



RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Turkish learning anxieties of refugee students in Turkey and the effect of some variables on their learning anxieties*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the Turkish learning anxiety of refugee students studying in secondary schools in Turkey and the effect of some variables on their learning anxiety. For this purpose, descriptive survey model, one of the quantitative research approaches, was used in the study. The research was conducted with 200 refugee students studying at Mezitli Imam Hatip Secondary School in Mezitli District of Mersin Province in the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The data of the study were collected with "Personal Information Form" and "Anxiety Scale for Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language". Descriptive statistical techniques, t-test for independent samples, one-way analysis of variance for variables with more than two groups were used to analyze the collected data. At the end of the study, it was determined that refugee students had a moderate level of anxiety. In addition, it was determined that gender, age, mother tongue, duration of stay in Turkey, reason for being in Turkey, place of birth variables had no effect on students' Turkish learning anxiety.

Keywords: Turkish Learning, Anxiety, Refugee Students.

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid developments in the field of science and technology increase people's need to access accurate information and make it necessary for them to communicate with each other for different purposes. This necessity has also led people to learn foreign languages. Individuals who want to learn a foreign language need to acquire basic communication skills in the target language in order to communicate successfully. Learners' individual characteristics such as their knowledge and cultural background, attitudes, academic achievements, etc. are also important in achieving successful results in foreign language learning (Aydın & Zengin, 2008). One of the factors affecting individuals' language learning process is anxiety.

Anxiety is an affective and cognitive response state that is encountered in almost every aspect of daily life and in different ways. There are various definitions and explanations about anxiety in the literature. Some of these definitions and explanations are; 'a state of physical, mental and emotional arousal that a person experiences when faced with an unwanted stimulus' (Keşaplı & Çiftçi, 2017:464); 'a state of fear, anxiety and restlessness that occurs with overreaction to subjectively perceived situations' (Suadiye & Aydın, 2009:174); 'anxiety arising from the fear that something sad will happen, gloom, grief, sorrow, *tasa*' (Ayverdi, 2006:1616); 'a feeling of tension that usually arises from the thought that something bad will happen and whose cause is unknown' (Turkish Language Institute [TLI], 2023). When the definitions and explanations are analysed, it is understood that anxiety occurs in various ways.

The results indicate that anxiety should be evaluated in two different ways, positive and negative. The first one (positive anxiety) is the anxiety that increases the motivation of the learner and facilitates learning by keeping the mind awake; the second one is the negative anxiety that is felt at a high level, makes the learner make mistakes and prevents learning (Yaman, 2010). In other words, anxiety level has both positive and negative effects on foreign language learning. For example, individuals

with high levels of anxiety may experience disturbances in attention and perception and feel inadequate. On the other hand, anxiety felt at a normal level can positively affect success (Aydın & Dilmaç, 2004).

Kleinmann (1977) found that students with high anxiety levels used grammatically difficult expressions in their narration skills (as cited in Aydın & Zengin, 2008). Steinberg and Horwitz (1986), on the other hand, found that students with high levels of anxiety resorted to interpretation less than students with low levels of anxiety. Based on these results, it can be said that the anxiety experienced by individuals in foreign language teaching directly affects the learning process (Batumlu, 2006; Horwitz & Young, 1991). As in other disciplines, the level of anxiety experienced by learners in foreign language learning processes can directly affect their success.

Scientists have classified anxiety in different ways such as affecting state, continuity, source, positive and negative desire (Aydın & Zengin, 2008; Kapkıran, 2002; Scovel, 1991; Spielberg et al. 1970; Wilson, 2006). It is classified as 'facilitating and hindering' according to the state of influence; 'situational and continuous' according to its duration; and 'personality-induced, event-induced and situation-induced' according to its source. There are also anxiety types such as communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluation' (Özdemir, 2013:42).

State anxiety is expressed as the state of fear, panic and uneasiness experienced by the individual at the time of danger and is generally accepted as normal (Aydın & Zengin, 2008:84); State anxiety is 'the negative result that an individual feels in the face of any specific situation' (Kapıkıran, 2002: 34); 'it is a type of anxiety that increases when stress is intense and decreases when stress disappears' (Spielberger et al., 1970).

