

The Impact of International Exchange Programs on English-Speaking Anxiety Among EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of overseas experiences gained through international exchange programs on EFL learners' English-speaking anxiety, with a focus on Spanish and Turkish students. Based on empirical data collected from Spanish and Turkish students participating in an international exchange program, this study used an experimental research method approach with pre-test and post-test measurements to investigate the multifaceted relationship between experiences abroad and English-speaking anxiety. The sample consisted of 80 (40 Turkish and 40 Spanish) 3rd year EFL students who participated in Student Exchange Mobility and 80 (40 Turkish and 40 Spanish) 3rd year EFL students who did not participate in the program. In total, 160 students participated in the study from 6 universities, Spanish and Turkish students from 3 different universities each. The purposive sampling method was used in the study, and suitable classes were selected, and data were collected. A quantitative research approach was used to collect data. Statistical analysis of the test results showed that there had been a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. These results indicate clearly that the intervention has succeeded in improving post-test scores. This research adds to the wide understanding of nuances of the dynamics of English-speaking anxiety in an international exchange setting, with practical implications for educators, program managers, and language learners who seek to heighten the chances of success for such programs.

Keywords: English-speaking anxiety, international exchange programs, cultural exposure, study abroad experiences

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the development of communication technologies have created an unprecedented level of intercultural exchange and international interaction. The consequence has been an even greater prominence of English as an international language, which has increased demand for English Language Learning (ELL). In most countries, English is taught as a foreign language and has become a key competence, especially for EFL learners. It enables students to experience different cultures and practice the target language in reality. Such opportunities can reduce language anxiety and enhance speaking performance (McIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

In this context, intercultural exchange and international interaction have increased with globalization and the advancement of communication technologies. As a result, the value of a global language such as English has further increased and the demand for learning English as a foreign language has also impacted. English is taught as a foreign language in many countries and has become a necessary skill, especially for students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

It enables students to mix with different cultures and practice their English through practical encounters. These opportunities can help learners reduce their nervousness when speaking English and improve their speaking skills (Mcintyre & Gardner, 1994).

However, many learners of English experience language anxiety, which hinders language acquisition and self-expression. Anxiety about speaking a foreign language well is a common problem, especially among EFL learners. This anxiety can interfere with language learning and prevent students from expressing themselves. Exchange programs are a promising solution to this problem. Through exposure to a foreign language environment, the programs provide ample opportunities to overcome language anxiety and ensure the practical development of language skills.

Moreover, exchange programs offer EFL students the opportunity to use English as a 'contact language' in an EFL context (Firth, 1996). Thus, it helps to develop intercultural

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competence by increasing cultural awareness among the beneficiaries of this program. Despite some research exchange programs for student teachers and the effects of mobility programs on university students' language learning beliefs, there is a lack of research on how these programs affect participants' self-efficacy and speaking concerns.

By actively engaging with the language, both in a new cultural environment and by being exposed to a new language, students or participants who benefit from the program can improve their language skills, and, with the increase in these skills, their anxiety towards language learning and speaking can change positively. In sum, while exchange programs offer valuable opportunities for linguistic and cultural growth, unfortunately, how effective such a program is in reducing language anxiety and increasing language proficiency has not yet been fully examined. This study therefore investigates whether international exchange programs affect language anxiety and English language learners' speaking proficiency. Thus, this research is needed to understand the program's specific impact on participants' speaking-related anxiety, which are crucial for fostering sustained confidence in language use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization has increased people's mobility and information exchange in recent years. In this respect, international exchange programs are one of the main opportunities for students to speak different languages and exchange cultures.

Lately, English-speaking effectively is a common problem, especially among EFL learners (Horwitz, 2005). Anxiety about speaking English can negatively affect the language learning process and prevent students from expressing themselves. International exchange programs can have an important role in this area. These programs offer students the opportunity to live and study abroad, allowing them to interact with a new culture and use English through real-life experience. These experiences can help students reduce their anxiety about speaking English and improve their speaking skills (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). For this reason, there has recently been a greater focus on the study of context and L2 oral development through language exposure, especially through study abroad programs such as Erasmus+, which have been found to greatly affect the level of oral English proficiency by increasing oral accuracy, lexical complexity, syntactic complexity, accuracy, and speaking anxiety (Leonard & Shea, 2017; McManus et al., 2020; Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012). Particular focus has been placed on findings related to studying abroad in terms of syntactic accuracy and complexity (Borras & Llanes, 2019). Furthermore, individual case studies also highlight notable gains in morpho-syntactic control

among participants (Mougeon & Rehner, 2014). In broader studies, researchers have examined whether studying abroad improves general language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking, within the framework of general language competence (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995). By looking at the general language proficiency framework, it was examined whether there was a competent development in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. In terms of language competence, Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014) examined how students' English language scores improved and whether participating in these change programs caused a change in their perceptions. They found that those who had studied abroad prioritized fluency and effective communication more and noted a positive change in their perceptions toward English (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Interestingly, some studies have found positive aspects of anxiety. In addition to improving performance, it is a "motivator to problem solving and planning" (Ghinassi, 2010, p. 44). Some studies have focused on individual-specific studies and cases. For example, it has been concluded that there is an improvement in the control of morpho-syntactic control by individuals (Mougeon & Rehner, 2014). Some studies (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995) examined improvements in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills as proficient by looking at the general language competence framework. Studies such as this have analyzed speech anxiety, and rather than focusing on its negative aspects, some of the findings have referred to its driving and goal-orientating effects.

Thus, it has been seen that speech anxiety triggers not only negative feelings but also some positive phenomena (Sussman, 2000).

