



## A study on English preparatory class students' assessment preferences and test anxieties

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### Abstract

This study aims to determine English preparatory class students' assessment preferences and test anxieties and whether there is a relationship between these two dependent variables or not. It also aims to see whether or not there is a significant difference between nationalities in terms of assessment preferences and test anxiety, and also to learn the reasons behind these differences if there are any. 147 university students who will study in English-medium departments at a private university participated in this study. In this study, a mixed method was adopted that integrated quantitative and qualitative data, which were collected through two inventories and one interview. The results present a report of students' assessment preferences and also reveal that there are significant differences regarding nationality. The results have also shown that there is a significant difference in Turkish and foreign students assessment type preferences, grading and reporting preferences, and general test taking anxieties.

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*Keywords:* Foreign language learning; assessment; assessment preferences; test anxiety

## 1. Introduction

In Turkey, English is taught as a required course starting from the primary school through university, even though the allocated time for English classes vary according to grade and school type. Therefore, how English is taught is an important matter of concern especially after the Ministry of Education, which followed the behaviorist approach at first, totally changed the teaching approach and adopted the constructivist approach to teaching in 2004, a new term started for English teaching as it did in other branches.

The constructivist approach mainly aims to promote active learners constructing their own knowledge and also to promote understanding students' individual differences (Huang, 2002). So, thanks to constructivism students started to take more active roles in the learning and assessment process. However, one side of the constructivist approach is ignored. Students, as individuals, do not seem to have much to say on how they want to be assessed. Although from primary to high school classes, the Ministry of Education has set some requirements for the assessment process that are in line with constructivism, such as the need to give projects to students or grade students' participation in the

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lessons in order to involve the students more, in the end the teachers are the ones who decide how they are going to assess the students; the students are not really a part of this process.

It is the same at the university level; a group of teachers come together and decide how students will be assessed. Since there are many students in preparatory classes it is not very easy for the students to take some roles in the assessment process. Even if it is difficult to learn each individual's preference, the fact that they, as individuals, have some test-taking preferences does not change and these preferences should be considered while preparing tests to increase their performance and decrease their test anxiety.

While there are a number of studies conducted on assessment preferences in the literature, there are only two studies in Turkey which focused on assessment preferences in an English teaching context. In her study, Doğan (2013) studied the factors that affect English Language Teaching Department students' assessment preferences, and in another study, Büyükkarcı (2010) researched the effect of formative assessment on learners' assessment preferences in English as a foreign language (EFL) context. The current study is carried out with students who learn English as a foreign language in preparatory classes. Since the study is done in a multicultural environment at an international university, unlike the other studies, it researches whether there is a significant difference between foreign students' and Turkish students' assessment preferences in an EFL context. Because of these different aspects of the research, it contributes to both Turkish and international literature.

In this study, what English preparatory class learners prefer for their own assessment are addressed in the light of research questions prepared by the researchers. The aim of this study is to determine the assessment preferences and test anxieties of Turkish and foreign English preparatory class students. This study also aims to find a relationship between foreign and Turkish language learners' assessment preferences. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are language learners' assessment preferences and test anxieties?
2. What is the relationship between language learners' assessment preferences and test anxieties?
3. Is there a significant difference in foreign and Turkish language learners' assessment preferences and test anxieties?
4. What are the underlying reasons for the difference (if any) in foreign and Turkish language learners' assessment preferences and test anxieties?

## **2. Related Research**

This study is mainly centered on two concepts; namely, "assessment preferences" and "test anxiety". Assessment preference is defined as the "imagined choice between alternatives in assessment and the possibility of the rank ordering of these alternatives" (Van de Watering, Gijbels, Dochy, & Van Der Rijt, 2008, p.647). For the other concept, test anxiety, Sarason (1986) says that it is beyond simply being an unpleasant experience for the affected person and, as Spielberger (1972) put forward, it plays a role in personal phenomenology and influences performance and personal development.

### *2.1. Assessment Preferences*

There have been many studies conducted in the related literature examining the different aspects of the assessment preferences of students. Most of the studies are related to the assessment type and item type preferences of learners, while some of them investigate the relationship between assessment

preferences and instruction and performance. There are also several studies focusing on variables such as motivation, student involvement, pre-assessment preparation, learning strategies and orientations.

In their studies with high school students and university undergraduates, Zeidner (1987) and Anderson (2001) found that multiple choice (MC) questions are preferred. Zeidner (1987) also reported that high school students want to be assessed by MC questions rather than open ended questions because students find them easier, less complicated, more understandable and more interesting. Students also think that these question types are fairer and less tricky. However, there was still a majority of participants who regarded essay-type exams as better assessment types in reflecting what they know about a subject when compared to multiple choice type exams.

In another study, carried out with 304 Sport Science undergraduate students in a School of Sport Sciences and Technology, Arslan (2013) indicated that students preferred some forms of alternative assessment, multiple choice format and performance-based tasks or skills depending on which course they were studying. There were also significant differences in terms of what students wanted to know about the details of the assessment process. According to the studies of Birenbaum and Feldman (1998), students generally prefer multiple choice formats, or simple and de-contextualized questions, over complex and authentic questions such as essay type assessments or constructed-response types of questions. Traub and McRury (1990), also found that students have more positive attitudes towards multiple choice tests in comparison to open ended tests because they think that these tests are easier to prepare for, easier to take, and bring in relatively higher scores.

