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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY ON TEXT ANXIETY AMONG FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

A descriptive study on test anxiety among foreign language learners

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Abstract: Test anxiety has considerable effects on the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Thus, it is necessary to research the issue to provide concrete and realistic solutions to test anxiety. Moreover, research on anxiety in the Turkish EFL context mainly focuses on the sources and effects of foreign language anxiety. This study aims to find the test anxiety levels among Turkish EFL learners and explore whether test anxiety levels differ regarding certain variables. In this descriptive and correlational research, a background questionnaire and the Foreign Language Test Anxiety Scale (FLTAS) were administered to 246 participants studying at preparatory schools. After presenting the descriptive data, t-test, ANOVA, Kruskal Wallis-H Test were conducted to examine the differences in test anxiety and variables. The study concluded that EFL learners suffer from test anxiety at a moderate level. The results also indicated that test anxiety levels significantly differ regarding certain variables such as age, gender, socio-economic background, types of high schools and departments graduated, language proficiency and achievement levels, study skills, and test types administered.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; text anxiety; demographic variables

Test anxiety has mainly adverse effects on the foreign language learning process and achievement (Aydın et al., 2020). For example, it decreases the interest in language learning, learning motivation, achievement, and learning potential (Julkunen, 1992). It also causes inconsistency between the scores and the actual use of the foreign language (Latulippe & Light, 1983), which increases the number of mistakes and creates a barrier that makes it impossible for the learner to reflect the learner's actual performance (El-Banna, 1989). Last, test anxiety is also the source of physical and psychological problems among learners (Aydın et al., 2006).

Certain factors trigger test anxiety among language learners. Cultural differences, social inequality, inappropriate test content, and problems concerning the testing process are some of those factors (Neely & Shaughnessy, 1984). Problems regarding the validity, time limitation, test environment, test instructions, test techniques, and format and length also provoke test anxiety (Young, 1986). Additionally, standardized tests (Rotenberg, 2002), low level of language proficiency, learners' prior experiences, and weak study skills cause test anxiety (Rasor & Rasor, 1998). Last, environmental and situational factors are directly and closely related to test anxiety (Bushnell, 1978).

In a general educational context, test anxiety can be defined as "the set of cognitive, physiological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on exams or similar evaluative situations" (Zeidner, 2007, p. 166; Zeidner, 1998, p. 17). Within the scope of the foreign language learning context,

test anxiety is one of the varieties of foreign language anxiety in addition to comprehension apprehension and fear of negative evaluation (Aydin, 2019). Test anxiety which is related to apprehension towards academic

evaluations can be defined as a consciously or unconsciously unpleasant experience encountered in many test-related situations among foreign language learners (Horwitz & Young, 1991). The conceptualization for test anxiety relates to the Self-Regulative Theory that specifies transactional processes and self-referent information (Zeidner, 2007; Zeidner & Matthews, 2005). Self-regulative processing is activated when the thought of potential failure in a testing situation is experienced. The process is influenced by negative self-beliefs resulting in test anxiety. Thus, since the learner feels the danger and threatened, she tends not to show avoidance regarding actual performance.

Research shows that test anxiety levels differ in terms of certain variables. For instance, Hembree (1988) found that the levels of test anxiety differ regarding gender, grade, and language ability. Guida and Ludlow (1989) noted that learners with high socio-economic status felt more test anxiety. Putwain (2007) also found that ethnic, socio-economic backgrounds, and gender were significant predictors of test anxiety. In addition, research results indicate that the lack of study skills provokes test anxiety. Wittmaier (1972), for example, found that learners who had higher quality of studying behaviors had lower levels of test anxiety. Culler and Holahan (1980) also reached similar results. In addition, Rasor and Rasor (1998) noted that lower study skills caused higher test anxiety among students. Cassidy and Johnson (2002) also found that high-anxious learners had low studying behaviors. Aydin (2013) found that gender, age, grade, and achievement level impacted test anxiety. Gursoy and Arman (2016) reached similar results regarding grade, gender, and achievement level. Some other factors that provoked test anxiety were the testing atmosphere (Shohamy, 1982), low level of language proficiency (Horwitz, 1986; Joy, 2013; Rotenberg, 2002; Sarason, 1972; Williams, 1996), assessment methods and test instructions (Oh, 1992). In a recent study, Aydin et al. (2020) found that EFL learners suffered from test anxiety due to fear of failure, past experiences, parental expectations, low study skills, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and low performance on tests. On the other hand, Khoshhal (2021) concluded that familiarity with question types decreased test anxiety. Finally, the results of Limoudehi and Mazandarani's (2021) study revealed a meaningful relationship between gender and test anxiety.

