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## A COMPARISON OF STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH (LOTEs) IN TURKEY AND IN THE USA

*Research Article*

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## Abstract

The study aimed at investigating learners' attitudes towards languages other than English (LOTEs). The study also explored participant instructors' views on students' attitudes towards LOTEs. In order to collect data, a language attitude questionnaire was designed by adapting Students' Attitude Toward Foreign Language (SAFL) instrument. The study sampled a total of 316 students, 261 from Turkey, 55 from the USA. University students enrolled in a second language course in the USA and Turkey were compared in terms of their responses to SAFL items as well as their attitude scores for each of the 4 dimensions. Separate confirmatory factor analyses were conducted for each sample with 4 varimax rotated, orthogonal factors. Factor scores for each individual were computed based on the weights identified by the factor analysis to obtain general measures of motivation, students' effort and instructor's role, self-confidence and self-interest, and students' anxiety. According to the research findings students learning LOTEs have favorable attitudes towards the language they are learning both in Turkey and the USA due to their interests in the cultural products of the countries speaking those languages and increasing educational opportunities.

*Keywords:* Language attitude, motivation, LOTEs.

## 1. Introduction

In today's world there has been an increasing interest and need towards learning foreign languages. For the people living in the multicultural and multilingual world of today learning one foreign language is not enough in order to communicate effectively. Therefore, the need for learning a second or even third foreign language is inevitable. Especially in Turkey which has been in the process of becoming a European Union member, the importance of learning foreign language has been emphasized more than in the past. As Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan's (2015) current literature survey has revealed, the number of published studies in the field of L2 motivation research has grown dramatically within the last decade. Similarly, in Europe people are encouraged to learn at least two foreign languages (Demirel, 2003, p. 18) and also in the USA there has been an effort to adjust their language teaching system so that it can enable students learn more than one foreign languages (Lambert, 2001, p. 348).

One important problem in learning a foreign language is that, although they are given the same opportunity to learn, some people can learn a foreign language more easily and successfully while others find the process of learning a new language very difficult and challenging. There can be many external factors such as curriculum, teaching methods,

materials and techniques that may have an effect on this process. However, research in foreign language learning focuses more on the internal aspects of language learning. Researchers have conducted several studies regarding this issue and the results have shown that there are several factors such as differences in language intelligence (Caroll, 1990), native language skills (Skehan, 1992), motivation (Gardner, 1985), attitude (Caroll, 1990), and anxiety (Campbell and Ortiz, 1991) which might answer the question why those students may have difficulties in learning a foreign language. Findings indicate the importance of attitude in language learning since the more positive the students' attitude towards the foreign language is, the higher their grades get (Sutarso, 1996). Many researchers (Dörnyei, 1990; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972) claim that attitudes play a vital role in the way people behave as their attitude towards the target language and culture have an influence on all of their responses to the target language. Attitudes of the individuals learning a foreign language can be affected positively and negatively depending on their experiences in and outside the classroom. If a student falls short of accomplishing one task in a language class, this negative attitude can be generalized to a dislike of the whole process of language learning. On the other hand, "if a student has a positive attitude towards the whole school this can profoundly affect one's specific L2 learning disposition" (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 50). For this reason, students should have a positive attitude towards the target language so that they can be successful in the language classes.

Many researchers have tried to define attitude. However, the one that Smith took from Milton Rokeach is the most extensive. Rokeach defines attitude as "a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or a situation, predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner" (cited in Smith, 1971). Smith explains this definition firstly referring to the enduring nature of attitudes. He stated that attitudes are enduring because they are learned, and therefore they can be unlearned. As they are learned, they can be taught. He claims that we can teach students to like a foreign language. If students come to the language classrooms with neutral or positive attitudes about the target language, their attitudes about language and learning will be influenced by the situation itself (Smith, 1971, p. 82). He also refers to the idea that attitudes develop within a frame of reference. As attitudes are situational, they can be generalized. He counted language, teacher, class, books and assignments as being within the frame of reference of learning and within the situation of school. Therefore, if students don't like learning and school, teachers and assignments, they can generalize this dislike to learning a new language. That's why we need to raise positive attitudes and feelings in order to increase the efficiency of the students in language learning classes (Smith, 1971, p. 82).

There are several factors in second or foreign language learning that may have an impact on the formation of learners' attitudes. The first one is affective factors. Gardner (1985) divided affective factors into two categories: (a) factors prior to learners' approach to the second or foreign language study and (b) factors that develop during the learning process. As for the factors prior to learners' approach to the second and foreign language Gardner emphasized the importance of integrative motivation over instrumental motivation as it may be more powerful in facilitating successful language learning (1985, p. 14). The second category involves the experience that the second or foreign language learner has in the language learning setting which may result in different attitudes towards the learning situation. Atchade (2002) also mentioned personality factors as having an impact on learners' attitudes. For example, an ethnocentric person who views the group he belongs to more important than others most probably show a negative attitude towards the target language. Another factor is social influence. Researchers maintain the belief that the social context may

have an impact on second or foreign language learners' attitude (Gardner, 1988; Norrish, 1983). Atchade (2002) mentioned other sources of influences on learners' attitudes towards learning a second or foreign language as parents because the way parents view the second or foreign language has an effect on learners' developing negative or positive attitudes; teachers as they should be aware of the fact that learning a foreign language involves both cognitive and affective stages and learners as sometimes learners do not make any effort to learn a foreign language.