There are several results for gender differences in assessment preferences. Beller and Gafni (2000) reported that while female students prefer essay formats, male students show a slight preference for multiple choice formats. The study results found by Gellman & Berkowitz (1993) were in line with the study mentioned above. When it comes to performance differences of the genders in different assessment types, Ben-Shakhar & Sinai (1991) found that male students perform better on MC questions than female students, and female students perform better than male students on open ended questions.

## 2.2. *Test Anxiety*

The term test anxiety refers to the set of physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses that accompany the concern about the possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation (Sieber, O'Neil, & Tobias, 1977; Zeidner, 1998). Huberty (2009) claims that 30% of adolescents experience test anxiety. The elements of anxiety include a subjective feeling state, behavioral response, and certain physiological responses (Zinbarg, Brown, Barlow & Rapee, 2001).

Test anxiety is a strong variable that leads to certain attitudes towards assessment format. Students with high test anxiety have more favorable attitudes towards multiple choice questions whilst those with low test anxiety tend to prefer open ended formats. In the study conducted with English learners, Salehi & Marefat (2014) found that both language anxiety and test anxiety affect language learning negatively. The study results also showed that language anxiety and test anxiety are related to each other. It means that the students with high language anxiety tend to have high test anxiety too and vice versa. They also found that foreign language anxiety and test anxiety have a negative effect on students' final exam grades, suggesting that language anxiety and test anxiety are strongly correlated. In the study carried out with students studying English as a second language, Teemant (1997) indicated that test anxiety is the strongest predictor of test performance when it is compared to students' language proficiency and assessment preferences.

Traub & McRury (1990) also showed that it is possible that some students prefer written assessment formats because they are used to it, but not because they are good at them. Their findings of the relationship between assessment type preferences and the resulting scores on the assessment formats

showed some significant differences. Interestingly, students who preferred written assessments obtained lower marks on the same kind of assessment. In written assessments, students preferred especially the multiple choice format since they think they reduce stress and test anxiety and are easy to prepare for and to take.

### 3. Method

This part presents information on the participants, data collection process, data collection tools and data analysis used in this study.

#### 3.1. Sample / Participants

The study was conducted with 147 English preparatory class students at a private university in Turkey. The demographic information for the independent variables of the study is given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the Participants' Gender and Nationality

	Nationality		Total
	Turkish	Foreign	
Male	56	26	82
Female	52	13	65
Total	108	39	147

It can be observed in Table 1 that 82 males and 65 females participated in the study. 108 of the participants are Turkish while 39 of them are foreign. The age of the group ranges from 18 to 22. While Turkish students are from different parts of the country, foreign students are mainly from African and Asian countries. Students' departments of study range from social sciences to physical sciences. When these students arrived at the university, their English levels were identified as A2 or B1 according to the Cambridge Placement Test, which shows that the students had some experience with the English learning process beforehand.

#### 3.2. Data collection procedures

In this study, a mixed method integrating quantitative and qualitative data was used in order to reach more reliable results. With this method, the goal is to get results that support each other and the method also allows for analyzing the data and enlightening the problem in a more comprehensive way (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

The quantitative data were collected in November and December of 2014 from English preparatory class students studying at Antalya International University during their lesson periods with the necessary permission given by the administration and the teachers. The researcher went to most of the classes herself and explained the aim of the study to the students and instructed them about how to complete the survey. At other times, the instructor of the class was informed about the details of the study and was requested to take the responsibility for administering the questionnaire to the students. The students were given the Assessment Preferences Inventory API (Birenbaum,1994), and the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) (Büyükkarcı, 2010).

Firstly, a pilot study with 22 students was carried out. These students were given Turkish versions of the Assessment Preference Inventory (Gülbahar and Büyüköztürk, 2008), which includes 80 items and TAI. Then, seven items were excluded to make the Turkish and English versions of the inventory parallel for the analysis. There were no changes to the TAI. These tools are explained in detail under the data collection tools title.

The qualitative data were collected via semi-structured surveys with 15 students who volunteered to help. These students were chosen among the ones who already filled out the questionnaire. The semi-structured interview was chosen among the other interview types; namely, structured, unstructured and semi-structured because it perfectly fits the aim of the study. While it allows the researcher to design the questions according to the framework of the study, it also provides the students with some flexibility in their answers (Nunan, 1992). The fifteen-minute interviews were done at about the same time the quantitative data were collected, as a concurrent design requires.

### 3.3. Instruments

The quantitative data were collected by two questionnaires; namely, the API and the TAI. To obtain the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was carried out with the students.

#### 3.3.1. Assessment Preferences Inventory (API)

The API, developed by Birenbaum (1994) and adapted to Turkish by Gülbahar and Büyüköztürk (2008), was used in this study to discover the assessment preferences of the students. While foreign students used English versions, Turkish students were given the Turkish version of the inventory. The API is a five-point Likert scale consisting of three main dimensions: assessment-form related dimensions, examinee's related dimensions and grading and reporting. As stated in the Table 2 below, two dimensions of the inventory are focused on in this article.

**Table 2.** Dimensions of the API

<b>I.</b>	<b>Assessment- form Related Dimensions</b>
<b>1.</b>	Assessment Types (15 items)
<b>a.</b>	Classical Assessment
<b>b.</b>	Alternative Assessment
<b>II.</b>	<b>Grading and Reporting</b> (14 items)

While analyzing the results, the maximum point of preference is calculated for each sub-category by multiplying all the items of that category with 5 since it is a 5-point scale inventory. For example, “pre-assessment and preparation” has four items and it can get 20 for its maximum value. The Turkish version of the study (Gülbahar and Büyüköztürk, 2008) consisted of 80 items and was used in the pilot study, which was carried out with the participation of 22 students. The data were entered into the statistic program IBM SPSS 20 and the reliability check showed that they have a good level of reliability with Cronbach's Alpha .74. After the pilot study, the items were reduced to 73 by excluding 7 of the original items, and the main study was carried out. In the main study, the Cronbach's Alpha was .88, which shows a high level of reliability.

