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Examining tertiary-level distance EFL learners' perceived value of learning English and foreign language anxiety in compulsory English classes

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ABSTRACT

Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) attach different values to learning EFL depending on their goals. Regardless of their perceived value, a multitude of studies have shown that learners tend to experience anxiety when learning EFL; however, little research has been conducted within the context of distance education. The purpose of the study is to examine the interplay between non-English major distance EFL learners' perceived value of learning English and their foreign language anxiety. A group of first-year undergraduate students ($N = 383$) who were enrolled in compulsory English classes from various departments completed a web-based questionnaire measuring their perceived value of learning English and distance foreign language anxiety. The findings indicated that first-year students valued learning English, and they were moderately anxious about distance language learning. Additionally, significant moderate to weak relationships were noted between perceived value and anxiety. Several sociodemographic and language background variables were also found to predict each construct.

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As English is a universal means of communication and lingua franca of science, technology, media, and business, it has proven to be a highly powerful tool enabling people to keep pace with developments in a wide range of settings (Kırkgöz, 2007). These circumstances also apply to the Turkish context where the role and position of English have undergone various changes through the years as reflected by the language policies as well as socioeconomic factors. In line with these developments, the value attributed to the English language by the learners has also shown variations depending on their purpose of learning. Since English is a two-semester compulsory first-year course taught at higher education institutions across Turkey, regardless of their interest, non-English major students typically have to enroll in these classes as

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a degree requirement. Students who take compulsory English classes bring with them their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations, or lack thereof in these classes. Although the concept of perceived value is rather personal as indicated by Liu (2007), the purpose of learning is linked with various extrinsic and intrinsic forces that drive learners. Students' view of value is very much related to the benefit they will acquire, which is shaped by the feeling of what is taken for granted (Hermawan, 2001). In this respect, a better understanding of the importance attributed to English by the learners may help reveal their expectations of and needs for learning the language. However, such expectations and needs are shaped by a wide range of individual, social and contextual factors. Only a thorough examination of these may help explain learners' perceptions regarding the value of learning English.

Anxiety has a significant affective role on foreign language learning as well as learners' achievements. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) was considered to be a distinctive type of anxiety because "no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Therefore, unsurprisingly, FLA has been extensively studied (MacIntyre, 2017, p. 11) in face-to-face classroom environments (e.g., Liu, 2006; Thompson & Khawaja, 2016; Tran et al., 2013) as well as in distance language learning contexts (e.g., Donahoe, 2010; Hurd, 2007; Pichette, 2009). Along with the advances in technology and the effect of globalization, the number of language classes in distance learning offered by institutions at the tertiary level has been on the rise (Tarone, 2015). Especially after the circumstances brought about by COVID-19, a need for more comprehensive research on anxiety in distance education arose. When language learning and teaching take place at a distance, learners and teachers have to weigh more upon their "affective resources" due to the more secluded learning environment, isolation from classmates and instructors, and diminished and changed forms of social relationships (White, 2003, p. 114), which may affect distance language learners' levels of FLA.

Therefore, there is more need for investigating distance EFL learners' perceived value of learning English and their anxiety in compulsory English classes. To date, to the best of our knowledge, almost no attempt has been made to clarify whether there is a connection between language anxiety and the value of learning English for distance EFL learners and whether and to what extent learner variables affect this relationship. An elaboration of each construct along with their predictors could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Therefore, the present study sets out to investigate EFL learners' perceptions of the value of learning English in relation to their foreign language anxiety in their compulsory English courses at a distance. A secondary objective of the study is to examine the contribution of different learner variables to the explanation of each construct.

2. Literature Review

2.1 EFL Learners' Perceived Value of Learning English

Besides personal motives, people learn foreign languages as a result of the needs and expectations brought about by globalization, which may be described as a set of intricate and worldwide "interconnections between societies, culture, institutions, and individuals" (Tomlinson, 1997, p. 170). By learning English as a lingua franca, people not only foster new forms of identity but also gain benefits for personal, professional, and business purposes (Graddol, 2001; Jenkins, 2006; Kachru, 1992). Political reasons, access to information, and economic concerns could be cited as some further factors contributing to the significance and spread of English. These factors inevitably affect the hiring tendencies of employers who may prefer employees with working proficiency in at least one foreign language. Research has indicated that employers expect job candidates to have at least medium English proficiency, but they also require effective communication skills (Ting et al., 2017). Despite the need for improving foreign languages, studies with a particular focus on English language proficiency further indicate a

global concern over the growing gap between the competence levels of graduates and the level required for employment (Sarudin et al., 2013).