Trait anxiety, as the name suggests, is a type of anxiety that does not disappear immediately when it occurs, is continuous, and does not occur only in threatening situations. According to Spielberg et al. (1970), trait anxiety varies in duration and intensity from person to person

and is more continuous and constant than state anxiety. In addition, they stated that personality structure being inclined to anxiety affects this type of anxiety.

Scovel (1991), on the other hand, mentioned facilitative and inhibitory anxiety in terms of affecting the individual. If the felt anxiety motivates the individual and brings out the success performance, it is considered as facilitative anxiety, and if it hinders the success of the individual, it is considered as inhibitory anxiety. Similarly, Wilson (2006) stated that facilitative anxiety improves the individual's performance in the language learning process, while inhibitory anxiety has a negative effect on learning and performance. However, according to Horwitz (1986), facilitative anxiety cannot be mentioned because anxiety can have a positive effect on neither learning nor performance since it has negative connotations. Therefore, Horwitz (1986) accepts only inhibitory anxiety that has a negative effect on the learning process. The explanations and classifications indicate that all individuals who make up societies experience more or less anxiety at different moments of their lives for different reasons. In this context, it is possible to say that exposure to negative situations triggers and feeds anxiety more. As a result of this situation, the quality of life and learning of individuals can be negatively affected.

Thousands of people have been forced to migrate from their places of residence due to different reasons in Turkey's geography in recent years. Turkey's development and geopolitical position has been an important factor for migrants to migrate to Turkey. As a result of forced (war, climate, discriminatory policies, etc.) or voluntary (education, health, work, trade, etc.) relocations, Turkey today hosts millions of people. These people are given education and training by formal and non-formal education institutions.

Migration has had many effects (sociological, economic, political, etc.) on Turkey. One of the limited number of positive effects is the learning of Turkish by foreigners. It is possible to say that this situation has made Turkish a language that

is both learnt and taught and whose users are increasing every day. One of the pillars of the education given to refugees is Turkish language teaching. Maintaining the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language and increasing its quality in a way to meet the needs is a necessary and important issue for the healthy realisation of the integration process of the relevant people into the society.

In the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, it is important to determine the learning concerns of the interlocutors and to take necessary measures to ensure the success of the education. Language education is a whole, therefore, it is carried out in a way to complement each other in all learning areas. There are various studies in the literature to determine the readiness and anxiety of students for each learning area (Aytan & Tunçel, 2015; Genç-Köylü, 2020; Göçer, 2014; Halat, 2015; Maden, Dincel & Maden, 2015; Melanlıoğlu & Demir, 2013; Özdemir, 2019; Polatcan, 2018; Sallabaş, 2012; Sönmez, 2021). However, no study was found in the literature to determine the Turkish learning anxiety of refugee students studying in secondary school. This situation can be considered as a deficiency for the literature.

The present study, which was prepared to determine the Turkish learning anxiety of refugee students studying at the secondary school level in Turkey, is thought to contribute to the relevant literature and to improve the quality of Turkish education given to refugee students.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, it was aimed to determine the Turkish learning anxiety of refugee students studying at Mezitli Imam Hatip Secondary School in Mezitli District of Mersin Province and the effect of some variables on learning anxiety. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

- How are the Turkish learning anxieties of refugee students?
- Do the Turkish learning anxieties of refugee students differ according to various variables (gender, mother tongue, age, place of birth,

duration of stay in Turkey, reason for being in Turkey)?

METHOD

Research Model

In the present study, descriptive survey model, one of the quantitative research approaches, was used. 'The survey model is a research approach that aims to describe a past or current situation as it exists (Karasar, 2012: 77). In the present study, it was deemed appropriate to use the descriptive survey model since the Turkish learning anxieties of refugee students and the relationship between some variables and learning anxieties were wanted to be described as they existed.

