# TEACHER-RESEARCHERS IN ACTION

Edited by
**Kenan DİKİLİTAŞ, Richard SMITH, Wayne TROTMAN**

This book of teacher-research reports contains studies carried out across Turkey and beyond, and contributes to the emerging literature on how teacher-research can be supported and sustained in the field of English language teaching. The underlying motive behind publication of this book by IATEFL's Research SIG is not only to share the actual findings of the research studies but also to showcase them with a view to dissemination of the idea that teacher-research has great positive value as a professional development strategy. Publication of the book has been timed to coincide with the Research SIG's first *Teachers Research!* Conference, which, it is hoped, will become a regular international event.

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**IATEFL Research Special Interest Group**

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# *Introduction*

This book contains chapters written by teacher-researchers working at universities across Turkey. The book aims to provide opportunities for teachers to share their research relating to classroom practice with the wider ELT community across Turkey and internationally and provides a platform for general reflection on the basis of a wide selection of teacher-research studies.

The conference which gave rise to this teacher-research book was supported by the IATEFL Research Special Interest Group, and it thereby took on a pan-Turkey and wider international dimension. However, the conference already had a history of over three years, rooted in the activities of the Professional and Academic Development Division of Gediz University since 2010. Every year from 2011 onwards, teachers working at Gediz had presented on their research at an annual conference, as follows:

June and July 2011: First conference (in-house only), held at Gediz University Çankaya Campus with the participation of about 40 instructors.

June 2012: Second conference, held at Gediz University Seyrek Campus. Plenary speakers from overseas were invited for the first time  — Martin Lamb (University of Leeds, UK) and Richard Smith (University of Warwick, UK) — and instructors from Gediz University had the opportunity to receive feedback on their presentations from these ELT specialists.

June 2013: Third conference, held at Gediz University Çankaya Campus. The plenary speakers were Simon Borg (University of Leeds) and, for the second time,  Richard Smith (University of Warwick). There were presenters as well as audience participants from universities across Turkey.

Papers presented at these first three Gediz conferences have been edited and incorporated into three books (Dikilitaş 2012, 2013, 2014), which provide a record of the research engagement of Gediz teachers over this time.

The June 2014 conference was held once more at the Gediz University Çankaya Campus. This time there were three plenary speakers – Anne Burns

(Aston University, UK), Dick Allwright (Lancaster, UK) and Richard Smith (University of Warwick, UK), and – due to the publicity IATEFL Research SIG gave to the conference – some speakers from outside Turkey as well as from other institutions in Turkey. .

The TR programmes at Gediz University since 2010 have aimed to:

- encourage instructors to reflect critically on current teaching practices
- raise their awareness of new practices
- encourage them to examine and review their beliefs
- help them gain further insight into their teaching
- improve their motivation
- heighten their awareness of learners.

These objectives appear largely to have been achieved, as teachers have consistently reported how they have benefitted from the process of researching and from the findings that they obtained from their studies.

The Gediz programme has had the following characteristics:

- led by an internal trainer
- classroom as research setting
- external perspectives involved
- on-going support
- writing-up and publishing
- supported by following conferences
- sustained for 5 years

There has, then, been a CPD strategy based on teachers developing their own teaching via involvement in doing research over a relatively long period of time each year (at least 8 months). This is in stark contrast to many other CPD programmes in preparatory programmes in Turkish universities, which tend to be shorter-term (involving workshops, seminars, or talks) and which may not require teachers to be so active.

This book is a unique collection that brings together leaders in the area of teacher-research (part I) and language teachers who have been doing teacher-research for professional development (part II). There are also studies carried out by professional researchers in Turkey regarding how to facilitate teacher action research with in-service and pre-service teachers (part III). This blend

of perspectives from leaders, teacher educators and teacher-researchers constitutes coherent content, which together exemplifies an emerging strategy for professional development: teacher-research.

The main aim of this book is not so much to disseminate the knowledge generated by teachers as to showcase a range of teacher-research studies in order to inspire other teachers across the world. We hope that similar projects with teachers can be conducted in different contexts such as primary, secondary and high school as well as with the teachers from higher education who are mainly focused on here.

Part One opens with a chapter from Anne Burns and her suggestion that action research is a much more rewarding experience when carried out in a collaborative manner on an area of mutual interest. After listing eight characteristics of what she believes collaboration involves, such as equality and reciprocity, Burns outlines the value of and lists several practical ideas for working collaboratively. It is noticeable in the present book that four out of eighteen studies were carried out in collaboration in the sense that at least two researchers were working on individual projects, although most others were carried out in collaboration with professional development leaders. Perhaps in the light of Burns' insights we can look forward to reading about more collaborative studies in both senses in the near future.

Following this, Dick Allwright pleads for 'understanding' from all involved in research. After addressing the tough question of what 'understanding' entails, Allwright seeks to persuade us that if understanding is so important, then it is something researchers, teachers and learners need to be working towards. He concludes that by using a form of practitioner research called Exploratory Practice, both learners and teachers are able to develop at the same time.

Richard Smith next describes the rationale, nature and origins of a workplan involving what he terms 'exploratory action research', utilised as a means for inducting secondary school teachers in Chile into teacher-research. This approach seems to combine elements of both action research and Exploratory Practice but Richard also explains how it had origins in experience and how exploratory action research emerged as a practical initiative, not primarily as an attempt to influence theory.

Completing Part One Kenan Dikilitaş explains how professional development has undergone immense changes in recent years, with a movement away from top-down models emphasizing received knowledge, and more towards

teachers becoming researchers of their own classrooms and thereby creating their own knowledge.

Part Two consists of eighteen chapters presenting teacher-research studies. The first, by Rukiye Eryılmaz, looks at what students think about corrective feedback and asks which correction method they prefer. Following this, Koray Akyazı and Savaş Geylanioğlu, reflect on their teaching practice and what they learnt by observing and discussing each other's lessons in a deliberate attempt to improve their teaching. Zeynep Aksel and Pelin Özmen share findings of action research carried out to mirror the motivation of students, and address this issue by enhancing student motivation through reflection on motivation. Following this Elif Başak Günbay and Gülizar Aydemir focus on difficulties beginner level students face with speaking in English. On the same topic, Şehnaz Yusufoviç then focuses on language anxiety, one of the most basic reasons for students not being able to talk in the classroom.

Sedef Fenik's study concerns improving learners' presentation skills through an oral presentation evaluation rubric that promoted peer assessment. Next, Salim Razı investigates difficulties his students encountered in academic writing, and strategies they used to overcome these problems in an Advanced Reading and Writing Skills Course. The study by Vildan Sakarkaya focuses on reasons for and solutions to her students' reluctance to participate in pair and group work activities, while Nicholas Velde outlines an action research project which investigated critical incidents in the classroom and the effect of team-teaching on learning to mitigate such incidents during an ESL practicum course assignment.

Merve Güzel explores via questionnaires and interviews the views of University Prep School students and instructors regarding the concept of learner autonomy. Following this, Kevser Özdemir measures the impact of using learning-centered techniques on students and investigates the idea that successful learners assume a certain degree of responsibility for their own learning. Huriye Jale Günes Coşardemir investigates the effect of using learning strategies on academic success with regard to two classes of students who had failed the previous track.

Stefania Kordia provides an insight into the ways that English language teaching and learning practices in expanding circle countries such as Turkey and Greece can be redirected so as to incorporate recent developments in the field of English as a lingua franca. Ezgi Çetin evaluates methods of

error correction in teaching pronunciation in preparatory classes in order to gain insight into the views of novice English language instructors. Esin Yüksel explores Turkish students' preferences about vocabulary instruction through reading, and attempts to find a happy medium between what they want and teachers' actual practices.

Duygu Işık looks into whether integrating target language cultural elements into language teaching makes learning more effective or not. In a collaborative study, Canan Önal and İlknur Kurtulmuş created awareness amongst their students about being independent readers and helped them realize that new vocabulary could be learned more effectively and retained longer if they discovered the meaning in context. Çiler Inan explores how to create a learner-centred classroom environment and how to get learners involved in the classroom work and more responsible for their own learning. Alexandros Palaiogiannis presents research that deals with the integration of commercial video games in a Greek senior secondary school context aiming at investigating whether such games have the potential to foster the development of language learning strategies and learner autonomy. Finally, Sevil Gülbahar reports on the use of L1 in the classroom from students' perspectives, with a particular focus on teachers who prefer not to use the L1.

The final part of this book contains five chapters which relate to how teacher-research can be well-supported. In the first of these İsmail Hakkı Erten points out that there is a paucity of studies into the attributions language learners generate concerning their performance and proposes this as a suitable topic for future teacher-research studies. In the second chapter here Jerome Bush writes on 'Integrated Teacher-research' in a High School in Istanbul, which was the result of adapting teacher-research to the primary and secondary environment. All studies were conducted on the theme of motivation and the goal became not the production of an individual study to develop an individual teacher, but a series of studies along a single theme that could be compared and contrasted.

The third study here, by Yasemin Kırkgöz, describes a collaborative action research teacher development programme established between six primary school teachers of English and a university teacher educator. The six newly-qualified English language teachers critically examined their instructional practices in the teaching and learning of English among young learners. The penultimate study in this part is by Sezgi Saraç, Galip Zorba and Arda Arıkan,

who present data on the benefits and limitations of participant-centred action research relating to a pre-service English teacher training intervention. Completing Part Three is a chapter by Wayne Trotman, whose study examines reasons for choice of projects carried out by Turkish university level teachers of English and looks at issues faced throughout the research period and how they were dealt with.

As we look towards the 2015 conference, the fifth in the series, but the first to be wholly organized by the IATEFL Research SIG (in collaboration with Gediz University), we feel the comprehensive picture presented by this collection belies the criticisms that are sometimes heard that teacher-research is only rarely undertaken when not part of a degree programme. Part II, in particular, showcases teacher-research studies carried out by teachers in a higher education context who were strongly encouraged but not forced to participate in action research. Most teacher-researchers who wrote chapters in this book were for one year provided with sustained support for planning, doing, presenting, and writing up their own research. This book therefore contributes overall to the emerging literature on how teacher-research can be supported and sustained in the field of English language teaching. The idea of editing and publishing the book emerged from the editors' collaboration, which started in 2012 and has continued to today, and our desire to promote the idea of teacher-research more broadly. We hope we have succeeded in achieving our underlying aim — to showcase these studies with a view to dissemination of the idea of teacher-research as a professional development strategy around the world for the community of English language teachers and teacher educators

*Kenan Dikilitaş, Richard Smith and Wayne Trotman*

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## *PART I*

1     *Renewing classroom practices through collaborative action research*

*Anne Burns*

> For me [AR] is really a quest for life, to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge – knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself. (Marja Liisa Swantz, in Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 1)

## Introduction

Action research has become an important professional avenue for language teachers wanting to deepen their understanding of their classrooms, their teaching and their students (Edge, 2001; Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Through this understanding and their investigations and experimentation in the classroom, teachers can make important changes in practice for themselves and for their students. However, action research becomes all the richer when teachers have the opportunity to work collaboratively rather than in isolation, as sometimes seems to be suggested in some of the literature on action research (e.g Nunan, 1989; Wallace, 1998). In this chapter, I explore what collaboration in action research might involve and elaborate on different opportunities that teachers could take to work together on professional issues of mutual interest.

## Shifting views of the nature of teacher professional development

For many teachers around the world classrooms are isolated and isolating places. The traditional (and still highly current) mode of teaching involves one teacher in one classroom with his or her students, with little time or opportunity available for the sharing of professional ideas. After completing their training, teachers often enter educational contexts where they are given little support to address the immediate teaching challenges they face. While they

might have completed courses on language learning, teaching methodology, or testing and assessing students, the content of these courses may be heavily theoretical or focus on idealised recommendations for teaching that bear little or no relationship to teachers' own teaching contexts (Farrell, 2009). As Sagor (1992, pp. 3-4) points out: "The topics, problems  or issues pursued [in academic research] are significant but not necessarily helpful to teachers on the front line". Similarly, when more experienced teachers are offered professional development that consists of workshops based on "handed-down requirements" (Leung, 2009, p. 53), they are likely to find little of relevance to their daily work and may even actively resist what is being advocated.

In contrast, where teachers are part of an active "community of practice" that draws on their personal ideas and experience and assists them to take these ideas further through collaboration, they gain a collective opportunity to change those practices (Richards & Pennington, 1998).  A growing trend in the literature (e.g. see Burns & Richards, 2009; Johnson, 2009) advocates that teachers' professional development should be located in localised  school-based practices where teachers can investigate and problematise their teaching and reflect on their "living knowledge" (see the introductory quote from Swantz, in Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and lived experiences. One significant way in which this can be done is through collaborative action research.

## The value of collaborative action research

Action research democratises the process of knowledge production by building on the actions, beliefs and understandings of those working within a particular social context. It places emphasis on 'insider' experiences, rather than the more generalised observations of teaching and learning that may be advanced by external researchers.  Collaboration with others in the same or similar social situation (managers, colleagues, learners, parents) means that collective knowledge can be more widely shared, expanding beyond the individual teacher's classroom and potentially influencing other teachers' practices more broadly.

## Delineating collaboration

Collaboration is a notoriously elusive concept to capture and can be perceived differently within the diverse professional contexts of education, business, medicine, and technology, thus giving rise to multiple definitions. While col-

laboration and collaborative action research are frequently referred to in the language teaching professional development literature (for recent examples see Shen & Huang, 2007; Lin, 2012; Banegas et al, 2013), it is more difficult to find actual descriptions or definitions of what is meant by collaboration in action research and teacher development. One useful summary related to collaborative teacher development  is provided by Johnston (2009, p. 242) who describes it as:

> ...any sustained and systematic investigation into teaching and learning in which the teacher voluntarily collaborates with others involved in the teaching process, and in which professional development is a prime purpose.

He goes on to argue that collaborative professional development is not something that can be "done" to teachers, but that they "must have, or share, control over the process".

In a further attempt to capture salient meanings, from the literature as well as from my own experiences of working with concepts of collaborative action research, below I attempt to tease out some of the key characteristics of  a collaborative approach.

- Mutuality: shared sense of ownership and investment in the research and its outcomes
- Equality: democratic participation combining different roles in the research (teachers/students/facilitators)
- Collectivism: joint researching and sharing of ideas-in-progress
- Reciprocity: equal access to information and data by participants
- Sustainability: support from other team members to keep focused and on-task
- Affirmation:  joint evaluation and validation of each other's research
- Sociality:  awareness of broader social and educational context
- (Re)generation: dialogue as a source of creative reconstruction of practice

Central to the advantages offered by collaborative, rather than individual, action research is dialogic interaction between participants, which from a socio-constructivist perspective offers opportunities for teachers to externalise

existing tacitly held knowledge and to mediate each other's thinking (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).  Developments in thinking are thus scaffolded by  peers so that new knowledge that might not  be accessible individually can be articulated and reflected upon (Johnson, 2009). This form of professional collaborative learning:

> regards learning as an active, constructive process, in which knowledge is not just transmitted but is jointly created in an inherently social context where [people] work in groups...within an authentic situation using high-order thinking and problem-solving skills. (Woo et al., 2011, p. 44)

## Ways of working collaboratively

Various options for collaboration in action research can be considered. Each example that I describe is illustrated by comments from teacher-researchers I've worked with in the Australian context (all quotations are from Burns & Hood, 1997).

First, teachers can collaborate with other teachers within their own workplaces or across similar workplaces. Here I discuss three options for this kind of collaboration:

1) Research pairs: Two teachers work together on an area of mutual interest

2) Research groups: Teachers, in pairs or individually, come together to work on their selected topic and collaborate with the group to share their insights

3) Research teams:  Based on an existing team (e.g. discipline, department, faculty) teachers work together on a selected area of curriculum development

One teacher, who was already familiar with individual research in her classroom, comments on  how she saw the opportunity to do action research with other teachers as a productive way to "open a door"  on the challenges she faced:

> At a time when I was searching for solutions, the invitation to join an action research project seemed to open a door to a new way of problem-solving. I was not unfamiliar with action research, but the attraction of this particular project for me was its collaborative nature. I saw it as an opportunity to explore my difficulties and to discuss strategies for dealing with these issues with peers who were experiencing similar concerns. (Pam McPherson, 1997, p. 26)

A second approach to collaboration is that teachers can work with their students, a dimension that is particularly central to exploratory practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), and that responds to other calls for greater empowerment of learners (e.g. Norton & Toohey, 2004).  In the comment below, the teacher describes her students as 'co-participants' as they worked directly with her to observe and comment (often very critically) on the impact of the actions she put in place.

> This classroom-based action research was carried out with the involvement of students in my...course. My...class also participated in the research. I shall refer to my students as co-participants in the research because they have actively provided me with data....
>
> There was a lot to learn from the reversal of roles as I became a teacher-learner... As I was not contributing much to my team, Bruce and Robert started to coach me by showing me some strategies (Lenn de Leon, 1999, p. 108 and p. 112)

Although rather uncommon in the language teaching literature, in a third approach to collaboration, other participants in the educational community can be involved, such as school principals, administrators, professional development leaders, supervisors and parents (an example of participatory research involving parents from multilingual backgrounds is Mawjee & Grieshop, 2002).  Such combinations mean that teachers and their partners get to see 'the other side of the picture', or more specifically, to see 'each other's picture' as they share their different perspectives and understandings. Interaction between these participants means that issues that may be standing in the way of students' effective learning can be broken down as new ways of supporting student learning are sought. The comment below is from a staff training

consultant who participated in action research with six teachers from various teaching centres in her region:

> From the outset of the project it was obvious that as a group we all had varying ideas and interest areas in relation to teaching [mixed ability] groups. The notion of 'disparity' meant different things to each of us and each teacher wanted to embark on an investigation of an area of relevance to themselves....
>
> Participation in this project has been an enriching and professionally rewarding activity. The collaborative nature of this type of action research has linked teachers from different centre to work together on a common theme. Knowledge, experience and expertise have been brought together and shared openly for the development of us all...our learners have remained central to the process. (Eady, 1997)

Finally, a perhaps better known form of collaboration is through facilitator-teacher partnerships. The most frequent examples are of collaboration between a university-based researcher and teacher groups, where the research expertise of the researcher is combined with the practical expertise of teachers. One possible threat to this kind of collaboration is the power-differential, in that the researcher and the teachers' approach may differ in terms of what is seen as research, or in who considers themselves to be the more dominant/expert partner in the relationship. On the other hand, the facilitator may be able to defuse teachers' anxiety about doing research and support the development of the kind of research skills and knowledge that underpin action research. Facilitators could also be lead-teachers or professional development coordinators working within the school and, in this case, will have more extensive insider knowledge of the context than an external facilitator. In the following comment, an insider-facilitator comment on the value of the kind of support facilitation can offer:

> On-going support is critical so that those involved have access to work-in-progress discussions on a regular and frequent basis, as well as coordination support where necessary. While teachers may be individually in the classroom, action research is a collaborative venture and other people are important for bouncing ideas off. (Jane Hamilton, 1997, p. 148)

## Practical ideas for working collaboratively

Drawing on my experience of working with teacher action researchers, I offer some practical tips for strengthening a collaborative approach to conducting action research within a school or organisation. They have been found to be effective in promoting the characteristics of collaboration outlined above and in enabling teachers to work constructively and productively together.

