

# Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Its Link to Speaking Self-Efficacy, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Self-Perceived Proficiency and Gender

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**Abstract:** This research study aimed to explore the speaking anxiety of Turkish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) and its relation to EFL speaking self-efficacy, fear of negative evaluation (FNE), self-perceived English speaking proficiency, and gender. 293 (132 females, 161 males) university-level EFL students completed the EFL speaking anxiety scale, EFL speaking self-efficacy scale, and FNE scale. Four main findings were obtained as a result of the statistical analyses: (i) students' speaking anxiety had a negative relationship with both self-perceived oral English proficiency and speaking self-efficacy, (ii) a positive relationship was determined between FNE and speaking anxiety, (iii) EFL speaking anxiety was found to be lower in boys than in girls, and (iv) speaking self-efficacy, FNE, and self-perceived oral proficiency were identified as meaningful predictors of students' EFL speaking anxiety. In light of these findings, the study offers some pedagogical implications.

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## **Introduction**

**M**ANY scholars in the second language acquisition field claim that affective factors (e.g. self-confidence) are as crucial as linguistic and cognitive factors in second/foreign language (L2) learning process (see Gass et al., 2013; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Pawlak, 2017). Therefore, these factors have been heavily researched. Mercer et al. (2012) have defined affective variables as the “non-cognitive factors that may influence second language acquisition, which are connected to emotions and feelings (these may include boredom, anxiety, shyness, embarrassment, or low self-esteem)” (p. 248). To date, among these affective variables, L2 learning anxiety has been one of the most interesting and popular topics of research (Daubney et al., 2017; Horwitz et al. 2010; MacIntyre, & Gregersen, 2012; Teimouri et al. 2019). Although stating that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is connected to the “communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation”, Horwitz et al. (1986) consider it “as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). As for MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), L2 anxiety is “a term that encompasses the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual’s mother tongue” (p. 103). In other words, it is the worry or fear experienced by L2 learners while learning, and more specifically, speaking and listening to the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The crucial point here is that anxiety is especially common when speaking L2 in foreign language learning contexts (see Mak, 2011; Suleimenova, 2013). Many studies (e.g. Liu & Jackson; 2008; Tianjian, 2010), have found that FLA causes students to avoid communication in L2. Therefore, understanding L2 speaking anxiety and the other factors associated with it is essential to make the foreign language learning journey more fruitful and successful for learners.

When the literature is examined, we can say that studies conducted on general FLA have enriched our understanding to a greater degree so far. However, there is a considerable need for studies that directly focus on foreign language speaking anxiety and other factors related to it. With its unique and complex features, it has been demonstrated that FLA is related to many independent variables (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020), and determining the role of different variables, especially on L2 speaking anxiety, can help us understand how to best support learners. Based on these facts, this study intends to extend and contribute to the literature in terms of L2 speaking anxiety by examining university-level Turkish EFL learners’ speaking anxiety and its relation to the following variables: EFL speaking self-efficacy and FNE as affective variables, self-perceived English speaking proficiency as a language-related variable, and gender as a socio-demographic variable.

These variables were chosen because it is yet unclear to what degree they are associated with foreign language speaking anxiety. Taking that into consideration, this study hopes to make a valuable contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of EFL speaking anxiety by focusing on all of these variables, which have not been evaluated together in many previous studies, in a single study and in the same sample of participants.

## **Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Self-Efficacy**

One affective factor that is critical for the L2 learning process and is closely associated with FLA is L2 self-efficacy (Brown, 2007; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In a well-known quote from Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is described as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Mercer et al. (2012) define it as “an individual’s perception of or belief about his/her capabilities to complete a specific task successfully” (p. 252). When self-efficacy is considered in the L2 learning context, it is commonly explained as learners’ beliefs and thoughts about their skills and abilities to accomplish a given task in the target language (Wang et al., 2014). People’s actions, thoughts, motivations, and feelings when doing something are affected by their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). Therefore, when a person believes that s/he has competence and ability to complete a given task successfully, i.e., when s/he has sufficient self-efficacy, then s/he may make an effort and show persistence and determination to complete that task (Bandura, 1997). Considering this, it can be said that self-efficacy serves a crucial function during the L2 learning experience because it is a highly demanding and challenging process for learners.