Numerous studies were conducted in this area to show the positive effects of foreign language attitudes on academic success (Bartram, 2010; Hermann, 1980; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ellis, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 2011; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Scherer & Wertheimer, 1964; Van Els et al., 1984). As attitudes have such an important impact on foreign language learning it is very important to measure it accurately. However, existing studies about foreign language learning and motivation mainly depends English as a foreign language or as a second language, therefore conceptual reframing of L2 motivation depend heavily on English (Duff, 2017; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). This is why researchers think it is questionable how applicable the theories and findings that constructed our understanding about the motivational processes of learning languages other than English (LOTES) (Duff, 2017). As there is this strong bias on global English in the both empirical and theoretical research on motivation and attitudes towards learning languages, it is clear that other languages are currently much less well represented in L2 motivation research (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017) which means there is a need for theoretically differentiated approaches to understand L2 motivation in relation to the target language that is being taught (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017).

In that sense some researchers question (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017) the impact of English on language learning motivation. Studies showed that students are generally aware of the global status and therefore the importance of English and this affects their attitudes towards learning LOTES negatively (Busse, 2017; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Henry, 2011). Or in some cases, as students are aware of the importance of English to find a job and the education system highlights the importance of English, it was sometimes perceived as a threat to their identity and resulted in adverse attitudes toward learning English (Busse, 2017).

In terms of the motivation research conducted in the United States, the focus is generally on heritage language learners (Oh & Nash, 2014; Xie, 2014), the integration of technology into the classroom (Cai & Zhu, 2012), or studying abroad (Martinsen, Alvord, & Tanner, 2014). Thompson and Vásquez (2015) carried out a research about the motivation of adult learners of LOTES (Italian, Chinese, and German) in the U.S.A., all of these learners were very advanced users of the target language and also had experience teaching that language, and thus, were not enrolled in university courses at the time of the study. There have been several studies that aimed to develop or adapt scales to examine students' attitudes towards language teaching in Turkey as well. Most of these studies focused on scale development (Akay & Toraman, 2014; Aydoslu, 2005; Çakıcı, 2001; Dağlıoğlu, 2004; Gömleksiz, 2003; Genç & Aksu, 2004; Selçuk, 1997; Üzüm, 2007) whereas there are limited scale adaptation studies (Gürel, 1986; Tunç Özgür, 2003; Tunçer, Berkant & Doğan, 2015). Moreover, all of these studies conducted in Turkey focused on investigating the attitudes of university students towards learning only English as a foreign language. On this note, in this study it is aimed to contribute to the existing attitude scales by adopting a scale to measure students' attitudes towards learning LOTES and more importantly it reports on the attitudes of learners of LOTES in two different countries, focusing mainly on the diversity of students' attitudes in language learning process.

Two central questions guided the research. The first prompted an exploration of the attitudes of university students in two universities in two different countries toward learning LOTE in terms of their motivation, effort and instructor's role, self-confidence and self-interest, and anxiety while the second permitted a focus on the perspectives and experiences of teachers' of LOTE.

To this end, the following research questions were formulated to guide the present study.

- (1) Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of university students in two universities in two different countries toward learning LOTE in terms of their motivation, effort and instructor's role, self-confidence and self-interest, and anxiety?
- (2) Is there any difference among the perspectives and experiences of teachers' of LOTE?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research design**

In the current study, an explanatory sequential mixed method design was employed (Creswell, 2014). First, quantitative data was collected and analyzed and then in order to get a deeper understanding of the results and to validate the results, qualitative data was collected with the focus group interviews.

### **2.2. Setting and participants**

The quantitative part of the study was conducted with 55 university students from the US and 261 students from Turkey who participated in the main study. The US sample included students studying French (61%) or Spanish (39%), whereas the Turkish sample included students learning French (61%), Spanish (18%) and Italian (21%). Both groups were compared in terms of their responses to individual items as well as their attitude scores for each factor. Ethical approval for this multi-site study was obtained from the respective Human Subjects Research Ethics Committees of both universities.

The qualitative part of the study was conducted with 6 instructors. Three out of 6 instructors taught LOTEs at a major state university in Turkey. Other three instructors taught Turkish at a prestigious university in the USA.