- Organise the research so that there are opportunities to work in pairs or teams
- Identify a common theme/themes that everyone is interested in researching
- Set yourselves agreed starting and end-points for your inquiries
- Work out a series of meeting/discussion times to suit participants
- Give everyone equal 'air' time during the discussions
- Share ideas/comment on each other's research
- Be frank, open and respectful in sharing ideas
- Plan a variety of different ways to report the research (written/oral/visual) and set realistic deadlines
- Aim to publish the research in a teacher-friendly form if possible (newsletter, journal) and support each other to do this
- Invite other teachers to a session where you can present your research collectively

## Final thoughts

Collaborative action research contributes to teachers' professional development in at least three ways: knowledge construction becomes both personal and collective; new teaching and learning practices are scaffolded and supported by others; professional confidence in one's own efficacy as a teacher is enhanced through affirmation from colleagues. These three dimensions are reflected in the comments of Marie, with which I conclude this paper.

> The action research group members not only listened attentively to my 'discourses' but were also most constructive in their advice. I found our discussions very extending—they gave me a broader

perspective on my teaching role with this type of group [of learn-
ers]. Being in a 'neutral' environment away from my teaching cen-
tre helped me to reflect on my classroom practice in a much more
objective way and I found it stimulating to work with teachers
from other centres. The project gave me a better understanding
of [ X] as an organisation endeavouring to adjust to changing
educational demands. (Marie Muldoon, 1997, p.  23)

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# 2 *Putting 'understanding' first in practitioner research*

*Dick Allwright*

## Introduction

First of all I want to explain why I think it is so important to put 'understanding' first, as the essence of all research worthy of the name. And I will need to address the difficult question of what I mean by the term 'understanding' for our field.

Secondly I want to persuade you that if 'understanding' is so important, then it is something everybody needs to be working for, not just researchers (even if they also happen to be teachers), but teachers and learners as well.

Thirdly, I shall acknowledge two major threats to putting understanding not only first, but also 'for all'. Both these threats are related to the eternal issue of finding time for everything people need to do in the classroom. One is the pressure to focus on 'action for change', rather than for 'understanding'. The other is just the overcrowding of the typical curriculum, and school timetable.

Throughout I will illustrate from published research and personal experience how some people have managed to find productive ways of addressing these concerns.

A word of caution before I go further.

I have been retired now for more than ten years, and so I could be talking today about concerns that are already being adequately addressed in the field of teacher-research in the language classroom. If so I can only apologise in advance and hope that my words will nevertheless serve to encourage people to 'keep up the good work', and reinforce anyone who is still finding it difficult to 'put understanding first', to get everyone working for 'understanding', and to find time for everything.

Finally, I will propose three questions that I would invite you to ask of any teacher-research you may be personally involved in:

    I.      Does this research pay sufficient attention to understanding?
    II.     Whose understanding can this research develop?
    III.    Is this research a good use of class time?

To get started I need to address the question: What is 'research'?

## Essentially research, for me, is a process of working for understanding

This is what basic science is about: doing research so that our understanding is developed. Research may have other functions in practice (e.g. product testing rather than hypothesis testing), but I believe it is universally acknowledged that its essential function is that of working for understanding. There will always be arguments about how research should be conducted to be worthy of the name, but not, I think, about what research is fundamentally for.

It is also universally accepted, I think, that understanding is a necessary pre-requisite for any intelligent decision-making. Not all decisions can be taken on the basis of a thorough understanding of the situation, but taking a decision without first even trying to understand the situation at stake makes no sense at all. 'Putting understanding first' is clearly what is required, and not just in science, or in education, but throughout life.

Note the conference theme puts a focus on teacher 'development'. For me there is a direct link to be made between the notions of 'development' and 'understanding'. In our field we distinguish between 'training', 'education', and 'development' for language teachers. For me 'teacher training' is about acquiring and mastering the necessary practical skills involved in being a classroom language teacher, starting with such basic things as knowing how to speak to the class so that everybody can hear what you are saying. 'Teacher education' is essentially about acquiring the relevant language and educational knowledge. That leaves 'teacher development' to be equated with going well beyond both skills and knowledge to work for 'understanding', a direct parallel with 'research' itself.

## But what do I mean by 'understanding'?

First of all, I see 'understanding' and 'knowledge' as two very different things. Gathering relevant 'knowledge' about something may be very helpful in developing an 'understanding' of it, but having a lot of relevant knowledge in itself in no way guarantees that understanding will follow. Something else is necessary if 'knowledge' is to lead to 'understanding', to something like 'wisdom'. In our field there are a lot of people who know a lot about communication, but their attempts to write about it, or talk about it, do not necessarily encourage us to believe they really understand how to communicate. They clearly know what they are talking about, but do not seem to know how to communicate their knowledge.

This brings us to another way of looking at what we mean by the word 'understanding'. There are two very different conceptions of what understanding involves: 'intellectual' understanding and 'empathetic' understanding, which could be very crudely paraphrased as 'understanding things' and 'understanding people'. The poor communicators about communication appear to have an intellectual understanding of their subject, but at the same time seem to lack the 'empathetic understanding' that would help them meet the needs of their readers or listeners.

Intellectual understanding appears often to be enough for the 'hard' sciences, looking for clearly and precisely articulated, evidence-based claims about the way that the physical world works – claims that can be challenged and perhaps disproved by subsequent research and new evidence. So, for example, early research on malaria suggested water itself was the carrier, but later research revealed the crucial role of the female anopheles mosquito.

But language teaching is not a 'hard' science. It is a social one, in which the role of people, and the relationship between them, is crucial, and infinitely more complex than the behaviour of mosquitoes. For that we need the sort of understanding that takes people properly into account, understanding based on empathy (on being able to see things from another person's point of view) rather than purely on intellect. This is the sort of understanding exhibited by experienced teachers who are acknowledged to be excellent at their job. One of the curiosities of such people, however, is that in our field there is practically a tradition that the best teachers have little or nothing to say about what makes them so good. On one memorable occasion I remember a very highly regarded language teacher in New York, when asked in public (at an inter-

national event at Teachers College, Columbia University bringing American, British and Canadian researchers together) what she did that made her so successful, could only say that all she knew was that she kept on getting her contract renewed, so she had to be doing something right.

What we are dealing with here, I believe, is best seen as a sort of understanding that cannot necessarily be put into precisely articulated statements like the scientific claims in the non-social sciences, but as the sort of understanding that nevertheless informs everyday classroom decision-making. In short, it is the sort of understanding that is perhaps 'beyond words', but that can nevertheless be 'lived', even if it cannot be usefully described so that others have something concrete to try to emulate.

I want to cover both sorts of understanding here, but my focus will be on the liveable kind, because it is probably much less familiar a concept in educational research circles, even though it is the stuff of everyday life. It is the sort of understanding that I find crucial to my notion of practitioner research. A telling example, for me, is the story told to me by a Brazilian teacher of her distress, and frustration, at her children listening to music during class. Instead of just trying to ban it, however, she got them to talk about *why* they seemed to need to listen to music all the time. They reasoned very well with her, she said, that they always worked to music in their ears at home, and that for them it wasn't the distraction it might be for her – in fact it served to insulate them from whatever else was going on at home. But they did acknowledge that they should not keep the music going while she was talking, because that was discourteous and unproductive. They reached a 'liveable understanding', in other words, one the teacher would not have reached by reading up about young people's need for distraction, or whatever other intellectual understanding might have looked worth investigating.

Something else I find interesting about this sort of understanding is that the understanding reached cannot simply be passed on to other teachers and simply adopted by them. What could be passed on, if the teacher wrote up the whole experience in sufficient detail, is the steps the teacher took to better understand her situation. Other teachers could try these steps out for themselves, modifying them as they see fit for their own specific situations. So this is the sort of work for understanding that may not produce straightforwardly communicable and replicable findings, but it can produce procedural descriptions that other teachers (and learners) may find helpful.

This double way of looking at 'understanding' can help us make what I believe is the crucial move from asking 'how' questions to asking 'why' ones. Understanding material things is often a matter of trying to discover the mechanisms that make things work the way they do. We don't have to try to take into account what motivation water might have for boiling at 100C. We can understand water without resort to such notions as motivation, because such notions are specific to living things. When we are trying to understand people, however, it is natural to ask such 'why' questions. Sadly, in our field, we have allowed the search for a purely intellectual understanding to dominate.

For decades now, however, we have all too often, I believe, tried to deal with understanding language teaching and learning as if it was an essentially technical matter of knowing precisely 'how to teach', a matter of finding the right classroom teaching techniques for maximum measurable achievement, rather than an essentially human matter – of getting the best relationship between teachers and learners for a broadly productive learning environment.

### From asking 'how?' to asking 'why?'

Ruwen Zhang's work on an extended reading class will illustrate this move from 'technical' to 'human' considerations. Zhang was very concerned that she could not find a successful way of teaching extensive reading at a Chinese University. She writes (Zhang, 2004: 331):

> "As a responsible teacher", "I have always acted in the problem-solving tradition, trying to get rid of problems one by one as soon as I come across them in my teaching activities. I have hoped that in this way I will improve my teaching method and help my students to develop their English language proficiency."

However, this approach had not worked for her (op cit: 334):

> "Frequent modifications to my teaching methods did not produce positive results."

Reflecting on the situation she realised (op cit: 334):

> "I had been so worried about the teaching outcomes, in other words, about the examination results, that I never cared about

whether my students enjoyed the class or not. It suddenly oc-
curred to me that that the only way out was to emphasise the 'the
quality of life in the classroom'."

She did so, successfully, and concluded (op cit: 345):

"Only by continuous exploration, only by successful co-operation
between teachers and students, can we navigate the complexities
of the language classroom effectively."

This work by Zhang represents a radical change from the traditional 'prob-
lem-solving' approach she had used up to then. It was informed by develop-
ments in 'Exploratory Practice', which I shall return to later in this paper.
This problem-solving approach was itself informed by the long tradition of
believing that salvation lay in the discovery of increasingly efficient teaching
techniques. Back in the 1960s the search was on for the 'best' language teach-
ing method, as if there would be just one 'best' method, which, once discov-
ered, could, and should be adopted universally – by everyone, everywhere (see
Smith, 1970). It did not take very long (less than a complete decade) for the
field to give up on 'method' as the key concept, because our experiments had
failed to demonstrate convincingly that method mattered so very much. One
critic wrote (Grittner, 1968, in Allwright, 1988: 10):

"...perhaps we should ask for a cease-fire while we search for a
more productive means of investigation."

That soon arrived. We realised we could break methods down into their
component teaching techniques, and look at them one by one. The 'method'
experiments had largely failed for technical reasons (the impossibility of con-
trolling them well enough, for example, when they needed to involve thou-
sands of learners over several years) (see again Allwright, 1988, Chapter 1).
Experimenting with teaching techniques looked much more promising to
many people), including myself at the time (see, for example, Lindblad, 1969
and Allwright, 1975). Techniques could surely be observed, and their success
or failure measured, in small-scale, relatively easily controlled experiments.
This was the advent of the idea that language teaching and learning could best
be improved by introducing new and more efficient teaching techniques.

I think it was this idea that informed the whole development of action
research, which switched the focus from academics doing the experiments to
teachers doing them for themselves, in a direct effort to improve the efficien-
cy of their teaching. That was fundamentally a 'political' move to 'empower'
teachers, to make it possible for them to be their own intellectuals, not eternal-
ly dependent on academics. So it represented a major break with educational
tradition, and as such was a very exciting development for many (including
me at the beginning, as an 'academic' having second thoughts about my role in
relation to teachers).

But it did not represent such a fundamental a break with ideas about what
sort of research was worth doing. Action researchers retained the basic aca-
demic model of small-scale experimental research (minus the 'control group'),
and the 'problem-solving' attitude of hoping to change things for the better
by finding more efficient classroom techniques. It was (and still mostly is?)
essentially about 'action for change', rather than 'action for understanding'.
So this was also basically a continuation of the faith in 'technicism' (for a full
discussion of this position, and its implications for practitioner research, (see
Allwright, 2005a). There was little sign of a serious concern for intellectual
understanding, let alone the empathetic sort of understanding.

## But, who needs to ask 'why?'? Who needs to understand?

Traditionally, and very crudely, it has been the researchers' job to develop un-
derstanding - to 'make sense of what's going on'. It is then the teachers' job to
put into practice whatever understandings the researchers develop – to 'make
what goes on sensible', and the learners' job is simply to do whatever the teach-
er wants them to do.

Following this crude representation, it clearly is the researcher's responsi-
bility to try to 'make sense of what's going on', but the researcher has no re-
sponsibility for 'making what goes on sensible'. That is surely the teacher's job.
But you cannot expect a teacher to be able to 'make what's goes on sensible'
unless the teacher can already 'make sense of what's going on'. Which begs the
question: 'Can teachers trust researchers to supply the sort of research findings
that will help teachers understand what's going on in their own classrooms?'
[Lots of additional questions leap up: 'even if researchers get the relevant find-
ings, can they communicate them successfully to teachers'; 'even if researchers
get the findings, can they truly help teachers understand what's going on in

their own classrooms, or will their findings be things that are generally true, but not necessarily true for any particular class at any particular time'.]

If the teacher is also the researcher, as in practitioner research, then the teachers is clearly responsible for both, and the teacher/researcher can hope to get an understanding that is directly appropriate for his or her particular learners. But not unless 'understanding' is what the research aimed at developing. Not if it's only trying to find a 'better' way of practising vocabulary, for example.

But what about the learners?

Wouldn't it be good if they understood (both intellectually and empathetically), and if they knew how they could help make what's going on sensible, for them? That may seem hopelessly optimistic, to expect learners to be able to contribute to their own learning in this way, but experience with 'Exploratory Practice', the sort of inclusive practitioner research I have been involved in developing over the last twenty-five or so years, suggests very strongly, that if you trust them to try, they will respond very well. (Recall the Brazilian teacher and her successful way of dealing with learners listening to music in class.)

It took us a very long time to realise that we could actually ask learners about their learning lives. It wasn't until 1980 that I formulated the proposition that I think has pleased me most in all my writing (Allwright, 1980: 165; also in Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 1):

"Learners are interesting, at least as interesting as teachers."

And even then I had not got far beyond thinking of learners as sources of data for me, the researcher, to interpret. We had got used to treating learners as objects of careful classroom observation, like ornithologists study bird migration, and we would try to interpret what they did in class, as if, as with birds, there was no point in trying to get them to talk to us about their experiences.

Nowadays teachers are routinely asked to be their own researchers, with their own experiments and their own interpretations, but it is still much rarer to see learners being treated as if they too might have anything of interest to say about their classroom lives, and even rarer to see them invited to ask their own questions about their own classroom language learning experiences.

But, many years ago now, in the mid-1980s, Safya Cherchalli asked fifteen-year-old Algerian learners about their learning lives. What they said to her made it very clear that they wanted to understand what's was going on in their lessons (Cherchalli, 1988). These comments were translated into English from

interviews Cherchalli conducted and recorded. The numbers in the brackets after each quote below refer to the page number in Cherchalli's thesis where each quote can be found. It's worth noting that half of the comments below were from the more successful students in the class. These are marked by an (S) after the page number. Where they were from relatively weak students, I have put a (W) after the page number. It is quite clear from Cherchalli's thesis that the relatively weak students in the class do not have a monopoly of concern about their need to understand what's going on in their lessons.

"It's all confusing, there is no structure in the lesson." (315W)

"Nobody has ever explained the techniques of these exercises!" (295S)

"I have no idea why we're doing this kind of exercise! I know that teachers have some idea in mind but I don't know which one!" (295S)

"If one day a student happens to miss a word, another day he won't understand a whole sentence, and then it will be whole paragraph. OK you can tell us that the students must ask the teacher for whatever explanation. But OK once, twice, often, and the teacher will get very fed up." (275W)

"If there is sufficient time we try to understand, use logic…if not, we draw heads or tails!" (298S)

Finally, and most despairingly:

"Sometimes I only understand a lesson after having exhausted the teacher and my classmates." (185W)

Other research has demonstrated just how what learners do in class determines to a large extent what learning opportunities are like in class (see Allwright, 1984; see also, much more recently, Woods, 2006). Notice how, from another of Cherchalli's learners, we can imagine that, had this student felt able to put the question in his or her mind, then that might have created a valuable learning opportunity for the rest of the class.

"Sometimes I feel like asking the teacher a question but just realising that perhaps the rest of the class understand I hesitate." (185W)

In Slimani's doctoral research (Slimani, 1987) we see how contributions from learners create learning opportunities that seem to be more successful in achieving learning than contributions directly from the teacher (see also Allwright, 2005b for a more recent discussion of the move from 'teaching points' to 'learning opportunities').

### So, what does all this tell us about the role of the learners?

They are key practitioners, in an essentially social setting. They want to understand, to make sense of what's going in their learning lives, and they can play a significant role in helping 'make what goes on sensible', too.