Research demonstrates that test anxiety has some profound effects on the foreign language learning process. For example, in a descriptive study, Aydin et al. (2006) concluded that test anxiety significantly decreased concentration, motivation, and achievement and increased the number of mistakes in the foreign language learning process. Haskin et al. (2003) found that test anxiety had debilitating effects on spoken proficiency among language learners. In another study, Schonwetter (1995) also noted that test anxiety decreases the level of learning outcomes. In the above-mentioned study, Aydin et al. (2020) concluded that test anxiety lowered performance on tests and caused inadequate concentration. Lastly, Khoshhal (2021) found that language performance decreases as test anxiety increases and vice versa.

Given that test anxiety has profound influences on the EFL learning process, more research is necessary due to specific reasons. First, differences in educational cultures and context may have an important place when test anxiety, causes, and effects are considered. Thus, it is necessary to perform research to provide concrete and realistic solutions to test anxiety in the foreign language context. Second, when new approaches, methods, changing parameters, recent theoretical concepts, and innovations in the language teaching and learning processes are paid attention to, more research seems necessary for an in-depth understating of test anxiety. Furthermore, several developments, improvements, and innovations were put into practice in the Turkish EFL learning and teaching contexts. For example, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an international standard for the description of language ability, has been used as a reference in the Turkish EFL context. However, how the application of the CEFR contributes to the Turkish EFL teaching and learning context seems to be an

unanswered question. Speaking specifically, how the outputs of the CEFR affect test anxiety needs to be understood. On the other hand, research on anxiety in the Turkish EFL context mainly focused on the sources and effects of foreign language anxiety (Aydın et al., 2006), the effects of variables such as gender (Aydın & Takkaç, 2007), achievement (Dalkılıç, 2001), and the use of technology (Aydın, 2011). In other words, it should be highlighted that research in the Turkish context mainly focused on foreign language anxiety rather than test anxiety. With these concerns in mind, the current study aims to find the test anxiety levels among Turkish EFL learners and explore whether the test anxiety levels differ regarding certain variables. For these purposes, the study asks two research questions.

- What is the level of test anxiety among Turkish EFL learners?
- Does the level of test anxiety differ regarding certain variables such as gender, age, socio-economic background, the types and departments of high schools graduated, language proficiency and achievement, study skills, the test types administered, departments, and language medium at undergraduate programs?

2. Method

2.1. Research context

In this study, a descriptive and correlational research design was preferred within the scope of an analytic approach and deductive objective. The reason behind this preference was that it seemed necessary to gain further insight into EFL learners' levels of test anxiety and the relationship between the variables described and test anxiety. Thus, the descriptive and correlational research design seemed appropriate to fulfill the purposes of the study. In addition, descriptive research refers to examining data with preconceived research questions. As the nature of test anxiety among foreign language learners and differences regarding its levels in accordance with certain variables are the main interests in the study, a questionnaire and a scale were used to gather data from the perspectives of the participants without any intervention within a natural context (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

2.2. Participants

The sample group in the study consisted of 246 students studying English at preparatory schools that aimed to learn English before enrolling in their undergraduate programs. The group consisted of 129 female (52.4%), 117, and male students (47.6%) whose mean age was 19.10 within the range of 18 and 22. The high schools they graduated from were state for 210 (85.4) and private for 36 (14.6%) participants. The departments they attended at high school were social studies (n=8, 3.3%), mathematics and science (n=131, 53.3%), equally-weighted (n=88, 35.8%), and foreign language (n=19, 7.7%). Of the participants, 24 (9.8%) stated that their families' income level was low, while 210 (85.4) were at a medium level. Twelve participants (4.9%) stated that the income level was high. The participants' undergraduate programs after the preparatory school were Business and International Relations (n=31, 12.6%), International Relations (n=27, 11.0%), Computer Engineering (n=27, 11.0%), Industrial Engineering (n=23, 9.3%), Economics (n=23, 9.3%), Molecular Biology and Genetics (n=14, 4.7%), English Language and Literature (n=10, 4.1%), International Commerce and Finance (n=10, 4.1%), Political Science and Public Administration (n=10, 4.1%), Constructional Engineering (n=9, 3.7%), Energy Systems Engineering (n=8, 3.3%), and History (n=8, 3.3%). The remaining 47 students (19.1%) were at the departments of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Finance, Social Service, English Language Teaching, Labor Economics and Industrial Relations, Physics Engineering, English Translation and Interpreting, Mining Engineering, Polymer and Material Engineering, Astronomy and Space Sciences, Biology, Environmental Engineering, Dentistry, Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, Visual Communication and Design, Mathematics, Mathematics and Science Education, Architecture Engineering, Audiology, Tourist Guiding, and Turkish Language and Literature. Their mediums of instruction at undergraduate programs were English – 100% (n=113, 45.9%), English – 30% (n=109, 44.3%), and Turkish (n=14, 5.7%). Apart from these programs, 10 students (4.1%) participated in English Language Studies such as English Language Teaching, English Language and Literature, and English Translation and Interpretation. Their levels of language in

