

The Influence of Teachers’ Behaviour on Learners’ Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of teachers’ behaviors on students’ foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) in Turkish middle school classrooms. Conducted with 55 students and two non-native English teachers over 14 weeks, the research included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and a foreign language anxiety scale. The findings reveal that teachers’ behaviors have a moderately significant impact on students’ anxiety levels, with positive behaviors reducing FLSA and negative behaviors exacerbating it. The results highlight discrepancies between teachers’ self-perceptions and their observed classroom practices, underscoring the need for greater teacher awareness of their impact on students’ learning experiences. This research contributes to the literature on FLSA by focusing on young learners in a Turkish context, emphasizing the importance of teacher attitudes and strategies in mitigating anxiety and fostering effective oral communication. The research took place in a Turkish state school classroom with 55 students and two non-native English language teachers over a period of 14 weeks. The findings concluded that teachers’ behaviours have an important impact, albeit small, on students’ speaking anxiety levels, where positive behaviours decrease FLSA, while negative behaviours increase it. The outcomes also highlight a mismatch between teachers’ self-perception and their classroom experiences.

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Introduction

Studies on speaking skill have increased with the widespread embrace of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) worldwide (Abdelmageed et al., 2020; Adem & Berkessa, 2022; Köksoy & Deniz, 2025; Saputra 2015; Toro et al., 2019). These studies concentrate on the impacts of ‘anxiety’ on speaking skill, which Spielberger (1983, as cited in Alrabi, 2014) defines as ‘the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system’. Speaking anxiety is also a phenomenon of nervousness that non-native speakers experience, which leads to overwhelming undesired results. It has assorted reasons and has been proven as one of the major factors influencing language acquisition (Köksoy & Deniz, 2025; Oflaz, 2019; Sutarsyah, 2017; Szyszka et al., 2024). Studies under the main heading of speaking anxiety have been examined with different subheadings, i.e., native and non-native teachers' effects (Han et al., 2016), in different cases (Syahrani et al., 2024), and in different contexts such as the Chinese context (Chen, 2024).

However, this study was conducted with the middle school age group, in the Turkish context (appx. 60 students) and native teachers (2). The aim of the study was established as measuring the effects of the teacher's role on the students' English-speaking anxiety and performance. Accordingly, the classes were observed during a term (14 weeks), and Alrabi's (2014) Teacher Classroom Observation Scale was used. At the end of the term, a semi-structured interview consisting of questions prepared by the researchers was conducted to be analyzed with the way of thematic content analysis with the teachers. Then, audio recorded interviews were transcribed to analyze. Additionally, a foreign language anxiety scale translated into Turkish (Aydın et al., 2017) was carried out. While collecting data with the consent of the participants, they were informed that the data will be used only for research and their personal information and raw recordings will not be shared with anyone else. Participants were also enumerated to ensure anonymity indicated by numbering.

The rationale of this study is to shed light on the literature in terms of how teachers in class behaviors and attitudes affect FLSA especially in the mentioned context. Thanks to this, it paved the way for awareness on developing strategies and techniques to cope with FLSA, from the point of view of teachers. Meanwhile, it examines from a psycholinguistic perspective by specifically targeting participants at the end of the critical period and revealing their state of anxiety.

Research Questions

RQ₁: What is the anxiety level of the students in oral language classrooms?

RQ₂: How do teachers perceive their own behavior regarding foreign language anxiety in oral language classrooms?

RQ₃: Is there a relationship between students' anxiety levels and teachers' behavior in oral language classrooms? If yes, to what extent?

Literature Review

Understanding Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

Learning English has become a must for people of the 21st century, and for EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners have many struggles regarding the learning process. However, the most influential one is the anxiety they are having during the learning process (Horwitz, 2001). Anxiety is broadly defined as a state of tension and worry and it has been identified as an obstacle affecting foreign language learning and performance as shown by several studies.

Previous research (e.g., Guiora, 1983; Young, 1991; Yan & Horwitz, 2008) exemplifies the causes of FLA with various personal and contextual factors such as self-esteem, social anxiety, and cultural expectations. The summary of the reasons found by various researchers are given in detail in Table 1.

Table 1

A Summary of Reasons for FLA by Some Researchers

Researcher	Reasons for FLA
Guiora (1983)	A threat for an individual's self-concept and worldview
Young (1991)	Self-esteem, social anxiety, competitiveness, learner's beliefs about language learning, teacher's beliefs about language learning
Yan & Horwitz (2008)	Expectations of parents, cultural and regional differences, classroom arrangement, learning strategies, comparison among classmates, motivation, and interest in language learning

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is found to be under the category of situation specific anxiety which is experienced by an individual during the use of the specific aspect of a foreign language (Aydın, 2008). Furthermore, it has been said that FLA has three sub-categories:

- a) *communication anxiety* occurring when learners' lack of communication skills
- b) *fear of negative evaluation* happening due to the social impression among others
- c) *test anxiety* occurring due to the fear of failure in the exams (Horwitz et al., 1986; Aydın, 2008).

Another comprehensive literature review study by Weerakoon et al. (2023) focused on 121 studies about sources of English Language Anxiety from both Eric and Scopus databases (p. 119). As a result, they firstly categorised the sources into three, namely, 1) learner-based sources, 2) class-based sources, and 3) out-of-class based sources, and the class-based sources mainly focuses on the teacher as the key.

Figure 1*Sources of English Language Anxiety based on the Study by Weerakoon et al. (2023)*

Sources of English Language Anxiety		
1. Learner-Based Sources	a.	Psychological
	b.	Academic
	c.	Socioeconomic
2. Class-Based Sources	a.	Teacher
	b.	Teaching Pedagogy
	c.	In-class Social Context
3. Out-of-Class Based Sources	a.	Out-of-Class Social Context

Just like the sources by Weerakoon et al. (2023), the study by Köksoy and Deniz (2025) revealed the situations causing foreign language anxiety which are mainly based on three dimensions, namely, a) student-related situations, b) teacher-related situations, c) teaching system-related situations. According to their study, teachers are to provide a positive atmosphere and teacher support to alleviate the foreign language anxiety. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers are a big source of foreign language anxiety among students.