### **2.3. Research instruments**

#### **2.3.1. The Students' Attitude Toward Foreign Language (SAFL) instrument**

The SAFL instrument was designed by Sutarso in 1996 to assess variables associated with students' attitudes towards second language use and learning. The original instrument is comprised 27 items that covered the following variables that are considered to affect students' attitudes; foreign language anxiety, self-confidence, self-interest, family background in foreign language, gender, motivation/usefulness, students' effort, instructors' role. After the item analysis 4 items with low discrimination indices were dropped. So the original instrument was composed of 23 items. Responses were collected with a 5-point Likert-type statements ranging from 1, not describe me, to 5, describes me, indicating to what extent the individual thinks the statement describes him/her in each item. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was .8712 with the Standardized item alpha is .8704. Factor analysis on the SAFL instrument revealed four factors based on the Eigenvalue criterion after a Varimax orthogonal rotation, namely Motivation, Students' Effort and Instructors' Role, Self Confidence & Self Interest, and Students' Anxiety. These factors accounted for 17.52%, 14.33%, 10.35% and 10.33% of the total variance. The SAFL is

based on the theoretical constructs, literature review, table of specification, and expert opinions, which contributed the content validity of the instrument.

Cross-cultural adaptation and reliability of the Turkish translation of the SAFL will contribute towards establishing the SAFL as a cross-cultural measure and enable cross-national comparative studies. Before the adaptation studies started the necessary permission was obtained from the author of the instrument. We followed the general guidelines for adapting an assessment instrument to a culture and language population (Geisinger, 1994).

### 2.3.2. Focus group interview questions

Focus groups were carried out to explore the items identified by the survey from teachers' of LOTE's perspective. Semi-structured questions were designed to elicit discussion about students' attitudes towards learning a LOTE and the factors affecting their attitudes in both countries with probes for items raised in the SAFL instrument analysis if they did not come up spontaneously. Teachers who had experience of teaching a LOTE in Turkey and USA were invited to participate in the focus group interviews. Two separate 60/58-minute focus groups were conducted (1 for teachers of LOTEs in Turkey and 1 for teachers of LOTEs in USA). Focus groups sessions were tape recorded and transcribed.

### 2.4. Data collection procedure and analysis

55 university students from the USA and 261 students from Turkey participated in the main study. The USA sample included students studying French (61%) or Spanish (39%), whereas the Turkish sample included students learning French (61%), Spanish (18%) and Italian (21%). Both groups were compared in terms of their responses to individual items as well as their attitude scores for each factor. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from both Institutional Review Boards of University of Pennsylvania and Hacettepe University.

The SAFL instrument was translated from English into Turkish by two translators, which was evaluated through the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). In the first stage two independent translators, translated the instrument from English into Turkish and then come together to solve any discrepancies in the 2 different versions of their translations, and formed the verified Turkish translation. To verify the translation procedure back-translation method was also used (Brislin, 1970). Two different translators translated the Turkish version back into English. In the second phase an English-speaking language expert and a Turkish-speaking language expert compared the original test with the back-translation to make sure that there is not any essential meaning change and to minimize the cultural differences. One of the experts mentioned that the back-translation versions of the 23<sup>rd</sup> item might indicate a slight difference from the original. The original sentence was like; 'I see my instructors when I do not understand something in my foreign language class', while the back-translation was 'If there is something I don't understand in foreign language courses, I will ask my teachers'. The expert mentioned that that might indicate seeing the teacher during the office hours while the translated version indicates asking questions in the classroom. Turkish version of the item revised by two experts and as a result we do not believe that the above-mentioned aspect of difference can create a construct bias in regard to the concept of attitude towards foreign language use and learning. We see the translation of the item as reasonable and valid. A team comprised of the authors and the translators reviewed the translations and finalized the Turkish version by taking into account all the comments made to represent the common judgment of the group. We worked with 6 domain experts with experience in both languages and cultures, and with the students of the target population.

The translated survey was administered to 213 students at Hacettepe University, who were attending a second language course other than English. A confirmatory factor analysis was

performed over the 23 items for the Turkish sample. A KMO measure of .796 suggest that the sample size was appropriate. As in the SAFL study, a principal components based factor analysis was carried out with varimax rotation. The scree plot supported the use of 4 factors (Figure 1), which altogether accounted for 56% of the variability in the data. The percent variance explained by each factor are: 25.15 % by factor 1, 13.80 % by factor 2, 10.76 % by factor 3, and 5.89 % by factor 4 respectively (Table 1). The Cronbach Alpha was found to be .76, which suggests that the translated instrument is reliable to use for the purpose of measuring students' attitude towards learning a foreign language.