English were A1-A2 ($n=195$, 79.3%), B1-B2 ($n=41$, 16.7%), and C1-C2 ($n=10$, 4.1%). The mean score for achievement in English was 74.20 within the range of 0 and 100. The mean score for the time assigned to studying English a day was 2.27 hours within the range of 0 and 7. Finally, the tests administered to the students were achievement tests (35%), proficiency tests (31.3%), placement tests (28.9%), and diagnostic tests (4.9%).

2.3. Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments consisted of a background questionnaire and the Foreign Language Test Anxiety Scale (FLTAS) developed by Aydin et al. (2021). First, the background questionnaire was used to gather information about the participants' gender, age, high school types and departments they graduated from, income levels, undergraduate programs, instruction mediums of the undergraduate programs, language proficiency, achievement scores, study hours, and test types administered. Second, the FLTAS was used to determine their levels of test anxiety. The FLTAS consisted of a 17-item Likert scale with three sub-scales: debilitating effects of test anxiety, sources of test anxiety, and physical effects of test anxiety. The scale accounted for 67.4% of variance with a value of .93 for Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .94 for debilitating effects of test anxiety, .74 for sources of test anxiety, and .80 for physical effects of test anxiety.

2.4. Data collection procedure

After obtaining research ethics committee approval and formal permissions from the school administration, an online version of the instruments was designed before its administration. An introductory text was added to inform the participants about the purpose, significance, methodology of the study, and the rationale behind the subject choice. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary. It was also stated that anonymity and confidentiality of their responses were ensured. Next, the data collection instruments were shared via Google Forms. The form was kept online for three months. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data collected. First, the frequency and percentage for gender, high school types and departments they graduated from, income levels, undergraduate programs, instruction mediums of the undergraduate programs, language proficiency, and test types administered were computed. The mean scores for age, achievement scores, and study hours were also calculated. Then, reliability coefficients and percentages of variances were computed for the FLTAS. The reliability coefficient in Cronbach's Alpha was .93, and the % of variance was 64.9. After giving descriptive data for the items in the scale to find the levels of test anxiety, t-test, ANOVA, Kruskal Wallis-H Test were conducted to examine the differences regarding the levels of test anxiety and variables presented above.

3. Results

Values presented in Table 1 show that EFL learners suffer from anxiety at a medium level. First, regarding the debilitating effects of test anxiety, students believed that feeling anxious about exams sometimes decreased their interest in learning ($\bar{x}=2.89$), caused them to lose their motivation ($\bar{x}=3.13$), and created a barrier to learning English ($\bar{x}=2.88$). Furthermore, they stated that test anxiety usually caused difficulties in oral production ($\bar{x}=3.59$) and lowered their performance in the target language ($\bar{x}=3.71$). They also perceived that they sometimes experience difficulties in learning new vocabulary ($\bar{x}=2.75$), understanding what they listened in English ($\bar{x}=3.22$), learning grammar ($\bar{x}=2.83$), reading ($\bar{x}=2.83$), and writing in the target language ($\bar{x}=3.23$). Second, in terms of the sources of test anxiety, EFL learners stated that fear of failure ($\bar{x}=3.77$) and unpreparedness to tests ($\bar{x}=3.78$) were perceived as strong sources of test anxiety. It should also be noted that feeling anxious in exams usually increased the number of mistakes ($\bar{x}=3.87$). Perceived low level of proficiency in the target language was also a strong source of test anxiety among EFL learners ($\bar{x}=4.02$). Third and last, test anxiety had certain physical effects on EFL learners. In other words, the participants stated that they sometimes had stomachache ($\bar{x}=2.60$) and headache ($\bar{x}=2.84$) and felt sick in the stomach ($\bar{x}=2.54$) when they felt anxious about tests.