### 3.3.2. Test Anxiety Inventory

The TAI by Büyükkarcı (2010) is used to collect data about students' test anxiety levels. The TAI is a 2-point scale inventory consisting of 50 statements which the participant decides whether or not they are "true" or "false" for them. It is also a multidimensional inventory consisting of several subsections; namely, "how others will view you if you do poorly" (8 items), "your own self-image" (7 items), "your future security" (6 items), "not being prepared for the test" (6 items), "bodily reactions" (7 items), "thought disruptions" (10 items) and "general test taking anxiety" (6 items).

**Table 3.** Examples of TAI Items referring to main sources and expressions of test anxiety

Item No	Item	Dimensions of the Inventory Main Sources of Anxiety
3	<i>People (family, friends, etc.) are counting on me to do well.</i>	Concerns about how others will view you if you do poorly
2	<i>Getting a good score on one test does not seem to increase my confidence on other tests.</i>	Concerns about your own self
1	<i>I wish there were some way to succeed without taking tests.</i>	Concerns about your future security
6	<i>I have always dreaded courses in which the teacher has the habit of giving pop quizzes.</i>	Concerns about not being prepared for a test
Item No	Item	Expressions of Test Anxiety
5	<i>I do not enjoy eating before or after an important test.</i>	Bodily Reactions
4	<i>During a test, I sometimes find myself having trains of thought that have nothing to do with the test.</i>	Thought Disruptions
7	<i>It seems to me that test sessions should not be made the formal, tense situations as they are.</i>	General test-taking anxiety

With the help of these items, the reasons behind the students' test anxiety, if they have any, can be discovered, as well as how they react if they get nervous. While analyzing the results, the maximum point of test anxiety is calculated for each sub-category by multiplying all the items of that category with 2 since it is a 2-point scale inventory. For example, "general test-taking anxiety" has 6 items and it can get 12 for its maximum value.

### 3.3.3. Semi-structured Interview

Dörnyei (2007) classifies interviews into four types, namely; single or multiple sessions, structured interview, unstructured interview and semi-structured interview. In this study, the semi-structured interview was preferred because it provides the researcher with flexibility (Nunan, 1992) by allowing the researcher to both follow a path and ask questions which have deeper answers rather than ready-made choices.

In this paper, the researcher wrote questions in Turkish and English following the structure of the API to elicit answers regarding dimensions of the API. After receiving confirmation on the appropriateness of the questions and their translations from two language experts, the questions were used in the study. The interview questions were piloted with one Turkish and foreign student to check the understandability of the questions and after necessary changes were made, the semi-structured interview was completed with 15 English language preparatory class students, 5 of whom are foreign

and 10 of whom are Turkish. These students were chosen among those who had already completed the API and TAI and they were all chosen on a voluntary basis.

During this process, firstly an appointment was arranged with the voluntary students. Students were asked interview questions and according to their answers extra questions were asked when necessary to get deeper answers. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant. It took fifteen minutes to interview each participant. After the interviews were carried out, each participant's recording was transcribed by the researcher to get them ready for content analysis.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative results were analyzed using the statistics program IBM SPSS 20. In order to clearly see the number of participants, crosstabs were used. To get results related to the research questions, the means were calculated and an Independent Samples T-Test was used. The means were used to see what the average for each item in the API and the Independent Samples T-Test was used to find out whether or not there is a significant difference according to gender and nationality since there are two groups. The qualitative results were analyzed with content analysis and the results were gathered under the titles in parallel with the main heading of the quantitative part: "Classical Assessment Types vs Alternative Assessment Types", "Simple Item Types vs Complex Item Types", "Cognitive Process", "Pre-assessment preparation", "Preferences of students' responsibilities", "Grading and reporting", "Test Anxiety".

## 4. Results

The quantitative and qualitative results of the study are given in this section. Firstly, the quantitative results are presented with the tables and explanations and then the qualitative results are given with the students' extracts.

### 4.1. Quantitative results of preparatory class students' assessment preferences

This part presents the quantitative data of participants' assessment preferences and test anxieties of the whole group, according to gender and nationality.

#### 4.1.1. Participants' preferences of classical assessment and alternative assessment types

In this part, the participants' preferences of classical assessment and alternative assessment types are presented in tables and analyzed. After presenting the level of the whole group's preference for assessment types, all the items under both assessment types occurring in the survey are presented with their means ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviations (SD).

**Table 4.** Means for classical assessment and alternative assessment types preferences

Assessment Types	N(147)	$\bar{x}$	SD	min	max
Classical Assessment		21.46	4.32	7	35
Alternative Assessment		25.63	6.27	8	40

According to Table 4, means for both categories demonstrate that preparatory class students prefer alternative assessment types slightly more than classical assessment types ( $\bar{x} = 21.46$ ,  $\bar{x} = 25.63$ ).