Apart from that, it shall be acknowledged that any type of anxiety including the foreign language anxiety (FLA) has mostly adverse effects on its experiencers (Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986, as cited in Aydın, 2018). Horwitz et al. (1986) indicated that foreign language anxiety affects the achievement of learners negatively. According to a study conducted by Steinberg and Horwitz (1986, as cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), learners' comments tend to be less interpretive if they are to feel more foreign language anxiety (FLA) (p. 284 – 285); therefore, learners dealing with high foreign anxiety levels will not be likely to force themselves to make their comments more intricate and difficult. The studies conducted in foreign language anxiety is mostly about a specific skill of foreign language like speaking anxiety and to exemplify, study for speaking anxiety among K12 students in Turkey by Mestan (2017). In the study, it has been said that English learners in Turkey have Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) because of the negative emotions and the fear of failure, coinciding with three sub-categories of foreign language anxiety by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Furthermore, Saltan (2003) suggested that speaking skill shall be taken as a separate phenomenon to be researched in terms of foreign language anxiety since activities having focus on speaking cause more stress on students (Horwitz et al, 1986; Koch & Terrel, 1992, as cited in Saltan, 2003, p. 20). According to Koch and Terrel (1992, as cited in Aydın et al, 2018; Saltan, 2003), the most anxiety-inducing classroom activities were oral classroom presentations and skits and they caused the most adverse effects on the language learning process. Numerous studies (Liu, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 1997) confirm that public speaking tasks such as presentations and oral exams are major sources of speaking anxiety. Another supporting idea of anxiety

on speaking by MacIntyre et al (1997) was that students become more and more silent in speaking tasks when experiencing FLSA; therefore, increasing their anxiety levels and causing a self-feeding cycle of anxiety to occur (p. 278).

In Aydın (2001 as cited in Saltan, 2003), the causes of foreign language anxiety in speaking and writing classes (productive skills) are categorised into three, namely, a) personal reasons, b) teachers' manners, c) teaching procedures. As it can be understood from these categorizations, 2 out of 3 factors are in the hands of the teacher, emphasizing the importance of the teacher role in students' foreign language speaking anxiety.

Teacher Awareness and Management of FLA and FLSA

Teachers shall be aware of the elephant in the classroom, which is foreign language speaking anxiety. Researchers emphasize that teachers play a crucial role in creating a low-anxiety environment through supportive practices and communicative methods (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mestan, 2017). Likewise, Gönen (2022) devised many sample practices for teachers to establish mindfulness in foreign language learners and with that, lowering the learners' stress and anxiety levels.

Teacher cognition, referring to teachers' beliefs and knowledge about classroom practices, shapes their approach to managing FLSA (Svendsen, 2023). Findings from Nepali (2023, p. 891) suggests that teachers' attitudes have effects on students' English speaking anxiety and he summarises these effects as;

1. Students feel more anxious when their teachers are strict, or perfectionist.
2. Teachers' friendly and interactive instructional strategies decrease the students' anxiety level.
3. Teachers' stern and silent monitoring leads to an increase in students' anxiety level.

First of all, the strategies to be used by teachers are covered in various research.

According to a study by He (2018) found that students preferred supportive and indirect error correction strategies. Both of the strategies given coincide with the reasons of foreign language anxiety studies by Aydın (2001) and Weerakoon (2023). Teacher-initiated strategies concern the personality traits of the teacher, and they are explained by adjectives such as friendly, humorous, patient, easygoing, lively, etc. The other strategy group, strategies concerning error correction, is directly related to the fear of negative evaluation by Horwitz et al. (1986) and Aydın (2008), and in this study, He (2018) revealed the students' preferences regarding error correction with the aspects of whether, how, and when. For the 'whether' part, more than half students preferred their errors to be ignored. Most of the students preferred indirect error corrections as well, and they equally preferred 'in-class' and 'after-class.'

Accordingly, Tsui (1995, as cited in Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022) claims that teachers' intolerance of silence increases the anxiety of students; therefore, concerning the teachers' personality traits category suggested by He (2008). Kondo

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and Yang (2004) focused on five strategies in order to mitigate anxiety symptoms. These suggested five strategies are preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer seeking. According to the interviews by Young (1992, p. 29), creating a secure atmosphere and reducing the affective filter by Krashen (1986) is also another crucial thing in terms of lowering the foreign language speaking anxiety levels.

In the study by Özdemir and Seçkin (2025), coping strategies for mitigation of the foreign language speaking anxiety were given with two subtitles, namely, the role of teachers and the role of learners. Again, the role of teachers is a milestone and teachers are to provide positive reinforcement, prepare fun and enjoyable lessons, and allow the use of L1, and so on. In other words, creating a positive atmosphere for learning has a pivotal effect on students' foreign language anxiety levels.

FLA and FLSA in the Turkish EFL Context

As an EFL country, Turkey puts more emphasis on memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary than on developing effective communication skills. As a consequence, language lessons are frequently viewed as insufficient for enhancing communication skills among foreign language learners (Alptekin & Tatar, 2011; Kara et al., 2017; Koral & Mirici, 2021; Sevingil, 2008; Zerey, 2008; as cited in Fındıklı & Büyükkarcı, 2023). Doğan and Osman (2021) stated that one of the potential causes of FLA is the input or exposure that learners receive to the target language. In Turkey, limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom contribute to high speaking anxiety among students (Doğan & Osman, 2021).

Although most studies in both Turkish and international contexts only looked at adult learners, and there is a significant lack of research on children's or teens' anxiety related to foreign languages (Akar, 2021), some studies (Köksoy & Deniz, 2025) show the levels of speaking anxiety in Turkish language classrooms across various educational levels resulting from different reasons.