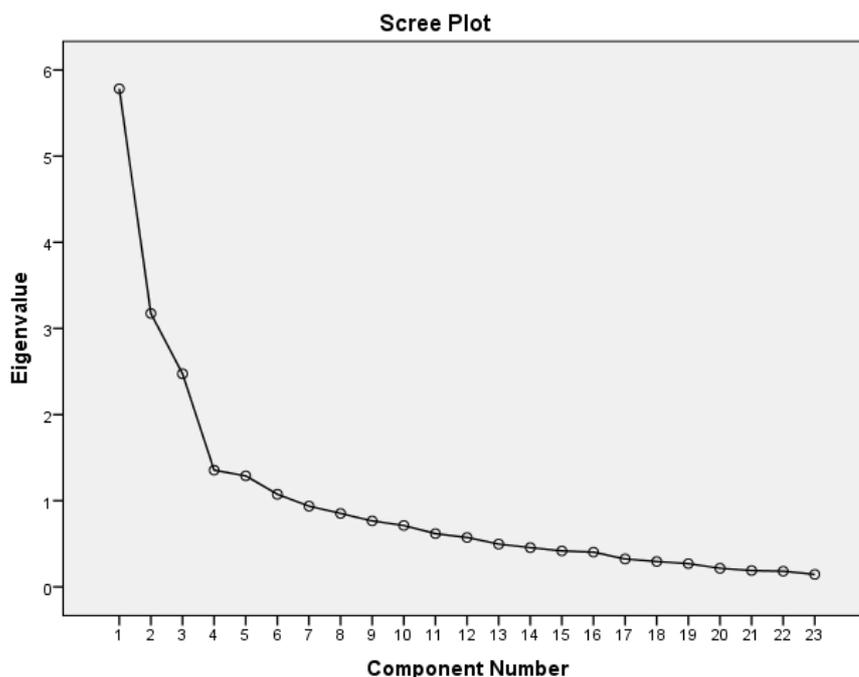


Figure 1. Scree plot for the confirmatory factor analysis conducted for the validation data.

Table 1. Eigenvalues and the total variance explained by the 4 components for the validation data.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.783	25.145	25.145
2	3.174	13.802	38.946
3	2.474	10.755	49.701
4	1.355	5.891	55.592

University students enrolled in a second language learning course in the US and Turkey were compared in terms of their responses to SAFL items as well as their attitude scores for each of the 4 dimensions. Separate confirmatory factor analyses were conducted for each sample with 4 varimax rotated, orthogonal factors. Factor scores for each individual were computed based on the weights identified by the factor analysis to obtain general measures of motivation, students' effort and instructor's role, self-confidence & self-interest, and students' anxiety.

As for the analysis of the focus group interviews, two investigators familiar with the focus groups carried out the focus group analysis using a grounded theory approach to explore items raised in the SAFL instrument and to get a deeper understanding of about students'

attitudes towards learning a LOTE. As a result of the analysis 5 broad thematic categories were generated from the focus group discussions; (1) English as L2 is an advantage most of the time, (2) better motivated for LOTE than English, (3) the affordances of learning environments, (4) limited learning resources, (4) self-confidence. Coding consensus was achieved through discussions between the researchers.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Quantitative results

University students enrolled in a second language learning course in the US and Turkey were compared in terms of their responses to SAFL items as well as their attitude scores for each of the 4 dimensions. Separate confirmatory factor analyses were conducted for each sample with 4 varimax rotated, orthogonal factors. The factor structures corresponding to the US and Turkish groups were then compared by computing Tucker’s coefficient of congruence after conducting a Procrustean rotation as implemented in SPSS by Wuensch (2016).

Figure 2 below shows the average ratings of students from both groups for each item used in the analysis. The average ratings for each item by each group were consistently above or below 3 out of 5 for positive and negative items respectively. Based on the bar chart in Figure 2, we can conclude that in general the students' attitude toward foreign language is positive in both groups.