Anxiety

Nowadays, anxiety is an intricate phenomenon on which academics (Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz & Horwitz and Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Spielberger & Sarason, 1975; Young, 1990) explored its multifaceted nature, its impact on human psychology, and its different influences on behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects. By investigating the effects of these on human nature and its place in the language learning process, their widespread impact has been discussed quite extensively. Some studies have focused on individual-specific studies and cases. For example, it has been concluded that there is an improvement in the control of morpho-syntactic control by individuals (Mougeon & Rehner, 2014). In some studies (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995), it was examined whether there was an improvement in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills as proficient by looking at the general language competence framework. According to several sources, anxiety is defined as follows:

“affective response” to a threat (May, 1977) or “subjective feeling of tension, worry” alerting the automatic nervous system indirectly, associated with a reaction to an object (Cheng, 2005). Looking at the formal definition and its counterpart in psychology, anxiety can harm a person both physically and mentally, causing short-term physical effects (rapid breathing, breathing difficulties, increased heart rate) as well as cognitive and emotional effects such as avoidance of learning (Kacelnik, 1975), increased feelings of anxiety, avoidance of learning activities, and poor performance.

However, the types and degrees of anxiety actually vary according to the situation the person is exposed to, the type of anxiety, and the trigger of the event. Anxiety has physical and cognitive effects and can be observed in specific contexts, such as language learning. Language learning and speaking anxiety can be analyzed as a sub-category of general anxiety and is a type of anxiety that arises in the process of learning a language, such as situational anxiety (writing, listening anxiety) that can occur in specific situations as a result of exposure in a second language environment (Horwitz, 1986). All in all, anxiety is a complex and pervasive phenomenon that affects individuals on multiple levels, influencing both behavioral and cognitive emotional responses. Academic research has underlined the harmful impact of anxiety-avoidance of learning and poor performance-and its situational triggers, in particular in language learning. Language anxiety is a special type of general anxiety that presents certain difficulties for learners, especially in second language environments, where situational anxiety can become pronounced, such as writing or listening. Though anxiety creates physical and mental challenges, being able to understand how anxiety specifically manifests itself within language learning may provide an understanding toward more specific strategies of support for learners in overcoming language anxieties and enabling them to achieve improved proficiency in the language studied.

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

In today's globalized world, learning a foreign language has become increasingly important for communication and success in various fields. Language learning can be a daunting task, especially when it comes to developing speaking skills in a foreign language.

Foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) is a common difficulty faced by many language learners (Jugo, 2020). It can be defined as the fear and nervousness that arises when a student tries to speak in a target language such as English. This anxiety can lead to feelings of frustration and low self-esteem, hindering the learner's ability to communicate effectively. Moreover, FLSA can manifest in both physical

and behavioural symptoms. These most prominent symptoms include increased blood pressure, change in tone of voice, trembling, loss of train of thought, flushing, and sweating (Beushausen, 2000). In classroom settings, if there is reluctance to speak in front of the class or in public (e.g. during presentations or speeches), or if the speaker is the focal point in an impromptu speaking environment, FFL increases (Beushausen, 2000; Renner, 2002). In addition to this, the WLSA that emerges in the process of learning and using a foreign language can be observed in three dimensions in classroom interaction (Horwitz et al., 1989): test anxiety, communication anxiety and negative experience anxiety. Test anxiety can generally result from having expectations that exceed one's performance, fear of failing the test, and anxiety about being evaluated negatively or unsuccessfully (Horwitz et al., 1986). In this sense, common causes of OER in the classroom include students comparing themselves with their peers and having expectations that exceed their abilities.

When analyzing the effects on language learners, we must consider the elements contributing to this. Multiple studies have highlighted the sources and impact of foreign language-speaking anxiety. According to the sources mentioned above, speaking activities, error correction, and communicating with English speakers are identified as high anxiety sources for learners (MacIntyre, 2014). Furthermore, negative self-perception and a lack of knowledge lead to anxiety. Such anxieties often stem from students' self-concept and the extent to which they trust others' assessments of their language skills. In this case, classroom and inter-group interaction, classroom language activities, and peers' attitudes towards each other can lead to an increase in this anxiety or to the anxiety of making mistakes. Overall, the formation of supportive environments in which learners can comfortably express themselves in the language is crucial in reducing language anxiety and improving the learning process.

Exchange Programs (Study Abroad)

Studying abroad is a transformative and important experience that provides students with the resources they need to succeed in today's diverse and globalized society. Research (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Salisbury et al., 2010) has clearly shown that studying abroad provides a variety of benefits, such as improving language fluency, increasing cultural awareness, and providing a competitive advantage in real-life environments. When a person meets a foreigner for the first time, he/she may feel a state of anxiety and may not be able to express himself/herself correctly in the first place. As this encounter and exposure increase, the person may become accustomed to the situation, and the anxiety of speaking a foreign language may diminish and fade away.

As a result, through exchange programs, participants get hands-on experience using the target language with native speakers and other students; they can be given quick feedback and corrections, which may initially cause anxiety but will later help students develop and improve their language (Dewsbury and Brame, 2019). Exchange programs also expose students to a wide variety of cultural settings and perspectives; one may have preconceived notions about a particular culture or way of life before being in this situation but later realize that one was wrong in this judgment (Gregory et al., 2016; Hollowell, 2019). By interacting in this way, it enables people to better understand and appreciate the language and the culture they have learned. It is worth noting that participants in exchange programs can overcome their anxiety about making mistakes by stepping out of their comfort zone and engaging in real-language interactions. Furthermore, the supportive and inclusive environment fostered through exchange programs can help students feel more comfortable developing their language skills. Above all, the exchange program offers a friendly and immersive environment in which the anxiety associated with speaking in a foreign language can be greatly minimized.

