is highly likely to bring about positive outcome in the examination of the language learning. Hu and McGeown (2020) explored a relationship between foreign language motivation and success in a study in which they investigated the primary school Chinese learners of EFL. The researchers also noted that some variables such as gender and age had an influence on motivation. Accordingly, the female students are more motivated than males, and the motivation and age have negative correlation as the motivation decreases as age increases. Additionally, Hu and McGeown's study revealed that learners' motivation decreases by the year of study (2020). The authors suggest engaging learners to cooperative language activities so as to help them increase their confidence and feeling of success, thereby increasing their motivation. On the contrary, the results from the present study suggested that motivation did not lead the learners to get high scores in the exam. The particular area tested in this research was speaking. The assessment of the other skills such as reading, writing, listening might bring about different results, but depending on the results in the current study, it might be concluded that how motivated the learners to learn a foreign language does not result in better achievement scores.

Some research investigated the relationship between the speaking anxiety and achievement, yet no significant correlation was found between them (Tridinanti, 2018). On the other hand, Tóth (2010) explains that the studies investigating the relationship between language anxiety and language skills have brought about consistent results. Accordingly, low anxiety results in high scores in the assessment of the language skills. The previous research shows that the learners with high anxiety are reluctant to communicate in foreign language, and anxiety has an adverse effect on L2 communication (Tóth, 2010). As parallel to the literature, the results from the present study suggest that language learners' speaking anxiety has a negative influence on the learners' speaking scores. Language learners with high anxiety levels were found to be with lower achievement scores when compared to language learners with low anxiety levels. Considering that learners who lack enough confidence to voice their thoughts in class; for example, while responding to a task or doing presentations in class, cannot perform well in the exam. Therefore, the present study suggests that it is essentially important to help learners to overcome the speaking anxiety problem or to look for the ways to handle it in language learning settings.

The other aspect which this study intends to reveal was to what extent the participants' motivation, anxiety and speaking score differed from each other with regard to the factors which the learners attributed to their success. To begin with, the study revealed that the language learners who took high scores in the speaking exam attributed their success to their ability of language learning. According to the attributions' theory, *ability* is an internal, stable and uncontrollable reason. Thus, the result suggests that the learners with high scores perceive themselves as a reason of their success in the exam, rather than an external factor. On the other hand, the language learners in the study indicated that they related their low score in the exam to the *assessor* who conducted the exam. The assessor is an external, unstable and uncontrollable reason and the result shows that the participants in the current study possibly attributed their failure to a

reason (assessor) which they could not control but may change in another exam. Considering this, it might be concluded that the learners held the belief that their score in the speaking exam may increase in another exam in which their speaking performance was evaluated by another assessor.

The study also unveiled the reasons that the language learners whose motivation was ranged from high to low attributed to their speaking achievement. Accordingly, the language learners whose motivation was high considered their success in speaking was due to their *ability*. As similarly to the participants with high speaking scores, highly motivated participants related their success to an internal reason. However, the participants whose motivation was defined as moderate or low in this research showed that their speaking score was a result of their *luck*, which is external, unstable and uncontrollable reason in the attribution theory. Taking the results here into consideration, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the participants who lacked motivation considered their success might change when, for example, they feel lucky in a different exam administered on a different day.

The study finally indicated that the level of anxiety of the language learners is likely to have an influence on their attributions to their success or failure. The language learners who have high speaking anxiety did indicate that their mood was the reason for the score they took in the exam. Considering this finding, it is possible to assert that the highly anxious language learners perceived how they felt on the exam day as a reason for their speaking score. As a factor, *mood* is unstable, and it may swing over time. Hence, looking at the result here, one may consider that the participants who have high speaking anxiety are likely to be in the belief that their score may change in time when they are in a good mood in another speaking exam. However, the mood is uncontrollable, so the participants may not have control over it. Therefore, the teachers' guidance and the learners' practice are crucial to help learners to make their speaking performance better in exams.

This study suffers from several limitations. First, it is only based on quantitative research methods. Therefore, the data were collected through one method and interpreted depending on the results derived from that. However, in further studies, interviews which would be conducted with the participants might give a better understanding of how anxiety and motivation influence their speaking achievement. Also, further research might focus on analyzing the effects of motivation and anxiety on language learners' speaking achievement depending on longitudinal research. This study revealed the effects only depending on one exam result, yet a further study might bring about more concrete findings if more exam scores could be analyzed over time. Additionally, the results from this study give insights about the relationship between motivation, anxiety and speaking achievement along with the reasons attributed to their success by the language learners at the university level. Thus, the results are far beyond to represent a large population of the foreign language learners. Therefore, similar research might be conducted with different sample group of foreign language learners at different education levels (for example, with the language learners at the primary school, secondary school) to explore the differences between the language learners.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

About the Author

Saliha Toscu is a lecturer at Çankaya University, Turkey. Her primary research interests include research into language teaching and learning, educational research, technology use in education and intercultural competence.

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