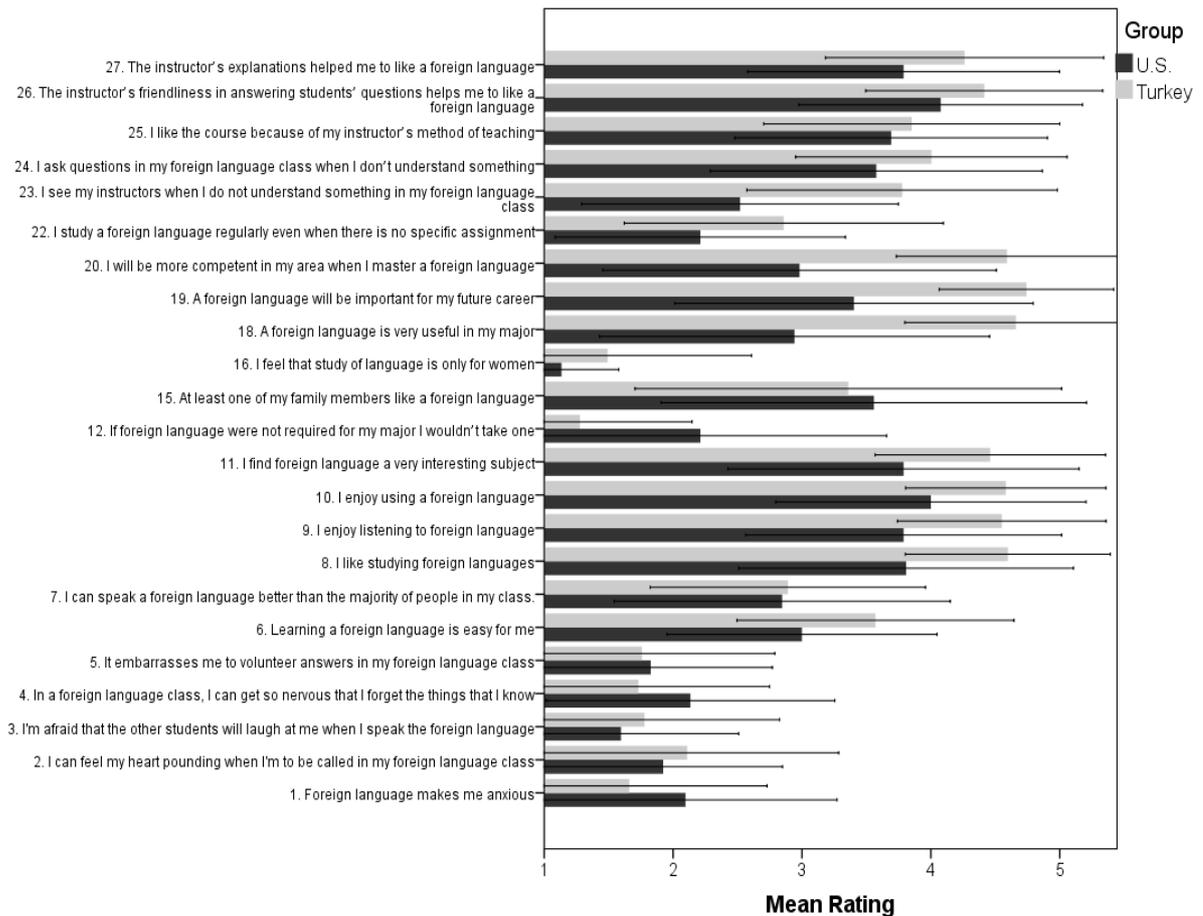


Figure 2. Mean ratings of students from the U.S. and Turkey for each survey item. The error bars indicate standard deviation.

Figure 2 suggests that the average ratings of students from the two groups are similar for all items. In order to check whether both groups had similar underlying factor structures, we carried out two separate confirmatory principle axis factor analyses with a varimax rotation over 4 factors on the US and Turkish samples. Table 2 below summarizes the percentage of the variance explained by the 4 factors for each sample.

Table 2. *Eigenvalues and the total variance explained by the 4 components for the confirmatory factor analysis on US and Turkish samples*

Group	Component	Eigenvalues		
		Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
USA	1	6.572	28.574	28.574
	2	3.390	14.738	43.312
	3	2.360	10.260	53.572
	4	1.635	7.110	60.682
Turkey	1	5.293	23.015	23.015
	2	2.787	12.117	35.132
	3	2.318	10.080	45.212
	4	2.019	8.780	53.992

Next, the factor loadings of the the two models were subjected to a procrustean rotation to align the principle axes obtained for both groups. Finally, a Tucker's coefficient of congruence is computed for each aligned factor, which are summarized in Table X below. The congruence levels indicated a high degree of similarity for overall motivation, effort and instructor's role, and students' anxiety (Lorenzo-Seva & ten Berge, 2006). A slightly lower level of similarity is observed for the Self Confidence and Self Interest dimension, which seems to be due to relatively higher average ratings of Turkish students on items such as "I enjoy listening to a foreign language" and "I enjoy using a foreign language".

Table 3. *Factor labels, corresponding items with highest loading and Tucker's coefficient of congruence values obtained between U.S. and Turkish samples for each factor.*

Factor Label	Items with High Loadings	Tucker's Congruence
Overall Motivation	19, 18, 20, 12, 8	.82
Effort and Instructor's Role	27, 26, 25, 24, 23	.90
Students' Anxiety	2, 4, 5, 3, 1	.84
Self Confidence & Self Interest	10, 6, 9, 7, 11	.71

### 3.2. Qualitative results

In the present study, perspectives of teachers of LOTEs with teaching experience in both countries were compared and contrasted in terms of factors effecting students' attitudes

towards learning LOTEs. As a result of the analyses 5 categories were found, (1) the affordances of learning environments, (2) limited learning resources, (3) self-confidence, (4) English as L2 is an advantage most of the time, (5) better motivated for LOTEs than English. Two of these categories are specific to the teaching of LOTEs in Turkey. They were added to the analysis nonetheless, as they are believed to be essential factors influencing students' attitudes towards LOTEs in Turkey and not including them would draw an incomplete picture of the situation in Turkey. Also researchers agreed not to mention these themes in the focus group discussion of teachers with teaching experience in US anyway as it is an English speaking country while English is the dominant foreign language which is being taught as a compulsory course in Turkey. Therefore, the focus will be on the three comparable themes between the two countries first and then the two Turkey-specific themes highlighting their significance for students' attitudes toward language learning will be mentioned.