Based on this context, Thompson and Lee (2013) argued that speaking anxiety in a foreign language is a complex phenomenon, and understanding its triggers and mitigation strategies is crucial in the process of providing a conducive learning environment for foreign language learners. For many reasons, such as participating in a cultural and educational exchange program, it has proven to be very important for professional, efficient, and foreign language development (Hien, 2022, p. 157). In the study of Suyanto et al. (2022), it has been literally proven that exposing students to the culture and language of the country in which they participate in the exchange program and experiencing the linguistically outside campus life (Wilkinson, 2020) helps to increase the language skills of the participants learning English as a foreign language (Vögtle & Windzio, 2016). Moreover, it has been established that (Deweale, 2019) such immersive experiences not only facilitate the enhancement of language proficiency but also serve to mitigate language-related anxiety. This is due to an increase in confidence among students as a result of their constant exposure to real-life language use and intercultural interactions. Thus, by providing continuous real-world language exposure and fostering intercultural understanding, immersive experiences play a pivotal role in reducing anxiety and building students' confidence in using the target language effectively.

Erasmus+

The Erasmus+ Program offers students various academic and personal development opportunities. In higher education,

after the internationalization policies, there was a need for a comprehensive program that would include the whole of Europe. Experiencing a different culture enables him to live in a different economic and political environment and earn a challenge towards future career goals (Marcotte, Desroches, and Poupart, 2007).

Before the creation of the Erasmus+ program, Europe faced significant educational and economic disparities between countries, which limited student mobility and academic collaboration across borders. The higher education systems were largely insular, with universities operating under national policies that often-prioritized domestic education over international collaboration. As a result, students and academics had fewer opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives or develop language skills necessary for a rapidly globalizing job market. All these factors therefore called for an integrated program that would respond to the need for student mobility, cultural exchange, and academic collaboration at a pan-European level, which Erasmus+ is.

The Erasmus+ Exchange Program emerged in the 1980s and was developed to promote and spread mobility throughout Europe (Pineda, Moreno, & Belvis, 2008). It provides a comprehensive framework for international exchange and cooperation in education, training, youth, and sport. Beyond the policy objectives, in recent years, Erasmus+ has become more realistic to make students experience different cultures, improve their languages, and build international networks. This program is a significant resource used to determine the requirements and principles of international education and learning in a European context (Ozdemir & Kayapinar, 2023).

Since Erasmus+ is designed according to transparency in educational policy, institutions and individuals can adapt and replicate it according to their educational objectives. The Erasmus+ program supports various levels of proficiency and skill development, classified into various categories depending on the type of exchange and learning goals.

Through this general framework program, Turkey, together with 47 countries, aims to create a European Higher Education Area with the aim of spreading internationalization policies and student and learning mobility (YÖK, 2017). To this end, the establishment of the 'Bologna System', the creation of a curriculum pool, and the promotion of unity in education have been promoted. (Commission, 2008). With the Bologna system; student mobility has become the main element of Erasmus+ mobility, aiming to create links and harmonized action between educational institutions in Europe.

The framework of Erasmus+ is constructed and explained in detail, highlighting its dual functions: descriptive functions that outline levels, analyze achievements, and include all

types of assessments and related terms, and pedagogical functions that shape learner autonomy and educational principles. Erasmus+ emphasizes the concept of multicultural environment, recognizing the importance of differentiating “oneness”, which describes society and country. Erasmus+, which consists of sub-categories like learner autonomy, self-assessment, and cultural diversity, provides an autonomous learner framework. It sets out to explore learning experiences and self-assessment, enabling learners to reflect on previous learning experiences and expected outcomes.

One of the most frequently referred to aspects of Erasmus+ is its support for communication and exchange in education. This program has created a common framework that has been standardized by removing differences between different cultures and national formations, following the developmental process since its publication, with several additions, becoming a guiding text for learners and instructors involved in international exchanges and education (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Within the scope of this program, students gain an international perspective by having the experience of studying abroad. Through this conscientiously managed project initiative is aimed at promoting lifelong learning, language learning, and inclusive development. Also, students who participate in these exchange projects will improve their linguistic skills by actively engaging in the foreign language community. Students can have a chance to form and foster new friendships while widening their social horizons (Goldstein et al, 2019). In addition to these social and linguistic benefits, the program also plays a pivotal role in language acquisition for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Overcoming Language Barriers: Exchange Programs as a Solution

Overcoming language barriers is an increasingly important area central to the entire discipline of second language learning. The problems range from cross-cultural effects (Oxford, 1996; Prodromou, 1994; Zhang & Nisbett, 2004) to the acquisition process (Schulz, 1991; Spada & Lightbown, 2019) and to the concept of understanding the target culture (Abarbanel, 2009; Brown & Brown, 2013; Sümer et al., 2008). Investigating language barriers and sojourn experiences, some studies (Freeman, 2000; Pavlenko, 2003) dealt predominantly with the program effects while sojourners were still in their L2 environment having practice opportunities and external motivation (e.g having international engagement in student groups sharing same experience and proficiency combinations). While these studies have focused on the immediate effects of the program during the sojourn period spent, they underscore the importance of continued engagement and cultural immersion for language acquisition.

From this point of view, international exchange programs serve as a significant tool for reducing English-speaking anxiety among EFL students. Research indicates that these programs effectively lower anxiety levels through cultural interaction and practical experiences (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Furthermore, exchange programs enable students to improve their language abilities and gain confidence (González et al., 2011). As a result, educational institutions and program organizers must devise techniques to boost the success of these programs, therefore increasing student experiences and strengthening international communication abilities.