Table 1. Descriptives for the levels of test anxiety (n=246)

Items	Frequencies					Mean	Std. Deviation
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always		
1. I lose my interest in learning English when I feel anxious about exams.	43 17.5%	50 20.03%	77 31.3%	44 17.9%	32 13.0%	2.89	1.26
2. I lose learning motivation when I feel anxious about exams.	32 13.0%	36 14.6%	74 30.1%	77 31.3%	27 11.0%	3.13	1.19
3. I think anxiety about exams creates a barrier to learning English.	56 22.8%	45 18.3%	57 23.2%	49 19.9%	39 15.9%	2.88	1.39
4. I have difficulties in speaking English when I feel anxious about exams.	22 8.9%	22 8.9%	58 23.6%	77 31.3%	67 27.2%	3.59	1.23
5. I have difficulties in learning new vocabulary when I feel anxious about exams.	54 22.0%	56 22.8%	57 23.2%	55 22.4%	24 9.8%	2.75	1.29
6. I have difficulties in understanding what I listen to in English when I feel anxious about exams.	31 12.6%	40 16.3%	65 26.4%	65 26.4%	45 18.3%	3.22	1.27
7. I have difficulties in understanding the texts I read in English when I feel anxious about exams.	24 9.8%	44 17.9%	72 29.3%	73 29.7%	33 13.4%	3.19	1.17
8. I have difficulties in learning grammar when I feel anxious about exams.	40 16.3%	58 23.6%	77 31.3%	47 19.1%	24 9.8%	2.83	1.20
9. I have difficulties in showing my real performance when I feel anxious about exams.	16 6.5%	24 9.8%	49 18.9%	83 33.7%	74 30.1%	3.71	1.18
10. I have difficulties in writing in English when I feel anxious about exams.	21 8.5%	43 17.5%	79 32.1%	64 26.0%	39 15.9%	3.23	1.17
11. Fear of failure makes me anxious.	19 7.7%	24 9.8%	44 17.9%	67 27.2%	92 37.4%	3.77	1.26
12. I feel stressed when I don't study properly for tests.	18 7.3%	22 8.9%	42 17.1%	77 31.3%	87 35.4%	3.78	1.22
13. I make more mistakes when I feel anxious in an exam.	9 3.7%	23 9.3%	34 13.8%	105 42.7%	75 30.5%	3.87	1.01
14. If I knew English better, I would be less anxious.	12 4.9%	22 8.9%	29 11.8%	68 27.6%	115 46.7%	4.02	1.18

15. I have a stomachache when I feel anxious about exams.	79 32.1%	48 19.5%	44 17.9%	43 17.5%	32 13.0%	2.60	1.42
16. I feel sick in my stomach when I feel anxious about exams.	89 36.2%	38 15.4%	48 19.5%	40 16.3%	31 12.6%	2.54	1.44
17. I have a headache when I feel anxious about exams.	54 22.0%	52 21.1%	61 24.8%	37 15.0%	42 17.1%	2.84	1.38

The results in the study indicate that the level of test anxiety among EFL learners significantly differs regarding certain variables when some of the items in the FLTAS are considered. For instance, in terms of gender, female students had more difficulties in showing their real performance when they felt worried about exams than male students did ($p=.02$). Female students also stated that they made more mistakes when they felt anxious in exams ($p=.02$), as shown in Table 2. Concerning age, the values in Table 3 showed that older students seemed to have more difficulties in showing their actual performance when they felt anxious about exams ($p=.01$).

Table 2. Gender and foreign language test anxiety (Independent samples t-test)

Items	Gender	Number	Mean	F	Sig.
I have difficulties in showing my real performance when I feel anxious about exams.	Female	129	3.80	5.32	.02
	Male	117	3.36		
I make more mistakes when I feel anxious in an exam.	Female	129	4.05	5.93	.02
	Male	117	3.67		

Table 3. Age and foreign language test anxiety (Kruskal Wallis-H Test)

Items	Age	Number	Mean Rank	χ^2	Asymp. Sig.
I have difficulties in showing my real performance when I feel anxious about exams.	18	70	113.9	13.37	.01
	19	114	120.0		
	20	38	122.9		
	21	14	181.5		
	22	10	151.4		

According to the values in Table 4 those who had lower income levels felt more stressed when they did not study properly for tests than the ones who had middle and high income ($p=.03$). Moreover, the participants who are in the low-level income group seemed to make more mistakes when they felt worried about exams ($p=0.01$) when compared to the ones in middle- and high-level-income level groups.