For all these reasons, among others, learning English as an L2 has become a must for those university students who wish to have a position in the global market. Although most students, as potential job seekers, are aware of this fact, they vary in terms of their motivational orientations or their “international posture,” which refers to “some learners [being] more interested in or hav[ing] more favorable attitudes toward what English symbolizes than other learners” (Yashima, 2002). Various factors account for the diversification of motivational levels among foreign language learners. According to Dörnyei et al. (2015), a student’s ability to create or simulate mental imagery of their experiences (e.g., as a fluent L2 speaker), which is called “vision,” predicts their motivation. Vision is introduced within the framework of Directed Motivational Current (DMC), which refers to “unique periods of intensive motivational involvement both in pursuit of and fuelled by a highly valued goal/vision.” This framework is grounded in various theories of psychology, one of which is the expectancy-value theory (EVT; Mills & Moulton, 2017). The classical definitions of EVT (Vroom, 1964), later came to be known as Situated EVT (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), indicate that a person’s motivation for an action is determined by expectancy (the probability of an action to be achieved) and (b) value (the worth attached to the action). While expectancy is further divided into a person’s expectations for achievement and values subjectively attached to a task, the value component has four distinct subcomponents, which are intrinsic value, utility value, attainment value, and perceived cost (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Thus, according to SEVT, these four factors determine the value of learning English as an L2. Essentially, these subcomponents are related to learners’ level of achievement and enjoyment in completing a task, the perceived utility of a course or task in relation to their goals, and finally, the amount of time and effort one has to dedicate to learning a foreign language.

There have been a number of studies that have examined the value of L2 learning from the perspective of tertiary students. A study conducted by Rivers (2012) explored the value of compulsory English courses as perceived by 138 non-English major students at a Japanese national university using a mixed methods approach. First, qualitative data collected via participants’ reflections on the importance of English together with the justifications for learning it were used to develop a survey for measuring the “perceived value of compulsory English language education” (p. 251). The resulting survey consisted of 12 questions with three dimensions, which were called international friendship orientation, international career orientation, and international engagement orientation. Based on the findings, the study claims to introduce a model for depicting the perceived value of compulsory English courses in the context of a presumed internationalized world and calls for similar studies to be conducted in other contexts to confirm its findings.

Mills and Moulton (2017) conducted a similar study looking at tertiary-level learners’ and instructors’ perceptions of the value of foreign language courses in a Romance Languages and Literatures program in the U.S.A. The data were gathered from 73 instructors and 377 students enrolled in a Romance language course through a perceived value survey asking respondents to rate the significance of 63 learning goals. There were two major categories of goals investigated: language-related goals [interpersonal communication, interpretive communication (reading-listening), presentational communication (writing-speaking), discourse competence and grammar] and content-related goals [(cultural) perspective, practices, and symbols & products]. The findings indicated that students and teachers placed a higher priority on language-oriented goals than content-oriented ones, with interpersonal communication and grammar being the most important. Besides, although students place a high value on discourse competence, instructors place a high value on cultural perspectives.

In the Turkish context, a recent study by Şen (2022) aimed to develop a scale for measuring the perceived value of learning English for Turkish university students. He collected data from 406 university

students, who were either enrolled in a one-year English preparatory school or were in the first year of their degree program. The findings indicated that L2 English learners had various motivational orientations related to themselves, society, and their professions, all of which affected how valuable they perceived learning L2 English. Significant group differences were gained in personal benefits and total ratings between students with and without English preparatory program education. Finally, in occupational benefits, variables that were found to show significant group differences were gender, year of study (first year vs. preparatory year), and the type of faculty/school.

Limited previous research looking at the perceived value of learning English (Rivers, 2012; Şen, 2022) and other foreign languages (Mills & Moulton, 2017) has shown that students value learning foreign languages, and certain demographic variables influence their perceptions. More studies aiming to better understand the value of learning English as perceived by university students enrolled in compulsory first-year English courses are needed. These perceptions may help reveal whether and how much learners value English despite having to complete their compulsory English courses offered as a degree requirement in the majority of Turkish higher education institutions. Moreover, a closer look at various individual and psychological variables may reveal interesting findings regarding the nature of students' value perceptions and any interrelationships.

2.2 Language Anxiety at a Distance

Anxiety has now been established as an affective factor playing a significant role in language learning regardless of the context. Horwitz (2017) describes anxious learners as feeling “distress at their inability to be themselves and to connect authentically with other people through the limitation of the new language” (p. 41). In this respect, although language anxiety could be regarded as a helpful “incentive” for second language learning, it has potentially debilitating effects on language performance (Brown, 1994). In the Turkish context, a plethora of studies have investigated FLA in relation to achievement (e.g., Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Demirdas & Bozdoğan, 2013), gender (e.g., Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), fear of negative evaluation and self-perceived proficiency (e.g., Subaşı, 2010), experience traveling abroad (e.g., Gültekin Çakar, 2009), and multilingualism (e.g., Thompson & Khawaja, 2016). A study by Aslan and Thompson (2021) also looked at the relationship between Turkish EFL learners' beliefs about foreign language learning and their language anxiety and concluded that learners' positive feelings toward learning languages may help decrease their anxiety.

Previous studies have also looked at EFL learners' FLA in different modes of learning (e.g., online, blended, and face-to-face). In distance education classrooms, problems arising from affective factors might deepen due to specific features of the language that are harder to learn in the distance education context (Sussex, 1991). It has also been noted that studies looking at learners' language anxiety in the online learning context have primarily investigated individual learning conditions (Hilliard et al., 2020). An often-cited study by Hurd (2007) examined low-intermediate French learners' anxiety in a distance foreign language learning environment and how they managed to deal with it. The data were collected on a longitudinal design using surveys, think-aloud protocols, and semi-structured telephone interviews. Findings, relevant to the present study, showed that anxiety was a factor affecting distance language learning supporting relevant studies conducted in traditional classrooms. In this respect, Hurd's (2007) study is very valuable because it aims to give a full picture of the anxiety of foreign language learners at a distance using a number of methods for gathering data. More recent studies on language anxiety in the context of online learning have predominantly focused on the benefits of eliminating the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the challenges associated with anxiety encountered during online courses (Estrella, 2023; Hayasaki & Ryan, 2022; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021; Russell, 2020; Tzafilkou et al., 2021).

