BELIEF PATTERNS AND ANXIETY LEVELS OF TURKISH EFL STUDENTS IN RELATION TO LEVEL OF INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether there is a relationship between anxiety levels and belief patterns of Turkish EFL students in relation to level of instruction. A total number of 207 students voluntarily participated in the study. To gather quantitative data, adapted Turkish versions of Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) were used, and qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data analyses revealed that low-proficient students are more anxious than their high-proficient peers. In addition, a significant relationship was found between students' anxiety levels and four belief patterns: high-anxious students believed that (1) English is a difficult language; (2) they do not have language aptitude; (3) they will not eventually learn to speak English; and (4) they feel self-conscious when speaking English in front of other people – the opposite beliefs were found to be true for low-anxious students. The qualitative data analyses also supported the finding that learner beliefs and anxiety have a close relationship. The implications are discussed.

Keywords: Anxiety, Belief, Level of Instruction, Turkish EFL Students.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language requires more than a teacher, a student, or a material. The "two and two makes four" logic has thus never been true when learning languages. There are countless variables to be taken into account with regard to foreign language learning – individual factors being one of them. Among these factors, the most extensively researched one is probably anxiety (Ay, 2010; Bekleyen, 2009; Gardner, Smythe, Clement, and Gliksman, 1976; Liu, 2006; Saito and Samimy, 1996; Rassaei, 2015; Woodrow, 2011; Zhang, 2013). Regarded as one of the sources of anxiety (Young, 1991), learner beliefs have also been investigated to a great extent in various contexts with students from different cultural backgrounds (Aydın, 1999; Cheng, 2001; Graham, 2006; Öz, Demirezen, and Pourfeiz, 2015; Thompson and Aslan, 2015; Truitt, 1995; Wang, 1998). The present study was carried out in Turkey, which is among the countries where students learn English as a Foreign Language (FL) beginning from Grade 2 until after

graduate level. A recent study carried out in Turkey by TEPAV and British Council (2013) reveals that:

> In 12 years of compulsory education, students do not make significant progress in English over their years of schooling. With repetition of the curriculum from grade-to-grade, students are unable to see evidence of progress in their own learning. As a result, they seem to start to *believe* that their level of English level actually deteriorates over the years. (p. 18 – italics added).

At this point, given that nearly one third of Turkish Universities favor English either 30% or 100% as their medium of instruction (TEPAV and British Council, 2015), when these students are enrolled at universities after completing their 12 years of compulsory education, their belief patterns about learning English gain utmost importance – especially at the language preparatory schools of these universities, where students learn English intensively for one year. However, to authors' knowledge, although there are a number of studies on learner beliefs carried out with Turkish

students in university contexts (Öz, Demirezen, and Pourfeiz, 2015; Thompson and Aslan, 2015), there are very few studies investigating both the belief patterns and anxiety levels of Turkish students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at university preparatory classes (Aydın, 1999). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the belief patterns and anxiety levels of Turkish EFL students studying at a preparatory school of a state university in relation to their level of instruction.

1. Theoretical Framework

Although the term anxiety can be defined as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986, p. 125), language anxiety is dealt separately than other types of anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) state that "anxiety based in the language environment would be associated with language learning whereas other types of anxiety would not show consistent relationships to performance" (p. 251). For FL anxiety, Horwitz, et al., (1986) believe that it is a combination of many complex cognitive and psychological traits, such as self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. A number of studies show that anxiety has negative effects on students' final course grades (Bekleyen, 2009; Horwitz, 1986), writing performance (Woodrow, 2011), and listening performance (Zhang, 2013).

Although these studies clearly show a strong relationship between FL anxiety and language learning, Horwitz (2001) explains that "It is often difficult to determine if anxiety has actually interfered with learning, thus influencing achievement levels; or if anxious learners simply have difficulty displaying the language competence they have attained" (p. 121). There have been certain attempts to determine the possible sources of anxiety. Onwuegbuzie, Baily, and Daley (1999), for example, suggested age, foreign languages, expected overall average for current language course, perceived scholastic competence, and perceived self-worth among sources of anxiety. According to a review of Young (1991), "learner beliefs about language learning" is one of the six sources of language anxiety.