Table 4. Income level and foreign language test anxiety (Kruskal Wallis-H Test)

Items	Income Level	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	Asymp. Sig.
I feel stressed when I don't study properly for tests.	Low	24	156.7	6.93	.03
	Middle	210	120.8		
	High	12	104.6		
I make more mistakes when I feel anxious in an exam.	Low	24	162.5	9.28	.01
	Middle	210	119.8		
	High	12	108.9		

The level of test anxiety among EFL learners significantly differed regarding the types and departments of high schools they graduated from. For instance, the values in Table 5 demonstrated that those who graduated from state high schools felt higher fear of failure than the ones who graduated from private high schools ($p=.00$). Moreover, state high school graduates stated that they made more mistakes when they felt anxious in exams ($p=.04$). When the departments at schools were considered, it was observed that the students who graduated from equally-weighted departments seemed to experience more difficulties in learning grammar when they felt anxious about exams than the ones who graduated from the departments of social studies, mathematics and science, and foreign language ($p=.00$). As presented in Table 6, the participants in the same group suffered more from test anxiety due to the perceived lack of language proficiency than those in other groups ($p=.04$). On the other hand, the students who graduated from the social studies department seemed to feel fear of failure more when compared to those who graduated from other departments ($p=.01$).

Table 5. Types of high schools graduated from and test anxiety (Independent samples t-test)

Items	Type of High School	Number	Mean	F	Sig.
Fear of failure makes me anxious.	State school	210	3.80	7.15	.00
	Private school	36	3.56		
I make more mistakes when I feel anxious in an exam.	State school	210	3.93	4.19	.04
	Private school	36	3.50		

Table 6. Departments at high school graduated from and foreign language anxiety (Kruskal Wallis-H Test)

Items	Department at High School	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	Asymp. Sig.
I have difficulties in learning grammar when I feel anxious about exams.	Social Studies	8	41.2	13.55	.00
	Mathematics and Science	131	12.5		
	Equally-weighted	88	131.9		
	Foreign Language	19	108.9		
Fear of failure makes me anxious.	Social Studies	8	152.9	12.39	.01
	Mathematics and Science	131	109.9		
	Equally-weighted	88	141.0		
	Foreign Language	19	123.2		
If I knew English better, I would be less anxious.	Social Studies	8	120.4	8.32	.04
	Mathematics and Science	131	118.7		
	Equally-weighted	88	137.3		
	Foreign Language	19	93.6		

The level of test anxiety also significantly differed regarding language levels, as seen in Table 7. The more proficient students experienced fewer difficulties in writing when they felt anxious about exams than the less proficient ones ($p=.04$). They also suffered fewer headaches than the students at the levels of A and B ($p=0.2$). Similarly, the students who showed a low level of achievement had more difficulties in learning new vocabulary when they felt worried

about tests than those who had higher achievement scores ($p=.05$). Moreover, as indicated in Table 8, they also suffered more from stomachache than those with higher scores ($p=.04$).

Table 7. Language levels and foreign language test anxiety (Kruskal Wallis-H Test)

Items	Language Levels	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	Asymp. Sig.
I have difficulties in writing in English when I feel anxious about exams.	A	195	126.9	6.53	.04
	B	41	120.6		
	C	10	70.10		
I have a headache when I feel anxious about exams.	A	195	129.3	8.36	.02
	B	41	108.2		
	C	10	74.2		

Table 8. Achievement scores and foreign language test anxiety (Kruskal Wallis-H Test)

Items	Achievement Scores	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	Asymp. Sig.
I have difficulties in learning new vocabulary when I feel anxious about exams.	0 - 49	22	158.2	6.09	.05
	50 - 74	82	118.4		
	75 - 100	142	121.1		
I have a stomachache when I feel anxious about exams.	0 - 49	22	152.6	6.32	.04
	50 - 74	82	111.9		
	75 - 100	142	125.7		

According to the values in Table 9, test anxiety significantly differed in terms of the time assigned to study per day. Interestingly enough, the students who never studied were less stressed ($p=.03$) and anxious ($p=.01$) than those who studied for more than one hour and more. Additionally, those who studied more than four hours a day were less worried and stressed than those who studied one, two, three, and four hours.