Many research studies (e.g. Kitikanan, & Sasimonton 2017; Mills et al., 2007) have highlighted that a positive interaction exists between self-efficacy and foreign language proficiency and achievement. Concerning the connection between FLA and self-efficacy, studies (e.g. Anaydubalu, 2010; Jee, 2019; Mede & Karairmak, 2017; Ozer, & Akcayoglu, 2021; Shih, 2019; Wang et al., 2021) have generally found that they are negatively correlated. High levels of L2 anxiety may cause learners to lose their confidence in terms of their language competence and reduce their sense of self-efficacy in L2 (Daubney et al. 2017). Similar results were also reported with regard to EFL speaking self-efficacy and anxiety. For instance, Gursoy and Karaca (2018) conducted a study with young EFL learners in Turkey and reported a meaningful and negative relationship between speaking self-efficacy and speaking anxiety in English. Likewise, Tianjian (2010) carried out research to examine Chinese EFL learners’ speaking anxiety and its relation to different variables, concluding that speaking anxiety was negatively associated with speaking self-efficacy. A few studies have produced results that contra-

dict these findings. For instance, Cubukcu (2008) found that there was not a significant correlation between foreign language classroom anxiety and foreign language self-efficacy. Also, Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019) found a positive relation between students' EFL speaking anxiety and self-efficacy. These contradictory results emphasize the need for more studies on this topic.

## **Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)**

Another affective factor linked to L2 anxiety is the FNE, which can be defined as people's anxiety about the probability of others judging and evaluating them unfavourably and negatively; a high level of FNE causes people to avoid situations where they may face the possibility of negative assessment by others (Leary, 1983; Watson, & Friend, 1969). Since the classroom environment is a social context and open to evaluation (e.g. peer evaluation, teachers' academic evaluation), speaking in L2 classes can be accompanied by the FNE (Horwitz et al., 1986). With respect to this, many studies (e.g. Aida, 1994; Aydin, 2008; Gkonou, 2014; Kitano, 2001; Mak, 2011) have demonstrated that FNE and FLA are positively correlated. For instance, Aral and Arli (2019) reported in their study that FNE affected EFL learners' language anxiety directly and positively, more simply, the higher the degree of FNE, the greater the rate of EFL anxiety. Also, Aydin (2008) conducted a study to explore the FLA and FNE of university-level Turkish EFL learners (n=112). In the findings of the study, FNE was reported as one of the major causes of learners' FLA. Aydin (2008) emphasized that students had a fear of speaking English in class in front of their teachers and friends due to the worry and anxiety brought by FNE. Likewise, in their study with Chinese EFL learners, Liu and Jackson (2008) reported that some students were anxious in English classes, had FNE, and were worried about speaking English in class. Their study indicated that students who were afraid of negative judgement felt more fearful and insecure when speaking English in public. Additionally, Gkonou (2014) revealed in her study with 128 Greek EFL learners that there was a strong correlation between FNE, speaking anxiety, and general language anxiety, and it was stated that when learners' FNE and speaking anxiety increased, their language anxiety also increased.

## **EFL Speaking Anxiety and Self-Perceived Speaking Proficiency**

Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasize that anxiety can negatively affect success in foreign language learning, exactly like in other academic fields (e.g. mathematics). When learners have a high degree of FLA, this may cause them to

have difficulty producing and understanding the target language (Daubney et al. 2017; Dewaele, 2012). These claims were supported by the outcomes of many studies (e.g. Dewaele, 2007; Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Hu et al., 2021; Shao et al., 2013; Teimouri et al., 2019) that reported a negative relationship between overall L2 anxiety and achievement. Similarly, the negative link between L2 anxiety and self-perceived overall L2 proficiency was also stressed in various studies (e.g. Dewaele & Shan Ip, 2013; Liu, & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre et al., 1997). As for studies specifically related to self-perceived L2 speaking proficiency and anxiety (e.g. Jiang, & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Dewaele et al., 2008), the common finding was that there was a noteworthy negative association between self-perceived oral L2 proficiency and FLA. In other words, students who stated that they had a higher level of oral English competence were found to be less anxious. Similarly, Gkonou (2014) stated that Greek EFL students who believed that their speaking proficiency was low were found to have high anxiety in speaking.