**Table 5.** Means for items referring to classical assessment

Items for Classical Assessment		$\bar{x}$	SD
CA1	Written tests with supporting materials (notes, books)	3.22	1.22
CA2	Written tests with supporting materials, with a time limit	3.12	1.24
CA3	Written tests with supporting materials, without a time limit	3.19	1.29
CA4	Written tests without supporting materials, without a time limit	2.78	1.32
CA5	Individual oral tests (speaking tests), without supporting materials	2.95	1.37
CA6	Individual oral tests wherein the questions are given half an hour before the test, without supporting materials	2.87	1.37
CA7	Individual oral tests wherein the questions are given half an hour before the test, and answers can be prepared with supporting materials	3.31	1.41

In Table 5 above, the means ( $\bar{x}$ ) for the items of classical assessment are given. When the means of first four items ( $\bar{x} = 3.22$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.19$ ,  $\bar{x} = 2.78$ ) are examined, it can be seen that students prefer to be assessed using supporting materials in a written test at a medium level. In speaking tests, it can be said that they would rather be given the questions half an hour before the test and prepare the answers with supporting materials ( $\bar{x} = 2.87$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ). It appears that they are not so eager to take exams in general ( $\bar{x} = 2.78$ ,  $\bar{x} = 2.95$ ,  $\bar{x} = 2.87$ ), since the means are around 3 or even below three in three of the items.

**Table 6.** Means for items referring to alternative assessment

Items for Alternative Assessment		$\bar{x}$	SD
AA8	Oral tests, in the form of a group discussion where the teacher observes and assesses the contribution of each of the participants	3.36	1.29
AA9	Take-home exams	3.08	1.43
AA10	Papers/reports	3.17	1.26
AA11	Portfolio (your collected work, finished and in progress)	3.01	1.32
AA12	Individual presentations (with the help of posters, slides etc.)	3.31	1.38
AA13	Group presentations (with the help of posters, slides etc.)	3.28	1.29
AA14	Projects	3.24	1.30
AA15	Computerized tests	3.14	1.36

Table 6 shows means ( $\bar{x}$ ) for the items of alternative assessment. Participants prefer all alternative assessment types more or less at the same level. Oral tests in the form of a group discussion ( $\bar{x} = 3.36$ ), presentations ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.28$ ), and projects have higher means. When the means are compared to the means in classical assessment types ( $\bar{x} = 3.22$ , 3.12, 3.19, 2.78, 2.95, 2.87, 3.31), it can be seen that alternative assessment types are preferred at a slightly higher level level ( $\bar{x} = 3.36$ , 3.08, 3.17, 3.01, 3.31, 3.28, 3.24, 3.14), since none of the means are below 3.

## 4.1.2. Participants' preferences for grading and reporting

In this section, means ( $\bar{x}$ ) for items referring to grading and reporting are given and analyzed according to the results.

**Table 7.** Means for items referring to grading and reporting

Items for Grading and Reporting			
	<i>To what extent would you like your teacher to ...</i>	$\bar{x}$	SD
GR60	refer in his/her assessment not only to the final product but also the process.	3.92	1.02
GR61	assess your participation in the class discussions as part of the grade.	3.76	1.2
GR62	assess the homework and exercises as part of the grade.	3.51	1.44
GR63	publish statistical data on each of the exam questions at the end of the course.	3.38	1.3
GR64	Use a rubric while grading.	3.38	1.31
<i>To what extent would you want</i>			
GR65	there to be several quizzes throughout the semester.	4.01	1.11
GR66	your achievements to be assessed by a variety of tasks of different types .	3.95	1.02
GR67	your papers to be assessed according to detailed and well-defined standards.	3.9	1.02
GR68	your papers to be read by two teachers and your mark to be an average of their assessment.	3.78	1.21
GR69	your grade to be given depending on your individual progress on the course.	3.72	1.16
GR70	your grade to be given depending on the grades of the other participants in the course.	2.74	1.49
GR71	your grade to exactly reflect your mastery of the subject matter.	3.71	1.18
GR72	to receive a profile of your achievements on the different topics studied in the course, and not only one total point.	4.15	.98
GR73	to receive a detailed feedback of a test written by you.	4.29	.9

Table 7 shows that participants prefer to have their effort during the teaching process to also be assessed ( $\bar{x} = 3.92, 3.76, 3.51$ ). Students also prefer to be assessed with different assessment types ( $\bar{x} = 4.01, 3.95, 4.15$ ) and well-defined standards ( $\bar{x} = 3.38, 3.90$ ) by two teachers ( $\bar{x} = 3.78$ ). They want their grade to exactly reflect their mastery of the subject ( $\bar{x} = 3.71$ ) and to be given depending on their individual progress ( $\bar{x} = 3.72$ ), not depending on other students' grades ( $\bar{x} = 2.74$ ). The participants highly want to receive detailed feedback on their paper after the exam ( $\bar{x} = 4.29$ ).

**Table 8.** T-test results for classical assessment types preferences according to nationality

Nationality	N	X	SD	df	t	p
Turkish	108	21.55	4.26	145	.401	.689
Foreign	39	21.23	4.53			

There is no significant difference ( $p = .689$ ) in participants' classical assessment preferences according to nationality ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Both Turkish and foreign students seem to prefer classical assessment methods at a medium level since their means( $\bar{x}$ ) are right between the lowest score (7) and the highest score (35) (Table 8).

**Table 9.** T-test results for alternative assessment types preferences according to nationality

Nationality	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	p
Turkish	108	24.80	6.32	145	-2.743	.007
Foreign	39	27.94	5.57			

There is a statistically significant difference ( $p=.007$ ) in participants' alternative assessment preferences according to nationality ( $p\leq 0.05$ ). When the means ( $\bar{x}$ ) are compared, it can be seen that foreign students seem to prefer alternative assessment methods more than Turkish students (Table 9).