For all these reasons I believe it makes sense to think about how we might treat learners as co-practitioners, alongside teachers, rather than as the passive 'clients' of professional services provided by teachers. This is the main idea throughout the book Judith Hanks and published about learner development through inclusive practitioner research (*The Developing Language Learner*, 2009). Because if learners are treated as practitioners, alongside teachers, and we think of teachers as profiting from their own development, then surely we should also be thinking about learner development in the same way, as something to somehow build into the curriculum.

But isn't it asking too much of learners to expect all of them to be capable of developing by reaching their own understandings of their classroom learning lives? Why not just let the teachers develop *their* (the teachers') understandings, and pass these on to their learners? Two main reasons:

a)  because of the inevitable communication problem (like the one between academic researchers and teachers). Is it reasonable to expect teachers to be able to pass on their understandings directly to all their learners?

And,

b)  because we cannot just 'borrow' other people's understandings, anyway. We have to make them our own. So why not *start* by trying to develop our own? It's what we all have to do all the time to get through life (making sense of everything), and all learners, absolutely all, however little intelligence they may display, deserve to be given every opportunity, with as much help as the essentially social setting of the classroom can provide, to develop their understandings just as far as they are in-

dividually capable of. It is, or should be, a central part of all education, surely.

Additionally, developing understandings (of what it means to be a classroom language teacher, of what it means to be a classroom language learner) is not something that can be done once and won't ever need to be done again. Since classroom life is a continuous, but continuously changing, process, so working for understanding it also needs to be a continuous process, fully integrated into everybody's everyday classroom learning and teaching lives.

### So, how can it be done?

What we need is an indefinitely sustainable way of helping all practitioners themselves (both teacher/researchers and learners) develop their understandings of classroom teaching and learning.

That's quite a lot to ask for already, but two external factors in particular typically make it even more difficult:

#### *Time pressures – a universal problem?*

Again we can learn from some of Cherchalli's learners in Algeria in the 1980s.

> "Teachers are generally in a hurry to get the lessons over and to pass to the following unit. It's exasperating! What kills me even more is that I spend all my time learning songs, trying to understand them, but I'm never given a chance to show what I know." (174S)

> "Sometimes we're blocked by a word. While we're thinking about it the teacher goes on talking about other things and we can't follow any more so we switch off." (186W)

> "We make mistakes because we're not given enough time to think about the rules! (253S)

> "We don't see the words again! We do understand them in class but we don't see them anymore." (189W)

Time to work through the language curriculum itself is never enough. So, time for any sort of research is going to be difficult to find, especially if we want it to be a continuous process, not a projectised one.

### The pressure for measurable improvement via visible change

Typically this seems to take the form of looking for the latest teaching techniques to get the best possible examination results – the 'problem-solving' approach that did not serve Zhang well enough.

I wish I could be persuaded that this particular pressure for change is not very widespread, and in any case not very strong, but I fear that it is almost universal, and can be very stressful. I think it becomes stressful especially when it seems to be promoting change for change's sake, as if change in itself were always desirable. (For more about 'change' see Allwright, in Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 282-3.)

It happens to be relatively easy to design a simple (if not entirely valid) practitioner research project to try out a change in the classroom, a new teaching idea perhaps. And decades of action research projects have been based on this basic intention. But, if working for understanding is the necessary prerequisite to intelligent decision-making, then we need to find time to ask 'why' before we try out a new 'how'. That way we can expect 'development' (ie better understanding), for both teachers and learners, as we saw in Ruwen Zhang's report. But it must necessarily take time, and as we have seen there is typically no time to spare.

There is one way in which the time taken working for understanding can actually save time in the long run, however, as we have frequently found with people using Exploratory Practice as the research model, rather than action research. Sometimes, more often than not in practice, the work for understanding itself resolves issues in a way that means new teaching techniques are just not needed. We saw this in the case of the Brazilian teacher upset by her learners listening to music in class. Teaching techniques become largely irrelevant because what is at issue is the quality of life in the classroom, not the up-to-dateness, or apparent technical efficiency, of the pedagogic techniques the teacher is using.

Both of the practical pressures I introduced above risk inducing burnout already (in learners as well as teachers), but this can only get worse if practitioners are also expected to somehow add a research dimension to their everyday classroom lives.

What we now need, then, is a way of helping Ts and Ls to understand, a way that challenges the pressure for visible change, that also somehow minimises the inevitable time demands, and so helps minimise the overall risk of burnout (again in both teachers and learners).

### The promise of exploratory practice

Exploratory Practice has been developed with such challenges at the forefront. One way we describe it is:

> Exploratory Practice is an indefinitely sustainable way for classroom language teachers and learners, while getting on with their learning and teaching, to develop their own understandings of life in the language classroom.

Unlike the varying lists of principles we have produced over the years (see Allwright, 2005: 353-366); and Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 260), these three lines seem astonishingly robust and resistant to significant change over more than twenty years of use. But such a cryptic description does seem to demand its own set of notes. So:

1. 'indefinitely sustainable' means it is not forced into time-limited projects, instead it involves a continuous commitment to exploration, whenever puzzling issues arise;
2. 'teachers and learners' means both need to be involved as 'understanders', as we have seen;
3. 'while getting on' means strenuously avoiding all parasitic research activities;
4. 'understandings' means accepting the plurality of understanding. It also means putting understandings first, and finding 'solutions to problems' second, if anywhere at all;
5. 'understandings' does not necessarily mean anything expressible in words, indeed, the most valuable understandings may be those that can only be 'lived', rather than expressed in words;
6. 'understandings of life' means life is the central concern, not 'improvement'.

Another way of describing EP, in one single convoluted sentence (based on Allwright, 2003: 127-8), is:

*Exploratory Practice involves*
  *A. practitioners (teachers **and** learners together) working to understand:*
  *a) what **they** want to understand, following their own agendas;*

b) not necessarily **in order to** bring about change;

c) not primarily **by** changing;

d) but by **using** normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools, so that *working for understanding is **part of** the teaching and learning, not extra to it;*

e) in a way that does not lead to 'burn-out', but that is **indefinitely sustainable**;

B. in order to contribute to:

f) **teaching and learning** themselves;

g) their own individual, collective, and mutual **practitioner development**.

What may not be immediately apparent in such statements is the idea that the whole conception of Exploratory Practice relies on it being integrated into the curriculum, not seen as separate from it. This essentially means that development, for all practitioners, is itself built in to the curriculum. The main mechanism for this is integration by using normal pedagogic practices as the investigative tools. Ana Rosario de Andrade's story will illustrate what may be involved, though all teachers will find their own preferred ways of working for understanding, naturally. (For Andrade's story in context see Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 208-209.)

> "The story of my puzzle began when I entered one of the class-rooms in the school where I teach night courses and I realised that some of my students had dropped out. I felt very disappointed because it was the end of the second semester and it would be a pity if they lost almost a year of studies. Then I proposed a class discussion in which their opinion and conclusions were raised.

The students realised that dropping out of school and not finishing the second grade would bring bad consequences in their life. They understood that the time they spend studying and the effort made would certainly guarantee a better job, it's an investment to achieve a positive result in the future. Moreover, they became aware that it's important to balance if giving up studying was really worthwhile. As I expected, they wanted to do something to help their friends.

After this reflection on our classroom reality and on some social problems, I decided to investigate *Why do my students drop out of school?*

It was great to see all the students preparing their investigation and the dedication to overcome their difficulty with the language in order to help their friends.

The investigation was carried out in a group of 35 students of ages ranging from 18 to 50. The class was divided into five groups, each group was responsible for one activity, and the activities were distributed according to their levels of knowledge of the language. The students grouped themselves, after they divided the activities. The students devised the activities according to their familiarity with the language. I helped the students with some problems with the language, when they asked for help. All the groups worked in close collaboration and with my orientation they started their research:

1st group: they prepared a questionnaire, with some personal questions in order to collect information about students' different problems and needs.

2nd group: they interviewed the drop-out students (they are all friends and live in the same neighbourhood) and tried to negotiate a special meeting with all the teachers involved in their classroom life.

3rd group: they made up sentences to motivate their friends to keep studying and some advice for the students to be aware of their responsibilities and try to accomplish the tasks.

4th group: they analysed each student's needs, trying to understand their friends' problem and also considering if it was possible to help them in some way. They also organised a meeting with the other teachers involved in their classroom life, where they showed the importance of their help in the process of bringing these students back. To my relief and surprise, the teachers decided to help us.

5th group: this last group made up a report on the students' experiences in handling working and studying, how they balanced working, family and studying, if the effort made in keeping up their studies was really worthwhile for their future."

Ana Rosaria comments:

> "This type of activity has proven to be very valuable in all aspects, since it provided a lot of growth for everyone involved. The students shared their experiences and reflected on the quality of life inside the classroom, introducing teachers and learners to the principles of classroom research, through Exploratory Practice.
>
> Besides all that, the students had to put into practice some grammar points like interrogative words, the use of *why* and *because*, and in order to write down some advice, the learners had to use some modals."

It would be foolish, and wrong of me, to try to persuade you that all of this is easy. It requires considerable thought to develop ways of working that suit a particular group of learners, and it may also call upon a teacher to demonstrate a level of trust in the learners that is initially more a a matter of hope than expectation. Trust, we have found, is a key element in classroom life. In practice we have found that demonstrating trust is an excellent way of gaining trust, so that trust in the classroom becomes mutual.

One way to approach the complex issues involved, and to share the inevitable burdens, is to seek out like-minded people and form a cooperative group. In Brazil the Rio de Janeiro Exploratory Practice group has been meeting regularly for many years now to work out collectively (teachers and learners together) how best to meet the challenges involved in incorporating EP into their teaching and learning. The work of the Rio EP Group is inspiringly described in Chapter 14 in Allwright and Hanks, 2009, a chapter entirely written by the members of the group themselves (for contact, write to epcentrerio@hotmail.com).

## In conclusion

In my abstract for this paper I wrote that I hoped to persuade you to agree with me on two sets of ideas that I believe have big implications for teacher-research:

1. That 'research' and 'development' are both essentially about getting understanding, so teacher-research for teacher development needs to be centred on working to understand, rather than on finding immediate solutions to practical classroom problems.
2. That learners need (and want) to understand at least as much as teachers do. That they do not think they get much help from teachers in this. And that our learners deserve all the help we can provide for them to develop their understandings.

I hoped also to persuade you that we can, by using a form of practitioner research called Exploratory Practice, both help learners develop their own understandings, and develop our own at the same time. In this way we can serve the important aim of bringing together both teacher and learner development.

As one of the founders of Exploratory Practice, I am obviously an advocate for doing research that way. But my greater aim here has been to address concerns I have about practitioner research in general:

I.    The risk that 'developing understanding' will be sacrificed to 'getting practical improvement'.
II.   The risk that, even if teacher-researchers' understandings are developed, the learners will not be encouraged to develop theirs.
III.  The risk that precious class time will be wasted.

So, whatever research model you find most appropriate for your purposes I urge you to ask the following three questions of any practitioner research project you are concerned with:

I.    Does this research pay sufficient attention to understanding?
II.   Whose understanding can this research develop?
III.  Is this research a good use of class time?

But, if you do try Exploratory Practice then please get in touch with us at the Exploratory Practice Network (via epcentrerio@hotmail.com, or r.allwright@lancaster.ac.uk) to let us know how you get on.

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## 3 Exploratory *action research as workplan: why, what and where from?*

### *Richard Smith*

### Introduction

In 2012 I was invited to advise on a project originally conceived by Tom Connelly of the British Council Chile. Disappointed by the results of previous, relatively top-down in-service teacher training initiatives, he had gained the approval of the Ministry of Education in Chile to sponsor up to 80 secondary school teachers to engage in a year-long action research experience. He had also appointed four mentors and arranged for all the participants and mentors to come together for a two-day workshop in Santiago in January 2013. My role was to plan the workshop and to provide a suggested outline for the year-long scheme of work. What actually happened overall has already been described (in Smith, Connelly and Rebolledo 2014). Innovative features included the fact that this was a programme for secondary school not university teachers, the fact that participation was voluntary, and attention was being paid to embedding the innovation rather than it being just a one-off. We also managed to achieve a flexible, process-oriented design, allowing for learning and modification along the way, and we feel, too, that we managed to develop fresh ideas about final sharing of findings in a teacher-friendly fashion. Rather than focusing again on these aspects, in the present short contribution I wish simply to provide some supplementary information about the rationale, characteristics and origins of the central notion of 'exploratory action research' (henceforth, 'exploratory AR') which I introduced at the workshop and which was refined as the project went on.[1] This notion emerged in response to specific local requirements, and my primary intention here is to show, for the possible benefit of others engaged in supporting teacher-research, how it has served a practical function in this particular context rather than to claim any kind of

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1   At the time of writing (April 2015), the project is due to enter its third year of implementation, with continuing British Council Chile and Ministry of Education Chile (PIAP programme) support.

intrinsic superiority for it over other forms of work. This reflective report begins, then, with considerations relating to practice, rather than with literature review or theoretical discussion. Nevertheless, from a desire to acknowledge sources and avoid misunderstanding I do end the report with some information relating to the origins of the notion of exploratory AR as developed in this project and the way it in some ways is and in other ways is not derived from or comparable to other approaches, in particular Exploratory Practice (see Allwright, this volume).

## A practical rationale

### Teacher-research in difficult circumstances

Doubts have previously been expressed – and continue to be expressed – about the feasibility of teacher-research forming part of ordinary teachers' lives (cf. Borg 2013). At the same time, teacher-research has been viewed as a particularly valid means for teachers to generate appropriate methodology in difficult circumstances (Smith 2011), and its wider transformative potential has long been recognized. My principal concern when responding to the challenge presented by the Chile project was, then, to recommend *realistic* procedures which would take full account of probable obstacles (cf. Smith, Connelly and Rebolledo 2014: 116), which would not add significantly to teachers' existing burdens, and which would, indeed, need to be built into teaching schedules of up to 40 lessons a week in situations where class sizes of 40 or more were quite normal. I hoped – more positively – that the approach would be experienced by busy teachers not only as viable but as practical and useful. Indeed, it would need to be seen from the outset as something which offered hope in difficult circumstances, not as yet another imposition in a long line of inappropriate in-service interventions.

### Need for a non-academic, gradualist and grounded approach

One factor militating against the widespread adoption of teacher-research which has perhaps not been emphasized sufficiently in the past may be the way academic norms are so often emphasized (cf. Smith 2015). Action research can seem off-putting to teachers for this reason, as has been shown by

Rebolledo (2013), who examined a previous initiative in the Chilean context. Paradoxically, indeed, teacher-research may have tended to become more associated with academic programmes than with voluntary activity on the part of teachers, as Borg (2013) has pointed out. Under the slogan 'Research *by* teachers *for* teachers', what I decided to try to come up with for the Chile project was a workshop and year-long plan which would start off with a deliberate attempt to demystify and, in a sense, de-academize or 'democratize' research (cf. Smith 2012). Also, rather than setting out an entire abstract 'technology' of action research in the initial workshop or associated materials, my plan was to initiate a *gradual* development of teacher-research capacities via an experience-based (that is, *grounded*) approach, to be supported by means of dialogue with mentors at points of need during the year.

## Exploratory action research as workplan

Those familiar with Exploratory Practice (cf. Allwright, this volume) may be wondering at this point why I did not recommend EP as a basis for teachers' work in the project. However, introducing teachers to action research had been pre-set in the agreement with the Ministry of Education and I was relatively comfortable with this emphasis due to my own background experience (see below). On the basis of the above considerations and this experience, I accordingly proposed a year-long plan of work which would involve a relatively long exploratory research lead-in period to be followed by one or, if time, two periods of action research 'proper', i.e. implementation and evaluation of a new action or actions for change. The descriptive term 'exploratory action research' came out of this, as I clarified and negotiated the overall workplan with those involved.

Exploratory AR, as this emerged within the project, can therefore be characterized as a gradualist approach, developed to be useful for induction into teacher-research in difficult circumstances, whereby teachers are encouraged first of all to engage in research-based *exploration* of issues arising in their classrooms via means which do not interfere with their everyday teaching, rather than immediately plunging into action and attempted measurement of change. Only after a first exploratory research phase has been completed are teachers guided to consider trying to resolve emerging issues by implementing and evaluating new actions, which themselves are grounded in and justified by findings from the first, exploratory phase.

Thus, the exploratory first phase which justified use of the adjective 'exploratory' before 'action research' can be seen to involve extensively clarifying the existing situation – the nature of a given 'problem' or other issue – before any action for change is conceived and undertaken. In diagrammatic form, the difference between 'conventional' action research (as this is often presented in texts and training programmes) and exploratory AR can be conceived of as follows:[2]
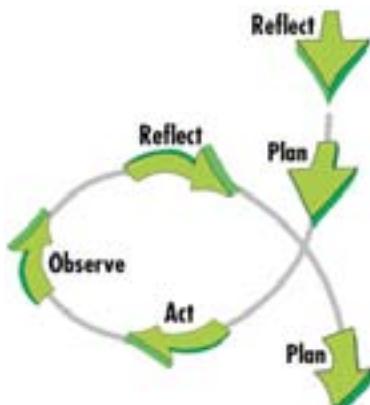


*Figure 1: Action Research*          *Figure 2: Exploratory AR*
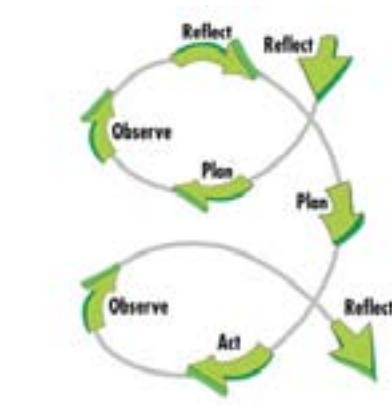
One example given to teachers at the initial workshop in Santiago was that, if lack of motivation seems to be an issue, students can be asked to write or talk about their current motivation (answering questions like 'What activities / materials do I like in class and why?'; 'What do I dislike in class and why?', 'What would I like to do in class and why?')  and the teacher can identify common concerns by analysing their feedback. This can not only help teachers decide on changes that are appropriate for their students, it also provides them with 'baseline data' – a way to compare the situations 'before' and 'after' any change they do try to implement. At the same time - as my own teacher-research and pedagogy for autonomy experience has shown me (cf. Smith 2003)

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2    There is a danger here of mischaracterizing action research, a danger which is apparent also in the way Exploratory Practice sets itself up in opposition to a particular conception of 'over-technical' AR. My general impression remains, though, that when AR is referred to in ELT – including in the visual models that are typically shown to represent it – the need for an initial, planned exploratory period is not generally mentioned.