Working Group

The study group of the research consists of a total of 200 refugee students studying at Mezitli Imam Hatip Secondary School (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades) in Mezitli district of Mersin province in the spring term of the 2023-2024 academic year. While determining the study group of the research, convenient sampling method, one of the non-random sampling methods, was used. The study group of the research consists of the participants that the researcher can reach considering the financial means and time available. Descriptive statistics regarding the socio-demographic information of the refugee students participating in the study are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of socio-demographic information of refugee students

Variables	Variable levels	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	109	54.5
	Male	91	45.5
Mother tongue	Arabic	154	77.0
	Other	46	23.0
Age level	11 age and under	56	28.0
	12 age	43	21.5
	13 age	47	23.5
	14 age and older	54	27.0
Place of birth	Syria	144	72.0
	Turkey	34	17.0
	Other	22	11.0
Language spoken in the family	Arabic	101	50.5
	Other	99	49.5
Duration of stay in Turkey	2 years and less	24	12.0
	3-5 between years	36	18.0
	6 years and more	140	70.0
Previous education	Turkish		
		Yes	18
	No	182	91.0
Reason for being in Turkey	Asylum with war	129	64.5
	For education	49	24.5
	Other	22	11.0
Total		200	100

When Table 1 is analysed, it is seen that refugee students are close to each other in terms of gender. When their distribution according to age levels is analysed, it is seen that there are the highest number of students aged 11 and below and the lowest number of students aged 12 and below. The majority of refugee students stated that they were born in Syria. Similarly, it was determined that Arabic was the mother tongue and the most spoken language in the family. When the duration of their stay in Turkey is analysed, it is determined that the majority of them have been here for 6 years or more. It is seen that the majority of the students have not received any Turkish education before. When the reasons for being in Turkey are analysed, it is determined that the majority of them defected due to the war.

Data Collection Tools and Process

In order to describe the Turkish language learning anxiety of refugee students, data were collected with the 'Turkish as a Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale' and 'Personal Information Form'.

Turkish as a Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale

The measurement tool used in the study consists of 39 items and 4 sub-dimensions in five-point Likert type. Before using this measurement tool developed by Genç Köylü and Işık (2020), the necessary legal permissions were obtained and the formula suggested by Uzunboylu and Sarıgöz (2015) was used to determine the perception levels of the scale by the students in the research group. Thus, a scoring standard of the measurement tool was established.

$$SA = \frac{YS-DS}{SS}$$

Here; SA indicates the range of options, YS indicates the highest option, DS indicates the lowest option and SS indicates the number of

options. When the grading of the measurement tool was analysed, the following formula was used since it was a five-point Likert type and the range was determined as .80.

For five-point Likert;

1.00 to 1.80 is very low

1.81 to 2.60 low

2.61 to 3.40 medium

3.41 to 4.20 high

4.21 to 5.00 is very high

Reliability and Normality Analysis of Measurement Tools

The validity and reliability study of the 'Turkish as a Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale' was conducted by Genç Köylü and Işık (2020) (the face validity of the scale was 92.76% and the Cronbach's Alpha (α) internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.96) and the scale was accepted as usable. Since the average age of the study group of this research was small (9-14), a pre-application was conducted on 60 students studying at the school where the application would be made. In order to provide evidence for the reliability of the measurements obtained within the scope of the application, Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients for the scale were recalculated and given in Table 2.

When Table 2 is examined, the reliability value of the total score of the measurement tool used within the scope of the research was found to be .70 and above. Reliability values of .70 and above are considered sufficient for the measurement tools used in measuring psychological constructs (Büyüköztürk, 2013). Accordingly, it was found that the measurement tool used in the study had sufficient reliability values. When the skewness and kurtosis values of the measurement tool were examined, it was found that the data collection tool was within the range of ± 2.00 . The

Table 2. Reliability values calculated for the measurement tools

Measurement Tools	Number of items	Cronbach alfa	Skewness	Kurtosis
Anxiety towards Turkish	39	.967	0.13	-0.76

fact that the skewness and kurtosis values of the measurement tool are within the range of ± 2.00 indicates that it has a distribution close to the normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010: 21; Shiel & Cartwright, 2015: 28).

Personal Information Form

The 'Personal Information Form' developed by the researcher was used to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of refugee students. The form consists of 8 questions to determine the basic characteristics of the participants such as 'gender, mother tongue, age level, place of birth, language spoken in the family, duration of stay in Turkey, previous Turkish education and reason for being in Turkey'. These variables were used to determine whether there is any relationship between the demographic characteristics of the participants and their Turkish learning anxiety.