There are a number of studies carried out on learner beliefs in different contexts with students from different cultural and language background. For instance, some of these studies found that beliefs about the difficulty of language result in FL anxiety of Asian students (Truitt, 1995; Wang, 1998). Similarly, some studies found that learners who believe that they lack a requisite gift for learning a second language tend to underestimate themselves about a particular language skill (Graham, 2006), or they may simply avoid enrolling language classes or class activities (Aydın, 1999; Cheng, 2001).

The reason why learner anxiety and learner beliefs show a close relationship is explained by Horwitz (1988) who states that "learner beliefs seem to have obvious relevance to the understanding of student expectations of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their language classes" (p. 283). For instance, most low-beginner students do not usually sound like a native speaker, but if they believe that a native-like pronunciation is crucial when speaking a foreign language, they will probably get frustrated when they cannot speak that way; or if learners believe that a person can learn a FL in one year, they might get disappointed when they see that they actually cannot. As Young (1991) points out "when beliefs and reality clash; anxiety results" (p. 428).

Level of instruction is also an area of interest in terms of language anxiety. Several studies show that as the grade or language level of students increases, language anxiety became a better predictor of achievement in second language (Gardner et al., 1976; Saito and Samimy, 1996), whereas other studies reveal opposite results (e.g. Liu, 2006). With Turkish EFL students at Grades 5, 6, and 7, Ay (2010) found that FL anxiety is more apparent in receptive skills (listening and reading) at beginner levels and in productive skills (speaking and writing) at higher levels. To authors' knowledge, however, there are no studies investigating the relation of level of instruction to learner anxiety and learner beliefs with Turkish EFL students at university level (i.e. university preparatory school).

2. Research Questions

In brief, as the reviewed literature indicates, although there are a number of studies carried out to investigate the

relationship between learner anxiety and language skills, such as listening (Bekleyen 2009; Zhang, 2013); writing (Woodrow, 2011); vocabulary learning (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989); final course grades (Horwitz, 1986); or general language proficiency (Liu, 2006), the studies which investigate the relationship between learner anxiety and learner beliefs in the Turkish context are few. Despite the fact that some of these studies are carried out in university contexts (Öz, Demirezen, and Pourfeiz, 2015; Thompson and Aslan, 2015); there are very few, if any, studies carried out in preparatory schools of universities investigating both the belief patterns and anxiety levels of Turkish EFL students – in relation to level of instruction. Therefore, the present study was carried out in order to answer the following research questions:

- What are the belief patterns of Turkish EFL students at a preparatory school in terms of language learning?

- What is their FL anxiety level?

- What is the relationship between their belief patterns about language learning and level of anxiety?

- Is there a difference between high and low proficient students in terms of their belief patterns about language learning and their levels of anxiety?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A total number of 207 Turkish students voluntarily participated in this study. At the time of data collection, they were learning English as a FL at a preparatory school of a major state university in Turkey. Forty of them took part in the piloting phase and the main data were gathered from one hundred and sixty-seven students (male: N=55 and female: N=112). Seventeen of these 167 students took part in semi-structured interviews. As for the level of instruction, eighty-eight of them were at CEFR A2 level (referred to as low proficient in the study) and seventy-nine of them were at CEFR B2 level (referred to as high proficient in the study). As for their English background, 28.2% of them had 0-5 years; 56.9% of them had 6-10 years; and 15% of them had 10 or more years of background in learning the English language. Their ages ranged from 17 to 32 (M = 18.85, SD = 1.94).

3.2 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

This study has a mixed research design, for the data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative tools. Among other functions of mixed methods research, the 'complementarity' function was favored in this study. As Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) explain, complementarity function "seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method" (p. 259). To this end, after the quantitative data were collected through BALLI and FLCAS, the qualitative data were gathered via two semi-structured focus-group interviews in order to gain a deeper insight about the constructs being investigated.