– if students have been asked for their ideas about how their motivation can be improved in class, this can provide a bank of potentially appropriate ideas for trying out, while there is a possibility that just consulting students can in itself help to solve a given problem, with no further action needed.

In the report already referred to above (Smith, Connelly and Rebolledo 2014), there is a full description of how the project turned out in practice in its first year. There were some quite significant problems but also several successes. As reported there (pp.126-127),

> a dominant theme in final reflections was that participants had learned to listen to their students more, and that doing exploratory research had thereby fulfilled a valuable pedagogical function which plunging immediately into the 'action' part of action research might not have fulfilled to the same extent. Overall, then, we feel we succeeded in developing innovative ways of making teacher-research appear feasible as well as desirable in teachers' eyes, in apparently very unpromising conditions. The successes achieved despite the difficulties encountered are equally, we should emphasise, a testament to the determination of the participating teachers, and to the dedication of their mentors. Our experience suggests that the success or otherwise of initiatives to engage teachers in teacher-research may depend largely on what kind of teacher-research is introduced to teachers, how it is presented to them, how it is supported and what style of sharing of the research is expected.  […] What we found ourselves promoting, increasingly, was something innovative and teacher-friendly, whereby we approached teachers in a way that was not off-putting or overly academic.

## Origins in practice

The origins of the exploratory action research workplan described above lie in my previous experiences as a teacher and teacher educator, experiences which themselves were informed by but not governed by the ideas of authorities including Dick Allwright and Anne Burns. Thus, while exploratory AR can be interpreted as a kind of compromise between or eclectic combination of

Exploratory Practice and Action Research (cf. Wyatt and Pasamar Márquez 2015), the truth is that I did not think of it in a theory-driven or 'mathematical' ('AR + EP => exploratory AR') manner at the time. Instead, as I have been describing, the phrase 'exploratory action research' emerged simply as a logical description (for teachers and mentors) of a form of practice which I thought, from my past experience, it would be appropriate to recommend according to requirements in this context.

Taking these reflections further, the recommended workplan was certainly influenced by my understanding of Exploratory Practice as this understanding had built up over the years, but I feel was governed to a still greater degree by my prior practical experience – or perhaps I should say by my understandings of Exploratory Practice and Action Research only as these had been mediated by previous practical experience. When I first came across (and admired) the ideas of Dick Allwright and Anne Burns in the 1990s I was already experimenting with ideas around developing autonomy in my own practice and, increasingly, conceiving of my own inquiries into this practice as 'action research' (cf. Smith 2003). When I moved into a role in teacher education in the UK in 2000, I transferred some of my previous autonomy-oriented practices into my work with pre-experience MA students and engaged *them* in an action research experience which mirrored the way I had myself been learning as a teacher. In parallel, I documented the development of their autonomy as learners of teaching ('teacher-learner autonomy') via a series of action research studies connected with the development of the course in question (cf. Smith 2005; Brown, Smith and Ushioda 2007; also, Smith, Barkhuizen and Vieira 2013).

I had previously seen, then, how empowering action research can be as a means of professional and academic development, in my own experience as a teacher (educator) and in work with student-teachers in a particular 'Professional Practice' module. The workplan for the latter UK course has remained largely unchanged during the fifteen years since its inception in 2000, and is basically the same as that portrayed in Figure 2 above ('Exploratory AR'), though within a shorter timeframe. In this conception, as in the model presented and named for the first time in Chile, deep exploration of a particular area of concern precedes coming up with a plan for change and evaluating a new intervention.

In Chile I had been asked to introduce participants to 'Action Research' and could not in fact have recommended 'full-blown' Exploratory Practice but

I would not, anyway, have felt qualified by my own prior experience (as described above) to do so. On the one hand I wanted to recommend a relatively long initial 'exploratory' phase but on the other hand I wanted also to leave the door open to an experience of 'action research proper' – for reasons partly related to the value I had previously found in this, as described above.

The major change in approach which I introduced for the Chilean context was to continually stress the need to integrate research with teaching, in other words for the former not to burden the latter but to enhance it. My awareness of this need came from prior interest in and engagement with issues of teaching in difficult circumstances (cf. Smith 2011) and the ideas I brought to bear were largely derived from my own autonomy-related experiences of 'researching-as-teaching-for-learning' or 'autonomy-oriented teacher-research' as I was putting it in conference talks at the time, including at the 2nd annual conference on action research at Gediz in July 2012 (see also Mercer, Smith and Ushioda 2012). Of course this desire to integrate research and practice is another aspect which is immediately recognizable as akin to Exploratory Practice but it was not directly derived from the latter.

All of this is perhaps an over-long justification for what I really want to say in this brief contribution, which is that the exploratory AR workplan was not, in the way it was developed for the Chilean context nor in its existing manifestation in my UK teacher education practice, just a combination of two theoretical positions – EP and AR – nor has it ever been intended as a 'rival' to them. The use of 'exploratory' in the phrase 'Exploratory AR' came primarily out of my prior experience and was a pragmatic response to a particular context (much as Exploratory Practice was born in particular conditions in Rio de Janeiro), not an 'academic' attempt to capture territory or attention.

To make a general point in conclusion, teacher-researchers and teacher educator-researchers are not dependent on background theory – we construct our own knowledge on the basis of experience, and this might include developing eclectic-seeming approaches which are contextually appropriate and congruent with our own experience and values, and which we should then feel at liberty to describe on their own terms and share for the possible benefit of others similarly engaged, but without denying the validity of others' approaches in their own contexts. This – I have been hoping to demonstrate – is different from an 'academic' strategy which involves denigrating or ignoring others' positions to advance one's own. Adopting an exploratory action re-

search workplan has shown its practical worth for us, in our experience in a particular context. In describing its rationale, nature and origins here I hope others might feel encouraged to use exploratory action research and/or develop/strengthen their own approach.

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# 4 Professional development through teacher-research

## Kenan Dikilitaş

This chapter discusses the relation between different forms of teacher-research including exploratory practice, reflective practice and action research. It also discusses the changing approaches to professional development in English language teacher education with references to the basic principles of these three forms of research.

Professional development (PD) has undergone major changes in its form and content recently due to simultaneous developments in education as well as technology and pedagogy. PD sessions have moved away from trainer-based to a trainee-based format, one in which trainees actively learn and develop using their own resources as well as constructive feedback and scaffolding provided by trainers (Mann, 2005).

Trainees are no longer seen as recipients of knowledge, but constructors of it through active engagement in the process of learning. In addition, they are given more opportunities to take control of their learning as is implied and encouraged by principles of autonomous learning. There are two basic reasons why teachers should maintain sustained participation in professional development. The first, as suggested by Bailey, Curtis and Nunan (2001), is that the professional field of English language teaching is changing and developing, which could be difficult to follow without integration into professional development. Similarly, another reason is that the basic knowledge about how to teach has for a long time also been undergoing dramatic changes (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Pedagogical and practical changes in language teaching can be monitored and understood through several professional activities ranging from top-down models, where teachers are provided with received knowledge, to bottom-up models where teachers are encouraged and guided explicitly to discover and understand the changing nature of knowledge and practice of language teach-

ing. From such a perspective, active research engagement is worth mentioning and highlighting as it prioritizes issues discussed above. Inquiry-based professional development encourages trainees to research their own practices, understand more about their own classroom context and come to a stage where they make informed decisions for development or change in the existing practices. The research they carry out with their learners and colleagues also gives them an opportunity to construct new knowledge through mutual development. Learners play a key role in the identification of the changes. As they are at the center of learning process, how they learn and promote linguistic knowledge will inevitably influence the way learning and teaching theories are constructed and put into use. It is actually the intellectual change in younger generations that force the theoretical issues to reconsider their underlying concepts. The teacher-researchers will access such knowledge base first hand rather than through the eyes of academic researchers who write their articles using academic language which teachers may not be able to understand and publish them in hard-to-access journals. Therefore, if teachers are equipped with researching skills and can be trained to put insightful critical thinking into what they are researching, the data they collect and the interpretations they draw from research could be most useful.

**Engagement in research**

Teacher-research as a professional development strategy has started to become an established one recently. The term 'teacher-research' refers to a form of research conducted by classroom teachers to investigate an issue they identify and reach some conclusions for themselves that can be constantly revised, improved and changed. Therefore, teacher-research is not a product in itself. Rather, it is a process through which teachers raise awareness in the issues in question and understand unexplored perspectives as a result of the extensive focused knowledge acquired through reading and thinking critically. It is this process of asking questions and trying to understand the scope that helps teachers develop ways of critically reflecting on the emerging issues. Learning how to identify issues and approach them critically is the key ability that teachers should develop because there is no end to the problems, questions and thought-provoking points that could emerge in any classroom.

These never-ending issues in the lives of teachers make teacher-research a continuous professional development tool, which focuses on teacher development through researching own beliefs and practices. Although teacher-research is known as research conducted by teachers in their classrooms, the form that it takes can vary according to whether it is based on exploration of context (Allwright and Hanks, 2009), reflection on teaching practices (Schön, 1983; Wallace, 1991) or taking action or making changes (Burns, 2011).

While conducting teacher-research projects since 2011, I felt that there was a clear distinction and relation between these three forms of research. To my understanding, exploratory practice is the first step to be taken before any data-based classroom research is carried out. By exploring a specific context, personal beliefs, and practices with learners or colleagues, you prepare the input or idea to reflect on, which is, I believe, the next stage. Once classroom issues are understood from different perspectives, then one can reflect on them systematically to gain deeper insight into issues initially highlighted in mutual quest. The ideas are outlined and the issue is clarified for further questioning. Though it seems that this is also a process of researching and analyzing, a more systematic research path should be planned and carried out as in action research, which requires trying out new practices and taking action accordingly, which may in turn promote instructional change. Without insightful data collection and analysis, it could be wrong to decide on changes in pedagogy.

The data collected and the ideas highlighted could not form a necessary basis for change. This shows clearly that different forms of research serve different purposes. If the aim is to understand the issues and enhance quality of life by raising awareness in different aspects of teaching, you can stay at the exploratory practice level. If the aim is to gain further insight into the explored areas of your teaching, then you need to start to theorize your ideas/personal experiences more systematically. When the theorized practices inform you that you need more concrete and objective data to ensure instructional or pedagogical change, then you should start to identify the issue properly carry out researching cycle to take actions or test the findings before you decide on any change. Therefore, we are proposing a long path before changing practices currently done. Exploring and reflecting may be two steps to take before any engagement in research for professional develop-

ment. The following figure shows how each form of research can support one another and can function as the driving force of the process of researching.



*Figure 1: Forms of Teacher-research for Professional Development*

The figure also symbolizes how the pedagogical issue is developed and deepened into a researchable and answerable focus. The size of each cog varies according to the degree of specificity. In exploratory practice, the issue in question is discussed and explored from a broader perspective, which is narrowed down to a relatively more specific focus in reflective practice, which can be a concrete experience. Then the reflection experience becomes the specific focus or the problem that could be solved in action research.

Allwright (2004) highlights the function of EP as providing a basis for

further change. He suggests that striving to understand classroom life will provide opportunities for teachers and learners to collaborate pleasantly and productively. He also advocates that this interaction can also prepare an insightful basis for smooth pedagogic change. It could be suggested here that Allwright also implies that one cannot make changes at the exploration stage but prepare in the cognition for changes to be made in the future. In addition, to call a pedagogical issue a problem without adequately exploring the dimension and reflecting on it could be dangerous. The necessity of exploring and reflecting before researching proves to be necessary at this stage as well. Allwright highlights this issue by suggesting a softer word, 'puzzle', instead of 'problem'. It is critically implied here that the exploration stage is where teachers unlock a puzzle and get to understand how and why they do things.  A project conducted in BirminghamUniversity, titled "Professional Development for Academics Involved in Teaching" (ProDAIT) suggests seven key principles of any EP, which adapted as follows:

- Prioritize quality of classroom life
- Strive mainly to understand classroom life
- Do it as a joint project with learners or other teachers
- Strive to create an atmosphere of collegiality
- Focus on creating mutual development
- Put explored issues into classroom practice
- Make EP a culture that is part of teaching

In addition to these seven principles adapted, the project which has been carried out at Gediz University for the past 5 years showed that teachers go through the exploration process before they engage in research. Therefore, one more principle can be added to this list, which is "to seek critical areas which need researching further". This principle is important in that it can help teachers do action research in areas that are critical to their classroom instruction.

Reflective practice, similarly, provides more solid evidence and basis for the problem to be investigated systematically before a teacher decides on a pedagogical change in classroom practices. RP supports the ideas that teacher can learn by closely reflecting on classroom experiences (Schön,

1983; Wallace, 1991). RP provides teachers with opportunities to gain insight into the experiences to better understand their practices. Teachers in such a practice based on thinking are expected to collect information about their teaching to promote them in the following stages. Such an activity can promote teachers' understanding of the issue in question from students' perspective as well as from their own subjective perspectives. The exploration through discussion in the EP as an initial stage is consolidated with more focused and closer examination of a specific practice. The emerging or identified weakness or points to improve at this stage can better inform the problem to be investigated in an action research, which can follow EP and RP activities.

Action research (see Burns, 2011) is seen as a cycle of researching and taking actions to solve pedagogical problems in a way that could be research-based or data-collection and analysis-dependent. What I claim here is that one may not be able to start an action research without dealing with exploratory and reflective practice, which can contribute to the critical clarification of practical issues and problems in the classroom teaching. To solve problems in teaching may require carefully followed exploring and reflecting process because after action research teachers may need to take action in the form of changing or seriously modifying their existing practices. Therefore, I believe that exploratory practice together with reflective practice is the first step to any research- or inquiry- based professional development.

Such a staged-account of engagement in research has been achieved in this project carried out at Gediz University. Different researchers followed different paths at different paces while proceeding with their research studies, but basically they invested a lot of time and energy on the clarification of issues and narrowing down the focus of the study. The discussions and ideas developed in the last four years will inform the next year's (2014-2015) teacher-research project. The following stages have been outlined and scheduled with 33 teachers who would participate.

*Table 1. A suggested teacher-research programme*

| Stages | Activities |
|---|---|
| 1st quarter | **Planning the research design**<br>1. Identifying purpose and scope<br>2. Specifying research questions<br>3. Discussing data collection tool<br>4. Deciding on analysis of the data<br>5. Outlining the research plan |
| 2nd quarter | **Doing teacher-research**<br>1. Preparing tools for data collection<br>2. Designing classroom activities or materials<br>3. Collecting data<br>4. Transcribing or sorting out the data |
| 3rd quarter | **Analyzing the data**<br>1. Answering RQs with evidence from the data<br>2. Drawing out implications<br>3. Developing ideas for reflection |
| 4th quarter | **Writing-up**<br>1. Writing up the section of the research<br>2. Editing the paper<br>3. Preparing the presentation<br>4. Submitting the research<br><br>Presentation at a Teacher-research Conference |

To help teacher-researchers evaluate their teacher-research at the end of their engagement in doing one is also important in that they can reflect on the overall teacher-research process. I designed a checklist for teacher-researchers to consider and wanted to ensure teachers know the scope and purpose of research they are going to engage in. This checklist can also provide them with an opportunity to evaluate their teacher-research and think proactively for the next research experience. It offers critical and constructive guidance to ultimately generate a work that is of value to their professional development.

*Table 2. Self-check list for teacher-research*

| Characteristics | Tick |
|---|---|
| 1.  I have done this research with and for my own students | |
| 2.  I have done this research for developing ideas for classroom teaching | |
| 3.  I am directly involved in the research as a teacher-researcher | |
| 4.  I have implemented a new practice or explored others' opinions | |
| 5.  I did this research in my own classroom | |
| 6.  I integrated a new practice into my own classroom | |
| 7.  I have sought my colleagues' opinions during the process | |
| 8.  I collected data from my own students | |
| 9.  I analyzed data using different tools | |
| 10. I reflected on and interpreted the research findings for development | |
| 11. It has helped me develop my classroom practices | |
| 12. I have shared new knowledge with my students | |
| 13. It has helped me understand the teaching and learning process | |
| 14. It has helped me understand the context in which I work. | |
| 15. I benefited from the research personally and professionally | |
| 16. I can describe changes or development in my instructional and professional understanding | |

It should be noted that the items of characteristics listed here have been created on the basis of the experiences in the project as well as from the relevant literature for the specific context in which I have been working. However, hopefully it can be used in any similar projects.

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# PART II

# 5  *Experiencing feedback from student and teacher perspectives*

*Rukiye Eryılmaz*

## Context and problem

I do not know how many times I have felt anxious about whether or not to correct a student who has made a mistake in class. The dilemma of letting mistakes happen or discouraging students has always confused and bothered me. On the one hand, I did not want to spoil students' motivation; on the other, I did not want to ignore the incorrect use of language. Therefore, I have usually been hesitant while giving feedback in class. At the same time, I have always tried to think of the correct way of doing it without offending the students.

Being a non-native English teacher I also make several mistakes ranging from unimportant to serious. When someone else corrects me, no matter how useful it is to me, I feel a slight embarrassment and frustration. Hence, I can imagine how annoying it is for a student to be corrected – interrupted – in front of their peers. Still, as teachers, we are supposed to control mistakes to an extent and make sure students do not fossilize them.

In this context, the main problem is how to correct students. So far, several methods, which will be explained later on, have been used by teachers. It is mostly us, teachers, who decide how and when to correct. Yet, what is happening on the students' side is ambiguous. Which correction methods are well-appreciated by students is a significant issue to be resolved. Therefore, I raised three questions:

- What do students think about corrective feedback?
- Which correction method makes them less annoyed?
- If students prefer a specific method, what does this mean?