## **Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Gender**

In addition to the affective and linguistic variables, gender as a sociodemographic variable and its link to L2 speaking anxiety also necessitates investigation because there are many contradictory results on the function of gender factor in L2 anxiety in the literature (Tianjian, 2010). In studies that belong to Jiang and Dewaele (2020), Dewaele and Al-Saraj (2015), Dewaele and Shan Ip (2013), and Matsuda and Gobel (2004), gender was not found to be a factor that had an impact on foreign language classroom anxiety. Similar to this, in Tianjian's study (2010), EFL speaking anxiety levels did not differ significantly between females and males. Gursoy and Karaca (2018), in their study with Turkish EFL learners, did not find a difference between girls and boys concerning speaking anxiety. Contrarily, the research of MacIntyre et al. (2002), which was conducted with students in grades 7, 8, and 9 in Nova Scotia, Canada, found that in the 9th grade classes, boys had higher levels of L2 anxiety when compared with girls. In their study on foreign language speaking anxiety, Tercan and Dikilitas (2015) reported that compared to males, female students had a little more anxiety when speaking English. These conflicting results call for further research on this issue as well.

## **Research Questions**

This study addresses the four research questions (RQ) below:

*RQ 1. What is the relationship between Turkish EFL learners' speaking anxiety, speaking self-efficacy, and FNE?*

*RQ 2. What is the relationship between EFL speaking anxiety and self-perceived English speaking proficiency?*

*RQ 3. Do participants' speaking anxiety levels differ by gender?*

*RQ 4. Which of these three independent variables (i.e. speaking self-efficacy, FNE and self-perceived speaking proficiency) are predictors of learners' speaking anxiety?*

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants of the study consisted of 293 (females = 132, 45.1%; males = 161, 54.9%) English preparatory school students of a state university located in a mid-sized city in central Turkey. They were EFL learners, and their average age was 19.1. The participants were enrolled in various undergraduate programs at the university, such as computer engineering, aircraft engineering, industrial engineering, aviation management, international relations and so on. They had to complete English preparatory school before starting their undergraduate courses. The English preparatory program provided students with a total of 30 hours of English lessons per week, including 6 hours of listening and speaking lessons, 6 hours of reading and writing lessons, and 18 hours of main course lessons. As the study data were collected at the end of the first academic semester, the participants were considered to be sufficiently experienced to respond to all the survey questions, especially those that are related to speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, and self-rated speaking proficiency. All the included participants consented to take part in this study.

### ***Research Instruments***

The questionnaire had 4 parts: (i) the participants' demographic information (e.g. gender, age), their undergraduate programs and their self-rated speaking proficiency in English; (ii) the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale; (iii) the Self-efficacy Scale for English (speaking dimension) and iv) the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale.

*Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale:* The foreign language classroom anxiety questionnaire was originally designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to measure and examine the general foreign classroom language anxiety level of learners. The scale, using a 5-point Likert scale and consisting of 33 items, was adapted to Turkish by Aydin (1999). However, studies conducted by Saltan (2003) and Ozturk (2012) aimed to measure and focus

on the learners' foreign language speaking anxiety level, rather than their general foreign language classroom anxiety level. Therefore, after ensuring that the Turkish translation of the scale was clear and understandable, these studies selected and used 18 items from the original scale that were determined to be directly relevant to learners' foreign language speaking anxiety. The current study used Ozturk's scale to measure EFL speaking anxiety levels. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale, extending from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)". Example items from the scale include statements like "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English classes" (item 1). As for the scale's reliability, Ozturk reported that the Cronbach's alpha reliability result was 0.91. In the present study, it was calculated as 0.947, which shows that the scale is highly reliable. Scores on the scale range from 18 to 90, with a high score pointing to high speaking anxiety.

*Self-Efficacy Scale for English:* Hanci Yanar and Bumen (2012) developed Self-efficacy Scale for English consisting of four subscales to assess and examine learners' self-efficacy beliefs in four language skills. This 5-point Likert questionnaire ranged from "not suitable for me at all (1)" to "totally suitable for me (5)". The current study only used the scale's speaking dimension (6 items) to assess participants' speaking self-efficacy in English. Hanci Yanar and Bumen reported the reliability for the overall scale as 0.97 and for the speaking subdimension as 0.92. In this study, Cronbach's alpha results demonstrated that the speaking self-efficacy scale reliability was 0.84, which indicates that the scale is quite reliable. Scale scores range from 6 to 30, where a high score represents a high speaking self-efficacy level.