A quantitative study conducted by Akar (2021) on 4016 participants across different age groups, found moderate speaking anxiety levels and age-related differences. The research revealed that all English learners in the Turkish environment have moderate levels of speaking anxiety and age is an indisputable factor that affects language learning. In addition, it turned out that younger age groups had lower levels of speaking anxiety, yet older people who have higher self-consciousness and are afraid of making mistakes experience speaking anxiety more. In the same way, younger learners feel more comfortable speaking and communicating with their teacher and peers, whereas older students are affected by anxiety in the case of speaking and communicating with their teachers when they are faced with teachers' feedback. (Aydin et al., 2017).

In addition, a study was conducted to find out the relationship between FLSA and self-efficiency by Gürsoy and Karaca (2018) where a mixed-method study was used on

secondary school students. The research reveals that the younger students have higher self-efficacy than the older ones. However, it also reveals that there is no significant difference between the anxiety levels of younger and older students conversely to the articles mentioned primarily.

The findings revealed a strong negative relationship between speaking efficacy and speaking anxiety (Basaran & Cabaroğlu, 2014). Additionally, it was found each student stated that the teacher's attitude impacts their ability to talk efficiently in class. In order to feel more comfortable speaking English in class, they expect their teacher to remain enthusiastic and casual, smile, support, encourage them, and speak in an approachable manner of voice. Also, most of the students experience speaking anxiety if the teacher is aggressive or negative and shouts at them while speaking in the classroom (Gürsoy & Karaca, 2018).

Further, the research conducted by Doğan and Osman (2021) on 100 pupils from 5th grade to 8th grade at a secondary school provided the information that 48% of students stated that they feel anxious or confused when speaking in English and 38% of students believe that if they speak English in class, their peers will make fun of them. Moreover, almost half of the students stated they feel more comfortable speaking English if they are certain they can construct the sentence properly and pronounce the words correctly (Gürsoy & Karaca, 2018).

The sources of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) have been extensively studied to identify the factors contributing to heightened levels of speaking-related anxiety among learners. Akkuş (2021) explored the causes of FLSA and compiled findings into a detailed table, summarizing the key reasons behind the phenomenon. According to the studies analyzed, the most anxiety-provoking factor for many EFL learners is speaking English itself, as it often triggers feelings of fear and self-consciousness. Additional causes include inadequate linguistic proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, lack of exposure to the target language, teacher attitudes, peer pressure, and classroom environment (Akkuş, 2021).

In conclusion, most of the research indicates that speaking anxiety in Turkey is influenced by several factors, including age, self-efficacy, teacher attitudes, and peer interactions. Younger learners generally exhibit lower levels of speaking anxiety and higher self-efficacy due to their openness to mistakes and less self-consciousness compared to older learners, who are more prone to anxiety due to heightened fear of judgment. A strong negative correlation between speaking efficacy and speaking anxiety highlights the importance of building students' confidence and proficiency in speaking English. Moreover, the teacher's role is crucial in shaping students' speaking experiences.

Similarly, peer interactions within the classroom environment play a crucial role. Many students report that disrespect or mockery from peers heightens their anxiety.

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A variety of research on FLSA has been broadly studied to find out the reasons that cause increases in the levels of speaking anxiety among the learners. Akkuş (2021) summarized the results of his research on FLSA in a detailed table, and these show that speaking the language itself is the crucial reason for anxiety, as it triggers feelings of fear and self-consciousness. Further reasons include a lack of grammatical knowledge, fear of negative evaluation, need for exposure to the language, teacher behaviours, bullying, and environmental issues.

The majority of research demonstrates that FLSA in Türkiye is impacted by different factors such as age, self-efficacy, teacher behaviours, and peer relations. Due to their little fear of making mistakes and low self-consciousness, younger learners demonstrate a lower level of speaking anxiety compared to older learners. On the other hand, older learners are susceptible to speaking anxiety, as their fear of judgment is higher. It shows the importance of increasing the confidence and proficiency of students in speaking English due to the negative correlation between speaking fluency and speaking anxiety. Furthermore, teachers' role in the effect on students' speaking competence is crucial.

Existing studies have examined FLA concerning factors such as age (Akar, 2021), level of FLSA (Fındıklı & Büyükkarcı, 2023), FLSA and self-efficiency relation (Gürsoy & Karaca, 2018), and teacher and peer effects (Doğan & Osman, 2021; Gürsoy & Karaca, 2018) the focus has been mainly on adult learners with a few of them focusing on young learners (Aydın et al., 2017; Köksoy & Deniz, 2025) especially for secondary school students.

The Study

While prior research has explored Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) concerning factors such as self-efficacy, and teacher or peer effects, the majority of these studies have focused on adult learners, leaving students of late critical period targeted in this study, largely underrepresented. The aim of this study is to fill the gap in the literature and to emphasize the teacher role in terms of students' foreign language speaking anxiety; therefore, how teacher influences FLSA and strategies to classroom dynamics improvement are investigated.

Methodology

Context and Participants

The research was conducted in 2 different public middle schools in İstanbul, Turkey. One of the middle schools was known as a pilot school adapting a program with 14 English lesson hours for the 5th graders. The study was conducted separately by 2 different researchers, one researcher at each school. The research participants, totaling 55 children aged 11-12, were selected from 5th and 6th graders at both schools and divided into two groups, Group A and Group B, consisting of 32 females, 21 males, and 2 with unknown genders. Furthermore, 2 female English teachers with teaching experiences ranging from 15-20 years were included in the study. The teachers of

Group A and Group B were chosen as T1 and T2, respectively. T1 was the teacher of Group A and T2 was the teacher of Group B. Additionally, a purposive sampling technique was used since the aim of the research was to focus on a specific group of students and teachers.