## Literature review

It is inevitable that second language learners make lexical, grammatical and phonological mistakes. Making mistakes is in the nature of learning. However,

not every incorrect utterance is a mistake; on the contrary, there are 'mistakes' and there are 'errors', which were defined by Norrish (1983) as systematic deviations that happen when a learner has not learnt something and consistently 'gets it wrong'. In other words, "error" is a form or structure that a native speaker deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use (Klassen, 1991). According to the *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (1992), a learner makes a mistake when writing or speaking because of lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance. Mistakes can be self-corrected when attention is drawn to them. In other words, an error occurs because the learner does not know what is correct, and thus it cannot be self-corrected (Erdoğan, 2005). That being the case, not every wrong utterance a student makes requires correction. The important thing is that teachers should be able to know when and how to intervene so as to not only help students learn but also to keep them motivated. However, there is a discrepancy among teachers over whether to correct all mistakes or just those which need immediate remedy.  Besides, some teachers may not know how to give corrective feedback, which can be defined as;

> Any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect. This includes various responses that the learners receive. When a language learner says, 'He go to school every day', corrective feedback can be explicit, for example, 'no, you should say goes, not go' or implicit 'yes he goes to school every day', and may or may not include metalinguistic information, for example, 'Don't forget to make the verb agree with the subject. (El Tatawy, 2002, p.1, quoted in Lightbrown and Spada, 1999, pp. 171-172).

At this point it is also crucial to know the difference between communicative practice and accuracy practice. In communicative practice language teachers should correct only those errors that hinder communication, whereas in activities involving a specific grammatical structure, a function, or a skill, correction should focus on errors strictly related to the structure being addressed. This issue is explained as follows by Carranza (2007);

> […] if teachers constantly correct learners' attempts to speak during free communicative activities, the learners might become frustrated, build negative attitudes towards language learning,

and feel embarrassed and reluctant to use the target language. At the same time, however, language learners need correction in order to improve their proficiency in the target language.

The opinions of learners, their preferences for error correction, and their views about different error correction procedures are almost totally neglected (Oladejo, 1993). It is true that we may not know which correction method is good for each learner. However, it is not impossible to learn what students think of corrective feedback. Since our main goal is to improve learning, we should consult with students as well and correct them in accordance with their needs and if needed preferences. As Oladejo (1993) argues;

> If error correction is to be effective as a major source of feedback to the learner, and as a means of generating correct target language performance, then teachers must be willing not only to change their attitudes towards errors, but they must also be ready to modify their old habits with regard to the practice of error correction in the classroom.

 I chose the feedback methods from Brown's *Principles of Language Teaching and Learning* (2000). He categorized them as recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, explicit correction, and repetition. Of these methods, recast and clarification request are implicit whereas the other four are explicit. Below, each term is explained with examples from my own class:

1. *Recast*: An implicit type of corrective feedback that reformulates or expands an ill-formed or incomplete utterance in an obtrusive way.

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S: I have got tall antique vase.
T: I see,J you have got a tall antique vase.

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2. *Clarification request*: An elicitation of a reformulation or repetition from a student.

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S: Reynaldo doesn't has any boxes of chocolate. (Grammatical mistake)
T: I'm sorry? (Clarification request)

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3. *Metalinguistic feedback*: Provides "comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance" (Brown, 2000 cited in Lyster, 2004, p.405).

S: I'm tired of being tell...
T: We talked about passive voice, remember?

4. *Elicitation*: A corrective technique that prompts the learner to self-correct. Elicitation and other prompts are more overt in their request for a response.

S: I'm going at home.
T: I'm going...?
S: Sorry, I'm going home.

5. *Explicit correction*: A clear indication to the student that the form is incorrect and provision of a corrected form.

S: What would you do if you see Michael Jackson?
T: No, no "see." What would you do if you saw Michael Jackson?

6. *Repetition:* The teacher repeats the ill-formed part of the student's utterance, usually with a change in intonation.

S: Where did you put the forks and knifes (knaıfs)? (Pronunciation mistake)
T: Where did you put the forks and knives (naıvz)?

When a teacher provides corrective feedback, he/she expects a reaction from students. This reaction is called uptake, which is […] 'a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance" (Tedick and de Gortari, 1998 quoted in Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p. 49). Additionally, learner uptake can be divided into two types: "(a) uptake that results in 'repair' of the error on which the feedback focused and (b) uptake that results in an utterance that still needs repair (coded as 'needs-repair')" (Fazilatfar and Jabbari, 2012, p.138 quoted by Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p. 49). Uptake does not always occur, that is to say not every

correction results in successful amendment. Clearly, there is no guarantee that students will always fix these mistakes successfully. Still, it is our duty to relax students whenever necessary.

## Procedure

Initially, I asked students the following:

1. Which method do teachers usually use?
2. Which feedback method is better for students?
3. Which feedback is less suitable for students?
4. Which feedback would you prefer?

This was the beginning of many challenges I encountered. The students had no idea of correction methods. Having learnt these methods, they answered the questions. Yet, my theoretical explanation of the methods may still have been confusing for them.

The second thing I did was to use one method more than the others each week. For example, for the first week I paid attention to using the recast method more than the others. Now and Then I took notes of the corrections I made in the classroom. The following week the students wrote their opinions on these two methods. They described how they felt when I used each one, and this continued for six weeks. Having completed this step, I prepared a more general survey which included eleven questions and applied it six weeks later (see Appendix).

After collecting all the data I needed, I went through a meticulous analysis and attempted to interpret them as much as I could.

## Findings and discussion

### *Responses to questions*

Students' answers to the above questions are listed in full in the table below (numbers in the table refer to the feedback methods discussed above, i.e. 1 = recast; 2 = clarification request; 3 = metalinguistic feedback; 4 = elicitation; 5 = explicit correction; 6 = repetition):

| Q | S 1 | S 2 | S 3 | S 4 | S 5 | S 6 | S 7 | S 8 | S 9 | S 10 | S 11 | S 12 | S 13 | S 14 | S 15 | S 16 | S 17 |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| 3 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| 4 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 |

*Table: Students' answers to four questions about feedback methods*

Answers to the first question (row 1) indicated the students' perceptions of the most common feedback method used by teachers. Answers showed that teachers used recast the most (six students). The second most common was said to be elicitation (four). For the second question (row 2), almost half of the students (eight) stated that they saw explicit correction as superior to other methods, with recast coming second (four). In answer to question 3, twelve students suggested the sixth method, repetition, as their least favorite (row 3). Seven students responded that they would most like to receive explicit correction, while five preferred metalinguistic feedback (question 4, row 4).

### During practice

*Metalinguistic feedback*: Six students had a negative opinion of this method while seven found it effective. Two showed a neutral approach towards it. The main reason why they found it inferior was that it was difficult for a student to recall the linguistic name of a certain grammar point. Moreover, one claimed that it was indirect while another asserted that it spoiled fluency. Those who thought positively about it suggested that it encouraged students to be active as well as being didactic.

*Elicitation*: Ten students evaluated this method as "not good." The main reasons were that it took time and made students nervous. One argued that it could cause embarrassment if students were unable to repair their mistakes while the teacher was waiting for a correct answer. Five students thought this method was effective since it enhanced their thinking ability.

*Explicit Correction:* This method was definitely the students' favorite since all except three made positive comments on it. The main argument for this favoritism was that it made a positive impact on learning. Students claimed they could understand their mistakes better thanks to this method. It was surpris-

ing that students' previous comments on this method stayed the same after its application in the classroom.

*Recast vs. Clarification Request:* Of these two, the students' favorite was clarification request. Two-thirds of the students supported it, claiming that it was more polite and encouraging. This way, they were able to realize that they had made a mistake easier.

*Repetition*: This was another method favored by students. Eight were in favour of it. Moreover, two noted it as the best method of all. However, those who were not fond of this method alleged that it was not didactic and resulted in students' not being able to realize their mistakes. One also suggested that it seemed rather rude.

Clearly, students' favorites were explicit correction and repetition, both of which were explicitly performed by the teacher. As we see, students have two main concerns with regards to feedback. First, they want to learn what is correct. Second, they expect the teacher to be polite while giving feedback. This attitude is a reflection of students' possibly low self-confidence in learning. They have a tendency to think that it is the teacher who knows what is wrong and what is not. Instead of discovering their mistake, they expect the teacher to notice and correct it for them. As for the expectancy of politeness, we can say that it is probable that they are afraid of being embarrassed when their mistakes are pointed out. Therefore, clarification request surpassed recast, which is mostly an ambiguity for students. I observed that very few students had been aware of my unobtrusive corrections. While receiving their comments related to recast and clarification request I noticed that only a few students had made remarks on recast. Clearly, it was not as evident as clarification request. As for metalinguistic feedback and elicitation, I can say that students do not strike a balance. They do not seem to have a satisfying understanding of the two methods, which resulted in unclear and complicated thoughts.

The survey results surprised me. First of all, seven students argued that it was not right for a teacher to correct all mistakes while eleven claimed the teacher should correct all mistakes. Except for two students who suggested all mistakes should be immediately corrected, nine asserted that correction strongly helped to prevent mistakes, whereas the rest surmised that it helped only to an extent. Twelve replied that they were positively affected by being corrected. Except for four, students mentioned that I gave them a chance to correct themselves. Interestingly, they also stated that it was impossible for

them to correct their own mistakes without the teacher's help. According to the survey, most students (seven) thought that elicitation was the most effective method and argued that the teacher used it more frequently than the others.

The survey results proved that students were in favor of being corrected. They obviously benefited from corrective feedback which helped them to learn from their mistakes. However, the survey showed me that students' perspective could change. This change might have been a result of the overall effect of the project. In the end, they preferred elicitation which prompts students to self-correct. Actually, in the survey I did not ask them their favorite method. Instead, I asked them which method was more effective. Still they preferred an explicit one. However, what makes it surprising is that elicitation is not as overt as explicit correction and repetition. It provides students with information to an extent and prompts them to self-correct. The survey showed that their dependence on the teacher changed slightly after the project.

## Reflections

Although carrying out this research project was not easy, it wouldn't be wrong to say that it made a deep impact on me. At first I didn't believe that I could manage this project, the reason being I had had some hesitations related to the way I did the research. During the six weeks in which I used the six feedback methods I was not sure if I was on the right track. Whenever I asked students to reflect on our practice I had a slight fear of not being able to get their honest opinions. Eventually, I realized that I had been wrong. My students' reflections were not only honest but also very helpful. Moreover, they told me that they had been really pleased when I asked them to share their opinions with me. Thus, the first thing I gained from this project was the reinforcement of teacher-student interaction. They never refrained from contributing to the project.

In addition, I have become more aware of the differences between errors, mistakes and slips of the tongue. Reactions I got from students helped me notice the differences among them. For instance, students could easily correct their mistakes; however, in case of an error they had difficulty correcting. Basically, if a student makes a mistake or slip, using methods like explicit correction or repetition is not very appropriate since it could cause students to feel irritated. Similarly, trying to help a student who makes a serious error with

the clarification method wouldn't help since the student needs an explanation and guidance in such a case. During the application of my research I was extra careful and avoided correcting randomly. This is actually something teachers should always consider. Interrupting students frequently and randomly doesn't mean helping students; on the contrary, it means undermining learners' motivation.

Students' preference for a specific method does not mean that it is the best, or else it does not show that it is the most effective one. However, it gives a teacher some valuable information on how students view language learning. Specifically, it helps a teacher understand what students expect from the teacher while giving feedback. This project revealed that students had an inclination for explicit feedback methods. However, students in general should learn how to self-correct as well. If teachers always correct students, over time it can become a habit. I noticed my students were not aware of their mistakes unless I made them realize. Maybe, by using implicit methods more often and showing students the differences between mistakes and errors, students can form a habit of self- and peer-correcting.

As for me, I do not know which method surpasses the others, and am not in search of it. Language is a multifaceted phenomenon. Teaching it involves several variables, and so does correcting mistakes. Since errors/mistakes are part of learning, I cannot restrict myself to certain rules. On the contrary, I am always open to changing and updating myself. However, what my students prefer in the process of learning can always be helpful to me.

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## Appendix

Survey on Error Correction (Immediate Feedback) in L2 Classrooms

1. Do you think that it is right for the teacher to correct all errors/mistakes?
   - Yes
   - No

2. What types of mistakes should be corrected the most?
   - Grammar
   - Pronunciation
   - Wrong Word Use

3. Which mistakes does the teacher correct the most?
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4. Should the teacher correct mistakes immediately or later?
   - Immediately
   - Later

5. To what level does correction prevent you from making these mistakes again?
   - Does no effect
   - To an extent
   - A lot

6. How is your motivation affected from being corrected?
   - Positive
   - Neutral
   - Negative

7. Does the teacher give you the opportunity to correct your mistakes/errors?
   - Yes
   - A little
   - No

8. Which method is more efficient?
   - Explicit Correction
   - Elicitation
   - Metalinguistic Feedback
   - Recast
   - Clarification Request
   - Repetition

9. Which method does the teacher use the most?
   - Explicit Correction
   - Elicitation
   - Metalinguistic Feedback
   - Recast
   - Clarification Request
   - Repetition

10. To what level can students correct their mistakes?
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# 6 *Peer observation: a systematic investigation for continuous professional development*

*Koray Akyazı and Savaş Geylanioğlu*

## Introduction

When one hears the term 'peer observation' many teachers may often feel a sense of anxiety, recalling painful memories of their teacher training practice. However, peer observation doesn't necessarily have to be used as an evaluative tool. The aim of this study is to reflect on our teaching practice and we thought the best way to improve our teaching was through observing each other's lessons. Peer observations not only help the observee but it also helps the observer reflect on his or her own teaching practice. This would give us an objective view on what we're doing in the class and also allow us to learn though a modelling and experimenting with different methods. One teacher is an experienced non-native teacher with an English Language and Literature background, whilst the other is a less experienced native English teacher from a non-ELT background. We both wanted to focus on teaching grammar as the books used to teach the main course had changed. Through the analysis of the collected data, we have transformed peer observation into teacher-research.

## Background of Koray

Krashen (1982) made the distinction between language learning and acquisition, and as I was born and grew up in England, it can be said that I had acquired English grammar as opposed to learning it. So, although I am a proficient user English, I was unable to explain or describe this knowledge of the language. Ellis (2008) highlighted the difference between implicit and explicit knowledge 'The acquisition of L1 grammar is implicit and is extracted from experience of use rather than from explicit rules.' I also learnt Turkish and a little of several other languages by witnessing its use and through practice. My French lessons at high school were also very fun and revolved around us doing lots of production through communicative activities. This previous experience of how I have acquired languages, along with the CELTA, seems to have an

impact on my teaching practice. In my first year of teaching at Gediz, our teacher trainer observed my lack of use of the board when presenting grammar. This stayed with me, and now having been given a grammar focused main course book to teach, I felt the need to reflect on my approach to teaching grammar. The particular class I had just started teaching was a B2 level, and I was experiencing some difficulties with them. I thought that perhaps my approach to teaching doesn't fit in with the students' ideas and expectations of what a grammar lesson should look like.

## Background of Savaş

I have been an English teacher for 12 years and I have taught English language in two different countries, firstly started in Turkey then, in the UK and then back to Turkey where I have been currently teaching to a preparatory program for a University. As it is commonly accepted by all ELT teachers, teaching a new language to teenage students who are preparing for their departments in their universities is a highly big challenge once their English learner background is concerned. It takes a lot of energy and effort to give them the ideal level of English in a year and prepare them for their departments where they will study their majors in a new and a different language. The whole year in the prep classes are mostly comprised of grammar teaching and here in the department we are a group of mixed teachers as foreign teachers (native speakers) and Turkish teachers (non-native speakers of English). Considering the fact that grammar teaching is the main goal or wholly believed to be the biggest challenge amongst students as down to my observations, and believed to be a quite boring class by its nature or how it is believed to be here in Turkey we may say, I have always wondered how a grammar lesson is to be conducted by native teachers of English, their applications, activities or the presentation of it and to what extend we, as non-native teachers could benefit from it or if we would apply any places of a native teachers' lesson to our own. This project, therefore, aims to see the different teaching methods, if any, between a native and a non-native teacher of English and the interaction in the classroom during a grammar lesson using the peer observation tool as a method.

## Research questions

Finding research questions that were answerable and informative was a difficult task. Over a period of two months, we constantly reviewed and changed the questions. With the help of the teacher trainer and our colleagues' critical evaluation, the following questions were created as the basis of our study.

| Research Questions | Data set |
|---|---|
| What are the initial beliefs of the two teachers? | 1st post observation transcript |
| What are the current grammar teaching practices of the two teachers? | Analysis of the 1st lesson outline |
| Are there any differences that occur in the 2nd and 3rd lessons? | Analysis of 2nd and 3rd lessons outlines |
| What are the developing beliefs in the 2nd and 3rd post observation discussions? | Analysis of 2nd and 3rd post observation briefings |
| What are the students' perceptions of the different lessons? | Analysis of the student focus group transcripts |

## Literature review

Peer observation refers to a teacher or other observer closely watching or monitoring a language lesson in order to gain an understanding or a concept of what that teachers applies in terms of teaching styles and techniques.

There is a wide range of perspectives regarding the definition of peer observation. Some of the descriptions for peer observation are as follows;

*Table 1: Defining peer observation*

| | |
|---|---|
| Bell (2002 ) | A partnership in which colleagues observe each other's practice, provide feedback and engage in a discussion aimed to promote reflection |
| Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) | The identification of strengths and developmental needs, and the formulation of an action plan for further improvement |
| Davys (2007) | A general term that may encompass any form of mutual support between people who provide useful feedback to each other |
| Clifford-Brown & Segal (2004) | Reviewing clinical reasoning skills and foster self-confidence and self-directed learning |
| Donnelly (2007) | A critical reflective device for teachers' personal development |
| Gosling (2005) | Higher awareness of the student learning experience |

As seen above, peer observation provides a feedback in order to track the teachers to become more aware of the issues for what they are really doing in the classrooms. It is an identification of strengths which is a mutual support amongst peers.