3.2.1 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

FLCAS was originally developed by Horwitz (1986) with an attempt to determine the range and degree of FL anxiety experienced in a language classroom. It is a self-report scale with 33 items, which assess the degree of anxiety, as evidenced by "negative performance expectancies, and social comparisons, psychological symptoms and avoidance behaviors" (Horwitz, 1986, p. 559). In the present study, in order to measure the participants' anxiety levels, a Turkish version of FLCAS was used. This version was adapted and used by Aydın (1999) in her Ph.D. dissertation. It was translated into Turkish through back translation technique and it was scored on a 5 point Likert scale, requiring participants to respond to each item with a single answer: ranging from never (1 pt.) to always (5 pts.). The 27th item, "I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than other classes", was excluded because all the participants were in preparatory school and their one and only class was English. The internal consistency of the adapted Turkish version of FCLAS was found .93 in this study. It was administered to the participants in their class hours by their English teachers.

3.2.2 Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

The original version of BALLI was developed by Horwitz (1988) in order to "assess student opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning" (p. 284). BALLI contains thirty-four items and it requires participants to respond to each item with a single answer:

ranging from strongly agree (1 pt.) to strongly disagree (5 pts.). It assesses student beliefs in five major areas: (1) the difficulty of language learning; (2) foreign language aptitude; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations and expectations. In the present study, to measure the participants' beliefs, a Turkish version of BALLI, which was also adapted and used by Aydın (1999) in her Ph.D. dissertation, was used. The internal consistency of the adapted Turkish version of BALLI was found .91 in this study. It was administered to the participants immediately after FCLAS in their class hours by their English teachers.

3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Two semi-structured focus-group interviews (one with A2 level group, one with B2 level group) were conducted with seventeen students (8 students from A2 level, 9 students from B2 level). Each interview lasted between 60 to 80 minutes and was audio recorded. All the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' mother tongue, Turkish, in order to better enable them to express their views and opinions more precisely and thoroughly (Dörnyei, 2007). The questions asked as prompts in the interviews were related to the items in the questionnaires. To ensure content validity, an expert opinion was taken to get feedback about the content of the interview questionnaires. The interviews were administered on different days to both A2 and B2 level participants.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from BALLI and FLCAS were analyzed via SPSS 20 Software Package. FLCAS yields to a composite score ranging from 32 to 160 – a higher score signifying a higher level of anxiety. As for BALLI, all the items were analyzed and interpreted individually. Although there are a number of studies which perform factor analyses to obtain underlying factors from BALLI (Diab, 2006; Thompson and Aslan, 2015; Yang, 1999), Horwitz (1988) explains that "a single composite score is not derived from the BALLI; rather, individual items yield descriptions of discrete student conceptions of language learning" (p. 284). Furthermore, in her comprehensive review of BALLI studies, Horwitz (1999), in line with her previous studies (see elsewhere Horwitz, 1986, 1987, 1988) favors an individualistic approach

towards the items, sharing results of those studies in tables with individual summaries for each item. Therefore, the results part of this study presents BALLI scores in tables which report each item individually with only the largest percentage of responses. In other words, each table reports whether the largest percentage (if above 50%) of students agreed or strongly agreed (SA+A) with an item, disagreed or strongly disagreed (SD+D) with it, or were neutral (N) about it. Data in the tables are rounded to the nearest whole number.

As for the relationship between BALLI and FLCAS, the participants were firstly divided by SPSS into three categories according to their anxiety levels: high, medium, and low. Then, cross-tabulation and Chi-square analyses were performed between these three anxiety levels and the individual items in BALLI to see if there are any meaningful relationships. Additionally, Pearson's r values were checked to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Next, after performing Levene's Test of Equality of Variances and finding that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, a two-tailed independent samples t-test based on equal variances was carried out in order to see if there were any differences in belief patterns and anxiety levels of students in terms of their level of instruction.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were first translated into English and then were subjected to content analysis, which Dörnyei (2007) describes as 'a second-level, interpretive analysis of the underlying deeper meaning of the data' (p. 246). This type of analysis includes transcribing, coding, looking for patterns, making interpretations, and building theories from the data. To this aim, the transcriptions from the interviews were put to pre-coding, initial coding, and second-level coding procedures. Through this iterative process, the themes of beliefs emerged at several phases and the reasons for the students' beliefs were identified. Some responses are randomly selected from the interviews and cited as anonymous quotations in order to shed light on the findings from the quantitative data by providing individualistic insights of the students.