Several studies have also looked at the predictors of foreign language anxiety and found that various learner variables such as knowledge of other foreign languages (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Thompson & Khawaja, 2016), perceptions of their relative levels of proficiency in an L2 (e.g., Teimouri et al., 2019), and study-abroad experience (Lee, 2018; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004) were negatively correlated with anxiety (cf. Doğan & Tuncer, 2016). Regarding gender, the findings are mixed. While females were found to be more anxious than males in some studies (e.g., Coşkun & Taşgın, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Geçkin, 2020), other studies revealed no significant differences between genders (e.g., Çetin, 2020).

Although previous research has examined the relationship between anxiety and some other variables, the findings are conflicting and need to be more closely examined for further support. Another aspect that remains unclear is how language learning anxiety in distance English language education may be related to the perceived value of learning English. To the best of our knowledge, the only study examining a similar relationship was conducted by Liu and Dong (2021) in the Chinese context. They examined the interplay between Chinese doctoral students' ($n = 74$) academic oral communication anxiety and how it is related to their expectancy-value beliefs through a three-part survey and interviews. The data were collected at the beginning and the end of a 16-week semester. Results demonstrate that expectancy is a negative predictor of anxiety at the beginning of the semester, while expectancy, intrinsic value, and cost value are the best predictors of anxiety at the end of the semester. In the Turkish context, similar studies looking at how foreign language learners' anxiety is related to their perceptions of the value of learning English could contribute to our understanding of the learner-related factors in language learning, which the current study seeks to investigate to fill the gap in the field.

To date, studies looking at tertiary-level students' perceived value of learning English have been limited (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1999; Liu & Dong, 2021; Rivers, 2012), especially in the context of Turkey (Şen, 2022). Since the perceived value of English language learning is closely linked to learners' motivational orientations, the concept deserves closer examination. In the same vein, anxiety, which has been found to be prevalent in EFL classes (e.g., Aslan & Thompson, 2021; Batumlu & Erden, 2007), has been relatively less examined in distance language learning. However, the need for developing a deeper understanding of anxiety in the new global context of language learning is more than ever. Apart from studying the constructs and their relationships, it is vital to identify the factors influencing anxiety in distance language learners, as well as the determinants of the value learners attribute to learning English.

Therefore, in order to contribute to our understanding of how distance learners' anxiety is related to the value they place on learning English and what factors explain each construct as well as their relationships, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What is Turkish tertiary-level distance EFL learners' perceived value of learning English?
 - 1.1. What sociodemographic (age, gender, experience abroad, place of residence, experience abroad) and language background variables (knowledge of the additional foreign language, self-reported proficiency, age of onset of acquisition) best predict distance EFL learners' perceived value of learning English?
2. What are Turkish tertiary-level distance EFL learners' FLA levels in compulsory English classes?
 - 2.1. What sociodemographic (age, gender, experience abroad, place of residence, experience abroad) and language background variables (knowledge of the additional foreign language, self-reported proficiency, age of onset of acquisition) best predict distance EFL learners' anxiety?
3. What is the relationship between distance EFL learners' perceived value of learning English and their FLA in compulsory English classes?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study is based on a quantitative paradigm with a non-interventionist correlational design, in which “investigators use the correlation statistical test to describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores [and] do not attempt to control or manipulate the variables” (Creswell, 2012, p. 338). Data were collected at one point in time using a web-based survey to test a potential relationship between tertiary-level distance EFL learners’ perceived value of learning English and their FLA. A secondary purpose of this correlational research was to examine the variables that best predict each of these constructs. Ethical clearance was obtained from the authors’ institutions.

3.2 Participants and Context

The participants of the study were 383 students who were recruited by convenience sampling. They were selected based on their enrollment in a compulsory first-year English class deployed online at a state university located in the western part of Turkey in the Spring 2021 semester. As a degree program requirement, they were required to take two compulsory English classes, which were held a minimum of 2 hours weekly for both the Fall and Spring terms. The classes were held online with a synchronous mode of learning, and live lectures were captured through the lecture-capture system. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The online survey was sent out to 1594 students, and 383 students completed it ($N = 383$). The sample comprised 232 female and 151 male undergraduates.