Peer observation described from very different aspects might have several strengths and weaknesses. Table 2 presents some of the strengths discussed in the literature.

*Table 2: Advantages for doing peer observation*

| | |
|---|---|
| Bell (2005) | Providing insight and supportive feedback |
| Bell (2010) | Developing a sense of collegiality |
| Bennett and Barp (2008) | Improving student learning |
| Bandura (1977, 1997) | Seeing what other peers do and improve themselves |
| Badre (2010) | Gaining different feedback from different people |
| Donnelly (2007) | Facilitating reflection on the effectiveness of the participant's own teaching<br>Fostering discussion and dissemination of good practice<br>Increasing teachers awareness in student experience of learning |
| Bandura (1997)<br>Badre (2010)<br>Bell (2010) | Improving in confidence in teaching and their self-efficacy |

As it is seen from the above chart, we, as teachers, gain good amount of positive results in peer observation. To support this idea, Richards and Farrell (2005) expresses quite the same outcome from a classroom observation by saying '*More experienced teachers can benefit from the novice teachers by peer observation.*' This clearly shows us that peer observation can play a significant role in classroom practices, can back novice teachers up when they feel stressed out with the monotonous teaching methods and can open a new sight to a better teaching. As Richards and Lockhart note, "much of what happens in teaching is unknown to the teacher" (1994:3). This also indicates that the unseen areas in teaching could be noted down by the help of peer observation which in return would be assistance for future conducts in teaching for all teachers.

While this is the case and it has some positive factors, there also may be some limitations to be a disadvantage for some reasons according to some of the researchers.

*Table 3: Limitations*

| | |
|---|---|
| Quirke (1996) | A kind of a theatrical action as no one acts in their normal behavior. |
| Richards and Farrell (2005) | Some problems in implementing the procedures during the lesson. |
| | Miscalculation in adapting the activities. |
| | Difficulty in describe accurately in real time such as the actual language that was used during a teacher – student exchange. |
| | A threatening experience because the teacher is now on 'show' |
| Richards (2011) | Some degree of anxiety |
| Badre (2010) | Possible bias relating to the observer's own beliefs about teaching. |
| | The need for training on how to observe and be observed |
| | Insensitivity during the feedback |

As a clear note for the limitations of peer observation, it can be seen from the above chart that it may cause some misunderstanding in between the peers.

## Procedure

We decided to follow a reciprocal / developmental model of peer observation where two teachers took turns in observing one another's lessons; it also has themes from the developmental model as Kenan Dikilitaş, the Head of Professional Development, was also involved in the process. We have also grounded our research on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

The data collection consisted of a cycle of three observations per teacher, in which the two teachers observed and took notes on one another's lessons. The observations were recorded with a combination of field notes and narrative summary format and were also recorded on video for later evaluation which would assist teachers to analyse the activities and student engagement in the lesson. After each observed lesson, the notes were then discussed in a post observation meeting for evaluation in which the Head of Professional Development was present in order to give guidance when necessary. The following themes emerged from the initial post observation meeting:

- inductive /deductive teaching approach
- classroom management
- example rule / rule example
- learner / teacher centred
- student / teacher talking time

It was also decided that the students perceptions of the different lessons should also be collated and analysed in order to triangulate our data collection. After the observed lessons, students were placed in groups to reflect on the lesson based on the following questions:

- What is the difference between the three lessons?
- Which lesson did you enjoy the most?
- Which lesson do you think you learnt the most?
- Which lesson would you prefer to have in future English lessons?

After further discussion together with the mentor, we decided to narrow the observational focus down to grammar instruction, and then to inductive and deductive dichotomy, as this would also encapsulate the other themes.



*Figure 1: The cycle followed by the teacher-researchers whilst doing POT*

## Findings and discussion

### Research question 1: Current teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar

We initially conducted our first lessons without a pre observational focus in order to see where we required or needed to develop our teaching practice. After the lessons, we had a post observation meeting together with Kenan (the Mentor), here we reflected on our views about teaching grammar and discussed what had happened during the lesson. Together with the mentors' help we exposed the main focus of the research. The table below presents the current beliefs of the two teachers when teaching grammar.

*Table 4: Initial beliefs about grammar teaching from the 1st observed lesson*

| | Deductive approach | Inductive approach |
|---|---|---|
| Koray | "deductive teaching is boring and teacher centred" "it's an out of date way of teaching" "probably better suited for exam teaching" | "grammar should be presented in an integrated way as opposed to directly from the book" "learners should induce grammar structure from exposure to contextualised input" "activities are a good tool for providing grammar input" |
| Savaş | "The teacher should give the grammar structure" "In Turkey, the teacher has to give pre information before moving on to giving the actual lesson" | "In inductive approach, teaching is not very involved" "time consuming" "teacher is killing himself trying to control the students" |

It can be understood from the descriptive sentences that T1 has a preference for an inductive approach. He believes that the teacher ought to allow learners the chance to take responsibility for their own learning, as opposed to being taught grammar structures explicitly in a teacher centred classroom environment. On the other hand, T2 views a teacher's role as being the disseminator of knowledge in the classroom, and that inductive teaching is both energy and time consuming, but also passive in the role as a teacher.

**Research question 2: What are the current teaching practices of both teachers?**

As this was a reflective tool for PD, we wanted to see where we stood in terms of teaching practice at the beginning of the study. This would give an objective analysis of our teaching and give us the focus points we would later concentrate on in future observations.

*Table 5: Koray's 1st observed lesson outline (Parallel structure)*

| Stage | Description | Interaction | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Warm-up | Collaborative kinaesthetic activity | GW | 5 |
| Input | Wall dictation with complicated texts | T-S GW | 10 |
| Exploration Noticing | Sts try to simplify sentences | S-M PW | 8 |
| | Compare students' sentences with teacher's | S-T | 5 |
| Controlled Practice | Exercise from course book | T-S-M | 10 |
| Freer practice | Sts create own sentences using parallel structures | S-M | 10 |

Koray's attitude towards teaching seems to be reflected in above lesson outline. Creating integrated skills activities to give students the opportunity to notice the structure and then practise using it. With no explicit grammar input from the teacher, students are directed towards the grammar tables in the reference section if and when needed.

*Table 6: Savaş' Observed 1st lesson outline (2 and 3 conditionals)*

| Stage | Description | Interaction | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Warm-up | Discussion leisure time | T-S | 5 |
| Input | Presenting formula | T-S | 5 |
| | Structural differences | T-S | 10 |
| | Practising the structure | S-T | 10 |
| Exercises | Sentence completion | T-S | 15 |
| Activities | Presenting songs and pictures | S-T | - |
| Warm-down | Summarizing what has been learnt | T-S | 5 |

Table 6 shows the sequence of activities based on natural deductive approach Savaş followed. Here he describes the grammar structure in detail before starting the activities. The lesson flow is based on teacher's performance only with the majority of the lesson being spent in giving the grammar target structure to the students.

**Research question 3: Were there any differences seen in the 2nd and 3rd observed lessons**

*Table 7: Koray's 2nd observed lesson (If clauses)*

| Stage | Description | Interaction | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Input | Give students sample sentences and structure | T-S | 10 |
| Controlled Practice | St do multiple choice exercise from book | T-M-S | 5 |
| | Sts rewrite sentences using it clause | PW | 8 |
| | Peer check in groups | GW | 2 |
| Feedback | Students board their sentences for whole class discussion | S-T-S | 10 |
| Freer Practice | Exercises from course book | T-S | 10 |
| Warm down | Summary of where and why we use It clause | T-S | 2 |

From Table 7 it may be seen that Koray experimented in applying a deductive teaching approach, as he had observed in Savaş' previous well executed deductive lesson. The grammar structures were given to the students at the beginning of the lesson. A big difference was noticed in seeing the students so quiet and easy to manage, without any real effort from the teacher.

*Table 8: Savaş' 2nd observed lesson (Parallel structures)*

| Stage | Description | Interaction | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Warm-up | Introducing the structure | T-S | 5 |
| | Presenting samples | S-T | 5 |
| Input | Applying Structural differences | T-S | 10 |
| | Practicing the structure | S-T | 10 |
| Exercises | Students Sentence completion | S-T | 15 |
| Warm-down | Summarizing what has been learnt | T-S | 5 |

Table 8 shows the group of activities that was also based on deductive approach though the teacher's intention was to do an inductive approach. This time there were more practices on the grammar structure that were predominantly performed by the students. It appears there may have been some resistance to experiment with a change in practice at this stage of the study.

*Table 9: Koray's 3rd observed lesson outline (Definitive / Non-definitive relative clauses)*

| Stage | Description | Interaction | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lead in | Family Guy video clip | T-S | 3 |
| Test/ Controlled practice | Sts categorise and correct sentences (def/non-def) | T-S-M PW | 5 |
| Setting Context | Elicit story from pictures about Savaş Sts rearrange mixed sentences to create story | T-S GW | 3 7 |
| Freer practice | Sts make the story more interesting using target grammar structure | GW | 10 |
| Feedback | Sts share stories | Whole class | 5 |
| Focus on form | Elicit grammar structure and rules | T-M-S GW | 8 |

As the lesson outline demonstrates, Koray has integrated themes of deductive teaching, in an inductive lesson, with testing and controlled practice at the beginning but still inductive in terms of eliciting gaps in structure from students. There was also much more learner interaction.

*Table 10: Koray's 3rd Observed lesson outline (Adverbials)*

| Stage | Description | Interaction | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Warm-up | Presenting video in context | T-S | 15 |
| Practicing the structure | Eliciting Students'sentences | S-T | 10 |
| | | S-T | 5 |
| Exercises | Eliciting Sentence samples | S-T | 10 |
| Activities | Presenting videos | S-T | - |
| Warm-down | Summarizing what has been learnt | T-S | 5 |

The table above shows a lesson plan based on an inductive approach. The teacher starts the lesson with practicing the grammatical structure samples and moves on with a video presentation followed by sentence formations done by the students as a confirmation of the knowledge elicited during the first part of the lesson.

### Research question 4: What are the developing beliefs of the teachers in the 2nd and 3rd post observation discussions?

*Table 11: Opinions taken from 2nd post observation meeting*

| | Deductive approach | Inductive approach |
|---|---|---|
| Koray | "deductive approach has its place but shouldn't be used all the time, especially with prep school students" "I felt more relaxed, classroom management was much easier" | "students should induce grammar structure from the exposure to contextual input" "activities in the class room are a good way to provide grammar input" "the teacher should release control of the classroom, letting students practise" |
| Savaş | "this is still a grammar lesson and I still believe students should be followed and you just can't leave it all to the students" | "activities are a time consuming thing" "I wanted to give sample sentences first rather than the structure which I believe was something I don't normally do" |

### Koray's reflection

After observing Savaş' lesson, I experimented teaching with the deductive approach. I noticed that the class was much easier to manage as the lesson was centred on me, as opposed to the learners. The class was very quiet and calm, students seemed to be getting on well with the exercises from the book, however there were several students who didn't appear to be doing anything. I remember it feeling more like a high school environment as opposed to a university preparatory school. Although it was easier to manage the class, I don't think students really had the opportunity to practise using the language as much as they would have normally.

### Savaş' reflection

As seen in the table, I have somewhat strict rules over deductive grammar teaching that is due to teaching deductively for a long term. Even though the lesson was planned and conducted to be more like a student based one, there was still quite a little resistance executing one. I seemed to be in control with the practices during the lesson.

*Table 12: Opinions taken from the 3rd post observation meeting*

|  | Deductive approach | Inductive approach |
|---|---|---|
| Koray | "students can get bored easily as they soon become disengaged" "structures should be highlighted allowing learners to notice, rather than being taught" | "grammar structure should be reinforced after giving sufficient time for students to induce the rules" "learning occurs through practice" |
| Savaş | "although inductive is preferred approach, let's not forget that deductive approach is there to be applied" "deductive approach should be in a process of goals as most teachers say" "requires less effort" | "all about activities, no grammar teaching" "normally we have to see a grammar teaching lesson, rather than activities" "doing activities is something else, it's not teaching, it's another way of conducting a lesson" "some of the activities may be a bit confusing" |

## Comments about changes in beliefs after the final lesson

### Koray

After the third and final observation, my views on a traditional deductive approach still remain unchanged. Our prep school students, who have six lessons of English lessons five days a week need lessons that are both engaging and allow learners to use their cognitive thinking skills. We should allow students the opportunity to become learners, actively seeking out rules and patterns in language, as opposed to being passive recipients of knowledge.

### Savaş

In this final post observation I believe that the inductive lessons are rather attractive to students, however, he still believed a grammar lesson should be conducted deductively. I also believe that teachers should be careful when performing an inductive lesson and students should be kept in line with the structures at the of the lessons.

### Research question 5: What are students' perceptions of the different approaches to teaching grammar?

The following table attempts to compare the differing opinions on grammar instruction taken from both classes. It was decided that the students' perceptions of our teaching practice should also be taken into consideration, as they are often able to give a different perspective about the lessons compared to the teacher's opinion.

*Table 13: Focus-group feedback on the approaches for both classes*

|  | Inductive Approach | Deductive Approach |
|---|---|---|
| Students' perceptions of the different approaches | engaging | disengaging |
|  | interactive | limited interaction |
|  | informative | passive students |
|  | competitive | learning-oriented |
|  | activity-based | little practice |
|  | learning-based | memory based |
|  | discovery-based | explicit teaching |
|  | not grammar focused | grammar focused |
|  | kinaesthetic orientation | limited participation |
|  | more students talking | less student talking time |

Towards the end of the study we played the videos of the recorded lessons back to the classes, followed by a focus group interview with the students. We wanted to triangulate our perceptions of teaching, to those of the observer and the students. As can be seen, students find the inductive approach as offering more fun, being learning-based and increased levels of interaction as well as being more learner-centred. Although several students commented that there was more learning in the deductive lessons, they were considered as boring and not providing enough opportunities for interaction and practice.

## Reflections

*Koray's reflection*

After writing an exploratory practice research paper the previous year on teaching phrasal verbs, I wanted to do something where the focus of the research was me and my teaching practice. I could never have realised the depth at which doing peer observation could go to when used as a reflective tool, nor how difficult it would turn out to be.

As this model of peer observation included a cycle of three sessions followed by peer observations, we were given many useful opportunities to reflect on our teaching practice. I used to think that my lessons were all inductive but after doing lots of reading, I learnt what an inductive lesson should actually be. I soon realised that I was neglecting the grammar structure input my students were so used to receiving, in favour of more time for practice. As a result of this project, I have revisited my beliefs on the importance of matching my teaching style to that of the classroom, rather than always following an inductive approach. Now I am more aware of the need for including grammar structures after giving enough time for the learners to induce the rules for themselves.

> We were lucky enough to have an educational developer who was also involved in the project. He helped deepen the study and narrow our attention on the main issues discussed in this study. He was there to provide assistance in giving feedback throughout the research, from developing the research questions through to the analysis of the data and finally writing the paper. Without the educational developer's active role, the post observation meetings may have had a negative impact on teacher confidence, as at times, feedback was judgemental and subjective.

The focus of this project wasn't to change our practice, but to reflect on our beliefs about teaching grammar. We have both noticed good practice in the class, and tried to implement and combine new styles of teaching into our own class to good effect. I have researched extensively on the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive teaching, including when, why, and with whom. In my opinion, deductive teaching may be more suited to teaching students, whereas learners may appreciate the inductive approach. The major-

ity of our students at Gediz University prep school appear to be students, so surely the task for me is to find the happy medium.

As a result of this teacher-research project, I have also deepened my knowledge on the different models of peer observation, with their differing advantages and disadvantages in reflective practice and teacher development. I know feel more confident in my teaching practice as I feel more aware of students' expectations and needs as second language learners.

*Savaş' reflection*

In my case, it all started with a curiosity for how a lesson was to be conducted by a native teacher when teaching grammar and the degree of interaction between the teacher and the students during that lesson.

At the end of three grammar lesson observations we gave feedback to each other under the supervision of a school mentor who was present with us at every feedback session. After analyzing our first lessons the outcomes indicated that we were completely different from each other in terms of teaching form and technique which was something I had expected to happen. I must admit that my expectations were higher as I had the belief that a grammar lesson would be held better with a native teacher and the students would learn or gain better insights tactics in grammar lessons. But this was not the case. The lessons were appreciated equally by the students as the inductive lessons taught by the native teacher were equally regarded as good as the deductive teaching method, moreover, some of the students commented that a deductive lesson was more engaging at some point.

My initial focus of working with a native teacher was to look at classroom interaction patterns. After experimenting with different types of activities I now feel more aware about the importance of student interaction within a classroom. It goes without saying that peer observation helped us to elaborate new ideas to perform better grammar lessons and a clearer insight of what we really were in teaching. With the help of peer observation teachers can also re think and establish new patterns of practices for themselves to improve and change in a positive way thus it helped us (teachers) see both gaps and positive aspects in our own grammar lessons and practices of which we were not previously aware. Finally, peer observation in general can help narrow the gap between one's belief and the view of teaching and what actually happens in the classroom.

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# 7 *Enhancing student motivation through reflection on motivation*

*Zeynep Aksel and Pelin Özmen*

## Context and problem: why motivation?

Learning a language is a complex process and there is a close relationship between motivation and language learning. Furthermore, motivation is central to it and without this learning hardly occurs. So it's not surprising to note there are numerous studies on motivation. As a result of these studies we note a clear connection between motivation and success in language learning. Therefore, motivation plainly results in success. Motivation among students makes all the difference and it is vital to any teacher. Thus, students can be motivated by their teachers and achieve their goals. A teacher's role in creating a classroom where students are motivated to learn is very important for the education process. If students are motivated they look forward to coming to the language classroom and want to engage in class. Every student's motivation is different. Therefore in motivation it is important to understand the motivational strategies and implement them into the teaching-learning process. If, as teachers, we are able to apply motivational strategies, we can thus enhance both student performance and classroom experience.