### 3.2.1. The affordances of learning environments

One of the most important factors effecting students' motivation to learn is the affordances of learning environments. Having technologically well-equipped and comfortable classroom environments can have direct effect on learning. Both groups of teachers mentioned the influence of the affordances of the learning environment on their students' attitudes towards learning a LOTE as illustrated in the following excerpt from a teacher;

'Language learning process is directly related to the physical conditions of the learning environment apart from the teacher and the students. Having effective learning environments is as important as students' own efforts to have positive attitudes towards learning a language'.

The focus group analysis showed a difference in terms of the efficiency and structure of the learning environments in two countries. Teachers of LOTEs in Turkey mentioned having some problems with their classrooms, for example one of them said:

'Even though we are working at a prestigious university in Turkey, we do not always have good classroom conditions. We sometimes teach in classrooms where there is not enough light or the classroom might not be cleaned properly. If we turn on the air-conditioning for fresh air, the students can not hear my voice because of the noise it makes.'

Another teacher mentioned:

'In some classrooms the desks are fixed the way they are so it is not possible to move them. But some times we need U-shape classroom design to promote interaction among the students. They need to see each other, or else how are you going to have pair or group discussions, they cannot interact with each other. Or worse, in some classes students' desks are fixed towards the wall but the board is on the other side of the classroom, as the desks are immobile, they are not able to see the board.'

On the other hand, teachers with experience of US mentioned that the learning environment they had was designed to support the teaching philosophy and curriculum of the course as the following excerpts illustrate;

'Physical conditions were good, we had computer units in classrooms, they were secured with cables and stuff...'

'Having good physical conditions make it possible for us to do some cultural integration activities, such as cooking Turkish coffee in a Turkish language classroom or watching Nasreddin Hodja cartoon because something related come up

in the classroom. These motivate students a lot and they learn related concepts in the context and connected with the culture, and this change a lot of things.’

These responses suggest that the affordance of the learning environment is considered to be important by the teachers of LOTEs to help students develop a positive attitude towards learning languages.

### 3.2.2. Limited learning resources

Another theme that came out of the analysis is about the learning resources. Both groups of teachers of LOTEs believe learning resources like textbooks, software, videos or recordings for LOTEs are not adequate. To overcome the problems of teaching with limited resources, teachers have to put extra effort, as they believe the importance of the variety and quality of the learning resources for students’ attitudes. The following fragments show perspectives of teachers with US experience;

‘When we think about materials we cannot say that they are at the same quality and/or quantity of the materials available to teach English, they are limited. There need to be more books and materials available... Teachers are very important in terms of what they share with their students to teach them both the culture and language, I mean books and materials are important but teachers are beyond that. We followed a series of video clips for example and these had positive effects on students’ attitudes and motivation.’

‘When we think about materials we cannot say that they are at the same or quantity of the materials available to teach English, they are limited. There need to be more books and materials available...’

However, teachers with US experience also mentioned that institutional support was very effective in terms of improving whatever resources available and making them more accessible both for the teachers and students;

‘Books that you want can be brought to the bookstore, and there is this section they have in bookstore where the name of the teacher and course is written and the book that are going to be used in the course. And even better, under it you can find some used books, which are cheaper. These are good, very motivating. For anyone who ones to study, the resources are available.’

‘There is the Blackboard, which is a virtual learning environment and course management system; you can share materials you want online with your students. It made it very easy in terms of sharing the any resource you have as a teacher. Second hand books are easily available.’

On the other hand, teachers with experience teaching LOTEs in Turkey mentioned bigger problems. Their responses point out that resource constraints can engender the quality of the instruction and students’ motivation to learn the target language.

‘At the same time, we have problem like that, we have the teacher, design the program but we do not have books, I mean communicative textbooks at least. Especially it was the case for French, it was not until 3-5 years ago that we started to have some learning materials. I think the reason is that in 1960s Europeans left the Grammar Translation Method and 1970s they started using Communicative Method, but we still have schools that apply the grammar translation method. I think, one reason for this is that private and government institutions are based on exams like YDS (Foreign Language Proficiency Exam). In such exams the focus is on grammar rather than four basic language skills...In this sense we did not have a book available

until 3-5 years ago, then Ministry of Education published a book which focuses on 4 skills and is also cheap. Otherwise we have to buy books abroad.'

Buying books abroad does not solve the problem the teachers and students of LOTE face completely.

'In this subject, I want to add something, we buy our books abroad but in terms of Spanish I can say that the books are designed for European people. Apart from the grammar explanations the listening recordings are really difficult for our students to understand. It is almost a miracle to do these activities in classroom with the students. I mean, those books also have such problems.'

'And students access to the learning resources is also problematic. They use pirated textbooks mostly otherwise it is impossible for them to buy the books, they use photocopies, I only had one or two students who bought the original books, this is something important in terms of their motivation though.'