Table 1

Participants’ sociodemographic and language background variables (N = 383)

Variable	Descriptor	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Female	232	61
	Male	151	39
Age	17-19	158	41
	20-25	210	55
	26-30	7	2
	31-39	4	1
	40 and above	4	1
Year of Study	1	359	94
	2	13	3
	3	7	2
	4	4	1
Place of residence	A village	79	21
	A town with under 10K inhabitants	23	6
	A town with between 10K- 100K inhabitants	56	15
	A town with between 100K-500K inhabitants	61	16
	A city with between 500K-1M inhabitants	72	18
	A city with more than 1M inhabitants	92	24
Onset of learning English	Preschool	9	2
	Primary school	200	52
	Secondary school	156	42
	High school	13	3
	Other	5	1

A majority of students ($n = 348$, 91%) had never been abroad, and 355 (93%) of them reported speaking Turkish as their mother tongue. While English was the only foreign language for 123 students (32%), 263 (68%) of them stated that they knew other foreign languages than English. The students were from a diverse range of faculties which were the Faculty of Arts and Sciences ($n = 106$, 28%), Vocational School of Health Services ($n = 96$, 24%), Faculty of Education ($n = 56$, 15%), Vocational School of Social Sciences ($n = 30$, 8%), Faculty of Health ($n = 29$, 8%), Faculty of Sport Sciences ($n = 18$, 5%), Vocational School of Civil Aviation ($n = 16$, 4%), Faculty of Theology ($n = 16$, 4%), Faculty of Dentistry ($n = 9$, 2%), and Vocational School of Ulubey ($n = 7$, 2%). Table 1 presents further details about the participants' profiles.

Frequency analyses of participant profiles confirm that the majority of the students are below the age of 25. As for the representation of different faculties and schools, students from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Vocational Health Services together seem to constitute more than half of the population ($n = 202$, 52%). Following these two schools, the Faculty of Education has the biggest share with 56 students (15%). A relatively good representation is also observed in students' places of residence. The percentage of students who live in villages ($n = 79$, 21%) can be considered close to those who live in a big city ($n = 92$, 24%).

Regarding their proficiency, students rated their perceived English proficiency level on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) for each of the skills and components. Table 2 shows the participants' profiles regarding their self-perceived level of English proficiency as weighed by gender. Overall, ratings by males were higher than those by females in all components, with the highest difference observed in speaking followed by pronunciation. Overall, for their self-reported proficiency levels in English, the participants rated themselves below average ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 2.09$).

Table 2

Students' self-reported proficiency in English

Component	Female ($n = 232$)		Male ($n = 151$)		Total ($N = 383$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Reading	5.32	2.43	5.86	2.56	5.54	2.49
Writing	5.04	2.56	5.47	2.52	5.21	2.55
Listening	5.23	2.59	5.70	2.65	5.41	2.62
Speaking	3.90	2.38	4.91	2.59	4.30	2.51
Grammar	4.24	2.31	4.58	2.45	4.37	2.37
Pronunciation	4.66	2.37	5.30	2.64	4.91	2.50
Overall	4.19	2.02	4.61	2.18	4.35	2.09

Note. For ratings, the maximum score was 10.

3.3 Instruments and Procedure

Data collection was completed in a single session using a survey that consisted of three sections. In the first section, there were 11 questions capturing students' socio-demographic and language background information such as gender, age group, year of study, major field of study, place of residence, mother tongue, foreign language(s), the onset of learning English, experience in traveling abroad, and their perceived level of language proficiency in English.

In the second part of the survey, a 12-item questionnaire measuring the perceived value of learning English (PVLEQ) was used. Some items of the questionnaire originally developed by Rivers (2012) were slightly modified to adapt to the context and the distant mode of learning in the current study.

Each statement is measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 indicating “completely agree” and 1 indicating “completely disagree.” The third part comprised 16 items adopted from Hurd’s (2007) questionnaire which was developed in the light of MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) for measuring anxiety about learning a language at a distance (henceforth, DLLAQ). DLLAQ was preferred over the most widely used Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) given the context of distance learning. It should also be noted that the original questionnaire revealed a three-factor structure: anxiety associated with language input (6 items), processing (5 items), and output (5 items). In the current study, no factor structure was sought, but slight changes were made such as replacing “French” with “English” in order to fit the context of learning.

The items for both questionnaires which were originally in English were translated into Turkish by the authors and were back-translated into English by another expert with a B.A. in English Language Teaching. Some minor discrepancies between the translated and the original scale items were resolved. An expert with a Ph.D. checked the final version of the questionnaires for readability and internal validity, and no major changes have been made. The final version of the battery of questionnaires was sent out to the participants through Google Forms. In the PVLEQ, there were no reverse-coded items. However, in the DLLAQ, statements (items), 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, and 16 were representative of little to no anxiety, and thus were reverse-coded for the analysis. Table 3 below shows the reliability statistics of the instruments based on the student responses in the current study.

Table 3

Reliability Statistics for the PVLEQ and DLLAQ (N = 383)

Variables	Cronbach’s alpha	Number of items
PVLEQ	.89	12
DLLAQ	.78	16

Note. DLLAQ = Distance Language Learning Anxiety Questionnaire; PVLEQ = Perceived Value of Learning English Questionnaire

3.4 Data Analysis

To answer the first and second major research questions, descriptive mean scores and percentages were calculated for students’ anxiety and perceived value of learning English. For inferential statistics, both parametric and non-parametric tests were used to examine the relationship between anxiety and the perceived value of learning English as well as the contribution of any learner variables to predict the ratings of the questionnaires.

