

## Foreign language listening anxiety among Turkish EFL learners

**Rabia Borekci\***, Imam Hatip High School, 10100 Balikesir, Turkey.

**Fatih Yavuz**, Necatibey Egitim Fakultesi, Balikesir University, 10100 Balikesir, Turkey.

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### Abstract

Among the skills, listening has a remarkable effect on learning a foreign language, and it is a keystone for communication. Foreign language anxiety is an internal factor, which has several effects on learners' performance during the learning process. There are various types of FLA and listening anxiety is one of them. The aim of this research is to identify the level of foreign language listening anxiety among Turkish EFL learners' experience, and whether there is a significant difference between the school types and proficiency level. This research consists of 110 students from two different types of high school in the Turkish National Education System: vocational and public. Students were chosen randomly and the FLLA Scale was conducted; then the results were analysed with SPSS. According to the results, all these students experience FLLA and although their academic proficiency level is quite different, there is no difference between the school types.

Keywords : Listening, listening comprehension, FLA, FLLA.

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\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Rabia, Borekci**, Imam Hatip High School, 10100 Balikesir, Turkey  
E-mail address: [rabia\\_borekci@hotmail.com](mailto:rabia_borekci@hotmail.com) / Tel.: +90 505 877 59 32

## 1. Introduction

For decades, foreign language learning has become crucial for several reasons such as better education and job opportunities, preferable life standards and higher incomes. Learners are expected to be competent in many fields in language learning, and listening is one of these skills, as it is a core term in the language acquisition process (Asher, 1969; James, 1982). In EFL classes, listening is an inseparable part of learning because it is the active dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering and responding to the expressed verbal and non-verbal needs, concerns and information offered by other humans (Richards, 2008). Moreover, listening has a significant role in oral communication because learners are expected to be effective listeners from the very beginning of their learning process. The reason for this is that within most classroom settings, listening serves as a primary channel for learning (O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Furthermore, listening enhances comprehension (Vandergrift, 1999) and separates the process from previous experiences, interest in the topic, etc. (Nichols, 1955). The course books are enriched by listening activities (Ur, 1984) and more and more listening activities are added to books. Namely, it is believed that listening comes before speaking because exposing enough listening activity is necessary for improving necessary speaking ability (Yavuz, 2011). The role of listening has broadened dramatically and its exponential effects have been tried to be clarified deeply. Although some theoreticians assume that listening is acquired naturally during sessions (Vogely, 1999), others think the opposite. Listening skill was one of the skills that intermediate learners experienced difficulty (Graham, 2002) in; to comprehend what is heard is the keystone of communication. Otherwise, comprehension doesn't take place and it is a clear sign that there is a problem which prevents learners from understanding the ongoing context.

### 1.1. Foreign language listening anxiety

Although there is much research on speaking, reading and writing anxiety, listening is considered less popular compared with other skills, so studies are limited (Ko, 2010). Listening anxiety was first defined by Elkhafaifi (2005), as a situation in which learners feel fear and nervousness in a foreign language because they are expected to understand what is said to be a part of the learning process. The source of the anxiety is clarified when learners experience difficulty in listening comprehension, which causes listening anxiety and has a negative effect on their performance (Ko, 2010). To evaluate these adverse effects, Kim (2005) developed a scale to define the level of anxiety learners experience while listening.

## 2. Method

This research looks for the listening anxiety high school learner's experience, because FLLA may affect the whole language learning process adversely (Vogely, 1999). Course books contain many listening activities and comprehension is an effective way to be a part of the process. Moreover, in the Turkish National Education system, 9th grade students have started to have listening exams once or twice during the term. So listening anxiety that learners experience becomes crucial and the question this research is based on is whether there is a significant difference in FLLA among the students and also between the school types.

## 3. Research questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What level of FLLA do learners have?
2. Is there a significant difference in FLLA between school types: vocational and general?

### 3.1. Participants

Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale was conducted on 29th December 2014 at Anadolu Imam Hatip High School (AIHL) and Muharrem Hasbi Anatolian High School (MHAL). 110 students were chosen randomly, 75 boys and 35 girls and they were in four classes. Two classes were chosen from MHAL and the others were chosen from AIHL. Their backgrounds were almost the same; they had all graduated from primary school and they had been learning English since the 4th grade and the students are exposed to the same activities based on the same curriculum. They also learn another foreign language. The difference between the schools is their type, which means that students had different results from the general exam and, depending on their results, they were accepted from these schools. MHAL is the only Anatolian high school, whereas AIHL is also a vocational school. Before this scale is conducted, the listening comprehension activities were regularly applied based on curriculum and they had at least one listening exam.