4. Findings

4.1 Belief Patterns of Turkish EFL Students

As is shown in Table 1, the first component of BALLI measures students' beliefs about the difficulty of learning English. Most (63%) of the Turkish EFL students in this study believe that English is a language of medium difficulty and they (62%) think that less than a year is enough to become fluent in English. Qualitative data analysis indicates that students decide on the difficulty of English language by comparing it with their native language (i.e. Turkish) or with other languages, such as Russian or Japanese. Therefore, they consider English to be a language of medium difficulty.

For foreign language aptitude, as Table 2 shows, nearly all students (93%) believe that children are better FL learners than adults, and they think (68%) that there is a special ability for learning a FL. During the interviews, most students

stated that learning a FL is not a matter of ability, talent, or intelligence, rather they claimed that it only requires hard work and consistency:

- "Learning English is not a matter of ability, but a matter of studying."

- "Painting, for example, is a talent, but learning English is not."

- "Learning English does not require a high degree of intelligence; with a little devotion and hard work, good results can be achieved."

As for the students' beliefs about the nature of language learning, Table 3 shows that students are confused whether learning English is a matter of learning vocabulary. However, it can be observed that three of every four students believe that learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules and they (68%) think that being able to translate from Turkish is important. One of the low-proficient students during the interviews, for example, stated that they find it difficult to think in Turkish and then translate it into English.

Table 4 demonstrates the students' beliefs about learning and communication strategies. It can be seen that almost all (99%) students believe it is important to repeat and practice a lot, whereas only 40% of them say that they would go and practice speaking English if they saw someone speaking it. More than half (57%) of the students admitted feeling self-conscious when speaking English in front of other people. During the interviews, a high-proficient student stated that "Sometimes I cannot transfer the things I know to the person listening to me, this causes

No.	Item	SA+A	N	SD+D
3	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	82%	-	-
4	English is: a) a very difficult language, b) a difficult language, c) a language of medium difficulty, d) an easy language, e) a very easy language	-	63%	-
6	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.	88%	-	-
14	If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him/her to be come fluent? a) less than a year, b) 1-2 years, c) 3-5 years, d) 5-10 years, 3) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.	62%	-	-
24	English is easier to speak than understand it.	-	-	63%
28	English is easier to read and write than to speak and understand it.	84%	-	-

Table 1. Frequency Analysis of difficulty of Language Learning Component of BALLI

No.	Item	SA+A	N	SD+D
1	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	93%	-	-
2	Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	68%	63%	-
10	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	65%	-	-
15	I have foreign language aptitude.	63%	-	-
22	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	-	53%	-
29	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	-	47%	36%
32	People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	28%	35%	35%

Table 2. Frequency Analysis of Foreign Language Aptitude Component of BALLI

No.	Item	SA+A	N	SD+D
5	The structure of English is more difficult than that of Turkish.	-	-	59%
8	It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.	54%	-	-
11	It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	95%	-	-
16	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	36%	19%	46%
20	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	-	-	75%
25	Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.	84%	-	-
26	Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Turkish.	-	-	68%

Table 3. Frequency Analysis of Nature of Language Learning Component of BALLI

you to lose your self-confidence because I am sure I know the answer." As for the accent, about 82% of the students value a good accent, but nearly all (92%) of them disagree with the idea that you should not say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly. The qualitative data analyses of the interviews reflect that most students believe faulty pronunciation may result in a misunderstanding or may cause anxiety, and contrarily, a nice pronunciation may boost one's self-confidence - which was apparent in their expressions:

- "Speaking a language is like an art, the better you speak, the more you impress."

- "I think it's about self-confidence, if I had a nice accent, I would speak without hesitation."

About motivation and expectations, the data analysis indicates that students have positive beliefs about their motivation and expectations regarding learning English. As Table 5 signifies, the largest percentages for all four items cluster within agree and strongly agree responses.