The assumptions for conducting parametric tests of correlation analyses were first checked by using a Shapiro-Wilk test for normality. The test indicated that the data were normally distributed for all the sections except for the set obtained from the PVLEQ ($p < .001$). An examination of histograms, skewness, and kurtosis values further showed that the data for PVLEQ were slightly negatively skewed. However, a look at the individual cases in the total scores and the Q-Q plot showed that the values were reasonably well-distributed with the end of lines not following a linear pattern. Previous literature on how to deal with non-normality indicates that the most commonly-applied methods are employing data transformations, non-parametric tests, or the linear model (Pek et al., 2018). Despite its shortcomings in making inferences, the data for PVLEQ were transformed using a variety of methods, but the normality assumption was still not met. Therefore, a non-parametric test of correlation, Spearman’s rho, was used to test the monotonic relationship between anxiety and the perceived value of learning English. Further tests were also used to investigate whether learner background variables predict any of the dependent variables.

When checking the assumptions of regression analysis for DLLQA, an examination of a scatterplot showed that the linearity assumption was not violated. Similarly, the homoscedasticity of errors seemed acceptable as shown by the distribution of variances and errors. Errors were normally distributed based on non-significant Shapiro-Wilk test results. For the PVLEQ data, as an examination of the distribution of residuals indicated a non-normal distribution, alternative tests which are robust to normality were preferred to better understand the role of learner variables in predicting the perceived value of learning English.

4. Results

4.1 Turkish tertiary-level EFL learners' perceived value of learning English and its predictors

The first research question aimed to explore the perceived value of learning English as rated by Turkish tertiary-level students enrolled in compulsory English courses via distance education. The percentages and mean scores obtained via descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Students' ratings of the perceived value of English (N = 383)

Items	Likert-Scale					Item
	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M (SD)</i>
	Percentage (%)					
1. Interacting with foreign people in English is fun for me.	2.1	6.5	18.5	45.7	27.2	3.89 (.95)
2. Many Turkish companies will need English-speaking people in the future.	2.3	3.1	9.1	34.2	51.2	4.29 (.93)
3. I have ideas about international issues that I want to discuss in English.	7	23.3	34.2	24.5	11	3.09 (1.1)
4. I want to make friends with people from many different countries	2.1	3.1	13.6	35.8	45.4	4.19 (.93)
5. It will allow me to become an internationalised person.	2.1	3.7	13.6	45.7	35	4.08 (.90)
6. I can learn about topics that are not discussed in Turkey.	2.6	4.7	20.4	44.4	27.9	3.90 (.95)
7. I think my life would be more interesting if I had foreign friends.	1.3	4.7	13.8	39.9	40.2	4.13 (.91)
8. I will be able to develop a career as an international person.	3.4	7.6	18	39.7	31.3	3.88 (1.0)
9. I want people from different parts of the world to listen to my opinions.	3.4	30	19.1	40.2	29.5	3.85 (1.0)
10. I want to interact in English with international students on campus.	2.1	6.8	23.8	36.3	31.1	3.87 (1.0)
11. I want to be part of an international globalised society.	2.6	6.3	23.5	40.2	27.4	3.84 (.99)
12. I want to be able to tell foreign people about Turkey in English.	2.9	5.5	15.7	35	41	4.86 (1.0)
Average Percentage	2.83	8.78	18.61	38.47	33.18	
Overall Mean (<i>SD</i>)						3.48 (-0.7)

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Table 4 demonstrates that about 12% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 72% of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. Along with a mean score of 3.48 ($SD = -0.66$, $Sk = -0.66$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = -0.44$, $SE = 0.25$) out of 5, these findings indicate that students have an overall positive perception of the value of learning English. Students valued International Friendship Orientation ($M =$

4.02, $SD = 0.72$, $Sk = -0.66$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = 0.29$, $SE = 0.25$) and International Career Orientation ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.73$, $Sk = -0.91$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = 1.71$, $SE = 0.25$) equally high, followed by International Engagement Orientation ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.75$, $Sk = -0.51$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = 0.47$, $SE = 0.25$).

Since the PVLEQ data had a non-normal distribution, a series of non-parametric tests were conducted to examine how the perceived value of learning English differs by gender, age, experience in traveling abroad, knowledge of an additional foreign language, and faculty of enrollment. Findings of the independent samples Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there were no significant differences between students' perceived value of learning English in terms of gender, experience traveling abroad, and knowledge of an additional foreign language. However, a Kruskal-Wallis test showed that the place of residence significantly affects the self-reported degree of the perceived value of learning English, $\chi^2(2) = 11.78$, $p = .003$. Students who lived in cities with a population of 500K and more ($Mdn = 210.49$) rated the perceived value of learning English higher than those who were located in places with a population of 10K-500K ($Mdn = 191.68$) and 10K and below ($Mdn = 162.63$). To compare the mean ranks of the three groups, a post-hoc Mann-Whitney U test with a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .017 was employed. The difference between the ratings of the students residing in places with a population of 10K and below (Group 3) and those living in places with 500K and above (Group 1) was significant [$U(N_{group1} = 164, N_{group3} = 102) = 6230.5$, $z = -3.50$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .043$]. No significance was reached for comparisons with other variables.