Instruments

The triangulation method was exerted to ensure validity and reliability. Three types of tools were used including interviews, observation scales and Likert scales. Semi-structured interviews were used to comprehend English teachers' perception of their behaviour in classes. Interview questions were prepared by the conductors of the study collaboratively (see appendix A). The interviews included questions such as “How do you describe foreign language speaking anxiety?” and “What are the characteristics of the classes where foreign language speaking anxiety is witnessed?”. Corroborative observation scales administered by 2 of the researchers filled out according to a teacher classroom observation rubric, Alrabi's (2014), reflecting their experiences of two separate classroom observation data. Finally, a foreign language anxiety scale including 20 items translated into Turkish (Aydın et al., 2017) was used as a Likert scale to understand to what extent, and when, the students experience speaking anxiety.

Ethical Considerations

This section serves as a clarification explaining that the study was carried out considering the ethical rules. For this purpose, initially, the interviews took place wherever and whenever it was suitable for the availability of the interviewees. Participants consent was gained before the interviews and scales, kept their anonymity, and received data used only for research purposes. Additionally, permissions for the recordings were asked, and participants agreed. Finally, to protect the identities of the participants and to consider anonymity, participants were numbered throughout the paper.

Data Collection

To start with the interviews, interviews were set to the specific time according to the availability of the participants. The interviews lasted less than 20 minutes, and each teacher was interviewed separately at different times. Participants were asked to answer the questions at their own pace. For participants to feel more comfortable, participants were free to answer the questions in any language they wished. For the observations, two of the conductors of the research used their notes to fill the classroom observation scales. Researchers separately filled their scales considering their observations at two different schools to compare their data with the other two data results. These 2 different non-participant observation results were gathered to gain thorough insight into the effects of teacher behaviors. The observations took 2 days separately with the same students for both teachers. All kinds of student talks and attempts were taken into consideration while recording teachers' behaviors during the class times. Before the application of the Likert scales, participants were

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informed that they did not need to give any personal information but their ages and genders. Necessary explanations were made for each of the items before applying the tool. Participants were given enough time to complete the scales. As it was stated above, the scales were applied in Turkish from Aydın et al. (2017) that proved to be reliable and valid.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews was transcribed, translated into Turkish, and thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Codes related to teacher perceptions and behaviors were divided into broad concepts that emphasized differences between the two teachers' perspectives and classroom practices. For the analysis of the observation scales, each researcher analyzed the scale separately. Each category and theme were named distinctively. For the analysis of the observation scales, each researcher analyzed the scale separately. Each of the sections was grouped and noted according to the distribution of the items. Then, 2 different results were compared and noted down to explain the teachers' behavior from a different perspective and serve as an insight for the depth of the study. For the second step of the study, two different non-participant observation results throughout 14 weeks with the same students for both teachers were gathered to gain thorough insight into the effects of teacher behaviors. While doing so, student talks and attempts were taken into consideration while recording teachers' behaviors during the class times.

The translated version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Aydın et al. (2017), is used and the JASP (Version 0.19.1) programme was used for quantitative analysis. The dataset consisted of 55 participants from two groups, namely, Group A (N=25) and Group B (N=30). In the scale, there were no reverse items. The total FLCAS scores were calculated by summing each response for each item. For understanding the students' foreign language anxiety levels, the descriptive statistics was utilised. Being able to see the relationship between students' anxiety levels and influence of teachers' behaviour *an independent sample t-test* was used. For the comparison of the overall FLCAS scores of Group A and Group B, another independent samples t-test was utilised to reveal the differences between each item from two groups along with Cohen's d calculation in order to indicate the practical significance of the differences between groups. Cohen's d quantifies the magnitude of group differences in terms of standard deviations, with values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 representing small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

To ensure the reliability of the scale, a Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was conducted (See Table 2). The overall reliability of the scale was high (*Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.893$*); therefore, indicating a strong internal consistency with the confirmation that all items contribute positively to the scale's consistency.

The mean and standard deviation values for individual items were also examined, showing a reasonable distribution of responses across the items. These findings

indicate that the scale is robust and reliable for assessing the construct it was designed to measure.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics for the Scale (Cronbach's Alpha)

Statistic	Cronbach's α
Point estimate	0.893
95% CI lower bound	0.848
95% CI upper bound	0.928

Table 3

Item-Deleted Reliability Statistics

Item	Cronbach's α If Deleted	Mean	SD
1	0.882	2.727	1.297
2	0.886	2.873	1.348
3	0.883	2.145	1.268
4	0.885	2.273	1.269
5	0.882	2.727	1.433
6	0.883	1.982	1.178
7	0.884	3.309	1.205
8	0.889	2.145	1.208
9	0.883	2.655	1.294
10	0.889	3.309	1.359
11	0.890	4.327	0.747
12	0.890	4.000	0.974
13	0.892	4.509	0.869
14	0.887	3.509	1.069
15	0.892	3.473	1.166
16	0.892	4.000	1.021
17	0.892	4.145	1.028
18	0.890	1.473	1.069
19	0.888	1.709	1.257
20	0.884	1.891	1.133

Results

This study primarily aimed to explore the teachers' role in students' speaking anxiety levels in oral language classrooms. For this aim, students' anxiety levels were aimed to be discovered. Additionally, teachers' behavior and their perception about their behavior were examined. This section explains the achieved results.

Teachers' Perceptions about their Behaviour in Oral Language Classrooms

The participants of the semi-structured interviews were asked to answer the questions about their perceptions related to speaking anxiety in oral language classrooms, the cause anxiety, and the strategies they apply to cope with this situation. Table 4 shows a brief summary of the analysis of these interviews.