No.	Item	SA+A	N	SD+D
	Learning Strategies:			
17	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	99%	-	-
21	It is important to practice in the language laboratory.	60%	-	-
	Communication Strategies:			
7	It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	82%	-	-
9	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	-	-	92%
12	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	40%	32%	28%
13	Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.	86%	-	-
18	Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Turkish.	57%	-	-
19	Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Turkish.	40%	25%	36%

Table 4. Frequency Analysis of Learning and Communication Strategies Component of BALLI

No.	Item	SA+A	N	SD+D
23	If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	95	-	-
27	If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.	92	-	-
30	Turkish people think that it is important to speak a foreign language.	74	-	-
31	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.	51	-	-

Table 5. Frequency Analysis of Motivation and Expectations Component of BALLI

Qualitative data analysis also supported this result. During the interviews, no students had negative opinions about motivation. Students' motives to learn English were mostly about English providing them with better job opportunities; its being a global language and a lingua franca and a means of getting to know other people and to learn other cultures.

4.2 Foreign Language Anxiety Level of Turkish EFL Students

The Turkish version of FLCAS (Aydın, 1999) yields to a composite score ranging from 32 to 160 – a higher score signifies a higher level of anxiety. In this study, the scores ranged from 33 to 143, with a mean of 82.02 and a standard deviation of 21.37. This result indicates that Turkish students are rather anxious about language learning. The qualitative data analysis also supported this result and led to a number of reasons why students feel anxious. Some students were anxious about their competence in speaking:

- "When a teacher asks a question, I can understand it, I know what I want to say, but I fear not being able to put it into English."

- "Anxiety arises only in speaking, because it is the least practiced skill." "When speaking, I have lots of things in my mind but I cannot get them together, I just freeze."

On the other hand, interview data showed that there were also many students who stated that they do not feel anxious because they are 'self-confident'. One of these students at A2 level remarked that he was an amateur actor at a theatre company and he never felt himself anxious under any circumstance. He stated: "I am very bad at speaking English, but I'm not anxious at all when speaking – all my friends may laugh at me, I don't care a bit.", while another one said: "I don't feel anxious, because all my friends in the same class are at the same language level".

4.3 The Relationship between Belief and Anxiety

Among 34 items in BALLI, the data analysis revealed four meaningful relationships between students' beliefs and their anxiety levels. Item 4 correlated significantly with the anxiety level of the students χ^2 (1, N = 167) = 17.87, p = .02; and the relationship was found to be a negative and a moderate one (r = -.23, p = .00), which means that the

more the students believe that English is a difficult language, the more anxious they get. There was also a significant correlation between item 6 and anxiety levels of students χ^2 (1, N = 167) = 16.15, p = .04; and the relationship was found to be positive and moderate (r = .27, p = .00), which means that when the students do not believe that they will eventually learn to speak English, they feel themselves more anxious. Item 15 correlated significantly with students' anxiety levels χ^2 (1, N = 167) = 28.07, p = .00); and the correlation was positive and strong (r = .34, p = .00), which means that the more the students do not believe that they have language aptitude, the more anxious they get. Lastly, item 18 significantly correlated with the anxiety level of the students χ^2 (1, N = 167) = 46.89, p =.00; and the relationship was found to be a positive and a very strong one (r = -.46, p = .00), which means that when students feel themselves self-conscious speaking English in front of other people, this causes them to feel more anxious as well.

4.4 The Relationship between Level of Instruction and Anxiety

Independent sample t-test results suggested a significant difference between the anxiety level of high-proficient group (M = 78.10, SD = 22.32) and the anxiety level of low-proficient group (M = 85.55, SD = 19.94); t (165) = 2.27, p = .02, which reveals that low proficient students are more anxious than high proficient students. However, qualitative data analyses did not completely support this finding. It was found out that there were a number of high proficient students who were anxious and some low-proficient ones who were not.

- "Anxiety arises only in speaking, because it is the least practiced skill" (B2)

- "When speaking, I have lots of things in my mind but I cannot get them together, I just freeze" (B2)

- "My second language is indeed German, so I have problems with English grammar; and when we do grammar activities, I feel anxious." (B2)

4.5 The Relationship between Level of Instruction and Beliefs

The quantitative data analysis indicates that high and low proficient students have significantly different beliefs about 15 items in BALLI. As Table 6 shows, low proficient students find English more difficult, but they indicate that 1-2 years is enough to learn English; whereas high proficient students show a tendency towards 3-5 years. As items 16 and 20 show, whereas high proficient group is negative towards the idea that learning English is a matter of learning vocabulary items and grammar rules; low proficiency group seem more positive towards this belief. As for language aptitude, high-proficient group seems to associate foreign language learning more with 'a special talent' or 'intelligence', whereas low-proficient students tend to disagree that they have language aptitude.