**Table 10.** T-test results for preferences of test taking, grading and reporting phases according to nationality

Nationality	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	p
Turkish	108	53.07	7.53	145	2.188	.030
Foreign	39	49.92	8.18			

There is a statistically significant difference ( $p = .030$ ) in participants' preferences of test taking, grading and reporting phases according to nationality ( $p\leq 0.05$ ). Turkish students have a higher level of preferences related to test taking, grading and reporting phases than foreign students while both nationality groups seem to have a high level of preferences for test taking, grading and reporting phases since their means( $\bar{x}$ ) are closer to the highest score(70) than the lowest score (14) (Table 10).

#### 4.2. Preparatory class students' Test Anxiety Levels

This section gives the means ( $\bar{x}$ ) for the test anxiety level of the whole group, main sources of test anxiety for the whole group and expressions of test anxiety of the whole group, as well as an interpretation of the related data.

**Table 11.** Test anxiety level of whole group

	N(147)	$\bar{x}$	SD	min	max
Test Anxiety		79.34	9.54	50	100

As can be seen in the Table 11 above, this group's test anxiety level is relatively high ( $\bar{x} = 79.34$ ).

**Table 12.** Main sources of test anxiety of whole group

Main Sources of Test Anxiety	N(147)	$\bar{x}$	SD	min	max
Concerns about how others will view you if you do poorly		13.03	1.66	8	16
Concerns about your own self		11.12	1.91	7	14
Concerns about your future security		9.25	1.53	6	12
Concerns about not being prepared for a test		9.74	1.65	6	12

When the means in Table 12 are analyzed, it can be seen that the participants have concerns about future security ( $\bar{x} = 9.25$ ) at a medium level while they have more concerns about how others will view them if they do poorly ( $\bar{x} = 13.03$ ), their own self-image ( $\bar{x} = 11.12$ ) and not being prepared for a test ( $\bar{x} = 9.74$ ).

**Table 13.** T-test results for participants' expressions of test anxiety according to nationality

<i>Expressions of Test Anxiety</i>	Nationality	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	p
<i>Bodily reactions</i>	Turkish	108	11.75	1.97	145	-.834	.406
	Foreign	39	12.05	1.82			
<i>Thought disruptions</i>	Turkish	108	15.46	2.58	145	.426	.671
	Foreign	39	15.25	2.62			
<i>General test-taking anxiety</i>	Turkish	108	8.81	1.68	145	-2.456	.015
	Foreign	39	9.58	1.69			

According to Table 13, there is no significant difference ( $p=.406$ ,  $p=.671$ ) in participants' expressions of test anxiety under the bodily reactions and thought disruptions dimensions according to nationality ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). When looking at the means ( $\bar{x}$ ), it can be seen that both nationalities show bodily reactions ( $\bar{x} = 11.75$ ,  $12.05$ ) at a high level while their thought disruptions ( $\bar{x} = 15.46$ ,  $15.25$ ) are at a medium level. However, there is a significant difference ( $p=.015$ ) in the general test-taking anxiety dimension according to nationality. Although both nationality groups have general test-taking anxiety ( $\bar{x} = 8.81$ ,  $9.58$ ) at a low level, Turkish students seem to have less general test-taking anxiety than foreign students.

### 4.3. Qualitative Results

In this section, interview results which were analyzed with content analysis are reported. Participants were asked questions about their assessment types and test anxiety, so the results are two-folded. Therefore, results are given in two sections.

#### 4.3.1. Assessment Preferences

To find out which assessment types preparatory class students prefer, they were asked the following question: "What kind of assessment types would you prefer to be used in the assessment of your achievement? Written, oral, group work, presentation, homework, etc.?" Their answers show that they think that if there is to be an exam, at least it should provide a holistic assessment of a student; it should not be assessing one aspect of learning at a time:

FS13: A combination of something like exams, tests like writing tests, presentations, group involvement, participation, and the most important thing, your attendance and how much you concentrate in your classes.

TS5: Personally, I prefer presentations and homework. You get ready for them and try to do your best. Therefore, the results are better. Classical ones should be there, too but need to be supported by these.

TS6: I think it cannot be dependent on only one thing. But, I generally like group work more, because you gather with your friends and work together. It should not be only group work, though.

In spite of the fact that they are not so eager to be formally assessed in general, it has been found that participants prefer alternative assessment slightly more than classical assessment types if they need to choose. When interview results are analyzed, it has been observed that most of the students prefer to be assessed by alternative assessment and accordingly named at least one of the items of alternative

assessment; mostly group work, presentations and homework. In accordance with the quantitative results, female and male participants' answers on the question were mostly parallel. However, there was an obvious difference between foreign and Turkish students' answers. In line with the quantitative results, almost all foreign students claimed that they prefer to be tested by alternative assessment and did not refer to any items of classical assessment types, while most of the Turkish students preferred a combination of classical and alternative assessment types. A few Turkish students claimed that they prefer only classical assessment types.

Qualitative results also showed that there is a significant difference in assessment type preferences according to nationality. Obviously, foreign students are more eager to be assessed by alternative assessment types. When interview results are analyzed, it can be seen that this is mainly because they are used to these kinds of assessment. The majority said they especially gave presentations during high school in their own countries, when they explain their assessment system:

FS13: ... practical labs, presentations, plus the major part is class participation.

FS14: Speaking is tested in the presentation and what happened in the class.