### Teacher one

The aim of this research was to better understand student motivation towards learning English. As an instructor I can clearly see that sometimes my students are highly motivated or demotivated. The starting point of this research was to understand what affects their motivation and what their attitudes were towards learning English. Within this framework I researched the relationship between motivation and language learning and analyzed the relevant data in order to determine ways to motivate my students.

### Teacher two

From my own experience, I can openly state that a teacher is significant to help students to be motivated but sometimes s/he alone might not be sufficient to motivate each student. That is the answer to the question of why some language learners are more successful than others. Personally, I can mentor some to be motivated, however I want all to be motivated. To this effect, I explored the connection between language learning and motivation as an action research at Gediz University this year.

## Literature review

In this teacher-research we aimed at increasing student's motivation by engaging them in discussing what motivates and demotivates them during the learning process. In the literature there are several references that support this view. For example, according to Gardner and Lambert (1985), there is a close relationship between language learning and motivation. Even though motivation is a term used in academic and research settings there is little consensus regarding its precise meaning (Dörnyei, 1998).

Motivation has a close relationship with language acquisition as students' motivation affects their learning process. Cook (2000) discovered that language acquisition is not the same among all learners. Furthermore, he maintains that there are three main factors which concern and influence second language acquisition (SLA): age, personality and motivation, and adds that among these motivation is the most significant. Ellis (1994: 715) approached motivation as the attempt which learners make for learning a second language because of 'their need or desire to learn it'. Lightbown and Spada (2000: 33) identifies motivation in SLA as 'a complex phenomenon which can be defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs and their attitudes towards the second language community'.

To base debates upon second language teaching it is crucial for teachers to find innovative ways to enhance student motivation. Children acquire their first language involuntarily, unconsciously, and reflexively but adults learn a second language by deliberately, consciously, knowingly and wilfully taking on and assuming rules of language and learning strategies (Krashen, 1985, cited in Cook, 2000). In the same way, in our classroom practices we surfaced adult learners' motivational awareness through various tasks and got them to mirror and explore their own motivational aspects. By discussing motivation in a systematic way with carefully designed interaction patterns we believed students can have a chance to view motivational dimensions of their learning process from a deliberate, conscious and willing perspective.

Since some language learners are more successful than others, it is necessary to shed light on possible causes. In general, factors specifying differences between the learners' language acquisition are called individual differences and attitudes. According to Gardner and Tremblay (1994) all individual differences and attitudes affect learners directly. Considering these it makes sense to question language learners in order to enhance motivation. This might lead us to reveal the significance of communicating with the language learners during the lessons in this way. At that point it is also necessary to explore students' expectations through their own idiosyncrasies. Attitudes are considered as basic issues in much research since they directly affect the language learning process (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Deci and Ryan 1985; Dörnyei, 1990, 1994, 1998; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Gardner and Tremblay, 1994; Ellis, 1994).

## Procedure

The study involved 25 A2 level EFL learners who each answered four different open ended questions to understand their motivation. Every week they were given one such question which they answered individually, in pairs and in groups, respectively. The first three questions aimed to understand their approaches towards learning English and factors that affect their motivation or demotivation. The first was "Why do I learn English?" The purpose was to address and understand their self-awareness towards learning English. The second "What is your approach towards learning English?" By asking this we tried to learn the students' attitude towards learning English. We wanted them to fill in branches of a tree and they thus wrote the ways in which they could use the language they were learning. The purpose was to make them understand the areas where they use and need English in their lives. In response to the third question, "What makes you feel motivated & demotivated?" they listed internal and external factors that affected them.

At the end of the classroom motivational studies we wanted to explore how students' motivation was influenced by this oral and written engagement. To

this end we asked them the following final question "How did you feel about these activities?" This was individually answered and afterwards, discussed as a whole class to understand whether these questions had any impact on their motivation. During this process we did not interfere with any response that they had written and, in order to provide anonymity, did not request they write their names. Turkish students wrote their answers in Turkish as they felt they could express themselves better this way.

*Questions in data collection*

| Q1 | Why do I learn English? |
| Q2 | What is your approach towards learning English? |
| Q3 | What makes you feel motivated & demotivated? |
| Q4 | How did you feel about these activities? |

*Summary of the procedures*

|  | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Purpose | Understanding approaches to learning | Learning the students' attitude towards learning English. | Finding the internal and external factors that affected them. | Exploring how students' motivation was influenced by oral and written engagement. |
| Procedure | individually, in pairs and in groups | Individually, in groups | Individually, in pairs, in groups | Individually, classroom |
| Skills | Discussing and writing | Discussing and writing | Discussing and writing | Discussing and writing |
| Duration | 50 minutes | 50 minutes | 50 minutes | 50 minutes |

## Findings and discussion

After we collected these data we framed our research questions as follows;
1. Does engaging in these activities help students become more motivated?

This question was the main purpose behind this study. To understand this we analyzed their answer to "How did you feel about these activities?" As the answers were clearly expressed, we could draw a conclusion and prepared a chart accordingly.

2. Why do students think these activities are motivating?

To answer the second research question we translated every response that they had given. As some answers are similar to each other we counted how many responses were the same and gathered those under eight key themes which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

### Research question 1: Does engaging in these activities help students become more motivated?

With this question we wanted to understand whether engagement in these activities had created motivation for students. The data where students were asked to decide and answer emerged as shown below.

*Table 1: Number of positive and negative responses by students*

| Students (N) | Yes | No | Neutral |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | 23 | 2 | - |

Table 1 demonstrates the high number of students who believed that this experience of discussing motivation with classmates had had a positive impact on becoming more motivated.

### Research questions 2: Why do students think these activities are motivating?

The second research question was asked in order to identify reasons that make these activities motivating for them. We found eight impact areas from the students open ended responses. They reported that talking about motivation in the classroom in pairs and in groups gave them a chance to revisit their motivation. Some answers given by the students are illustrated in table 2.

*Table 2: reasons for positive motivational aspects*

| Impact | N | Illustrative Students Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Motivation increase | 18 | "Because of these activities, I saw that our teachers are trying hard for us. I started to enjoy English even though I hate it." "It increased our motivation positively." "I wanted to learn English more." "These surveys give us a break during our lessons and thus, increase our motivation." |
| Awareness | 17 | "I realized the importance of English." "It helped me realize that I had to try harder to develop myself." "I understood that learning a language is very useful." |
| Learning | 9 | "I can differentiate what is useful and what is not." "I learned effective learning methods." "I learned how to study English." "I learned time management; I stopped wasting my time and started to learn how to study efficiently." |
| Thought-stimulating | 7 | "I questioned why I needed to learn English." "These activities broadened our way of thinking." "I think this is an opportunity for us to correct our mistakes and increase our motivation." |
| Self-expression | 4 | "These kinds of surveys make us feel valued and we can express our feelings via these activities." |
| Social development | 3 | "I had better and quicker connection with my classmates." "I started to think about the effect of English in our lives." "These activities helped me realize that I can work in groups." |
| Sense of belonging | 1 | "These kinds of surveys make us feel valued and we can express our feelings via these activities." |
| Problem Identification | 1 | "It helps us to convey our problems." |

*Table 3: reasons for negative motivational aspects*

| Student | Reasons |
|---|---|
| 1 | "I think they are useless." |
| 2 | "I like them because we did not have to do any lessons." |

To look at what makes these activities motivating, figure 1 visualizes the most reported reasons. The major aim of the activity was to help the students feel more motivated by reflecting on their motivation to learn and exchange ideas with others. It seems that this has been achieved, on the basis of their self-reported responses.
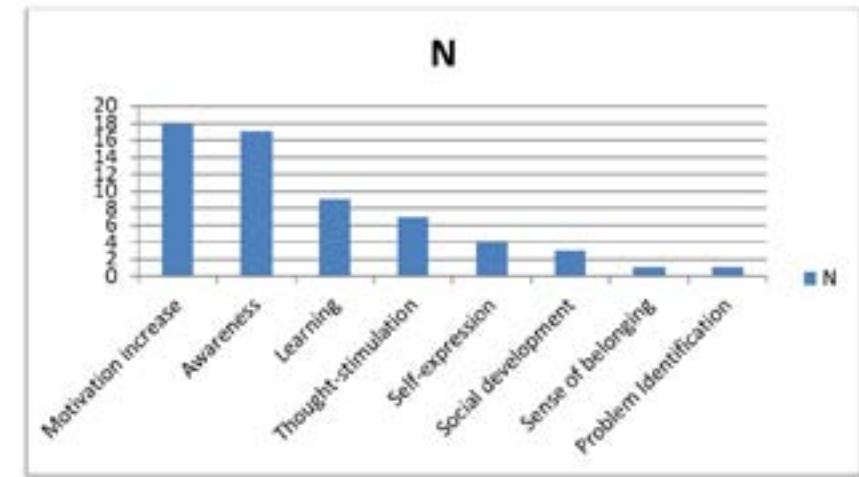


It was clear that we realized the role of student reflection over issues that are problematic for themselves. By sharing ideas they came to realize where they were and how they could improve these weaknesses. The activities we conducted in the classroom offered them an opportunity to think about and see themselves, which also provided us with a detailed account of how they view motivation and how we can help them be more motivated. We discuss more specific influence of the project in the reflection section below.

## Reflections

### *Teachers*

Experiencing this exploratory practice study was both inspiring and eye-opening. By carrying out this research we started to know more about students' views of motivation to learn. During this process we read various articles about motivation theories but both felt that was insufficient as our argument on motivation could only be explored through practical rather than theoretical knowledge. Our first significant point was to make students reflect by asking questions, thus raising their awareness towards learning a second language. At that point we found that our own awareness towards integrating motivation into teaching was really surprising to us. Since we were planning to ask those motivational questions to raise awareness, we realized that it was important for a teacher to do something to raise awareness. However, after engaging in them, we learned that it was really vital to show concern for their ideas on their own motivation. In consequence, we have learned that we can deal with issues on motivation by means of motivational practice techniques that we have obtained during fruitful action research sessions

### *Students*

As noted earlier, students were less motivated before being involved in this exploratory practice study. It is possible to say that by discussing learning a new language students became more aware of the impact it would have on their future. According to the feedback they had given we could easily observe that asking those questions about motivation increased their motivational levels. Furthermore, when they were asked to answer questions about demotivation they could express themselves freely, and by writing and discussing all these questions we can state that this exploratory practice study raised their awareness, self-expression skills and sense of belonging in various ways.

### *For Future Practice*

Considering the activities we applied in the classroom and after analysing the results, we concluded that this exploratory practice was beneficial for the engagement of students in the classroom in terms of motivation. We came to a mutual agreement that we could and should ask such questions during the lesson. As they tend to feel demotivated during the lessons, we will sometimes apply these questions to affect their motivation, realizing that a 'recess' during a lesson could highly be motivating.

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# 8 *Tackling speaking challenges faced by low-level learners of English through consultation with students*

### *Elif Başak Günbay and Gülizar Aydemir*

## Context and problem

When we first had speaking classes in an A1 classroom, we had not expected that we, the teachers, would be the only ones talking. The first impression that we had in the first five minutes of the lesson was that we would have a challenging quarter. However, we couldn't ignore the fact that speaking is crucial because it improves students' communicative skills and only then students can express themselves. This study focuses on the difficulties students (beginners) face with speaking in English. We tried to explore these challenges from the students' point of view, exploring why many second language learners, especially those who don't have a strong background in English, like our students in our preparatory school, feel that speaking in a foreign language is harder than writing, listening or reading. We also wanted to find out when and at what point the students should be expected to speak in the target language. To do this, we prepared questionnaires to find out what impedes their speaking skills. Analyzing the feedback from the questionnaire, we gave a second questionnaire to ask for solutions from the students. According to the reactions and feedback, there are 2 main factors: linguistic and non-linguistic. This study provides a student perspective on their own challenges and offers solutions to major problems in speaking. It also answers a question for us: what should be expected of low level learners in terms of their speaking at the beginning of their learning experience?

## Research questions

This study focused on the reasons why students have difficulty in speaking and some possible solutions offered by them. Research questions were as follows:

1. What are the factors that cause students to have difficulty in speaking?
2. What can be done to overcome these difficulties?
3. Is it right to expect students who have just started learning English to speak?

## Literature review

There are different theories about whether students who have just started learning English should be expected to speak or not. Some theories support the idea that compelling students to speak in the early process of learning may cause challenges while others find it necessary to wait until students are provided with sufficient input.

Krashen (1981) thinks that production should be delayed until learners are ready. Students should not be expected to speak unless sufficient input is provided. Krashen points out the importance of comprehensible input in the process of language learning. According to his comprehensible input theory students are to go through a process similar to children. He makes emphasis on exposure and input rather than practice and production. Students must be exposed to language via sufficient input in order to generate spoken and written acquisition automatically. This is only possible when enough focus is on listening and reading; therefore, before production learners should be allowed to listen and read to be ready to speak. In addition, Krashen thinks that there are affective filters that play an important role in language acquisition. High motivation and self-confidence are some of them. In a classroom atmosphere high motivation and self-confidence should be high and anxiety level of students should be low. Thus, for a lower filter to work learners need to be relaxed. According to Krashen's theory, there are three stages in the process of second language learning:

1. Pre – production: Learners do not response but participate. (eg. by pointing)
2. Early – production: Students answer fixed conversational patterns. (eg. How are you? )
3. Speech – emergent : eg. role plays, games, personal information, opinions, group problem-solving.

On the other hand, Swain (1995) believes that production should be integrated from early on. Swain points out the importance of output. According to Swain, students should be pushed to speak. Being pushed will prompt them to recognize the linguistic problems that they have. Students' dialogue with others will show whether learning takes place or not. Thus, it is also right to say giving feedback is necessary in the learning process since when learners are in the process of language acquisition; they often make mistakes which help them understand the language better while speaking.

## Procedure and findings

### *Research question 1: What are the factors that cause students to have difficulty in speaking?*

A questionnaire was prepared to find out English speaking problems of students who have difficulties and problems due their level of English. The questionnaire was given to approximately one hundred students in five different A1 classes. The aim of the questionnaire was to detect the difficulties and problems that low level students had. As they were A1 students the questions of the questionnaire were in Turkish and the students were expected to answer them in Turkish. The questions translated into English were as follows;

1. How important is "speaking" when learning a new language? Why?
2. What are some of the practices you do to improve your English?
3. How do you feel when you speak English?
4. In your opinion, what's the best way to improve one's speaking?
5. What are some difficulties/problems that you encounter when speaking English?

The data collected through the questionnaire was firstly analyzed by categorizing and then counting the responses. Regarding the responses, two main factors were categorized as linguistic and non-linguistic. The results of the first questionnaire which was done to discover the problems of the students show that the main factors that relate to their speaking problems are as shown in Figure 1:
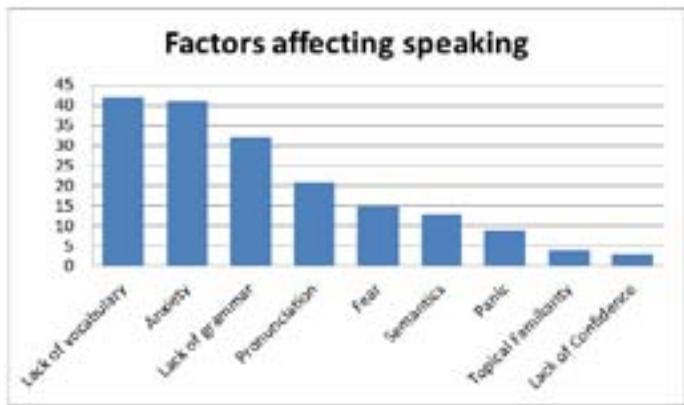
*Figure 1: Distribution of the specific factors affecting speaking*

In Figure 1, lack of vocabulary seems to be the major obstacle emerged in the study. Students feel the need to have a wide range of vocabulary in order to express themselves. Anxiety is the second biggest obstacle after lack of vocabulary. It is an affective factor meaning a emotional factor which influence learning. Lack of grammar, pronunciation, fear, semantics, panic, topical familiarity and lack of confidence are the other factors that follow.

The data collected through the questionnaire was firstly analyzed by categorizing and then counting the responses. Regarding the responses, two main factors were categorized as linguistic and non-linguistic. Figure 2 shows the distribution of factors.
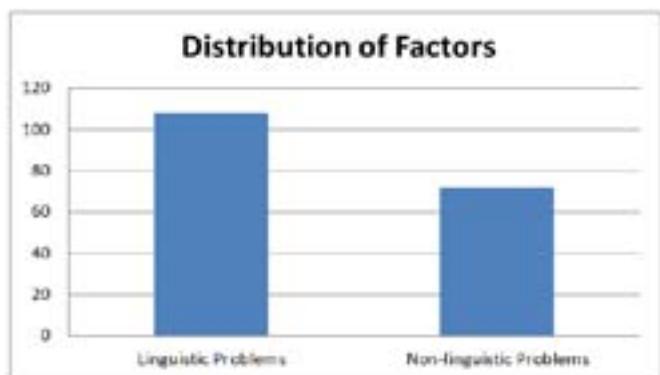


*Figure 2: Distrubution of the factors affecting speaking*

As the table demonstrates, linguistic problems outweigh the non-linguistic problems. The result of the distribution was the opposite of what we were expecting to find at the beginning. This tells us that asking for students' point of view helped us a great deal for finding the right aspect for this study.

According to the results, the linguistic factors are: lack of vocabulary, lack of grammar, semantics and pronunciation, wheras non-linguistic factors are: lack of confidence, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, panic, unfamiliarity to the topic. These are shown in Figure 3.
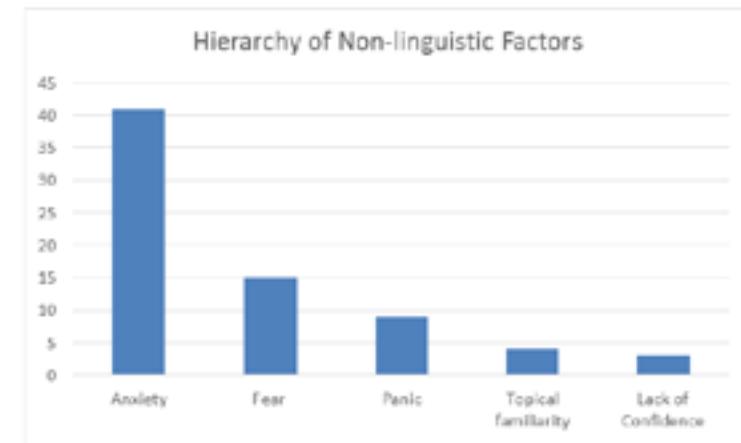


*Figure 3: Specific analysis of non–linguistic factors*

When we look at the affective non- linguistic factors (Figure 3), we can see that anxiety plays an important role along with fear, panic and lack of confidence and topical familiarity. Students insist that they even forget the easiest word or structure because of anxiety. It seems to weaken their self-esteem and confidence therefore making the way for the other factors; panic and lack of confidence.