A series of further Spearman's correlations were computed to examine the interplay between the perceived value of learning English and the self-reported proficiency in overall ability, speaking, listening, writing, reading, grammar, and pronunciation. The findings revealed that there was a positive correlation between the perceived value of learning English and self-reported proficiency in overall ability [$r_s(381) = .22$, $p = .000$], reading [$r_s(381) = .16$, $p = .001$], writing [$r_s(381) = .16$, $p = .001$], speaking [$r_s(381) = .21$, $p = .000$], grammar [$r_s(381) = .19$, $p = .000$], and pronunciation [$r_s(381) = .21$, $p = .000$] components, but not in listening [$r_s(381) = .075$, $p = .142$]. However, listening was found to be somewhat related to the IFO factor [$r_s(381) = .10$, $p = .048$] of PVLEQ.

4.2 Turkish tertiary-level EFL learners' FLA in compulsory English classes at distance education and its predictors

The second research question aims to explore distance EFL learners' self-reported degree of anxiety. Table 5 presents the raw percentage and mean scores for DLLAQ ratings. After reverse coding of DLLAQ items, a mean score of 3.00 out of 5 was found ($SD = 0.52$, $Sk = -0.15$, $Ku = 0.35$), which indicates that the students were overall neutral about their anxiety level. Findings further revealed that students showed anxiety about the output factor the most ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.69$, $Sk = -0.32$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = 0.18$, $SE = 0.25$) followed by the input ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.63$, $Sk = -0.12$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = 0.09$, $SE = 0.25$) and the processing factors ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.73$, $Sk = 0.38$, $SE = 0.13$, $Ku = -0.09$, $SE = 0.25$).

As some of the striking figures demonstrated in Table 5, about half of the participants (50%) declared feeling anxious unless English was spoken very slowly and deliberately, and listening to others speak English fast was bothersome for almost half of the students (48%). A majority of the participants (81%) equated their exam results with their efforts in learning English. Interestingly, less than a quarter (11%) reported feeling worried about learning new vocabulary, and % 19 of them stated that hearing new or unfamiliar words would not worry them. Almost half (% 43) of the participants felt tense when they had to speak in English. Sixty-two percent of the students could not retrieve known expressions when nervous, and more than two-thirds (73%) got upset when they knew how to communicate in English, but could not verbalize it.

Table 5
Students' ratings of EFL anxiety in compulsory English classes at distance education (N = 383)

Items	Likert-Scale*					Item M (SD)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Percentage (%)						
1. I enjoy just listening to someone speaking English.	4.2	9.7	27.7	41.3	17.2	3.58 (1.02)
2. I am not bothered by someone speaking quickly in English.	12	35.8	24.5	19.3	8.4	2.76 (1.15)
3. I get flustered unless English is spoken very slowly and deliberately.	5.7	22.2	21.9	35.8	14.4	3.24 (1.15)
4. I get upset when English is spoken too quickly.	11.2	24.5	26.6	27.7	9.9	3.31 (1.14)
5. It does not bother me if my English notes are disorganized before I study them.	20.9	41	16.4	15.1	6.5	2.45 (1.17)
6. I get upset when I read in English because I have to read things again and again.	7	25.3	24	34.2	9.4	3.55 (1.17)
7. I constantly feel that if I make more of an effort I will get better results.	2.3	5.2	11.7	38.6	42	4.13 (0.97)
8. Learning new English vocabulary does not worry me; I can acquire it in no time.	3.7	7	24.3	42.3	22.7	3.73 (1.01)
9. I am confident in my ability to appreciate the meaning of English dialogues.	2.9	10.7	33.2	42.6	10.7	3.48 (0.92)
10. I do not worry when I hear new or unfamiliar words; I am confident that I can understand them.	5	17	31.1	35.5	11.5	3.32 (1.04)
11. I am anxious with English because, no matter how hard I try, I have trouble understanding it.	11.2	31.6	24.5	22.2	10.4	2.68 (1.04)
12. I may know the proper English expressions, but when I am nervous they just will not come out.	3.4	13.6	21.7	42.6	18.8	2.89 (1.18)
13. I get upset when I know how to communicate something in English but just cannot verbalize it.	2.1	7	18.3	50.4	22.2	3.60 (1.05)
14. When I become anxious during a tutorial I cannot remember anything I have studied.	5	15.7	20.9	36.6	21.9	3.84 (.92)
15. I feel confident that I can easily use the English vocabulary that I know in a conversation.	6.8	15.9	35.8	33.4	8.1	3.20 (1.03)
16. I never feel tense when I have to speak English.	18	25.3	33.2	17.8	5.7	2.68 (1.13)
Average Percentage	7.59	19.2	24.7	33.5	14.9	
Overall Mean (SD)						3.00 (0.52)

Note. Items 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, and 16 were reverse-coded. *1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.

Finally, a multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model to examine whether and how the socio-demographic and language background variables predicted language anxiety in distance education. Regression coefficients are shown in Table 6. Each of the listed predictor variables had a significant zero-order correlation with DLLAQ ratings; however, only gender and self-reported overall proficiency predictors had significant ($p < .001$) partial effects in the regression model accounting for 29% of the variance, $F(10, 381) = 12.29$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .29$, $Adj. R^2 = .26$. The findings indicated a decrease in anxiety as self-reported proficiency increased. It was further shown that females had higher levels of anxiety and that the knowledge of other foreign languages and experience traveling abroad were negatively correlated with anxiety.