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in Study Abroad Context

Within the context of studying abroad, FLSA represents a popular area of research given that international exchange programs often place students in communicative situations and require them to use a language other than their mother tongue. In the more straightforward way of defining FLSA, the definition can be made as the fear or anxiety about speaking a foreign language and negatively affecting both communication and learning outcomes. In this regard, FLSA is influenced by factors such as socio-cultural interaction, contact with native speakers, and individual competence. In addition, numerous studies have demonstrated that the study abroad experience is a globally influential factor, playing a pivotal role in shaping an individual's identity (Dolby, 2007).

As a transformative and constructive element, the study abroad experience fits in its own context and makes sense in an environment where students have a reflective learning experience and engage in cultural and intercultural communication (Holmes et al., 2015).

However, these reflective learning experiences are often complicated by the cultural and linguistic challenges students encounter while in the host country. For instance, culture shock and language problems in a host country add to the anxiety, producing self-conscious feelings among the students regarding their language proficiency (Kilanowski, 2017). Moreover, communication with native speakers can have a dual effect, where a positive experience raises confidence, whereas a negative interaction or even fear of judgment intensifies anxiety. Students with lower levels of language proficiency or with minimal prior exposure to a foreign language can be particularly susceptible to higher levels of FLSA since they lack linguistic tools that could help them deal with such challenging situations. Added to this is the need to perform at levels compared to both academic and social settings, which, again, fosters feelings of inadequacy, particularly in an environment that pressures students to

speak proficiently. By contrast, teacher, peer, and program coordinator support has eased anxiety, particularly with the provision of structured language learning activities (Martinez et al., 2021). By addressing such factors, institutions would better prepare their students for the linguistic demands of studying abroad and reduce levels of anxiety associated with foreign language speaking (Anderson, 2020). Equally, by putting such structured language support in place, an institution can have a critical and anxiety-reducing effect on pre-existing levels of EFL students' anxiety about speaking English, thus better equipping and preparing these students for confidence during international exchange experiences.

Research Question 1: What is the level of English-speaking anxiety among Spanish and Turkish EFL students before participating in an international exchange program?

Research Question 2: Are the pre-test Foreign Language Speaking-anxiety Scores (FLSAS) of the experimental group and control group significantly different?

Research Question 3: Are the post-test FLSAS of the experimental group and control group significantly different?

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test FLSAS of the experimental group and control group?

Research Question 5: How does participation in an international exchange program affect Spanish and Turkish EFL students' English-speaking anxiety?

Research Question 6: Does the interaction between gender and nationality influence the effect of an international exchange program on English-speaking anxiety levels among Spanish and Turkish EFL students?

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopts a quasi-experimental research design to investigate FLSA in the context of a study abroad program. This research design, according to Rijgersberg & Meinders (2009), focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data for the purpose of measuring variables and determining relationships among them. Typically, this is accomplished through the use of organized tools such as questionnaires or scales. Validated anxiety measures are used in this instance to quantitatively assess FLSA, enabling statistical investigation of anxiety levels in connection to variables including language competency, prior exposure to the foreign language, and contacts with native speakers. This study provides a methodical tool to assess the frequency and severity of anxieties faced by students participating in study abroad programs.

Besides, quasi-experimental research design makes it possible to identify trends and patterns that can be extrapolated to larger populations by focusing on measurable

data. By access in this data, it increases the generalizability of the study and its conclusions. Moreover, the statistical insights obtained with this technique contribute to creating evidence-based methods to reduce FLSA in future study-abroad participants (Anderson, 2020). Therefore, applying quantitative methodologies increases the capacity to make reliable inferences about the variables that cause FLSA and the effectiveness of support networks in reducing this anxiety (Smith, 2019).

Instruments

The main instrument used to collect quantitative information is the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS). Huang's (2004) original scale was adapted by Balemir (2009). This scale is the adaptive version and was used in the study. The first part focuses on obtaining participant descriptive data. This aspect, which is very important for demographic profiling, helped the descriptive statistics of the study. Respondents were asked about their age, gender, educational background, and other relevant information that may help to frame their responses. In the second part, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the given statements using a 5-point Likert scale. There were options ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Disagree', 'No comment', 'Agree', and 'Strongly Agree'.

By using this Likert-type scale, the participants were able to describe their level of nervousness when speaking in a foreign language. The scale was given to the participants in electronic form.

Participants were instructed to read each statement carefully and selected the answer that most accurately reflects their thoughts and experiences regarding foreign language speaking anxiety. Data was collected in a way that protects the privacy and anonymity of the participants and encourages them to be open and honest in their responses. The data, descriptive statistical analyses, and responses from the Likert scale of Section 2 were statistically analyzed to find patterns and trends in the study participants' fear.

Participants

Spanish and Turkish third-year university students learning English as a foreign language participated in the current study. In total, six universities, consisting of three from Spain and others from Turkey, compiled the participants. Classes were selected from the faculties of universities in Turkey and Spain for the purpose of this research, based on the purposive sampling method suggested by Cresswell (2017). Thus, the final sample consisted of 80 students from Spanish universities and 80 students from Turkish universities, equally divided between the two countries.

Data Analysis

To obtain meticulous analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) performed a rigorous analysis of the quantitative data gathered for this study. There were numerous crucial steps in the analytical process. To offer a brief description of the data, descriptive statistics were produced. The participants' speaking anxiety levels were analyzed on a mean basis before and after the exchange program to determine the central trend. To assess the normal distribution of the data, two commonly employed statistical tests, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, were conducted. The results of these tests inform subsequent analyses and the selection of appropriate statistical methods. The distribution of the data was assessed and provided information about the dataset's normality. T tests were used as the main inferential statistical analysis tool. In order to identify statistically significant differences in speaking anxiety levels before and after the exchange program, a paired-samples t-test was used. The assessment of changes over time in the same participant group was made possible by this test.