Table 4*Teachers' Perceptions about their Behaviour in Oral Language Classrooms*

Themes	Categories	Codes
Perception about student profiles	Views about the source of speaking anxiety Views about the groups where anxiety is seen the most	I think what underlines all of this is that they don't study enough Children are worried about being ridiculed by their friends Speaking anxiety is seen in those who do not work enough and have a lower IQ Intermediate grades are always like that, they are afraid of each other
Personal attributions	Views about the most anxiety increasing activities Views about strategies for handling the speaking anxiety	During Q&A sessions, when expressing themselves, when participating in class The parts related to speaking; they are also afraid of making sentences It is very difficult if the child is very closed. I try to have conversations so that they are motivated, it's okay to make mistakes
General perspective	General views about students with anxiety	No matter what the teacher does, if the child does nothing, nothing happens. There can be positive examples. If your friends don't bully you, then of course it is motivating.

Q&A: Question and answer*

The analysis of codes led into more conceptual categories, which led to wider themes about teachers' behavioural awareness. Most commonly mentioned categories are the 'views about the source of speaking anxiety' and the 'views about the groups where anxiety is seen the most.' Along with these, the 'views about the most anxiety-increasing activities' were the category in which both of the teachers agreed on the same conclusion for the first time. The following quotations better explain this statement:

"During question-and-answer sessions, when expressing themselves, when participating in class, there are situations like I'm going to do something wrong, my friends are going to laugh at me or my teacher is going to get angry with me." (T1)

"They hesitate more in the parts related to speaking. They are also afraid of making sentences." (T2)

Aside from this category, two teachers usually came up with opposite statements. One of the major disagreements was in the "views about the source of speaking anxiety" category. Quotations below serve as an example:

"I think what underlies all of this is that they don't study enough, they don't listen to the lesson. They have prejudices, like I don't understand this." (T1)

“Children are worried about being ridiculed by their friends, mispronouncing and being bullied in this area. Otherwise, I don't think they are afraid of their teachers, but they are very afraid of each other.” (T2)

The last category to clearly show the perception difference between the teachers is the “general views about students with anxiety” category. The following items give the reader a deeper understanding of the statement given above:

“No matter what the teacher does, if the child does nothing, if he doesn't take any steps, nothing happens. So, fifty percent is the student. The remaining 25 percent is the teacher and 25 percent is the parents. But the student has a lot of work.” (T1)

“I try to make them a little more courageous by stating that I will not evaluate such things with grades and that it is important to participate in the lesson even if they make mistakes. So, there can be positive examples as well. Your friends don't bully you. Then of course it is more motivating.” (T2)

Even if they were not clearly explained in the section above, the two teachers had a considerable difference of opinion in the categories about the groups where the anxiety was seen the most and the strategies about how to cope with the speaking anxiety in the classroom. This section could bring a light to understand how the teachers perceive their behavior and role in students' anxiety. The following sections will help the reader comprehend if the teachers' perceptions about themselves match with what the students feel about anxiety in oral language classrooms.

Observation Scale Findings

Observation findings of T1

According to the observation scale (see appendix B), which consists of three main categories: the teacher's level of building self-confidence of Ss, reducing their anxiety level, and demonstrating proper teacher behaviour, the results are noticeably at the stage of rarely or never. It was observed that solely 2 of the items were seen 'very often' as well as 3 items were seen 'often' on the scale of 20 items. These items can be named technical issues that the teacher helps students understand the activities or testing entirely in terms of instructions, grading system, time, etc., and avoiding chaos in the class.

When the categories were analysed in detail, it seemed that in terms of building self-confidence, the teacher was weak in giving positive feedback for work and encouraging with effective praise of their ability. She also seems to 'never' celebrate learners' achievements with extra tangible rewards or notes.

Students' understanding of the nature of language, variable beliefs, and expectations from the teacher have significant impacts on speaking a foreign language. However,

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as the data shows, the teacher again has very little effort on these specific topics to decrease the anxiety level of the students. As the observation scale presents other attempts that teachers are supposed to do in the classes, they are adjusting time for feedback sessions to facilitate students' grasping the source of their errors. Furthermore, there is a significant requirement with regard to monitoring their involvement in the oral activities, allowing them to tolerate self-talk, and benefiting from modelling to correct the students' errors as well. Despite that, all these anxiety-reducing factors were observed quite less in the behaviours of participant teachers. Therefore, it was seen that the items in the category of demonstrating appropriate teacher behaviour were met quite rarely.

Although there are a great number of behaviours performed in the classes, the scale focuses on a few variables that have critical importance to collect objective and reliable data. These can be listed as follows: to create a respectful and relaxed atmosphere that they feel their acceptance in, to build a class community where they can make conversations without stress, brainstorm, and get answers properly when they ask questions. The results from the observation revealed that the teacher displays these behaviours never or rarely again.

Additionally, it was observed that T1 did not make a distinction between genders about letting students speak. So, she fairly and equally gave permission to the students to talk. However, it was also seen that considering the total class member number, 20% of the students dominantly talked throughout the observation process. The teacher did not seem to force the students to speak; she only let the students talk who were willing to talk.

Observation findings of T2

According to the first part of the scale named building self-confidence, 7 items were included. 3 of the items were rarely observed, 3 of them were never observed, and one item was observed often. Accordingly, T2 was observed as not providing students stimulating rewards and positive feedback. Along with that, she seemed to rarely provide positive notes on written works and tasks.

For the second section named reducing anxiety, 17 items were included. Among these items, 8 of them were observed very often, 2 of them were often, 5 of them were seen occasionally, and 2 of them were seen rarely. To take a closer look, very often observed behavior was the teacher giving enough time for students to complete the tasks, giving clear instructions, tolerating errors, and allowing students to practice their own speech. Often observed items were the teacher helping students set realistic goals and helping students understand the basics of the language. Occasionally seen behavior was using modeling to correct errors and helping students have a clear concept of anxiety. Rarely observed items were the teacher having sessions for students to self-correct.