Table 9. Time to study per day scores and foreign language test anxiety (Kruskal Wallis-H Test)

Items	Time to study per day	N	Mean Rank	χ^2	Asymp. Sig.
I feel stressed when I don't study properly for tests.	0	18	83.7	13.9	.03
	1	65	131.2		
	2	75	135.4		
	3	47	117.4		
	4	17	137.6		
	5	17	98.6		
	6	7	95.2		
If I knew English better, I would be less anxious.	0	18	69.4	15.9	.01
	1	65	130.0		
	2	75	120.7		
	3	47	127.4		
	4	17	138.4		

5	17	146.7
6	7	113.1

The participants stated that their performance in proficiency tests was worse than placement or achievement tests as they could not show their potential due to a higher level of test anxiety. Proficiency tests prevented them from showing their real performance when compared to placement and achievement tests ($p=.04$). Furthermore, achievement and proficiency tests caused more headaches when they felt anxious compared to placement tests ($p=.04$), as shown in Table 10. As a final note, the undergraduate programs they would attend after the preparatory school and the language medium of the mentioned programs did not show any differences when the items in the FLTAS were considered.

Table 10. Test types and foreign language test anxiety (ANOVA)

Items	Test Types	N	Mean	F	Asymp. Sig.
I have difficulties in showing my real performance when I feel anxious about exams.	Achievement Test	86	3.65	3.3	.04
	Placement Test	71	3.48		
	Proficiency Test	77	3.88		
I have a headache when I feel anxious about exams.	Achievement Test	86	2.93	3.2	.04
	Placement Test	71	2.47		
	Proficiency Test	77	2.97		

4. Conclusion and discussion

According to the results of this study that aimed to determine the level of test anxiety among EFL learners and the differences of the test anxiety level regarding certain variables, two main conclusions were reached. The first conclusion is that EFL learners suffer from test anxiety at a moderate level. Speaking more specifically, they believe that test anxiety has debilitating effects on learning performance, interest in learning, motivation, oral production, vocabulary, and grammar learning, listening and writing skills at a medium level. Furthermore, they perceive that fear of making mistakes, unpreparedness for tests, and perceived low proficiency levels are strong sources of test anxiety. Test anxiety among EFL learners also brings physical problems such as stomachache and headaches. Second, test anxiety levels significantly differ regarding certain variables such as age, gender, socio-economic background, types of high schools and departments graduated from, language proficiency and achievement levels, study skills, and test types administered. At the same time, no difference is observed with regard to undergraduate programs and language medium at the programs. For instance, female students have more difficulties showing their actual performance and making more mistakes when they feel anxious in exams. Older students also seem to have more difficulties in showing their real performance. Students who have lower income levels feel more stressed when they do not study properly and make more mistakes when worried about exams. Additionally, state high school graduates feel higher fear of failure and make more mistakes when they feel anxious in exams. Students who graduated from equally-weighted departments experience more difficulties in learning grammar due to test anxiety and suffer more from test anxiety due to a perceived lack of language proficiency. Low levels of proficiency and achievement are also sources of test anxiety which results in physical problems. Students who study more than four hours a day are less worried and stressed than those who study one, two, three, and four hours. Last, proficiency tests have adverse effects on showing their real performance when compared to placement and achievement tests.

A summary of the results of this research is provided below. The results obtained from the study contribute to the extant literature in the context of EFL teachers' perceptions of test anxiety. First, the results of the present study indicate that test anxiety has some adverse effects on learners' motivation and learning performance, as found by

Aydın et al. (2020). Likewise, this finding is consistent with other studies in the literature, like Schonwetter (1995), who revealed a decrease in the level of learning outcomes due to test anxiety, and Khoshhal (2021) who found a negative