The fact that most students are using photocopies affects the learning quality in some ways. One of the teachers explain how this affects the instructional pacing which could have detrimental effects on delivery procedures, classroom management and both teacher's and students' motivation.

'For example, you prepare something about colors and teaching this from a black and white book would be ridiculous. Or sometimes some students in the classroom have colored photocopies or pirated books while others have black and white. And you ask a question some gets it but some does not because of the books. Students need to be able see and compare what they hear with the visual they have. Even this effects the reciprocity in the classroom and most of the language learning activities are based upon this reciprocity.'

### 3.3.3 Self-confidence

Although results of the SAFL instrument did not reveal any significant difference between these two cohorts of students in terms self confidence and students' anxiety, focus group analysis showed otherwise. While teachers of LOTE with US experience mentioned how confident their students in classroom, teachers with Turkey experience said students are dramatically affected by the fear of being wrong in the classroom. Fragments of teachers of LOTE with US experience;

'First of all, students are comfortable about the homework and exercises, they do everything they can do, with out any anxiety, without being afraid of making mistakes, without being afraid of criticized. For the things that they were not able to do they would just come up and say I could not do this, that simple.'

'For one thing they are self-confident. They know to embrace their mistakes in classroom and that makes it easy for them to learn. I mean even if they have problems in the target language, this does not seem to effect their motivation or attitude. They keep trying and seemed to be very confident in fulfilling their duties, homework or in-class exercises.'

Self-confidence is extremely important in language learning and it is a well-known fact that it creates a vicious circle. Students with self-confidence learn more and gain more confident while students with low-self esteem struggle in learning the target language at the desired level and continue to have low self-esteem. This affects students' language anxiety and willingness to participate. Teachers with Turkey experience highlighted this in their

response as a factor to effect students' attitudes and mentioned that their students do not feel very confident in their language ability in general;

'Well as it is anew language, and for Italian for example, it has a certain accent, they are so shy about it. If I say this like this will everybody laugh kind of shyness. For this reason, I choose some activities to encourage them to get to know each other. As it is an elective course, they are coming from different departments, they see each other for this course only, so for this reason I guess they shy away from each other a little bit.'

'What if I can't pronounce it correctly, what if I say something wrong? I can see these concerns in their faces. And teachers' classroom management in these cases also effect students' attitudes and willingness. If I form wrong sentences would they laugh at me and how would the teacher react in that case? If the teacher is friendly and encourages having fun while learning, students can say I can make any mistakes, not big deal and focus more on communication.'

#### 3.3.4. English as L2 is an advantage most of the time

Teachers of LOTEs in Turkey, in our case, think that their students' prior language learning experience with English makes it easier for them to learn the 3rd language since the L3 learner has already acquired one L2. They claim these students are more experienced language learners and have developed some language learning strategies. As participants said;

'I think we as the teachers of Spanish, Italian or French are luckier than the teachers of English whose courses are compulsory. The students would come to our classroom with an understanding of, a notion of a language, I mean before they came to our class they develop some language learning skills. Frankly, generally this makes our life easier.'

'As my friend says they came to our classroom knowing a foreign language and we are teaching them an other one and this very advantageous for us in many ways.'

'First of they know English as a second language... in terms of understanding in general rules, this is, I mean like subject, verb kind of.. this is convenience for us.'

These fragments indicate that teachers of LOTEs believe knowing English as L2 has benefits in the process of learning a LOTE as a third language. They found that this experience somehow presupposes a degree of progression in gaining command of a third language, which produce mutually advantageous outcomes for both the teachers and students.

#### 3.3.5. Better motivated for LOTEs than English

There is range of motivation for students to learn a language and motivation influence students' effort tremendously. According to the analysis of our focus group interviews with teachers of LOTEs in Turkey, students are more motivated to learn a LOTE than English. Teachers of LOTE consider themselves as lucky in that sense. One teacher said;

'When we look at the motivation for learning a language we are luckier as teachers of LOTEs. They choose these courses, they are here because they want to.'

‘In general students we have in LOTE classrooms are more motivated than students who are learning English as compulsory course. They came like I heard Spanish in that song, Ricky Martin, Shakira..’

Students’ this self-interest manifests it self in-class and out of class activities they do. These can be both seen as signs of positive attitudes they have towards learning the target language and at the same time a way to develop more positive attitudes;

‘I had this student, at first she needed some guidance but then she even went to Italy with her own efforts. She is graduating this year, she is from English Language and Literature department, and she shows this deep interest to Italian that she did not show to English. She is really committed, she translated a book form Italian by herself, now she writes and translates all forms of correspondence basketball tournaments and games.’

‘I had a group of students like that.. one of them translated a horror movie from Spanish by himself. Others students in that classroom were from English Language Translation and Interpreting Department and we translated a Spanish teachers’ story book to Turkish as a class as part of the course and then they finished the rest out of the classroom and now it is going to be published with my edits.’