The last section under the title of demonstrating proper teacher behavior had 10 items that were observed. Among these items, 1 of them was observed very often, 3 of them were observed often, 4 of them were seen occasionally, and 1 of the items was seen rarely. The most witnessed item was the teacher creating a stress-free atmosphere for the students. The often observed behavior was again giving clear instructions and showing interest in students' personal lives. Occasionally observed behavior was the teacher being supportive and helpful, giving clear responses when the students needed them, and showing personal concern and acceptance. Lastly, rarely observed behavior was the teacher avoiding making comparisons.

Other than the items observed in the classroom observation scale, some additional notes were taken about the general behavior of the T2. It is noted that the teacher did not discriminate against the students in terms of gender. She provided enough time span to each student to talk equally. More than 50% of the class is observed to participate in the class frequently.

Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) Findings Students' anxiety levels

The data collected contains 20-item responses from two groups, labeled as Group A (n= 25) and Group B (n = 30), and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) total score. The central tendency and variability within each group were summarized by calculating the mean, standard deviation (SD), standard error (SE), and coefficient of variation (CV) for each item (See Table 5). The mean scores across items ranged from 2.08 to 3.44 in Group A and 1.7 to 3.2 in Group B. For overall FLCAS, Group A's anxiety level (M = 5.93, SD = 1.91) was slightly higher than Group B's level (M = 5.55, SD = 1.58), yet both groups suggest a high levels of anxiety with a high variability. The standard deviations for individual items ranged from 1.29 to 1.57 in Group A and 0.79 to 1.29 in Group B. While responses to Item 13 were more consistent (SD = 0.557) in Group A, responses to Item 5 (SD = 1.573) were more scattered.

As can be observed from the CV values of the total scores, which are 0.256 for Group A and 0.191 for Group B, the replies in Group A are comparatively more dispersed with the SE values being relatively low, revealing an accurate estimate of the group means. These differences may reflect different perceptions or experiences between the two groups. Additionally, the total mean score of Group A (62.24, SD = 15.922) was higher than that of Group B (57.633, SD = 11.000); therefore, suggesting that Group A has higher levels of anxiety overall.

Table 5
Students' Anxiety Levels (Group A and Group B)

Item	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of Variation
1	A	25	3.160	1.434	0.287	0.454
1	B	30	2.367	1.066	0.195	0.451
2	A	25	2.720	1.458	0.292	0.536
2	B	30	3.000	1.259	0.230	0.420
3	A	25	2.680	1.520	0.304	0.567
3	B	30	1.700	0.794	0.145	0.467
4	A	25	2.280	1.458	0.292	0.640
4	B	30	2.267	1.112	0.203	0.491
5	A	25	3.160	1.573	0.315	0.498
5	B	30	2.367	1.217	0.222	0.514
6	A	25	2.120	1.394	0.279	0.658
6	B	30	1.867	0.973	0.178	0.521
7	A	25	3.440	1.294	0.259	0.376
7	B	30	3.400	0.973	0.178	0.286
8	A	25	2.080	1.288	0.258	0.619
8	B	30	2.200	1.157	0.211	0.526
9	A	25	2.640	1.350	0.270	0.511
9	B	30	2.667	1.269	0.232	0.476
10	A	25	3.480	1.388	0.278	0.399
10	B	30	3.167	1.341	0.245	0.424
11	A	25	4.360	0.638	0.128	0.146
11	B	30	4.300	0.837	0.153	0.195
12	A	25	4.080	0.997	0.199	0.244
12	B	30	4.000	0.947	0.173	0.237
13	A	25	4.680	0.557	0.111	0.119
13	B	30	3.667	1.033	0.189	0.282
14	A	25	3.800	1.080	0.216	0.284
14	B	30	3.070	0.970	0.177	0.297
15	A	25	3.720	1.173	0.235	0.315
15	B	30	3.167	1.185	0.216	0.374
16	A	25	4.240	0.831	0.166	0.196
16	B	30	3.900	1.155	0.211	0.296
17	A	25	4.240	1.200	0.240	0.283
17	B	30	4.300	1.088	0.199	0.253
18	A	25	2.560	1.227	0.245	0.479
18	B	30	1.400	0.932	0.170	0.666
19	A	25	2.400	1.480	0.296	0.617
19	B	30	1.600	0.968	0.177	0.605
20	A	25	1.560	1.003	0.201	0.643
20	B	30	1.833	1.234	0.225	0.673
FLCAS Total	A	25	62.240	15.922	3.184	0.510
FLCAS Total	B	30	57.633	11.000	2.008	0.382

Comparison of Group A and Group B Students' Anxiety Levels

Four of the 20 items revealed statistically significant differences between groups in "ITEM 1," "ITEM 3," "ITEM 5," and "ITEM 19." These findings indicate that responses to these items varied significantly. There were no discernible differences between the

two groups for the remaining items, such as total FLCAS, which were not statistically significant ($p = 0.106$).

Figure 2
Statistically Different Items

ITEM 1	ITEM 3	ITEM 5	ITEM 19
<p>ENG: How would you feel if you are to take more English lessons?</p> <p>TR: Daha fazla İngilizce dersine girsen ne hissedersin?</p>	<p>ENG: How do you feel when you are in English lessons?</p> <p>TR: İngilizce dersine girince ne hissediyorsun?</p>	<p>ENG: How do you feel when your teacher calls for you in English lessons?</p> <p>TR: İngilizce derslerinde öğretmen sana seslendiğinde ne hissediyorsun?</p>	<p>ENG: How do you feel when you raise a hand in English lessons?</p> <p>TR: İngilizce derslerinde parmak kaldırdığında ne hissediyorsun?</p>

Significant items revealed that Group A consistently outperformed Group B in certain areas. For “ITEM 1,” Group A showed higher scores with a medium effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.637$); this reflected a notable advantage potentially related to increased confidence or decreased anxiety. Similarly, “ITEM 3” presented the largest effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.831$), indicating a significant difference and suggesting a significant advantage for Group A in this particular area of language learning or anxiety reduction. In “ITEM 5,” Group A’s scores were higher again, with a medium effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.571$); this highlighted their relatively lower anxiety or higher ability on the measured construct. Finally, “ITEM 19” showed a significant difference with a medium effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.522$), further highlighting the stronger performance or reduced anxiety of Group A compared to Group B.