However, it is interesting that many of the participants did not refer to alternative assessment while answering these three questions, especially Turkish students. It may be because students are so used to taking classical assessment types that they immediately associated anxiety with classical assessment and gave the answers accordingly when they were asked about their anxiety. When the participants' answered the question "Do you think that anxiety has an effect on your success?", they mostly implied that classical types do, saying that "when I take the exam", "with the time limit", "during the exam", "in the speaking exam". As it can be seen, test anxiety is closely associated with classical assessment types in students' minds. But when they are given options to choose they are more eager to choose alternative assessment as it is seen in the results of the API survey.

To learn what students prefer for grading and reporting, the question asked is as follows: "What kind of details do you want to learn after an exam?" Their answers show that students generally prefer that their effort and participation during the teaching process also be assessed. They also prefer to be assessed with different assessment types and their papers to be assessed according to detailed and well-defined standards. However, when the answers to that question are analyzed, it can be seen that the point each student talked about without exception is receiving detailed feedback on their paper after the exam:

TS8: I want to look at my paper in detail. Where did I make mistakes? I want to know what I did well and what was bad.

F15: The grade is not important for me, but I want to see my paper to learn from my mistakes and not to make them again.

TS2: I would like to see my paper, especially my mistakes, to do better in other exams.

As it can be clearly seen, students give great importance to learning from their mistakes and not repeating them.

#### *4.3.2. Test Anxiety*

Participants were asked three main questions to elicit the data related to test anxiety. The first question was asked with the purpose of learning their general idea about the assessment process. The question is as follows: What comes to your mind when I say assessment? Most of them associated assessment with tests and tests with anxiety, but in spite of this fact, the majority thinks that assessment is necessary in the teaching process. These are some sentences from student interviews supporting the above fact:

FS12: "...Sometimes many students are under pressure and stress and can't think properly..." "... but it is the most conventional way to check the students' success right now. There is not any assignment that can check the students like a test right now..."

TS4: "...I generally get nervous..." "We have to love them because they are necessary to grade performances..."

TS3: "To me, exams are really necessary. Without exams, students will have no aim, nothing to study." "...I get anxious especially when I know the answer..."

Secondly, the question of "What makes you nervous before exams and assignments?" was asked to learn what their sources of test anxiety are. In line with quantitative results, while they were talking about what makes them nervous they mainly referred to their concerns about their own self-image and then how others will view them if they do poorly. After that comes not being prepared for a test and the last and least mentioned is concerns for future security.

TS3: "... I am afraid that I cannot succeed..."

TS4: "... It is the fear of not being successful..."

TS9: "... Am I gonna pass, or not?" "...I think of the expectations of my family..."

FS14: "If you repeat the same thing (preparatory class), no, I cannot accept that..." "...and family, I don't want to be the stupid one in the family. All my brothers are doctors..."

Finally, the participants were asked the question: "How do you react psychologically and physically when you get anxious before or during an exam? While most of them said they show bodily reactions, almost half of them said that they suffered from thought disruptions and general test taking anxiety.

TS1: "...I sweat a lot. I remember that I wetted my exam paper..."

TS10: "...I shake, especially my hands and legs..."

FS13: "...I go to the bathroom too much..." "... I cannot think properly, sometimes I forget what I know..."

Among expressions of test anxiety, bodily reactions such as sweating and shaking are more common than thought disruptions and general test taking anxiety.

## 5. Discussion

As clearly stated in the introduction part of the study, five research questions are discussed in the light of the quantitative and qualitative results.

**Research Question 1:** *What are language learners' assessment preferences and test anxieties?*

The data collected by three means shows that students accept the fact that assessment is necessary, but they are not so willing to be included in exams. They prefer to be assessed with a more holistic method, not only with one exam or at one time. However, if there has to be an exam, students prefer alternative assessment types, mostly group work, presentations and homework, slightly more than classical assessment types. This is mainly because classical assessment types cause stress and a tense atmosphere, while they find alternative assessment types more helpful and relaxing. Related to that, in the quantitative part of the study one of the important results in their preference of classical assessment is that students prefer exam types without a time limit but with supporting materials. In the study by Ben-Chaim and Zoller (1997), they also report that students prefer written, unlimited time examinations and those in which the use of supporting material is permitted. Time limits are seen to be stressful and to result in pressure. In this study participants expressed that they find answering questions in a limited

time stressful, too. This may be one of the other reasons why they prefer alternative assessment types more. Students also want their participation, attendance and interest to be a part of their assessment.

In practice, it may be recommended to teachers to keep classical assessment types while assessing the students, but also to include alternative assessment types, mainly group work, presentations and homework if they want to decrease students' anxiety level. Teachers should be reminded that classical assessment types with a time limit are the main causes of student anxiety, while alternative assessment types could play an important role in decreasing student anxiety. According to the results, it may also be advised that teachers take into consideration participation, attendance and interest as a part of their assessment.

In both the qualitative and quantitative sections of the study, participants generally claimed that not only do they prefer that their effort and participation during the teaching process be assessed, but also that they prefer to be assessed with different assessment types and that their papers be assessed according to detailed and well-defined standards. However, when the answers to that question are analyzed, it can be seen that the point each student talked about without exception is receiving detailed feedback on their paper after the exam. Students give the highest importance to this so that they can learn from their mistakes and not repeat them again. Gibbs & Simpson (2004) also emphasized the importance of feedback, saying that students should be supported by feedback so that they can build on their mistakes and improve their learning process.

As can be seen, students state that they want to know the details about the grading process. Therefore, if it is a subjective exam, teachers can share the rubric that they will use to grade the student. If it is objective, the teacher can show the answer key to them after the exam so that students know on what teachers are basing their grades. Students also say that their effort should be a part of their grade. To meet that wish, a simple rubric can be prepared by the teacher and students' participation can be graded accordingly and given a percentage out of the total grade. However, the most important thing here is to show students' their exam papers afterwards, focusing on the mistakes. Seeing their mistakes teaches students and makes them feel relaxed.