*The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale:* Leary (1983) developed the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, and this scale was adapted to Turkish by Cetin et al. (2010). As Leary explains, the scale measures "the degree to which people experience apprehension at the prospect of being evaluated negatively" (p. 371). The adapted scale was composed of 11 items (e.g.; item 3: "I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings") and a 5-point Likert scale from 1, corresponding to "absolutely inappropriate," to 5, corresponding to "absolutely appropriate". In Cetin et al.'s study, the reliability analysis of the scale was performed and found as follows: Cronbach Alpha internal consistency (0.84), split-half (0.83), and test retest (0.82). The current study found Cronbach's alpha reliability as 0.889, which shows that the scale is quite reliable. Three items on the scale were reverse-coded as they were negatively worded (e.g. "Other people's opinions of me do not bother me"). The score ranges from 11 to 55, with high scores indicating a high FNE level.

*Self-Rated English Speaking Proficiency:* Self-perceived proficiency is seen "as an alternative measure of FL achievement" (Jiang, & Dewaele, 2020, p. 3). Based on this, the participants self-rated their own English-speaking proficiency on a 4-point scale ranging from poor, moderate, good



**Table 1. Descriptive Values of the Scales.**

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
EFL Speaking Anxiety Scale	293	51.15	16.37	18-90	0.947
EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale	293	17.80	4.54	6-30	0.840
FNE Scale	293	26.73	8.87	11-55	0.889

**Table 2. Skewness-Kurtosis Values.**

	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
EFL Speaking Anxiety Scale	0.029	-0.710
EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale	0.117	0.050
FNE Scale	0.457	0.094

to very good. The distribution of the self-rated oral proficiency of the participants was as follows: 18.4% poor, 53.2% moderate, 22.2% good, and 3.1% very good.

The following table (**Table 1**) demonstrates the descriptive values related to speaking anxiety, speaking self-efficacy, and FNE scales.

## ***Data Collection***

The questionnaires for the study were administered to 11 intact classes at the end of the fall semester of the 2019-2020 academic years. The Turkish version of the survey was distributed to the students to ensure that the participants could clearly understand each statement. Paper-and-pencil method was used for the collection of the data, and the completion of the surveys by each class took an average of 10 to 15 minutes.

## ***Data Analysis***

With the purpose of assessing the normality of the variables, measures of skewness and kurtosis coefficients were performed and the relevant values are provided in **Table 2** below.

The variables met the assumptions of normality. An independent sample t-test was performed to analyze the differences between the two groups. The relationships between the variables were examined with the Pearson correlation coefficient. A series of simple linear regression analyses

**Table 3. Correlations among Participants' EFL Speaking Anxiety, Speaking Self-Efficacy, and FNE Levels.**

		<b>EFL Speaking Anxiety</b>	<b>EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy</b>	<b>FNE</b>
EFL Speaking Anxiety	r	1	-0.516	0.456
	p		< 0.001	< 0.001
EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy	r		1	-0.223
	p			< 0.001
FNE	r			1
	p			

**Table 4. Relationship between Participants' Efl Speaking Anxiety Level and Self-Rated English Speaking Proficiency Level.**

		<b>Self-Rated English Speaking Proficiency</b>	
EFL Speaking Anxiety	r	-0.495**	
	p	0.000	

**Table 5. Examination of the Participants' EFL Speaking Anxiety Levels by Gender.**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
EFL Speaking Anxiety	Female	132	56.06	15.63	4.819	< 0.001
	Male	161	47.13	15.91		

**Table 6. Findings of the Regression Analysis.**

	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F/p</b>
Constant	84.299	3.324		25.359	0.000	0.516	0.267	105.8/ < 0.001
EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy	-1.862	0.181	-0.516	-10.289	0.000			
Constant	28.631	2.712		10.558	0.000	0.456	0.208	76.55/ < 0.001
FNE	0.843	0.096	0.456	8.750	0.000			
Constant	74.279	2.554		29.079	0.000	0.495	0.245	91.48/ < 0.001
Self-Rated English Speaking Proficiency	-10.977	1.148	-0.495	-9.565	0.000			

was conducted to determine the predictive power of the independent variables (speaking self-efficacy, FNE and self-perceived speaking proficiency) on the dependent variable (speaking anxiety). The IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 program was employed for all the statistical analyses. Additionally, the significance level was set at 0.05.

## **Findings**

The first RQ of the study was concerned with the relationship between the participants' EFL speaking anxiety, EFL speaking self-efficacy, and FNE. The table below contains the results of the Pearson correlation analysis, which was employed to assess the relation between these variables.