correlation between language performance and test anxiety. In addition, this study has shown that test anxiety causes poor performance, particularly in oral/aural and written skills and vocabulary and grammar learning. Similarly, in a study by Haskin et al. (2003), it was observed that language learners showed poor spoken performance due to test anxiety. Furthermore, the low achieving participants in the study have stated experiencing physical problems due to test anxiety which was also suggested by Aydın et al. (2006). Second, the present study has found out that there are some reasons for test anxiety among learners. For example, it has been revealed that learners with a low proficiency level suffer from test anxiety more, and this finding is compatible with the studies of Horwitz (1986), Joy (2013), Rotenberg (2002), Sarason (1972), and Williams (1996) who suggested that a low level of language proficiency provokes test anxiety. Moreover, learners' poor study skills were detected as another source of test anxiety. In parallel with this finding, the studies by Wittmaier (1972), Culler and Holahan (1980), Rasor and Rasor (1998), and Cassidy and Johnson (2002) also demonstrated that students with low levels or lack of study skills have higher test anxiety. Finally, it has been shown that the level of test anxiety differs according to certain variables. For instance, learners' socio-economic background causes a significant difference in test anxiety levels among language learners, as suggested by Putwain (2007). However, unlike the present study which found out that students with low-level income feel more anxious, Guida and Ludlow (1989) noted that learners with high socio-economic status felt more test anxiety. In addition, age and test types were detected as the other two variables influencing the levels of test anxiety among language learners. Namely, it was found that older students show poor performance due to test anxiety, and similarly, proficiency tests decrease students' performance due to a higher level of test anxiety when compared to placement and achievement tests. These findings are also consistent with other studies in the literature. For example, Aydın (2013) revealed the effect of age on test anxiety, and Oh (1992) suggested that assessment methods and test instructions may provoke test anxiety. Likewise, Khoshhal (2021) highlighted the role of familiarity with question types in decreasing test anxiety. Lastly, gender was a variable that has a significant impact on test anxiety. The study has shown that female students suffer from test anxiety more than male learners. Similarly, Hembree (1988), Limoudehi and Mazandarani (2021), and Putwain (2007) concluded in their studies that gender is an essential variable for test anxiety.

In light of the findings, some practical recommendations can be noted. Notably, language teachers should be informed about the significance of test anxiety and its debilitating effects on the EFL students' motivation, learning interest, and language achievement. To raise awareness of anxiety-provoking elements, these issues should be involved in teacher education programs (Aydın et al., 2020). In the matter of alleviating the EFL learners' test anxiety, the teachers' role might be pretty significant; therefore, they should display a considerate attitude towards apprehensive students and encourage them not to avoid making mistakes which is a natural component of language learning (Dalkılıç, 2001), especially female ones because they make more mistakes in the exams due to their test anxiety. Furthermore, teachers should teach their students the tackling strategies to overcome their test anxiety (Joy, 2013). To reduce the physical problems stemming from test anxiety, teachers might suggest students receive professional help. Besides, before taking the tests, students can be trained by school counselors and guides in terms of techniques to relax (Aydın et al., 2020). Since test types also create a difference in the levels of the EFL learners' test anxiety, as Oh (1992) suggested, language teachers should be able to detect the test types which cause the increase and attempt to mitigate their anxiety through some strategies such as discussing the nature of the related test types and allowing the students to be frequently successful in them. Moreover, teachers should select less anxiety-provoking tests and familiarize their students with them before the exams (Shohamy, 1982). In particular, instructors should attempt to make the EFL students familiar with the proficiency tests, high-stake anxiety-provoking exams in preparatory classes in Turkey. Another crucial point is that test developers should pay meticulous attention to testing

what was taught and how it was taught in class, and they should go hand in hand with the program developers who are the decision-makers of teaching what and how. Given that the more time students allocate daily self-study, the less anxious they will be, it is crucial for curriculum developers to design a program allowing and encouraging the EFL learners to study at least four hours a day. In addition, since students who graduate from state high schools are predisposed to demonstrate more fear of failure and make more mistakes when they are anxious, policymakers should consider and develop policies to balance the language teaching quality between state and private high schools.

Some limitations of the study can be noted. First, the scope of the study was confined to descriptive and correlational data obtained from a background questionnaire, the Foreign Language Test Anxiety Scale by Aydın et al. (2021). Second, the participants were restricted to 246 EFL learners studying at preparatory schools at two state universities. Third, the data included EFL learners' perceived test anxiety. To conclude, it should be noted that the data collected were limited to participants' self-report and perceptions rather than the actual levels of test anxiety. Further research focusing on EFL learners' actual anxiety regarding tests is warranted, as studies mainly focus on learners' perceptions. For this purpose, it can be recommended that qualitative and experimental studies should be carried out for an in-depth and better understanding of test anxiety among foreign language learners. The effects of psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of the issue should also be investigated.

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6. Disclosure of Conflict

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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