For important items (“ITEM 1,” “ITEM 3,” “ITEM 5,” and “ITEM 19”), Group A consistently scored higher than Group B; this supports the hypothesis that Group A outperforms Group B on these specific measures. The largest effect size was observed for “ITEM 3” (Cohen’s $d = 0.831$), suggesting a significant difference between groups for this item.

Nonsignificant results, on the other hand, show that neither the FLCAS total nor the majority of items differ significantly between groups. This shows that while there are differences between groups in certain aspects of language classroom anxiety, these differences are not present in all of the characteristics that were measured.

Table 6
Independent Samples t-Test Results

Item	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE (Cohen's d)
1	2.351	53	0.011 ^a	0.637	0.285
2	-0.764	53	0.776	-0.207	0.272
3	3.068	53	0.002 ^a	0.831	0.295
4	0.038	53	0.485	0.010	0.271
5	2.108	53	0.020	0.571	0.283
6	0.791	53	0.216	0.214	0.272
7	0.726	53	0.235	0.197	0.272
8	-0.364	53	0.641	-0.099	0.271
9	-0.075	53	0.530	-0.020	0.271
10	0.849	53	0.200	0.230	0.273
11	0.294	53	0.385	0.080	0.271
12	0.305	53	0.381	0.082	0.271
13	1.359	53	0.090	0.368	0.276
14	0.687	53	0.247	0.186	0.272
15	0.589	53	0.279	0.160	0.272
16	1.230	53	0.112	0.333	0.275
17	-0.194	53	0.577	-0.053	0.271
18	0.549	53	0.293	0.149	0.272
19	1.927	53	0.030	0.522	0.281
20	-0.889	53	0.811	-0.241	0.273
FLCAS Total	1.264	53	0.106	0.342	0.275

Note. For all tests, the alternative hypothesis specifies that group A is greater than group B. Student's t-test. ^a $p < .05$. Brown–Forsythe test is significant ($p < .05$), indicating a violation of the equal variance assumption.

Discussion

When the findings of the study are considered, there are a couple of salient indications that are worth keeping in mind to discuss the further issues. The initial captivating finding is about the teachers' perspective of the source of anxiety since they both see the source of the anxiety as student-based. The most remarkable finding of the observations seems to be the different classroom atmospheres provided by the teachers. As a result of this study, it is drawn to this conclusion by examining if the teachers provided a safe and stress-free environment, and a clear difference is observed between the two classes. Anxiety scale findings showed that in general there is not a major difference between the students' anxiety levels. However, the significant part about the scale findings is that the items that considerably differed between the groups were all about the teachers' effect.

Following these findings, it is important to discuss why and how these findings might have occurred. To start with the interviews, it is mentioned that the teachers usually find the students responsible from their anxiety levels. It is ultimately important to understand and think why the teachers end up with the same comments somehow. As well as there might be various reasons explaining these perceptions, some of the reasons can be listed such as the fact that some teachers might not want to take responsibility for the negative outcomes from the children. Another reason could also

be about some teachers' lack of awareness that a student's anxiety level is an issue that the teachers should interfere with. If the teachers are in this belief, it is probable that they will not take responsibility for students' anxiety levels. In this respect, when the interview results are considered, this study is in line with Svendsen's (2023) view. When it comes to the interview findings, it was seen that the teachers had two different classroom atmospheres. For sure, each teacher has their own unique atmosphere in the classroom. However, no matter how different the atmosphere might be, the teachers should make sure that the environment is safe and positive for the students (Köksoy & Deniz, 2025; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). The environment of the classroom is actually closely related to the approach that the teachers adopt. A great deal of teachers still adopt traditional methods and approaches despite the new methods that consider the learners as the center of teaching and learning. This belief causes them to see the teachers as the authority, which means the classroom environment is seen as strict and military-like. Simply, these explanations and assumptions might be the reason for the two observed different classroom environments.

Naturally, there are also some unexpected findings. Even though it is common that some findings might be unexpected, searching for the reasons behind them and trying to explain them is highly essential for the clarity of the study. The unexpected results arise from the anxiety scale findings. According to the findings, both groups had approximately the same level of anxiety. When the observation and interview findings were revised, the groups were expected to have different levels of anxiety stemming from the teachers' behaviors. As suggested, since the foreign language anxiety levels of the students from two groups were not statistically significant, other sources of foreign language anxiety (Köksoy & Deniz, 2025; Weerakoon et al., 2023) shall be taken into consideration in detail when searching foreign language anxiety. Again, there could be different explanations behind this result. The primary reason for this is that speaking anxiety has multiple sources. Teacher-originated speaking anxiety is one of them. The students' psychological state, lack of experience and knowledge, perfectionism, past negative experiences, and insufficient experiences also play an important role in speaking anxiety. Seeing that both groups had similar anxiety levels, it is assumed that in two classrooms, other dimensions of the anxiety might be more strongly affecting the students. It is plausible to come to this conclusion by revising the two totally different classroom environments created by the teachers. As a matter of fact, Aydın's (2008) view is precisely coherent with these explanations, and it summarizes this idea briefly.

One of the most substantial issues to argue is if this study fills a gap in the literature and brings any novelties. The following paragraphs explain why this study is essential and beneficial for the literature. There are two emphases that the study essentially presents. The initial point is that, especially in the Turkish context, English language education barely starts at around 10-12 years of age. This situation hinders the English learning process from the beginning since the critical years for learning a language are wasted. It is important to investigate the beginning of a language learning process. In

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Turkey, it is easily observable that even adults struggle and feel anxious with short presentations and small talks such as interviews. Seeing this, it is important to get to the root of this problem. At this point, this study presents an example of why people feel anxious even after years of foreign language education, and teacher-originated anxiety is especially what this study aimed to investigate.