Table 6

Results of a Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting EFL Anxiety in Distance Education (N = 383)

Predictor	B	SE	β	95% CI		Correlations
				L	U	Zero-order
Gender	3.47	.78	.25**	1.94	4.99	.28**
Additional foreign language	.74	.83	.04	-.89	2.37	-.11*
Experience traveling abroad	-.74	1.33	-.03	-3.35	1.86	-.15**
Overall proficiency	-1.29	.26	-.33**	-1.79	-.77	-.45**
Self-reported proficiency in reading	.15	.28	.05	.58	-.39	-.35**
Self-reported proficiency in writing	-.29	.26	-.09	.25	-.81	-.35**
Self-reported proficiency in listening	.09	.20	.03	.68	-.31	-.30**
Self-reported proficiency in speaking	-.29	.29	-.09	.32	-.88	-.42**
Self-reported proficiency in grammar	.27	.26	.08	.31	-.25	-.32**
Self-reported proficiency in pronunciation	-.46	.27	-.13	.10	-.97	-.38**

Note. $R^2 / F = .29 / 12.29$, Adj. $R^2 = .26$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, Cohen's $f^2 = .397$

4.3 The relationship between the value of learning English and EFL anxiety as perceived by tertiary-level EFL learners

The distribution of the data for the PVLEQ was found to be non-normal as mentioned earlier in the data analysis section. Therefore, a Spearman's rank order correlation was conducted in order to investigate the relationship between anxiety and the perceived value of learning English, which is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Spearman's rank correlation matrix for the perceived value of English and EFL anxiety (N = 383)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. PVLEQ	–						
2. PV IFO	.89 **	–					
3. PV ICO	.91 **	.74 **	–				
4. PV IEO	.90 **	.71 **	.74 **	–			
5. DLLAQ	-.27 **	-.28 **	-.18 **	-.29 **	–		
6. LA Input	-.15 **	-.17 **	-.06	-.18 **	.77 **	–	
7. LA Processing	-.42 **	-.40 **	-.37 **	-.39 **	.74 **	.35 **	–
8. LA Output	-.04	-.07	.04	-.09	.72 **	.41 **	.29 **

Note. PV IFO = International Friendship Orientation (PVLEQ Factor 1), PV ICO = International Career Orientation (PVLEQ Factor 2), PV IEO = International Engagement Orientation (PVLEQ Factor 3), LA Input = DLLAQ Factor 1, LA Processing = DLLAQ Factor 2, LA Output = DLLAQ Factor 3.

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The non-parametric correlation coefficient of Spearman's rho was computed among the overall ratings for both questionnaires and their factors. Cohen's (1988) standard was adopted for the interpretation of effect sizes. A small negative significant relationship between the perceived value of learning English and the distance English language learning anxiety [$r_s(381) = -.27, p < .000$] was observed. The findings further suggested a negative significant relationship between the perceived value of learning

English and the input factor [$r_s(381) = -.15, p = .003$] and the processing factor of anxiety [$r_s(381) = -.42, p < .000$], with small and medium effects sizes, respectively.

A similar relationship was found between the IFO factor of the perceived value of learning English and anxiety ratings. There was a negative relationship between the IFO and the DLLAQ [$r_s(381) = -.28, p < .000$], the input factor [$r_s(381) = -.17, p = .001$], and the processing factor of DLLAQ [$r_s(381) = -.40, p < .000$] indicating small and medium effects sizes. Somewhat different findings were reached with the computation of the ICO factor of the PVLEQ and its relationship with the anxiety measures. The ICO had a small negative relationship with the overall anxiety score [$r_s(381) = -.18, p = .001$], and a moderate negative relationship with the processing factor of the DLLAQ [$r_s(381) = -.37, p < .000$]. Finally, there was a small significant correlation between the IEO factor of PVLEQ and the DLLAQ [$r_s(381) = -.29, p < .000$]. The input factor and the processing factors of the anxiety questionnaire were also weakly [$r_s(381) = -.18, p < .000$] and moderately correlated [$r_s(381) = -.39, p < .000$], respectively, with the IEO dimension.

5. Discussion

One of the major goals of this study was to investigate the views of tertiary-level first-year EFL learners regarding their perceived value of learning English. Students' ratings suggested that learning English as an L2 was mostly valued by students especially to be able to establish friendships across nations and ensure career opportunities. These findings were in support of previous research emphasizing the importance of "international posture" (Yashima, 2002) and international friendship & career (Rivers, 2012), which were the most highly rated motives for learning EFL. Unlike previous studies, though, the role of friendship and career seemed to be equally important for the students in the present study. However, it should be noted that in Rivers' (2012) study, although learners valued career orientations, the findings indicated that this value was due to aspiration or imagined careers usually outside of Japan. It may be understandable why the students in this study rated career orientation as equally important as international friendships given the higher likelihood of pursuing a career requiring English competence as a result of increased globalization among other reasons.