The qualitative data analysis also supported this finding that level of instruction is a significant factor regarding students' belief patterns. For example, the interview data show that all nine B2 level students believed that English is an 'easy' language, whereas only three A2 level students agreed with their high-proficient peers. As for the language aptitude, all A2 level students agreed that everyone can learn a foreign language. However, four out of nine students at B2 level disagreed stating that everyone cannot learn a foreign language because it requires ability, aptness, and motivation. Here it can be seen that level of instruction seems to play a crucial role in students' beliefs

Category	Groups			
	A2 (N=88) M(SD)	B2 (N=79) M(SD)	t	df
The nature of language learning				
Item 5	3.35(1.01)	3.76(1.20)	-2.37*	165
Item 8	2.77(1.03)	2.22(.94)	3.62*	165
Item 16	2.86(1.19)	3.46(1.17)	-3.22*	165
Item 20	3.59(1.04)	4.25(.83)	-4.53*	165
Item 25	1.95(.85)	1.63(.83)	2.45*	165
Foreign language aptitude				
Item 2	2.44(1.07)	1.86(.95)	3.71*	165
Item 10	2.48(.92)	1.92(.85)	3.99*	165
Item 15	2.92(1.14)	1.78(.74)	7.49*	165
Item 32	3.38(.95)	2.77(1.16)	3.67*	165
The difficulty of language learning				
Item 3	1.97(.80)	1.68(.74)	2.34*	165
Item 4	2.89(.61)	3.38(.64)	-5.04*	165
Item 6	1.84(.80)	1.57(.79)	2.19*	165
Item 14	2.43(1.32)	2.89(1.36)	-2.18*	165
Learning and communication strategies				
Item 7	2.19(1.16)	1.56(.69)	4.34*	165
Motivation and expectations				
Item 31	2.93(1.24)	2.52(1.25)	2.12*	165

* =p <.05

Table 6. Independent Samples t-test Results for 15 items in BALLI

about the nature of learning a foreign language.

5. Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative data analyses of the present study have led to several important results the first of which is that the belief patterns and the anxiety levels of Turkish EFL students are significantly related to each other. High-anxious students: (1) believe that English is a difficult language; (2) they feel self-conscious when speaking English in front of other people; (3) they do not believe that they have language aptitude; and (4) they are negative towards the belief that they will ultimately learn to speak the language well. The opposite beliefs have been found to be true for low-anxious students.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews added to this relationship between belief and anxiety. For example, the data analyses showed that high-anxious students avoided speaking because of their anxiety, but when they did so, they could not produce any output, which in turn impaired their input, and thus the chance of improving their speaking ability. Then, this lack of practice in speaking again results in anxiety. This result is similar to those in Woodrow's (2011) study, where she found that students with high-anxiety studied English for fewer hours per week than their low-anxious peers, and this was apparent in their writing performance as well. At this point, language anxiety seems to create a 'double bind' (MacIntyre, 1995, p. 97) for language learners, in which they learn less and they may not be able to demonstrate the information that they have learned.

Another finding of the present study is in a scale ranging from 32 to 160, the anxiety level of Turkish prep school students was 82, which can be interpreted as high. However, when compared with students from other countries, the anxiety level of Turkish students is lower than that of American students of Spanish (Horwitz, 1986); Korean students of English (Truitt, 1995); and Japanese students of English (Matsuda and Gobel, 2004), but higher than Iranian learners of English (Talebinejad and Nekouei, 2013). This finding suggests that anxiety levels may differ depending on cultures. Truitt (1995) claims that Korean students may be more anxious because of their 'competitive' nature or because of their 'social distance'

from English speakers (p. 98). However, when the anxiety level of American students of Spanish (Horwitz, 1986) is taken into consideration, which was pretty close to that of Truitt's (1995) research, it would not be sensible to suggest the same causes for American students as well. In the light of this comparison, it can be argued that the anxiety level of Turkish students is found to be moderate in the present study.