Below, we detail steps to ensure this systematic analysis. The table presents key criteria used in quantitative research. Accurate representation of reality was achieved through internal validity, ensuring that the study's findings accurately reflect the phenomenon being investigated.

Implementation of results refers to external validity, aiming for the generalizability of findings across different settings or groups. Consistency is ensured by internal reliability, which confirms that results are reproducible under similar conditions. Lastly, objectivity is maintained through external reliability, allowing results to be verified and replicated by others using the same methods (Table 1).

RESULTS

This section delineates the research findings derived from the data collection procedure. After compiling the data,

Table 1: Key Criteria for Ensuring Rigor Quantitative Research

Criterion	Quantitative Research
Accurate representation of reality	Internal validity: Ensures the research results accurately reflect the phenomena being studied.
Implementation of results	External validity: aims for generalization of findings across different settings or groups.
Ensuring consistency	Internal reliability: ensures the results are consistent and reproducible in similar conditions.
Objectivity	External reliability: ensures that the results can be verified and replicated by others using the same methods.

the descriptive statistics part of the study was examined. Following this, in-depth statistical analyses of the quantitative data received through the questionnaire were presented. Subsequently, each research question was distributed separately, culminating with a discussion and interpretation of the research findings within the parameters of the literature.

RQ-1: Changes in Students' English-Speaking Anxiety Levels

RQ-2: The Impact of International Exchange Program on English-Speaking Anxiety

The results of the quantitative data are presented in this section below. Each research question is examined in detail, and the analyses of quantitative data for the research questions are given.

The normality table is given below, and one of the important steps in order to make data collection, processing, analysis, and interpretation processes error-free is the detection of erroneous, incomplete, incorrect, and illogical data and making the data suitable for analysis before proceeding to statistical tests.

In this context, various analyses and controls were conducted using IBM SPSS 26.0.

The necessary preliminary analyses were made for the data, and descriptive statistical processes, frequency tables, and normality tests were applied to check and determine the dependent variables and independent variables in the data set. The data set was made suitable for analysis by checking whether there was any erroneous data. When the data were examined, it was checked whether the data were normally distributed in order to ensure that the analyses were performed correctly and the values gave the closest result. The results of the quantitative data are presented in this section below in Table 2.

Table 2: Normality analysis

	Variable	N	Lowest t	Highest	a	\bar{X}	SS	Distortion	Kurtosis
CO NT	Spanish Control Group Pre-Test Results	40	47.00	116.00	.872	81.25	16.76	-.006	-.312
RO L	Turkish Control Group Preliminary Test Results	40	47.00	123.00	.860	75.50	14.98	.567	1.396
GR OU	Spanish Control Group Post-Test Results	40	44.00	116.00	.853	81.72	16.00	-.157	-.179
P	Turkish Control Group Final Test Results	40	47.00	109.00	.820	79.97	13.24	-.042	.247
EX	Pre-Test Results of the								
PE	Spanish Experimental Group	40	47.00	99.00	.751	73.27	13.67	.127	-.878
RI	Turkish Experimental Group	40	50.00	116.00	.816	74.62	14.76	.756	.323
ME	Preliminary Test Results								
NT	Spanish Experimental Group Post-Test Results	40	52.00	116.00	.819	80.40	12.71	.294	1.435
AL	Turkish Experimental Group	40	48.00	112.00	.813	82.17	15.07	.028	-.214
GR	Final Test Results								
OU									
P									

When we look at the normality analysis results of the control and experimental groups (EG), the distributions of the pre-test and post-test scores of the Spanish and Turkish students were evaluated. In the control group, according to the pre-test results of the Spanish control group, the mean score was 81.25 and the standard deviation was 16.76. In order to determine normality, Kurtosis and Skewness values were also taken into consideration to interpret whether the data were normally distributed or not. In Table 2, it is seen that the Skewness-Kurtosis values of the variables are within the accepted range of ± 1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Although the results are slightly skewed to the left, the values are accepted within the normality values.

In the pre-test results of the Turkish control group, the mean is 75.50 and the standard deviation is 14.98. However, the skewness is in the positive direction (0.567) and although the distribution of this group is skewed to the right, it is seen that the ratio of these values to the standard error is within the accepted range of ± 1.5 and the values are accepted among the normality values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

In the post-test results of the Spanish control group, the mean score was 81.72, and the standard deviation was 16.00. The skewness value (-0.157) indicates a slight skew to the left, while the kurtosis value (-0.179) indicates a flat distribution. In the post-test results of the Turkish control group, the mean was 79.97, and the standard deviation was 13.24. Skewness (-0.042) indicates an almost symmetrical distribution, while kurtosis (0.247) indicates a slightly more pointed distribution.

In the EG, the mean score in the pre-test results of the Spanish students was 73.27, and the standard deviation was 13.67. The skewness value (0.127) indicates a slightly right-skewed distribution, while the kurtosis value (-0.878) indicates that the distribution is flat. In the pre-test results of the Turkish EG, the mean was 74.62, and the standard deviation was 14.76. However, in this group, skewness (0.756) indicates a skewed distribution to the right, while kurtosis (0.323) indicates that the distribution is slightly pointed.