After the validity and reliability of the measurement tools were ensured, the necessary permissions were obtained from Baskent University Ethics Committee and Mersin Provincial Directorate of National Education for the collection of the study data. After the necessary permissions were obtained, the application was carried out on the days and hours determined in the spring term of the 2023-2024 academic year. At the beginning of the application, the participants were informed that the personal information they provided would not be shared with anyone and that the data to be collected would only be used in the current study. After detailed explanations were given to the participants, the application was started.

Data Analysis

In data analysis, descriptive statistics measures (frequencies and percentages), skewness and kurtosis values, mean and standard deviation values of the measurement tools, independent samples t-test for variables with two groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for variables

with more than two groups and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability analysis were used respectively. In the difference analyses, .05 level was taken into consideration for statistical significance and all analyses were carried out through SPSS (version 25) package programme.

FINDINGS

The findings obtained in this study, which aims to examine the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish language course, are given in parallel with the order of the research questions. In this context, firstly, descriptive statistics were calculated in order to determine the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish language and are given in Table 3.

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the scores obtained from the Turkish language anxiety scale, which consists of 39 items and has a five-point Likert scale, range between 39 and 195 points and have a mean of 106.48. The mean value given in parentheses was obtained by dividing by the number of items and the anxiety levels towards Turkish were interpreted using these values. Accordingly, it is seen that the score of 2.73 points to the middle level according to the cut-off score given in the title of data collection tools. This finding shows that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are close to the average.

After analysing the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson, the differences of this anxiety level according to socio-demographic variables were examined. Firstly, independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to gender and the findings are given in Table 4.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained from the Turkish language anxiety scale

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	\bar{X}	SS
Turkish learning anxiety	200	39.00	195.00	106.48 (2.73)	35.83

When Table 4 is analysed, it is seen that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are not statistically significant according to gender ($t_{198} = 0.06$; $p > .05$). Accordingly, it is determined that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards the Turkish course are at a similar level regardless of their gender.

After the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to gender, independent samples t-test analysis was performed to compare them according to their mother tongue and the findings are given in Table 5.

When Table 5 is analysed, it is seen that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are not statistically significant according to their mother tongue ($t_{198} = 1.23$; $p > .05$). Accordingly, it was determined that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards the Turkish lesson were at a similar level regardless

of their mother tongue.

After the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to their mother tongue, one-way analysis of variance was performed to compare them according to age level and the findings are given in Table 6.

When Table 6 is analysed, it is seen that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are not statistically significant according to age level ($F(3-196) = 1.81$; $p > .05$). Accordingly, it was determined that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards the Turkish course were at a similar level regardless of their age level.

After the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to age level, one-way analysis of variance was performed for the comparison according to the place of birth of the student and the findings are given in Table 7.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test results on the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to gender

Variable	Gender	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Anxiety	Female	109	106.61	34.28	198	0.06	.952
	Male	91	106.31	37.80			

Table 5. Independent samples t-test results for the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to their mother tongue

Variable	Mother Tongue	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Anxiety	Arabic	154	108.18	34.03	198	1.23	.220
	Other	46	100.78	41.20			

Table 6. Results for the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to age level

Variable	Age level	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	F	p	Difference (Tukey)
Anxiety	11 age and under	56	110.34	35.01	3-196	1.81	.146	No difference
	12 age	43	107.33	32.95				
	13 age	47	111.81	37.65				
	14 age and older	54	97.15	36.44				

Table 7. Results related to the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to place of birth

Variable	Place of birth	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Anxiety	Syria	144	108.36	33.97	198	1.19	.234
	Turkiye and Other	56	101.63	40.16			

When Table 7 is analysed, it is seen that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are not statistically significant according to their place of birth ($t_{198} = 1.19$; $p > .05$). Accordingly, it was determined that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards the Turkish course were at a similar level regardless of their place of birth.

After the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to place of birth, one-way analysis of variance was performed for the comparison of the duration of their stay in Turkey and the findings are given in Table 8.

When Table 8 is analysed, it is seen that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are not statistically significant according to the duration of their stay in Turkey ($F(32-197) = 0.23$; $p > .05$). Accordingly, it was determined that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards the Turkish course were at a similar level regardless of the duration of their stay in Turkey.

After the comparison of the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson according to the duration of their stay in Turkey, one-way analysis of variance was performed for the comparison of the anxiety levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson according to the reason of their stay in Turkey and the findings obtained are given in Table 9.