Third, it is observed that beliefs are not always put into actions. For example, nearly all (99%) students believed that it is important to repeat and practice a lot. However, only 40% of them said that they would go and practice speaking English if they saw someone speaking it. Here anxiety acts like a stumbling block in the middle of the road because nearly half (57%) of the students stated that they feel themselves self-conscious when speaking in front of other people. Qualitative analyses also supported this finding suggesting that when students are self-confident, they feel less anxious about English. This result is in line with those found in other studies which concluded that students' lack of self-confidence may be a source of their FL anxiety (Aydın, 1999; Graham, 2006; Öz, Demirezen, and Pourfeiz, 2015; Truitt, 1995; Wang, 1998).

Lastly, level of instruction was found to be important when explaining both the belief patterns and anxiety levels of the students. Of thirty-four items of BALLI, fifteen of them were answered significantly different by low- and high-proficient learners. Low-proficient students believe that: (1) English is a difficult language, (2) *[but]* learnable in 1-2 years, (3) *[by]* memorizing vocabulary and learning grammar rules, (4) *[because]* English is not that different from other subjects (italics added for emphasis). On the contrary, high-proficient learners believe that learning English is (1) not learnable in 1-2 years; (3) *[by]* memorizing vocabulary or learning grammar rules; (4) *[because]* English is different from other subjects (italics added for emphasis). Additionally, low-proficient learners were found to be more anxious than high-proficient students. This finding is also in line with those found by Gardner, et al., (1976) and Liu (2006) who suggested that the more proficient in English the students were, the less anxious they seemed to be. The fact that low proficient students do not believe in language

aptitude or any kind of special talent for language might also cause them to feel anxious. Results coming from qualitative data analyses indicated that whereas most high-proficient learners believe in language aptitude, almost none of low proficient students believe so. What low proficient students suggested during the interview was that hard work and consistency is enough to learn English successfully.

In brief, it is clear from the data analyses results of the present study that when explaining the relationship between anxiety and beliefs, a unidirectional pattern is very unlikely to suggest as there are numerous variables to be taken into account, such as self-confidence, motivation, or level of instruction. As MacIntyre (1995) agrees, variables like aptitude, cognition, anxiety, or learning behaviors are not involved in a strict linear process, but rather they function in a recursive, cyclical pattern. In other words, aptitude can influence anxiety, anxiety can influence performance, and performance can influence anxiety (p. 95).

Conclusion

This study is significant in the sense that although belief and anxiety are two psychological constructs which have been studied to a great extent in educational contexts, there are very few, if any, studies carried out with Turkish EFL students in preparatory schools of universities. There are also, to authors' knowledge, no studies investigating these two constructs in relation to level of instruction. This study, therefore, aimed to find out whether there was a relationship between Turkish EFL students' anxiety levels and belief patterns in relation to their level of instruction. A total number of 207 preparatory school students participated in the study. Forty of them attended the piloting phase and 167 students were involved in the actual data collection procedure. Two questionnaires were administered and two interviews were conducted with students at different levels of instruction (CEFR A2 and B2 levels). The quantitative measures were adapted Turkish versions of BALLI and FLCAS and the qualitative measures were semi-structured focus-group follow-up interviews. As the present study adapted the complementarity function of the mixed methods design, the quantitative and quantitative methods were combined at the data analysis phase, and thus triangulation is ensured to achieve research validity.

The data analyses results revealed that anxiety plays a significant role on students' beliefs about language learning, and level of instruction plays a significant role in students' belief patterns and anxiety levels. In particular, it was found that low level students have ill-advised beliefs, such as: (1) English is a difficult language; *[but]* (2), it is learnable in 1-2 years; *[by]* (3) memorizing vocabulary and learning grammar rules; *[because]* (4) English is not that different from other subjects (italics added for emphasis).

Implications

The implication of these findings is that this kind of beliefs may affect students' learning process and thus might result in low performance in terms of their achievement. Therefore, not only the educators engaged in language teaching, but also those engaged in teaching other subjects at any level should pay utmost attention to the belief patterns of their students from the very beginning until the very end of the learning process. It should be kept in mind that if ignored, ill-advised, or misguided beliefs of students might turn into anxiety, and anxiety might result in failure, or it may even become a lifelong suffering for the learners, because according to Oxford (1999), state anxiety may turn into trait anxiety and it may never diminish.

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