According to the post-test results of the Spanish EG, the mean was 80.40, and the standard deviation was 12.71. Skewness (0.294) shows a slightly skewed distribution to the right, while kurtosis (1.435) shows that the distribution is reasonably pointed. In the post-test results of the Turkish EG, the mean was 82.17, and the standard deviation was 15.07.

In general, the skewness and kurtosis values of the Turkish control and EGs show that the distributions do not deviate much from the normal distribution, while the results of the other groups generally show a structure close to the normal distribution.

Paired-Samples T-Test Results of Turkish and Spanish Control Groups

Table 3: Paired-Samples t-test results for pre-test and post-test Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) Scores of Spanish control groups (CG)

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair	Pre-Test						
	Post-Test	-.475	17.373	2.747	-.173	39	.864

As Table 3 shows, the results of the paired-samples t-test do not indicate a statistically significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group.

The mean score in the pre-test ($M = 0.47500$, $SD = 17.37$) did not statistically significantly improve in the post-test ($M = --$) ($t(39) = -0.173$, $p > .05$).

These findings suggest that the control group did not experience a significant reduction in English-speaking anxiety following the intervention. The 95% confidence interval of the difference (-6.03 to 5.08) also confirms the lack of a meaningful change in anxiety levels. In other words, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test FLSA scores of the Spanish control group.

Table 4: Paired-Samples t-test results for pre-test and post-test Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) Scores of Turkish control groups (CG)

		Paired Differences			t	df	p
		M	SD	Std. Error Mean			
Pair	Pre-Test						
	Post-Test	-.475	22.56	3.56	-1.254	39	.217

As Table 4 shows, the results of the paired-sample t-test do not indicate a statistically significant difference in the pre-test and post-test FLSA scores of the Turkish control group. The mean score in the pre-test ($M = 4.47500$, $SD = 22.57$) did not statistically significantly improve in the post-test ($t(39) = -1.254$, $p > .05$). The 95% confidence interval of the difference (-11.69 to 2.74) includes zero, further confirming the lack of a significant change in the anxiety scores. These findings suggest that the Turkish control group did not experience a meaningful reduction in their FLSA after the intervention.

RQ-3: Are the post-test FLSAS of the experimental group and control group significantly different?

RQ-4: Is there a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test FLSAS of the experimental group and control group?

Results supported by tables below Paired-Samples T-Test Results of Turkish and Spanish EG and Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of the Spanish EG and Control Group (CG) and presents whether the intervention made a difference between the experimental and control group.

Paired-Samples T-Test Results of Turkish and Spanish EG

Table 5: Paired-Samples t-test results for pre-test and post-test FLSA scores of Spanish EG (EG)

	Paired Differences			t	df	p
	M	SD	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1						
Pre-Test						
Post-Test	-7.125	17.755	2.807	-2.538	39	.015

As Table 5 shows, the results of the paired-sample t-test indicate a statistically significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores. The mean score in the pre-test ($M = -7.125$, $SD = 17.76$) significantly decreased in the post-test ($t(39) = -2.538$, $p = .015$). In other words, since the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero (-12.80 to -1.45), it emphasizes that there is a significant reduction between the values. These findings underlie that the intervention had a meaningful impact, resulting in a significant decrease in the measured outcome. As the p-value is less than .05 ($p < .05$), the pre-test and post-test FLSA scores of the Spanish EG are significantly different. It is emphasized that this difference was in favour of the post-test.

Table 6: Paired-Samples t-test results for pre-test and post-test FLSA Scores of Turkish EG (EG)

	Paired Differences				t	df	p
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Error			
Pair 1							
Pre-Test							
Post-Test	-7.550	20.402	3.225		-2.34	39	.024

As table 6 illustrates, the paired-samples t-test results indicate a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. In the post-test, the mean score ($t(39) = -2.340$, $p < .024$) was considerably lower than in the

pre-test ($M = -7.550$, $SD = 20.40$). The considerable decline in scores is confirmed by the fact that zero is not included in the 95% confidence interval for the difference (-14.07 to -1.03). The findings reveal that the intervention had a significant effect, resulting in a noteworthy decline in the outcome that was being observed. In other words, there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test FLSA scores of the Turkish EG.

Independent-Samples T-Test

For the Independent Samples T-Test, it is assumed that the groups are independent from each other. In other words, it is accepted that the groups do not interact with each other. It is assumed that the homogeneity of the groups is ensured, and the scores in each group are normally distributed. The data set is made suitable for the tests by following some steps respectively.

It is checked whether the variances are homogeneous. The result is significant because the sign (2-tailed) is greater than 0.05. The conditions that must be met in the independent sample t-test; random sample drawing, the data being on an equal interval ratio scale, and the distribution being normal are the prerequisites to be met. We tried to make more meaningful interpretations of the differences obtained by using Effect Size and Power. Below, we can say that our data set provides the appropriate conditions and prerequisites to check our skewness values and proceed to our analysis since our sample size is less than 50 by looking at normality and skewness values.

Table 7: Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of the Spanish EG and Control Group (CG)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Post-Test							
Equal Variances assumed	2.287	.134	.410	78	.683	1.325	3.232
Equal Variances not assumed			.410	74.205	.683	1.325	3.232

As Table 7 shows, the results of the independent samples t-test for the post-test FLSA scores of the Spanish EG and control group (CG) indicate no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

The mean difference between the groups is 1.325 ($SD = 3.23$), with a t-value of 0.410 and a p value of 0.683, which is above the significance threshold ($p > .05$). The 95% confidence interval of the difference includes zero, confirming that there is no significant difference between the post-test scores of the Spanish experimental and control groups. In other words,

there was no statistically significant difference in post-test data between the experimental and control groups based on the nationality variable after the application.