When the subject is test anxiety, the data show that participants have a high level of anxiety, but in spite of this fact the majority thinks that assessment is necessary in the teaching process. It has also been found that the sources of their test anxiety are their concerns about their own self-image and then others' view when they do poorly. After that, the next source of anxiety is not being prepared for a test and the last and least mentioned is concerns for future security. Finally, the results clearly showed that most students have bodily reactions and almost half of them said that they experience thought disruptions and general test taking anxiety.

**Research Question 2:** *What is the relationship between language learners' assessment preferences and test anxieties?*

Although students admit that assessment is necessary in the teaching process, they have high levels of test anxiety in general before or during exams. Therefore, while preparing or administering tests, test anxiety should not be ignored if teachers are hoping to see students' actual performance. The study by Birenbaum and Feldman (1998) also shows that test anxiety has an effect on students' assessment preferences and indirectly on their performance. Thus, test anxiety is an inseparable component of the assessment process and reducing it to a certain extent will help to eliminate the barrier in front of preparatory class students' success.

As the source of their anxiety, students mainly pointed to their own self-image and others' view about their success. After that, the next source is not being prepared for a test and the least mentioned is concerns for future security. As it is suggested in the study by Büyükkarcı (2010), the reasons for future security being the least mentioned source of test anxiety may be the fact that these students might not

see the tests at a preparatory school for a university as threatening because they are not life changing exams. Or, as it is mentioned earlier, most of these students come from families that have a good financial situation. That may be another reason these students do not have concerns for future security.

When it comes to showing test anxiety, students mostly referred to bodily reactions. Sweating and shaking were frequently mentioned by the participants and half of them talked about thought disruptions and general test anxiety. Results also showed that although students are not so eager to take tests, they find alternative assessment types more attractive and they think that classical assessment types cause anxiety. They especially dislike classical assessment types with a time limit and without supporting materials. This may be one of the reasons why they go for alternative assessment types because alternative assessment types such as homework, group work, presentations, etc., give them preparation time and are open to the use of extra resources.

Quantitative results also showed that they want to see their grades and papers because they generally think that if they can see their mistakes, they will not repeat them and get better scores. This again will make them feel better before upcoming exams.

**Research Question 3:** *Is there a significant difference in foreign and Turkish English preparatory students' assessment preferences and test anxieties?*

There is a significant difference between foreign and Turkish students in general test anxiety, assessment types and grading and reporting preferences. Both quantitative and qualitative results show that there is a significant difference in the general test-taking anxiety dimension according to nationality. Although both nationality groups have general test-taking anxiety at a low level, Turkish students seem to have less general test-taking anxiety than foreign students. Since students accept that tests are necessary, it is normal that they have low general test taking anxiety. The reason why Turkish students have a lower anxiety level in this dimension may be because of the fact that they are more used to the system than foreign students, since foreign students mentioned the difference in assessment systems between Turkey and their own countries.

Quantitative results also showed that there is a significant difference in assessment type preferences according to nationality. Obviously, foreign students are more eager to be assessed by alternative assessment types and when the interview results are analyzed it can be seen that this is mainly because they are used to this kind of assessment. When they explain their assessment system, the majority said they especially had presentations during high school in their own countries. If it is a multicultural class, teachers should keep in mind that foreign students want to be assessed by alternative assessment types more than Turkish students. In parallel with this, in a study conducted with Chinese, Indian and European postgraduate students, it was found that students from all ethnic groups participating in the study mostly prefer group assignments and oral presentations are preferred to exams (Selvarajah, Pio & Meyer, 2006).

The other difference according to nationality is in participants' preferences for test taking, grading and reporting phases. Turkish students have higher levels of preference related to grading and reporting phases than foreign students, while both nationality groups seem to have a high level of preference for the grading and reporting phases according to API results. However, when participants were asked about how learning the details after an exam affects their test anxiety, their answers were mostly positive. They generally think that since they can see their mistakes, they will not repeat them and will therefore get better scores. However, there were also some foreign students who think that the effect depends on your grade. They say that if their grade is not satisfying, that can have a negative impact on their performance next time.

**Research Question 4:** *What are the underlying reasons for the difference (if any) in foreign and Turkish English preparatory students' assessment preferences and test anxieties?*

The cause of the differences in assessment preferences between Turkish and foreign students is thought to mainly result from not being used to the system in Turkey and having some different practices in their own country. This conclusion especially stands out in the difference in assessment type preferences. Quantitative results showed that foreign students prefer alternative assessment types more, and qualitative results also supported this fact, explaining that they had more alternative assessment types such as presentations and group work in their education system back in their country. Also the difference in their general test-taking anxiety fosters this conclusion. Since foreign students are not used to the system in Turkey, it is normal that they may have more general test-taking anxiety when compared to Turkish students, who have been in the Turkish education system for years. When teaching multicultural classes, it is highly important for teachers to remember that foreign students come from other countries and need time and guidance to adjust to the system.

## **6. Conclusions**

It is well-known to institutions and teachers that individual differences play a significant role in the teaching and learning process. In these circumstances, it would be unrealistic to expect that it would be different for the assessment process, which is an inseparable component of teaching. If every student is individually different, it is natural that they have different expectations, thoughts and feelings about assessment. Therefore, this study, carried out with English preparatory class students at the university level, is aimed at finding their assessment preferences and test anxieties and whether there is a relationship between these two or not. It is also aimed at determining whether or not there is a significant difference between genders and nationalities in terms of assessment preferences and test anxiety, and to learn the reasons behind these differences, if there are any. To fulfill these aims, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the participants. In light of the data found, the following conclusions were reached.