As seen from **Table 3**, the results indicate that there exists a significant moderate negative correlation between the participants' EFL speaking anxiety level and EFL speaking self-efficacy levels ( $p < 0.05$ ). As the participants' EFL speaking self-efficacy levels increase, their EFL speaking anxiety levels decrease. In contrast, there is a significant moderate positive correlation between the participants' level of FNE and level of EFL speaking anxiety ( $p < 0.05$ ). As the participants' FNE levels increase, their EFL speaking anxiety levels also increase. The table also demonstrates a significant low negative relationship between the participants' EFL speaking self-efficacy and FNE levels ( $p < 0.05$ ). As the participants' EFL speaking self-efficacy levels increase, their FNE levels decrease.

In response to RQ 2, the following table (**Table 4**) provides results regarding the relationship between self-rated English speaking proficiency and EFL speaking anxiety.

It is apparent from **Table 4** that the participants' EFL speaking anxiety scores and self-perceived English speaking proficiency scores were significantly and negatively related to each other ( $p < 0.05$ ). The correlation was moderate. As the participants' self-perceived English speaking proficiency levels increase, their EFL speaking anxiety levels decrease.

RQ 3 was about whether EFL speaking anxiety varied by gender. Therefore, in order to find out whether female and male students differ with respect to speaking anxiety level, an independent sample t-test was adopted and the findings are presented below.

**Table 5** demonstrates that there is a statistically significant difference between EFL speaking anxiety rates of participants in relation to gender ( $p < 0.05$ ). The EFL speaking anxiety levels of the male participants are less than those of the females. In other words, girls have higher speaking anxiety scores when compared to boys.

RQ 4 focused on the predictors of the students' EFL speaking anxiety. Based on this, a simple linear regression analysis was run with the aim of identifying how much of the variance of the participants' EFL speaking

anxiety level was explained by the independent variables, i.e. EFL speaking self-efficacy level, FNE level, and self-rated speaking proficiency, respectively. **Table 6** displays the findings obtained from the regression analysis.

When **Table 6** is evaluated in detail, it is clearly seen that the EFL speaking anxiety level is predicted by EFL speaking self-efficacy ( $F_{(1,291)} = 105.8$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). 26% of the total variance in the EFL speaking anxiety level is explained by EFL speaking self-efficacy ( $R = 0.516$ ,  $R^2 = 0.267$ ). The results show that EFL speaking self-efficacy is a significant negative predictor of EFL speaking anxiety. It is also seen that the EFL speaking anxiety level is significantly predicted by the FNE ( $F_{(1,291)} = 76.55$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The FNE accounts for 20% of the variance in the EFL speaking anxiety ( $R = 0.456$ ,  $R^2 = 0.208$ ). As can be seen from the table above, the FNE is a positive predictor of EFL speaking anxiety. Additionally, the EFL speaking anxiety level is explained by self-rated EFL speaking proficiency ( $F_{(1,282)} = 91.48$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Self-rated English speaking proficiency explains 24% of the variance in EFL speaking anxiety ( $R = 0.495$ ,  $R^2 = 0.245$ ). Self-rated English speaking proficiency significantly and negatively predicts EFL speaking anxiety.

## **Discussion**

This study found a negative relationship between EFL speaking anxiety and self-efficacy levels. This result corroborates the results of a good deal of the studies conducted before (e.g. Gursoy & Karaca, 2018; Tianjian, 2010). The results also revealed that EFL speaking self-efficacy is a negative predictor of EFL speaking anxiety, which supports the findings of previous studies on FLA and speaking self-efficacy (e.g. Jee, 2019). However, this outcome is contrary to that of Cubukcu (2008), who did not find a correlation between FLA and self-efficacy, and Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019), who reported a positive link between EFL students' speaking anxiety and self-efficacy. Here, it is essential to underline that most of the studies in the literature, including the current one, found a negative association between L2 anxiety and self-efficacy. A possible explanation for this might be that, since self-efficacy brings about an important effect on people's feelings (Bandura, 1995), low self-efficacy may cause students to become more anxious when speaking in L2. In the light of these results, it can be said that, if EFL learners believe that they can communicate and use English successfully, this may decrease their anxiety levels in speaking.