Table 8: Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of Turkish EG and Control Group (CG)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Post-Test	Equal Variances assumed	.856	.358	-.693	78	.490	-2.200	3.173
	Equal Variances not assumed			.693	76.73	.490	-2.200	3.173

As Table 8 indicates, the results of the independent samples t-test for the post-test FLSA scores between the Turkish EG and control group (CG) do not indicate a statistically significant difference. The mean difference between the groups is ($M=-2.20$, $SD = 3.17$), with a t-value of -0.693 and a p value of 0.490 , which is well above the significance threshold ($p > .05$).

Additionally, the 95% confidence interval of the difference (-8.52 to 4.12) includes zero, confirming that there is no significant difference between the post-test scores of the Turkish experimental and control groups. Regarding the post-test results following the application, there was not a significant difference between the experimental and control groups due to the nationality variable.

To determine the program's effectiveness in reducing foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) among participants, statistical analysis was conducted. Table 9 presents the Independent Samples t-test results, comparing the post-test FLSA scores of the Turkish and Spanish Control Groups (CG).

Table 9: Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of Turkish and Spanish Control Group (CG)

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	p	
Pre-Test	Equal Variances assumed	.393	.533	1.617	78	.110	
	Equal Variances not assumed			1.617	77.03	.110	

As indicated in Table 9, the independent samples t-test compares the pre-test FLSA scores of the Turkish and Spanish control groups. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups' pre-test scores.

The Levene's test for equality of variances shows an F-value of 0.393 with a p-value of 0.533 , suggesting that the assumption of equal variances can be assumed ($p > .05$). The t-test for equality of means reveals a t-value of 1.617 , a mean difference of 5.75 , and a p-value of 0.110 . Since the p-value is more significant than 0.05 ($p > .05$), there is no statistically significant difference.

Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from -1.33 to 12.83 , which includes zero, further indicating that there is no significant difference between the pre-test scores of the Turkish and Spanish control groups. In conclusion, the data reveals that prior to the intervention, both groups had comparable baseline FLSA levels. To clarify, there was no discernible difference between the control groups for the nationality variable based on the pre-test results obtained before the applications and the post-test results obtained following the applications.

Table 10: Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of Turkish and Spanish EG

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	p
Post-Test	Equal Variances assumed	1.691	.197	-.569	78	.571
	Equal Variances not assumed			-.569	75.847	.571

The EFL students?

Table 11: Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of Spanish EG by Gender

		Levene's Test		t-test		
		F	Sig.	t	df	p
Post-Test	Equal variances assumed	.681	.414	-.139	38	.890
	Equal variances not assumed			-.208	5.096	.843

The result of the Independent Samples t-test indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the post-test scores between the groups. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed that the assumption of equal variances was met ($p = 0.414$). The t-test for equality of means revealed a t-value of -0.139 with 38 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.890 ($p > 0.05$), suggesting no significant difference between the groups. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference (-14.68719 to 12.79830) includes zero, further confirming that the difference in post-test scores is not statistically significant. Therefore, there is no substantial difference in the post-test outcomes between the groups, indicating that any observed differences are likely due to chance. The gender variable of the Spanish EG did not show a significant difference in

the post-test results since the p-value was larger than 0.5 ($p > .05$). The final test results show no significant difference between the male and female participants in the Spanish EG.

Table 12: Independent Samples t-test results for post-test FLSA scores of Turkish EG by Gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
		F	Sig.	t	df	p		
Post-Test	Equal variances assumed	.373	.545	-.707	38	.484	-4.463	6.314
	Equal variances not assumed			-.797	10.035	.444	-4.463	5.603

As it is seen in Table 12, the result of the Independent Samples t-test reveals that when analyzed by gender, there is no statistically significant difference in the post-test FLSA scores of the Turkish EG. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed that the assumption of equal variances was met ($p = 0.545$). The t-test for equality of means revealed a p value of 0.484 ($p > 0.05$), suggesting no significant difference between genders. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference (-17.24524 to 8.31883) includes zero, further confirming that the difference in post-test scores by gender is not statistically significant. Therefore, there is no substantial difference in the post-test results between male and female participants in the Turkish EG.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present research investigated how international exchange programs contribute to decreasing the FLSA among Turkish and Spanish EFL participants. The results revealed a significant decrease in the anxiety levels among them. This effect was particularly stated in the EGs. Thus, real-world language immersion and interaction in the target language appeared to have a positive impact on learners. These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the effectiveness of authentic interaction in reducing anxiety in foreign language contexts (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Such exposure desensitizes the fear of making mistakes and builds confidence since one is in contact with his peers; therefore, there is natural communication taking place, as opposed to just artificial classroom practice. Consequently, as the student gets confident through these real interactions, anxiety in foreign language settings diminishes.

Similarly, in a study by Toubot & Abdullah (2018) with 4th-year EFL students, students' speaking anxiety levels were investigated along with their fear of being misjudged and low self-confidence. It was found that these factors increased students' speaking anxiety. In another study, Subasi (2010) observed that speaking anxiety is the most conspicuous

type of anxiety among other types of anxiety and is the most common type of anxiety towards language learning in the classroom environment. The result of our study, which supports this result, has similar characteristics with our study in terms of observing that in-class interactions and trainings have a positive effect on students' anxiety.

It can be said that a major consequence of this study is the association between direct contact with native speakers and a decrease in anxiety.

It can be referred to the fact that learners in both Turkish and Spanish EGs absorbed learning opportunities through real-life language resources, and in turn, this led to a remarkable increase in their speaking comfort level.