When looking at what English preparatory class students prefer for their assessment, it has been found that participants prefer alternative assessment types, especially group work, presentations and homework, to classical assessment types since they think that alternative assessment types cause less anxiety. For the same reason, exams without a time limit are favored among the students.

Another important finding is that students strongly desire to see their paper after they take an exam to learn from their mistakes and to not repeat them later. They also want to know some details about how grading is carried out by teachers. They demand that grading be done based on well-defined criteria.

The data demonstrated that there is also a strong relationship between English preparatory class students' assessment preferences and test anxieties. When students gave reasons for their assessment preferences, they mostly referred to test anxiety. The results showed that mainly how other people will view them and their fear of damaging their self-image cause their anxiety more than their concern for future security. Students also said that test anxiety, caused by different reasons, is mainly expressed by bodily reactions such as sweating and shaking and thought disruptions.

As for the difference between foreign and Turkish students' assessment preferences and test anxieties, three different aspects of the present study could be referred to: general test anxiety, assessment type and grading and reporting preferences. Firstly, Turkish participants are found to have less general test-taking anxiety when compared to foreign students, most probably due to the fact that they are more used to the assessment system in Turkey. This clearly shows the importance of familiarizing students with the assessment process and question types. Secondly, the other difference

between the nationalities shows that Turkish students have higher grading and reporting preferences than foreign students. The third and last difference between Turkish and foreign students is their assessment type preferences. It has been found that foreign students prefer alternative assessment types more than Turkish students.

These differences are mainly caused by the fact that student groups from different nationalities have different education and assessment systems in their own countries. Thus, being welcomed by a good teaching and assessment system orientation is highly significant for the foreign students enrolled in a school.

In parallel with some other studies in literature (Birenbaum, 1997; Salehi & Marefat, 2014), this study asks teachers to be aware that individuals and different groups made up of individuals may have different assessment preferences and test anxieties, which require investigating. This study also suggests that students' assessment preferences and test anxieties are highly related and they prefer assessment types that reduce their stress and anxiety, which may increase their performance. That's why it is important to adapt the assessment to the examinee's affect to reliably interpret their scores in a test.

To reach more anxiety-free assessment scores, students may be asked to choose their own preferred assessment type among a variety. Because of the facts presented above, it is highly suggested that students' assessment type, question type, test-taking, grading and reporting preferences be integrated into the teaching process in order to reduce students' test anxiety and to give students the chance to perform better and to limit the effect of anxiety.

## **7. Limitations**

This study is limited to 147 English preparatory students from different language levels at Antalya International University in Turkey, where there are almost 600 students.

This study is also limited to foreign students who are from only Asian and African countries, so multicultural aspect of this study is limited to those countries and the term "foreign" in this study will refer to only African and Asian countries.

Another limitation is that while Turkish students had a chance to complete the inventories in their mother tongue, foreign students completed it in English, which didn't offer them equal conditions while collecting data. The reason for this is Turkish students' high language anxiety and low confidence in their language competence, while foreign students are fine with such concerns.

## **8. Recommendations**

As mentioned above, this study provides information about English preparatory school students' assessment preferences and test anxieties with the help of both an inventory and interview. To support the data found in the study, some experimental study is needed to observe that what students think really affect their test performance or not. Also, this study would have given a broader picture if more English preparatory class students could have participated or if students from other universities could have been involved. Therefore, similar studies at different English preparatory classes of universities could contribute to the results of this study.

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## İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarındaki Türk ve yabancı öğrencilerin değerlendirme tercihleri ve sınav kaygıları

### Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce hazırlık sınıfındaki öğrencilerin değerlendirme tercihlerini ve test kaygılarını araştırmak ve bu iki bağımlı değişken arasında bir ilişki olup olmadığını incelemektir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin değerlendirme tercihlerinde ve test kaygılarında cinsiyet ve ülke bakımından anlamlı bir fark olup olmadığını bulmak ve eğer fark varsa bu farkın nedenlerini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Bu çalışmaya eğitimlerini İngilizce olarak tamamlayacak olan 147 tane üniversite öğrencisi katılmıştır. Çok kültürlü niteliğiyle birlikte, değerlendirme tercihleriyle ilgili yabancı dil eğitimi bağlamında Türk alanyazınında çok fazla çalışma olmadığı için alana katkı sağlayacaktır. Bu çalışmada nitel ve nicel verileri birleştiren karma araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Veriler iki adet envanter ve ikili görüşmelerle elde edilmiştir. Verileri analiz etmek için Bağımsız Değişkenler T-testi ve içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar İngilizce hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin değerlendirme tercihleriyle ilgili ayrıntılı bir rapor niteliğindedir ve ayrıca öğrencilerin değerlendirme tercihlerinin cinsiyet ve milliyete göre anlamlı farklar gösterdiğini ortaya konmuştur. Sonuçlara göre erkekler karmaşık soru tiplerini bayanlara göre daha çok tercih ederken, bayanlar daha kolay soru tiplerini tercih etmektedir. Ayrıca Türk ve yabancı öğrencilerin değerlendirme tipi tercihlerinde, sınav okuma ve raporlandırma tercihlerinde ve genel test kaygılarında anlamlı farklar olduğu ortaya konulmuştur.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* Yabancı dil öğrenme; değerlendirme; değerlendirme tercihleri; sınav kaygısı

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