### 3.2. Instrumentation

The Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale developed by Kim (2005) was administered to foreign language learners. The scale consists of 33 questions that ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Strongly disagree is accepted as one point and strongly agree is accepted as five points. The reliability of the scale is 0.93 (Kim, 2005). To provide better understanding the scale was translated into Turkish. The back translation technique was applied for FLLAS items. First, the researcher translated the scale into Turkish and then FLLAS items were translated back into English by another researcher. To sum up, the total score reflects the learners' responds to FLLA.

### 3.3. Procedure

The students were asked to complete the FLLAS. They were assured of anonymity and that participation in the study was voluntary. The aim of the research 'to gain an extensive understanding of FLLA' was explained to learners and it was used to provide better insight into the level of the listening anxiety learners' experienced and to perceive whether there is a significant difference between school types.

## 4. Data Analysis

Learners answered the questions in the FLLAS. The results were analysed with SPSS to obtain the mean, frequencies and standard deviations. To identify the difference between the groups, first, whether the total scores were normally distributed or not were checked and then independent samples *t*-test was applied.

## 5. Results

The Cronbach alpha of this questionnaire was 0.736. The sum score which consists of the total of the test scores and the total of test items is normal ( $P = 0.641$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). The variances of sum were homogeneous. The variance of test item scores and sum is also homogeneous. As a result of these normal distributions independent samples *t*-test was used.

1. What level of FLLA do learners have?

The mean of all the points' sum is 92 and the expected average score is 99. The results show the frequencies and percentages of learners' answers to the FLLAS questions. FLLAS items are on a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The possible scores on the FLLAS range from 33 to 165. The participants’ scores in this study ranged from 44 to 144. The learners mean FLLA level was 92.10 (sd = 19.28) and item 29 received the highest mean score.

2. Is there a significant difference in FLLA between school types: vocational and general?

According to the independent sample t-test results, there is no significant difference between the school types ( $p = 0.342$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), whereas the given answers of Q20, Q23, Q26, Q28 and Q29 show  $p > 0.05$  with a meaningful difference. Specifically, Q20, Q26, Q28 and Q29 show meaningful difference in favour of MHAL, while only Q23 shows a meaningful difference in favour of AIHL.

Table 1. FLLA independent sample t-test results based on school types

Question	School	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	P
Sum	MHAL	55	93.85	21.96	108	0.95	0.342
	AIHL	55	90.34	16.18			
Q20. I would rather not have to listen to people speak English at all	MHAL	55	3.65	1.19	108	2.72	0.008
	AIHL	55	2.98	1.39			
Q23. I get upset when I am not sure whether I understand what I am listening in English	MHAL	55	2.10	1.01	108	2.14	0.034
	AIHL	55	2.54	1.11			
Q26. I am nervous when listening to an English speaker on the phone or when imagining a situation where I listen to an English speaker on the phone	MHAL	55	3.63	1.25	108	2.05	0.042
	AIHL	55	3.09	1.51			
Q28. It is difficult for me to listen to English when there is even a little bit of background noise	MHAL	55	3.60	1.16	108	3.24	0.002
	AIHL	55	2.78	1.46			
Q29. Listening to new information in English makes me uneasy	MHAL	55	4.03	1.07	108	3.91	0.000
	AIHL	55	3.12	1.34			

**6. Conclusion and recommendations**

The aim of this research is to identify the level of foreign language listening anxiety that students experience and whether there is a significant difference between school types. Participants have almost the same backgrounds, they are all 9th grade students, have the same curriculum, English is their foreign language and in addition to English, they learn another foreign language. The difference between the school types and the level of proficiency don’t make any significant difference because learners have anxiety while listening in the target language. It is clarified that the difference in school types doesn’t make any significant difference and the results show that students experience FLLA during sessions.

Depending on the research results, some practical recommendations can be offered. First of all, further researchers could focus on the source of the anxiety that Turkish learner’s experience. Second, to deal with this type of anxiety, practicing a lot is suggested, however, further studies could concentrate on the strategies to deal with this type of anxiety. Third, the effects of gender, economical background and national differences could be searched and finally, correlation between listening anxiety among Turkish EFL learners and other types could be examined.

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