The findings further suggested that students living in places with a small population valued learning English less compared to those who live in cities with a much higher number of inhabitants. This may not be surprising since living in a big city may expose one to an environment that is multilingual and culturally diverse, which may ultimately lead to a broader understanding of the importance of learning a foreign language. Although Şen (2022) found significant differences in the perceived value of English in terms of gender and the type of faculty students were enrolled in, no such differences were found in the present study. Finally, self-reported proficiency was also an indicator of higher perceptions of the value of learning English. Students who thought of themselves as more proficient in most skill and competence areas valued learning English more. The fact that self-reported proficiency is likely to predict the perceived value is also worrying because it may imply that those students who do not perceive themselves as proficient enough are less likely to recognize the value of English language learning.

The present study also sought to explore the distance EFL learners' foreign language anxiety in their compulsory English courses. The findings demonstrated that students were somewhat anxious as shown by the subdomains of the anxiety scale, although overall they rated their anxiety level as neutral. Although the measurement tools and the contexts differ, the reason why the mean FLA rating was calculated as "neutral" might be because distance EFL learners might not have encountered all of the challenges and anxiety-provoking factors in a regular classroom due to the possibility of remaining somehow invisible in synchronous classes. In fact, Hurd (2007) also found that distance language learning reduced anxiety for certain students although it was not without its consequences. The present study also found significant gender differences, with females reporting more anxiety; however, there have been

mixed results regarding this variable in previous research. While some studies (e.g., Coşkun & Taşgın, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Geçkin, 2020) also examined university students' anxiety towards English courses and found females to be more anxious than males, other studies (e.g., Çetin, 2020) found no differences between genders. While gender differences in anxiety may depend on a variety of factors such as those related to the study designs, it may also be due to certain sociocultural differences across cultures and even sociodemographic differences among the students. Similarly, Coşkun and Taşgın (2018) previously attributed the high anxiety of female students to higher concerns and desires for making a living of their own. The present study was also supportive of previous research in that knowledge of additional foreign languages (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Thompson & Khawaja, 2016) and self-reported proficiency (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019) were negatively correlated with anxiety. Finally, experience abroad was also found to be a predictor of anxiety, which was in line with previous research (e.g., Lee, 2018; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004) although Doğan and Tuncer (2016) did not find it as a factor affecting anxiety. The fact that some findings contradict those of previous studies may be due to the distance learning context as well as the differences in data collection tools measuring anxiety; however, it should be noted that regardless of the mode of learning, context, and design, studies have yielded similar findings.

Finally, one of the primary purposes of the present study was to examine how EFL learners' perceived value of learning English and the FLA are related. The results of the study indicated that even if it is weak to moderate, distance EFL learners' FLA and the value they attributed to English were negatively associated. This relationship was supported by limited previous research conducted by Liu and Dong (2021), which also found a significant negative correlation between academic oral communication anxiety and intrinsic value at the end of the academic term although no perceived value-distance FLA relationships were found at the beginning of the term. The data in the present study were also collected at the end of the term, so studies looking at such a change in anxiety and value perceptions might reveal interesting findings. The interplay between the perceived value and distance FLA indicates that distant EFL learners tend to feel more anxious when they see less value in learning the language. Having this information is vital for language teachers as well as policymakers since the more EFL learners realize the value of learning English, the more likely they are to feel less FLA. Although no causal relationships may be claimed, this information should be considered very carefully, especially in the distant mode of language learning in which reaching out to more students is relatively more challenging.

The present study is not without its limitations. First, the findings are based on self-report measures, and data were collected through a single means of data collection at a single point in time from only a certain group of students at a certain institution. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized. Second, although significant correlations were reached between the perceived value and anxiety, these were small to moderate in magnitude indicating a need for a more comprehensive study of some other variables not accounted for in the present study. Besides, no piloting of the adapted scales was conducted due to the limited sample size available, and thus the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the present study fills a significant gap by demonstrating how the perceived value of learning English and FLA are related and what kind of factors affect this relationship. This helps teachers and other stakeholders to better understand and explain EFL students' attitudes and tendencies in language learning. Language teachers should consistently and decisively integrate activities that could consciously or subconsciously make them aware of the value of learning EFL and reduce their anxiety in distance education settings. Previous studies have also shown that instructors may encourage their students to value the experience of foreign language learning using various strategies such as helping them "envision" themselves as "linguistically proficient and globally competent speakers" (Mills & Moulton, 2017, p. 4). This can be accomplished through the implementation of activities that are geared towards bolstering their vision (see, Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) and setting

goals that are “short-term, realistic and attainable” (Loh, 2019). Finally, the role of technology and other materials used in the language classroom is critical for pinpointing the value of language learning. Through the use of various e-platforms and technological tools in the classroom, teachers may help students to recognize the connection between their lives and the foreign language by working collaboratively (Loh, 2019).

6. Conclusion

The current study looked at tertiary-level EFL learners’ perceived value of learning English and their FLA in a distance education context. The findings are interesting revealing how various sociodemographic and language variables explain each of the constructs. More importantly, the negative relationship between the perceived value and the FLA in the present study fills an important gap in the literature by showing how less anxious learners value learning English less. Further correlational and interventional studies investigating anxiety in distance language learning and the perceived value of language learning might provide more interesting insights into distance EFL learners’ language learning motivations.

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