It is associated with the theories concerning learner autonomy in reducing language anxiety (Horwitz, 2005). Besides, it can even be considered that involved students with less vocabulary of the target language will show the most improvement; this should be followed by international programs, which are obligatory for students with an initial level of anxiety higher than average ones to get over.

Nevertheless, the outcomes too reveal that not all students equally benefited from these programs. That is, some participants, especially in the control groups, showed no significant reduction in the levels of anxiety that may show the need for support and practice to get the best out of the immersion language program. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing the importance of teacher and peer support in reducing FLSA (Horwitz, 2001). The students who do not get education in the form of the interaction they need or do not get feedback that is appropriate for their needs during the language learning.

Moreover, no significant differences were observed in terms of anxiety reduction between the Spanish and Turkish groups. This indicates that the FLSA applies equally well to different cultures. These findings challenge previous research suggesting that cultural differences significantly influence levels of language anxiety (Sümer et al., 2008), but results suggest that exchange programs reduce anxiety while increasing contact and communication.

The study also points out the need for further research on the long-term effects of participation in exchange programs. Given that the current study has only investigated short-term anxiety reductions whether these continue when students return to their home countries is unknown. This suggests that future studies may consider longitudinal research to probe the persistence of the reductions in anxiety and its eventual impact on long-term language proficiency and usage.

Therefore, this research provides strong evidence that international exchange programs are effective tools for reducing anxiety among EFL students. While offering

ample real-life language practice and cultural enrichment, such programs allow the learners to face their anxieties and overcome them, eventually creating a more confident person and improving the language. These should be embedded within structured support and continuous feedback so that each student will have equal opportunity for meaningful engagement and thus reduce anxiety.

This study, therefore, points out the vast difference international exchange programs could make in reducing FLSA among EFL students. It became obvious from the statistical analysis of anxiety levels before and after participation in such programs that real-life exposure to foreign language environments does have a positive impact on students' ability to cope with their anxiety. As a result, both the Turkish and Spanish EGs showed a significant decrease in speaking anxiety after the exchange, drawing attention to the value of cultural immersion and interaction with natives in dissipating language-related anxieties.

Furthermore, though anxiety levels in the control groups did not show significant changes, the results from the EGs indicate that the structured exchange experiences offer good opportunities for language practice that increase confidence and fluency.

Again, this points out the importance of including such a program in the curriculum of EFL students in order to make the learning environment more stimulating and real. In another study, Lindsey (2005) concluded that students who participated in international exchange programs improved their language proficiency, while Llanes et al. (2016) concluded that doing the exchange program in a country where English is widely spoken has a greater impact on the development of oral skills in language learning. For example, they concluded that the language development of Spanish students who did their exchange program in a place where English is frequently spoken, such as Germany and the Netherlands, undeniably increased. In addition, McKay (2018) observed that while the skills such as listening, writing, reading and speaking of the students participating in the exchange program improved, students' self-esteem and motivation also visibly improved.

In the same vein, when the participants' FLSA was examined, Chen et al. (2022) reported that students participating in an online exchange program increased their speaking performance and decreased their anxiety levels. Based on this, because of this study, a significant decrease was recorded in the FLSA of both Spanish and Turkish student groups participating in the exchange program. In other words, we can say that because of this experimental study, the anxiety levels of the students participating in the exchange program decreased.

Implications

In summary, the findings of this study underline the need for a systematic exchange program approach that provides both instructional support and cultural preparation for the student. Programs should balance promoting student autonomy with offering guidance to ensure that students are able to make full use of their language immersion experiences. This holistic approach to support and guidance allows for intercultural adaptation as well as linguistic self-confidence, preparing students with the necessary skills to live successfully and undertake language learning activities across borders.

In this context, support and guidance systems can, in the process, minimize the level of ESL and thus create a suitable ground for deep, qualitatively sustainable language acquisition. The findings generated in this research underline the pivotal need for dedicated support for students participating in exchange programs to overcome anxiety barriers related to the challenges of language learning with both confidence and resilience at the same time.

Pedagogical Implications

Drawing on data-informed evidence, this dissertation contributes meaningfully to the field by providing fresh perspectives for researchers, curriculum designers in foreign language (FL) educators, and EFL students. Synthesizing the study's findings with current literature, the concluding remarks emphasize practical implications for EFL learners and both pre-service and in-service FL teachers. Given that this research was situated within the Turkish and Spanish context, it aims to offer targeted insights and practical recommendations applicable to the language-learning landscape.

Although research on reducing English-speaking anxiety (ESA) and supporting immersive language learning in exchange programs has gained traction, there remains a notable gap in applied research specifically within the Turkish and Spanish educational framework. This study addresses this gap by illustrating learner progress. In doing so, it seeks to advance understanding and inform practices that support language proficiency and intercultural adaptability in EFL contexts.

Implications for Pre-service EFL Education

The field of EFL is a holistic and dynamic process that incorporates both practical and theoretical education and should be responsive to global needs. In this dynamic integrative approach, language learning programs are a process that supports a natural and intuitive grasp of language learning that incorporates real-life dimensions, and even a

classroom instruction that takes a settled learning atmosphere one step further.

Obviously, the constructive role of the trainer who plays a leading role in this training process is of great importance and reinforcement of learning procedure is a major factor in the minimization of ESA. For this reason, creating learning modules that incorporate a student's self-reliability, self-confidence and production of language within the education program, supporting the creation of online tools and resources by following the innovations of the age are inspirational factors for learners, and the education community has a great share in this.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research could explore the long-term effects of such programs on language proficiency and speaking anxiety across different cultural contexts. This extension will help educators and policymakers contextualize international exchange programs to maximize their benefits for language learners.

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