As to the connection between the students' FNE and EFL speaking anxiety levels, a positive link between these two affective variables was obtained. Also, as mentioned in the findings section, FNE was a meaningful positive predictor of EFL speaking anxiety. This output is in line with what Aral and Arli (2019) found in their study. Since language learning takes

place in social settings that are open to evaluation, students' speaking anxiety may increase along with their FNE. It can be deduced from these findings that, like speaking anxiety, FNE may play a negative role in the L2 speaking process. Moreover, these results support the views of Aydin (2008), and Liu and Jackson (2008) who emphasized that FNE may hinder students' willingness to speak and engage in communication in English. The outputs of this study also show that when the participants have high levels of EFL speaking self-efficacy, their FNE level tends to be lower. Based on this, it can be said that if a learner believes that s/he can be a successful user and speaker of English, his/her FNE level may decrease.

This study, in accordance with the pre-existing studies (e.g. Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Dewaele et al., 2008; Gkonou, 2014), demonstrated that the relationship between the participants' EFL speaking anxiety levels and their self-perceived English speaking proficiency levels was significantly negative. In other words, if the learners' self-perceived oral English proficiency levels are high, their speaking anxiety levels are low. It was also seen that self-rated English speaking proficiency was a negative predictor of speaking anxiety. It could be deduced from these findings that if learners feel that their speaking competence is insufficient, they may get anxious while speaking English.

As for the findings on gender and EFL speaking anxiety, the present study revealed that boys had less EFL speaking anxiety than girls. A similar result was also reported by Tercan and Dikilitas (2015). On the other hand, this finding does not support the earlier studies that did not find a noteworthy difference between females and males with regard to FLA (e.g. Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015, Dewaele & Shan Ip, 2013; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004) and foreign language speaking anxiety (e.g. Gursoy & Karaca, 2018; Tianjian, 2010). This outcome contrasts with that of MacIntyre et al. (2002) who determined that 9th grade male students had more anxiety in foreign language than their female counterparts. It seems difficult to explain the reasons for these conflicting results. However, knowing whether anxiety varies by gender in their classes can give teachers the opportunity to better understand and assist their students. Further longitudinal research can provide more insights into the connection between gender and EFL speaking anxiety.

## **Conclusion**

The major objective of the study was to investigate the link between EFL students' speaking anxiety and speaking self-efficacy, FNE, self-perceived speaking competence, and gender. The findings demonstrated that while students' EFL speaking anxiety was moderately and negatively associated with their speaking self-efficacy and self-rated speaking proficiency, it was mod-

erately and positively correlated with their FNE. Regression analyses revealed that speaking anxiety was positively predicted by FNE, whereas it was negatively predicted by speaking self-efficacy and self-rated speaking proficiency. The research has also shown that girls had a higher degree of EFL speaking anxiety compared with boys.

All of these findings have considerable pedagogical implications. First, since there are many study findings regarding the unfavourable impacts of anxiety on L2 learning and speaking skill, it seems important for teachers to identify their students' speaking anxiety levels and its main sources (Horwitz et al., 1986). In light of this, teachers should ensure that the classroom environment is free from negative evaluation and that students can comfortably express themselves while using the L2. As anxiety can stem from fear of making mistakes and FNE, teachers should explain to learners that mistakes are natural components of the L2 learning and speaking process. Creating a classroom environment that evokes positive emotions in students can also help reduce student anxiety and fear (see also Tianjian, 2010). In addition, it may be beneficial for teachers to motivate their students to support their peers and to cooperate with each other in the learning and speaking process. Both teacher and peer support can boost students' self-confidence and encourage them to speak without worry. Moreover, as students living in an EFL context like Turkey are not surrounded by sufficient opportunities to use their second language actively during their daily lives, teachers should guide them and provide them with both in- and out-of-class speaking activities and assignments to practice and use the L2 as much as possible. This can be very helpful to enhance the self-confidence of students and to lower their anxiety and FNE related to speaking.

Finally, this study has some limitations and offers some important suggestions for future studies in light of these limitations. For instance, since the current study adopted quantitative methods to investigate students' speaking anxiety and its relation to aforementioned variables, future studies can adopt qualitative methods like interviews to gain a thorough understanding of EFL learners' speaking anxiety. Besides, the generalizability of the findings is subject to certain limitations as the study only includes participants from a university in Turkey. Future studies may include participants from different countries to increase the generalizability of the study. Finally, this study included only university-level students in the study sample. Based on this, further studies can focus on students from different grade levels (e.g. primary school students) to gain more insights into the EFL speaking anxiety and the variables associated with it.

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