These fragments indicate students’ interest in the culture of the target language and how it influences their attitudes towards learning the language. They are better motivated to learn a LOTE of their choice than English. Participants in our study think the reason for the difference in students’ motivation between LOTEs and English as a second language is related to the fact that English is compulsory for students in Turkey.

‘There are very few students who learn English as an elective course, they have it like compulsory, this is really unpleasant both for the students and teachers. We have some colleagues who work really under difficult circumstances in that sense. Teaching a language to students who are not interested in learning is exhausting. In that sense as teachers of LOTEs we are lucky. I believe the moment it becomes compulsory students’ motivation will start to drop. There students who like but can not speak English but in this education system they see it as an obstacle to handle, as an obligation, something that needs to be done.’

Teachers with teaching experience of both LOTE and English also highlighted the same theme from a different perspective. They highlighted the difficulties they experience to motivate students of English as they are not motivated enough to learn the language. The following statements show that compulsory language courses appear to actually be ineffective and require a lot of effort on teachers’ side to motivate the reluctant students. Students simply respond negatively to the pressure.

‘Students have some interesting reactions/protests to this notion of compulsory language learning I think. For example, I had some students who are studying Korean in my English classroom.’

‘When we are teaching English here we always have this motivation concern. I mean it is like we are teaching them English against their will. I always spend time to motivate my students in my classrooms when I am teaching English, like this is very important for your future and personal development kind of talk. But this not the case for elective LOTEs.’

#### **4. Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to compare students' attitudes towards learning LOTEs in Turkey and USA and explore factors affecting their attitudes. Overall, it was found that students' in both countries have positive attitudes towards learning LOTEs and there was not any significant difference between the two selected cohorts of Turkish and American students.

The positive attitudes that the students display could be because of the fact that the LOTEs included in this study were elective courses in both countries, which means most of the students take these courses just because they want to. This was confirmed by the focus group interviews as the teachers of both groups stated positive influence of being able to choose a course on students' attitudes and motivation.

This study found that according to the teachers of LOTEs learning environment is significantly associated with students' attitudes and in comparison to USA, learning environments in Turkey lacks some important features that might trigger student disengagement such as fixed desks that would not allow face to face interaction when necessary.

The majority of the teacher statements showed that the learning resources available for LOTEs are limited compared to the resources available for teaching English. When the dominant position of English as a foreign language in academia (Dörnyei et al., 2006; Henry, 2011) considered, it is quite understandable that there are not as many learning resources as there are for teaching and learning English. When the differences in the quality of learning environments and resources between Turkey and USA appeared in focus group interviews considered, we believe it can, at least partly, be explained by the fact that the participant university from Turkey is a public university whereas the participant university from USA is a private university.

The findings from the focus group interviews highlight considerable differences between these two cohort of students in terms self confidence and students' anxiety in language learning, however results of the SAFL instrument did not reveal any significant difference. Teachers pointed out that when compared to Turkish students, American students generally were more comfortable in participating classroom activities in front of their classmates and showed more confidence in their language learning abilities. This might be related to the cultural differences between the two countries. Learning culture in Turkish education system is not known to develop students' confidence. Approaches like student centered learning or communicative are still considered novel and sometimes viewed with skepticism.

One interested finding of this study is that teachers of LOTEs in Turkey believed that the fact that most of the students learnt English as L2 makes it easier for them to learn an other language and they seemed to have a more positive attitude towards learning LOTEs compared to learning English. This finding is in contrast to the studies that showed that students are generally aware of the global status and therefore importance of English and this affects their attitudes towards learning LOTEs negatively (Busse, 2017; Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). We believe this is mostly due to the required status of compulsory English courses.

#### **5. Conclusion**

From a language learning perspective, the findings are encouraging on two counts. Firstly, the positive attitudes of students towards LOTEs in spite of some factors that could affect students' attitude negatively are promising for multilingualism and intercultural understanding. Secondly, when students are provided with opportunities to exercise agency to

intervene in their learning paths, such as to be able to choose which language to study, they leverage efforts and resources effectively.

The findings of this study highlighted some factors that could be used as reference for developing the future language policy for LOTEs. For example, it pointed out the importance of agency in language learning. Students enrolled in LOTEs in this example have been characterized as holding positive attitudes towards the target language and as intrinsically motivated. Focus group analysis indicated student agency in choosing a foreign language course affected their attitudes towards language learning and effort to become autonomous learner as motivation and agency are known to be closely interrelated (Brown, 2014). In other words, differences in the sense of agency influence students' attitudes and decision making in their language learning endeavors (Van Lier, 2010).

This study underlined the importance of taking into account differences rooted in the factors related to the target language and its culture when designing or adopting approaches to help students to develop positive attitudes towards learning foreign languages and increase students' motivation. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to this study that suggest the need for future research.

While the current findings are not intended to be generalizable beyond the very particular context in which the research was conducted, the sample size was relatively small. Larger sample studies may be more insightful. Furthermore, participant group distribution is important, as the present study did not have equivalent group distribution due to the differences in the number of the students at two universities.

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