Another focus is the teachers' effect and awareness. The teacher factor is highly effective in speaking anxiety. It was shown in the anxiety scale that the anxiety levels of the students were close. However, the only items that differed noticeably were about the teachers' role. At this point, this study also plays a crucial role for emphasis and awareness raising about the teachers' impact since the teachers might not even have the awareness that they are partly responsible for the students' anxiety rates. Seeing two different contexts and methods, they might notice which approach they adopt and apply with or without noticing, and they might take action for the changes.

Overall, if the findings are to be stated briefly, it is observed that the teachers adopt different methods and classroom environments, and they did not perceive themselves as a possible source of speaking anxiety. Also, when the anxiety level differed between the groups, it was related to the teachers. These findings commonly imply that teachers' effect on anxiety is immense. However, it is not the mere source creating or boosting speaking anxiety in students. Moreover, it is inevitable that the students who receive an education in a stress-free and encouraging environment feel less anxiety, especially that created by the teacher.

Conclusion

As shown above, it is explicit that teacher behaviors undeniably affect the targeted age group's FLSA considering developmental period characteristics. Also, especially middle school ESL students in the context of the Turkish education system are in the period when they are just starting to establish their background on accepting learning a new language other than their mother tongue, getting to know that language, internalizing it and using it. Their learning performances and the anxiety levels are closely related with the teacher's behavior.

According to the results, at the very beginning of the classroom practices, teacher behaviors should be regulated by taking into account a fine adjustment in terms of psycho-linguistic principles. The interviews questioned and revealed the perceptions of the teachers about their own behaviors. Consequently, awareness of reversible effects of teachers on the anxiety level of the students helps them in promoting the welfare and success in the classroom so that one more obstacle to language learning can be eliminated.


It is quite natural that every study might lack certain points, tools, explanations, and details. In fact, it is essential to highlight the deficiencies of the studies to shed a light on the future and further studies and develop what is already done. In this respect,


major limitations of the study can be mentioned. Initially, it is rational to start with the context. In this study, the context is chosen as the Turkish context in favor of practicality. However, in future research, if the context is widened to other nationalities, the reliability of the results will be undoubtedly higher. Secondly, the tools that are used in the study are comprehensive. Yet, it should not be forgotten that anxiety is a very complex issue to handle, which means that the more tools are used, the better and more trustworthy the results are. This explanation can also be supported by the idea that anxiety has various dimensions. So, it is not a one-and-done process. It needs to be investigated over a longer period and with several tools and methods.

Most importantly, the implications drawn by the findings and results should be clearly stated in that the implications tell the first-hand addressees what kind of action should be taken and how. The most remarkable implications are, beyond any doubt, the teachers. Regardless of their ages or years of experience in teaching, all the teachers should take the responsibility of self-questioning. They need to revise their methods, techniques, beliefs, and applications, and they need to question the teaching environment they create. In need, they should not hesitate to take necessary education for both their well-being and the students' in the classroom. Making the speaking exercises a casual and daily habit in the class can also be another application. If the students get used to speaking daily and naturally, they will get comfortable in the language gradually.


Secondly and lastly, as often stated above, the dimensions of the speaking anxiety should be taken seriously. The teacher aspect is only a small piece of the sources of anxiety as seen throughout the study. To understand speaking anxiety extensively, each source of anxiety should be clarified, and various studies should be conducted by the researchers. In this manner, anxiety can be seen as a puzzle. If all of the pieces are placed carefully and the necessary amount of time and attention is dedicated, the drawbacks caused by anxiety, or maybe even the anxiety itself, can be eventually handled.

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World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants

The study followed the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants provided voluntary informed consent, and their anonymity and data confidentiality were strictly guaranteed throughout the research.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendix A

Teacher Semi – Structured Interview Questions

1. How would you define foreign language speaking anxiety, what is it for you?
2. What are the characteristics of classrooms where speaking anxiety is seen?
3. Do you observe speaking anxiety in your own class?
4. In what activities or situations do you observe speaking anxiety, and in which situations do you observe it?
5. Are there any methods you use to cope with speech anxiety, and if so, can you give examples?
6. Is there an example you would like to give as a critical incident?
7. Is there anything else you want to add about the speaking anxiety you observe in the classes?

Appendix B

Teacher Classroom Observation Scale by Alrabi (2014)

BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE	Use tangible rewards						
	Use effective praise						
	Celebrate learners' success and achievement						
	Provide learners with positive notes on their written work						
	Provide learners with positive feedback after they complete tasks						
	Encourage learners as they work on tasks						
	Reinforce students' ability						
REDUCING ANXIETY	Tackle learners' unrealistic beliefs						
	Help learners establish realistic expectations						
	Help learners establish clear goals						
	Help learners understand the nature of language anxiety						
	Help learners understand the nature of language learning						
	Give students sufficient time to finish quizzes/ exams						
	Make grading criteria clear						
	Make test instructions clear						
	Give students practice tests						
	Process feedback sessions to correct learner errors						
	Correct learner errors using modeling						
	Help learners to learn from their errors						
	Help learners understand the nature of their errors						
	Tolerate learners' errors						
	Monitor learners carefully when they are involved in oral activities						
	Allow students to practice self-talk						
Give learners opportunities for oral practice							
DEMONSTRATING PROPER TEACHER BEHAVIOR	Avoid involving learners in competition						
	Avoid making comparisons between learners						
	Respond properly when students ask for help						
	Give clear instructions						
	Brainstorm with students						
	Build a community of learners in class						
	Create a relaxed and less stressful atmosphere						
	Be supportive and helpful						
	Show concern about students' progress						
	Show personal concern, respect, and acceptance						
VARIABLES	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	N/A	
SCALE							

Note: N/A = (Not applicable). This option was assigned the value 9 and was regarded as a discrete missing computations.