When Table 9 is analysed, it is seen that the anxiety

levels of refugee students towards Turkish lesson are not statistically significant according to the reason for being in Turkey ($t_{198} = 0.37$; $p > .05$). Accordingly, it was determined that the anxiety levels of refugee students towards the Turkish course were at a similar level regardless of the reason for being in Turkey.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was determined that the Turkish learning anxiety of the refugee students participating in the study was at a moderate level. This shows that refugee students do not have a high level of anxiety while learning Turkish. This result coincides with the results of the studies (Boylu & Çangal, 2015; Dalcı, 2020; Genç Köylü, 2020; Halat, 2015; İpek, 2020; Karateke & Bayat, 2018; Kılınç, 2018; Miyanyedi, 2019; Özdemir, 2013; Yoğurtçu & Yoğurtçu, 2013) in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners.

Sevim (2014), Solak (2019), Tay and Doğan Kahtalı (2023), Özerbaş et al. (2023) found that students had a low level of anxiety while learning Turkish. However, Altunkaya (2015) concluded in his study that foreign students have high reading anxiety. Maden et al. (2015) and Barış and Şen (2019) concluded that foreign students' Turkish writing anxiety is high. Similarly, Ameen and Üstten (2021) concluded in their study that 3/2 of the students studying at Gazi TÖMER (B2 level) were anxious while speaking Turkish. These results in the literature reveal that the Turkish learning anxiety levels of

Table 8. Results for the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to the duration of their stay in Turkey

Variable	Duration of stay in Turkey	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	F	p	Difference (Tukey)
Anxiety	2 years and less	24	110.92	38.99	2-197	0.23	.796	--
	3-5 between years	36	106.94	39.46				
	6 years and more	140	105.59	34.50				

Table 9. Results for the comparison of refugee students' anxiety levels towards Turkish lesson according to the reason for being in Turkey

Variable	Reason for being in Turkey	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Anxiety	Asylum with war	129	107.18	33.32	198	0.37	.709
	For education and other	71	105.20	40.22			

foreign students studying in Turkey vary. There may be many reasons for this difference. In our opinion, factors such as alphabet difference, ethnic origin, social living conditions, exposure to Turkish, speaking Turkish in the family can be counted among the reasons for this difference.

It was determined that refugee students' Turkish learning anxiety did not differ according to gender, mother tongue, age, place of birth, duration of stay in Turkey and reason for being in Turkey. This result is supported by the results reported by some previous studies (Barış & Şen, 2019; Boylu & Çangal, 2015; Dalcı, 2020; Erdil, 2016; Genç-Köylü, 2020; Güneş-Şahin, 2021; Halat, 2015; Melanlıoğlu & Demir, 2013; Özdemir, 2013; Özerbaş et al., 2023; Taşdemir, 2017; Tunçel, 2014).

In the literature, there are also studies (Akbulut, 2016; Altunkaya, 2015; İpek, 2020; Kılıç et al., 2016; Kılınc, 2018; Maden et al., 2015; Özdemir, 2019; Solak, 2019; Tay & Doğan-Kahtalı, 2023) that reveal a significant difference between the variables of gender, age, mother tongue, place of birth, nationality and length of stay in Turkey and Turkish learning anxiety of foreign students learning Turkish. This difference is thought to be due to the different demographic characteristics of the participants of the studies.

Based on these results, the following suggestions were made:

- The Turkish learning anxieties of refugee students learning Turkish should be taken into consideration in the language learning process.
- It is important for teachers to take measures to reduce students' learning anxieties in order to achieve success in education. In this context, different methods and techniques can be used in teaching.
- Teachers should select course materials in line with the needs of the target group and organise the learning environment accordingly.
- The approach of educators teaching Turkish to foreigners to students should be friendly, sincere, caring and tolerant. Because such an approach can help students to think positively

about Turkey and Turkish and to reduce their anxiety.

- Institutions teaching Turkish to foreigners should provide necessary guidance services to students. In this way, students' anxiety can be reduced.
- This study aimed to describe the anxiety of refugee students studying at Mezitli Imam Hatip Secondary School in Mezitli district of Mersin province towards Turkish language skills and the effect of some variables on anxiety. Similar studies can be conducted with participants from primary school, high school and university students.

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