Vocabulary is essential to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary, students find it hard to understand others or to express their ideas. Lack of vocabulary followed by lack of grammar and pronunciation are the linguistic factors that impede their speaking. These are shown in Figure 4.
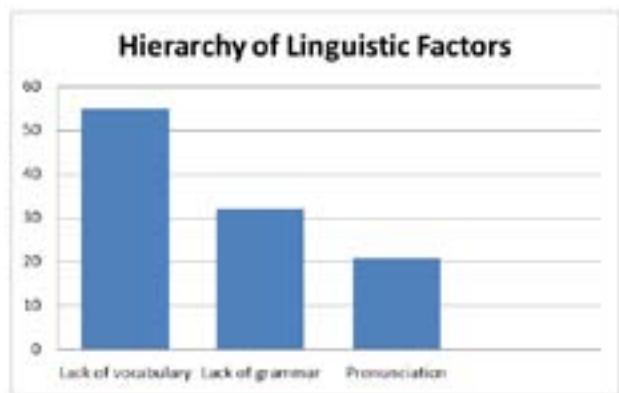
*Figure 4: Specific analysis of linguistic factors*

The above mentioned linguistic and non-linguistic factors that affect speaking have been elicited from the students and categorized by the teacher-researchers. However, we also thought that it would be logical to ask the same students for any solutions to the problems categorized in order to understand their ideas and blend them with ours. Therefore we decided to ask them about their own suggestions. Research Question 2 attempts to answer this question.

After we identified problems in each category, students were given another questionnaire which offered solutions to the common difficulties and problems pointed out in the previous questionnaire. They were expected to suggest possible solutions from their own point of view.

The second questionnaire had only one question;

With the help of the questionnaire given you before it was seen that low level learners have some common difficulties and problems. What are your solutions to them?

- I don't think I have enough vocabulary to express myself.
- I panic when I'm supposed to speak. I feel anxious, nervous etc.
- I find it difficult to form a sentence.
- I'm afraid of making mistakes.
- When I don't have enough background knowledge about the topic, I have poor performance.
- I don't think my pronunciation is good enough.

Data from the second questionnaire was analyzed to see the solutions from student perspective.

### Research question 2: What can be done to overcome these difficulties?

As our students were in the centre of problems themselves, we shared the results of the first questionnaire with our students. We prepared another questionnaire with the purpose of having a deeper understanding of what our students think about how to solve the problems they deal with. It can be said that the second questionnaire directly reflects the suggestions made by the students. They are tabulated in Table 1:

*Table 1. Students' suggestions for improving speaking skills*

| The elicited problem | Students' own suggested strategies |
|---|---|
| 1. I don't think I have enough vocabulary to express myself. | a. reading books<br>b. reading graders<br>c. more reading<br>d. using authentic caricature and magazines for vocab<br>e. using dictionary more<br>f. dictionary study from English to Turkish<br>g. spend more time on vocabulary study<br>h. more time for vocab development<br>i. thinking about the meaning of the meanings<br>j. studying vocabulary<br>k. writing sentences with target words<br>l. vocab learning through writing practices<br>m. memorizing and using the words in sentences<br>n. videos and games to memorize<br>o. memorizing systematically and testing<br>p. systematic memorizing<br>q. watching films and series with dictionary<br>r. listening to music<br>s. playing games<br>t. making foreign friends<br>u. it should be taught in a funny way that helps us focus on the word<br>v. learning vocabulary with Turkish meanings<br>w. forming a glossary<br>x. a separate vocabulary lesson<br>y. repetition of vocabulary |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2. I panic when I'm supposed to speak. I feel anxious, nervous etc. | a. More practice<br>b. Trust<br>c. A more friendly environment/teachers<br>d. Practice with foreigners<br>e. More speaking lessons<br>f. No grading system<br>g. Knowing more vocabulary<br>h. Hints and little help from others<br>i. Understanding that it is ok to make mistakes |
| 3. I find it difficult to form a sentence. | a. Vocabulary<br>b. Practice<br>c. Exercises about sentence structure<br>d. Writing practices<br>e. Talking to foreigners<br>f. Time<br>g. A more friendly environment<br>h. Better grammar<br>i. Reviewing what has been learned<br>j. Reading<br>k. More study on form |
| 4. I'm afraid of making mistakes. | a. Studying vocabulary<br>b. More experience<br>c. Less students in the classroom<br>d. No grading<br>e. More practice<br>f. Making mistakes and getting used to it<br>g. Environment<br>h. Pronunciation<br>i. Better grammar |
| 5. When I don't have enough background knowledge about the topic, I have poor performance. | a. Researching about the topic<br>b. Examples from everyday life<br>c. Interesting exercises about the topic<br>d. Reviewing what has been learned<br>e. More interesting topics<br>f. Having background information<br>g. Knowing more vocabulary<br>h. Better pronunciation<br>i. Listening to other people speaking about the topic<br>j. Speaking lessons |

| | |
|---|---|
| 6. I don't think my pronunciation is good enough. | a. Reading loudly<br>b. More pronunciation practice<br>c. More speaking practice<br>d. Repetition of vocabulary and memorizing<br>e. Listening to songs<br>f. Watching videos/ TV series/movies<br>g. Making foreign friends<br>h. Going abroad<br>i. Studying vocabulary<br>j. Having a speaking class at school<br>k. Reading<br>l. Having a class for pronunciation<br>m. More emphasis on phonetics in Turkish<br>n. More listening<br>o. No grading |

As seen above, students' responses to the questions were carefully categorized to see the whole picture which could tell us explicitly where the problem is and how the problem can be handled through students' eyes. We thought that looking at the speaking problem through their eyes could help us solve the problem more practically. The following section discusses these issues.

### Research question 3: Is it right to expect students who have just started learning English to speak?

Normally, in our school we do not have separate speaking class. However, students are required to have speaking exams at the end of each module including A1. This system compels students to produce orally even if they are not ready to do so and we often observe that students are challenged by this practice. It stems from the fact that students are not equipped with enough vocabulary, grammar and semantics and they feel under pressure, anxious and unconfident.

But only this year we had separate speaking classes for A1 students. Thus, we could focus on speaking just as much as other skills. The context of the lesson was based on real life situations and expressions so they were exposed to more input and seemed to benefit from the lessons. Even if they were supposed to start producing language right away, they felt more confident and comfortable as they had a better chance to get and use more knowledge. Swain's output

theory has an important role in our students' second language acquisition. We let our students make mistakes as this will prompt them to recognize consciously some of their linguistic problems.

**Discussion**

Although students want to improve their speaking skills at initial stages of language learning, as outlined in the findings sections they encounter or come up with a variety of challenges. Therefore, the results were helpful and guiding for understanding what specifically caused our students' speaking difficulties. Identifying them was the first aim of our study. The second questionnaire for student suggestions and solutions gave us an insight and helped us look at the problems from the students' point of view. As teachers it seems we need to learn how to deal with the challenges and help them promote speaking. In order to achieve this, we think that it is important to keep these points in mind:

1.   Lack of vocabulary:
- Picking up meanings of words from context. [Context has beneficial long-term effects.] If you have the time, and even if you think you don't have the time, try to add context. Writing a few example sentences using new vocabulary will help you remember the words in context.
- Playing oral and written word games to enhance their vocabulary knowledge
- Playing with words can be enjoyable for it creates an interest in knowing more about them
- Don't make random lists of new words. Try to group words in themes. This will help memorize new words more quickly.
- Learning Collocations
- Pre-teach vocabulary
- Preparation time
- The better prepared students are before an activity, the easier it will be for them.

2.   Anxiety, panic, Fear, Lack of confidence
- If the teacher is too involved, they will be distracted.

- Establishing good rapports with students, accept them as individuals, tolerate their mistakes, and create a supportive and relaxed classroom environment.
- Promote cooperation instead of competition.
- The activities should be centered on students' interests and be appropriate for their proficiency levels.
- Helping learners to accept the fact that they will make mistakes as part of the learning process.

3. Pronunciation
- Repetitive Review/Practice.
- Grasping every opportunity you have to speak with people in English.
- Recording themselves.
- Practice
- Read and listen simultaneously.
- Remembering that the spelling of words and their pronunciation are often different
- Role playing and impersonating native English speakers.
- Helping them to be good listeners (giving them a listening task, creating questions etc)
- Watch the movies in that language extensively and listen to songs in TL

4. Topic familiarity
- Researching about the topic
- Examples from everyday life
- Reviewing what has been learned
- More interesting topics
- Having background information
- Knowing more vocabulary
- Listening to other people speaking about the topic

## Reflection

It is difficult to solve a problem if it is looked from only one side of it. We believe that this study helped not only us but also the students to come to a realization about their own speaking skills and take an action. Speaking in a foreign language may seem difficult at first. However, it can be overcome. These suggestions give us an idea about what can be done to contribute more to their development. Before we got feedback from the questionnaires, we had thought that students had problems mainly with grammar and that was the reason why they had difficulty in speaking. However, the results showed us that it was not the only thing that stopped them from speaking. There seemed to be other problems both linguistic and non-linguistic. And the solutions offered by the students were indeed similar to what we saw as a solution. Through this study, we became more conscientous about designing the speaking lessons in order to avoid any difficulties that may be caused from our side as teachers. We are now considering those linguistic and non-linguistic factors that affect students' speaking skills in English to help them move forward in their learning process. As for Swain and Krashen's opinions on speaking, we found that there are points both of us agree with. However, in the end we are most likely to agree with Swain on this. We believe that students should be encouraged to speak from early on. Being pushed will help them to come to a realization about the difficulties they face, because from students' performance and responses, we can understand if the learning is taking place or not.

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# 9 *Exploring students' speaking anxiety in my classroom*

### *Şehnaz Yusufoviç*

## Context and problem

Researchers and teachers of foreign languages have long been aware of the problem of 'foreign language anxiety'. Any teacher of any language has realized and seen the effects and the results of students' anxiety. Having tried to find and develop speaking activities that encouraged my students to use the language they were learning, it occurred to me that many students were handicapped by anxiety while practising. I therefore decided to focus on the question of language anxiety since it is among the most basic reasons for students not being able to talk in the classroom. In order to conduct my research, I decided to use the activity 'Speaking Marathon' as a tool to help me to find some answers to the questions in my mind.

The problem was: students were reluctant to talk in English in the classroom. They even avoided using very basic words or structures. Instead, they preferred to be silent or whisper in their native language – Turkish - to show somehow they knew the answers to questions asked by the teacher. It was clear that anxiety was a factor in this. When the theoretical background is searched, it can be seen that there are several reasons for students to feel anxious. Bearing all the ideas in my mind, I wanted to focus on my idea that advocated: "Basically and most importantly they were afraid to hear their own voice in a new language which was an unknown or less-known area to them.

Language anxiety is a complex problem including issues of motivation, learning style, learning strategies, beliefs about learning, and attitudes of teachers and so on. I tried to isolate and focus on the problem of students' self-esteem with the intention of increasing it, by creating an assessment-free atmosphere during the activities.

The following questions are addressed in my study:

- Are students aware of their language anxiety? Do they think they can speak in the classroom?

- What reasons do students give for not feeling able to use English in the classroom?
- How do students feel and regard themselves while speaking English?
- Do some speaking activities - without any assessment worry - help students reduce their anxiety?
- Can I use these kinds of activities in any type of lesson to encourage students to use English in class?

## Literature review

Teachers and researchers recognize the subject of anxiety for language learners. Researchers get help from psychology and linguistics. They depend on general theorists of anxiety like Bandura and Pekrun; more situation-specific theorists of language learning anxiety like MacIntyre and Gardner; and theorists who highlight contextual levels of anxiety within individuals like Pappamihiel. This study supports Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Bandura explains self-efficacy "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p.2). Pappamihiel's (2002) explanations also helped my idea to create the practices: "Bandura's (1991) theory of self-efficacy posits that when a situation is perceived as threatening, the resultant anxiety is dependent on an individual's perception of his/her ability to deal positively with that threat…. Self-esteem can act as a mitigating factor in anxiety-producing circumstances". (Pappamihiel, 2002, p. 329) While stimulating students' own beliefs about themselves, I would be able to help them develop their own self-esteem; and the practices would be a kind of supplementary skill- based trials. MacIntyre's study (1995) and the conclusion part of it was supporting my idea of practising and so that creating a better self-esteem. It says: "…attempts to reduce anxiety may require some skills training as a supplement to anxiety reduction strategies in order to compensate for deficiencies created by anxiety arousal,…" (MacIntyre, 1995, p. 97).

The reasons for and consequences of language anxiety in foreign language learning are myriad and complex. Mahmoodzadeh (2012) states that 'in case of conducted studies on foreign language anxiety (eg., Aida, 1994; Macintyre, et. al.,1997), a review of the literature has shown that foreign language anxiety is negatively related to foreign language learning'. Nevertheless, researchers

in this area define their findings as "inconsistent and contradictory" (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). The reasons for these inconsistent, contradictory findings and the inconclusive nature of anxiety stems from it being dependent on a lot of variables. Young (1991) exemplifies these variables as "language setting, anxiety definitions, anxiety measures, age of subjects, language skill, and research design". How to interpret the results of anxiety research is also problematic. For instance, while Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) speak about "state, trait and text anxiety", Macintyre (1995) finds it beneficial "to place language anxiety into the broader context of the psychology of social anxieties" and supports his study with "anxiety from a cognitive perspective" (p. 91). This study categorises three general factors which impact on foreign language anxiety:

1. Cognitive Factors, which can be regarded as linguistic variables that show students' problems in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.
2. Affective Factors, which can be seen as non-linguistic variables that include psychological reasons, public speaking anxiety, social, socio-cultural anxiety, etc.
3. Other Factors, which can include teacher oriented variables, things related to classroom environment, learner beliefs, etc.

## Procedure

This research was conducted with 12 Yaşar University Prep School Pre-intermediate level Reading lesson students for a track lasting two months. Three different speaking activities were used. The activities were used 8 times over a 5 week period in accordance with a program schedule. Two questionnaires were prepared to be applied before starting and after finishing all activities. The activities were done only at the beginning of the lessons, starting with one minute in the first lesson and ending up with ten minutes in the last planned lesson.

### *Phase I*

To start collecting data for the research, the first questionnaire was given to the learners. The questionnaire was translated into the students' native language Turkish to make it more comprehensible and to be able to collect reliable data. The statements and questions can be seen in Appendix A.

*Phase II*

As a second step the three speaking activities – Speaking Marathon, Conversation, and Interview - were commenced.

The first activity, used for three lessons, was 'Speaking Marathon', in which all students were arranged sitting in rows facing each other. On the face of it, the activity appeared to be pair work but in fact each student worked alone. Students were talking to themselves in the target language without stopping. They could say anything in English: words, phrases, expressions, sentences. In the first lesson, the students tried to talk for one minute, in the second lesson for two minutes, and in the last one for three minutes. The aim of the activity was first, to help students get accustomed to their own voice in the target language; second, to make them feel more comfortable since everybody in the class was doing the same thing; and finally to make them realize they know some words, phrases, expressions in the target language and that they can say them.

No assessment or performance was made in order to create a low-anxiety, natural atmosphere. The students were informed of this and that only their names as pairs were noted down to be monitored easily. No interference and correction was made by the teacher to encourage a positive classroom environment. The teacher had purely a facilitating role.

The topics of the speaking marathon activity were also given to direct the students. For the first activity they were free to talk about anything to get them used to the activity itself. For the second activity the topic was 'jobs and people' since the preceding and following reading lessons were about these subjects. For the last speaking marathon activity the topics were 'jobs, people, places and food' to give them a broader range of material as the duration of the activity increased. These were also topics of reading texts covered in class.

The second speaking activity conducted for a further three more lessons was 'Conversation' in which students were again sitting in a row facing each other. Students were be arranged in different pairs, though they were free to choose partners. They were told to ask questions to one another, to be interested in their partner's answers and try to ask follow-up questions. The topic of the first conversation activity was free with the focus on students getting to know each other. Students spoke for four minutes. The topics for the second conversation, which lasted for five minutes, were: people, jobs, places, food, the internet, communication and education. The third and final conversation ac-

tivity, which lasted six minutes, included the same topics plus technology and animals (again covered in Reading lessons).

The third speaking activity held in class was 'Interview'. This was conducted by students in pairs twice. However, this time the pairs were arranged differently to increase the difficulty of the activities gradually since the same partners would create familiarity and higher self-esteem. But students do not always have the same people around them to talk. They should be able to, be brave enough to talk to everybody. The task was the same for both of the interview activities. The students thought of a list of famous people including film stars, politicians, athletes and artists. Each of them chose a famous person to become. They were then put in pairs to interview each other. The duration for the first interview was eight minutes and the second, ten minutes.

During all the activities all responses, comments, and complaints by the students were noted down for subsequent analysis.

The second questionnaire was applied after all the activities had been completed. Two more questions were added to the same questionnaire. These open-ended questions were:

Question 11. Do you think the activities we have done so far have been helpful to you? If yes, how?

Question 12. After all the activities we have done, do you think that you will be speaking in English more comfortably? (See Appendix B for the second Questionnaire)

## Findings and discussion

*Part I*

The results of the questionnaires are shown in pie charts reflecting students' ideas generally in three categories as positive, negative and no strong opinion. 12 students answered the first questionnaire. The results and answers of the first questionnaire are as follows:

Question 1: 'I can speak in English easily in the classroom'.
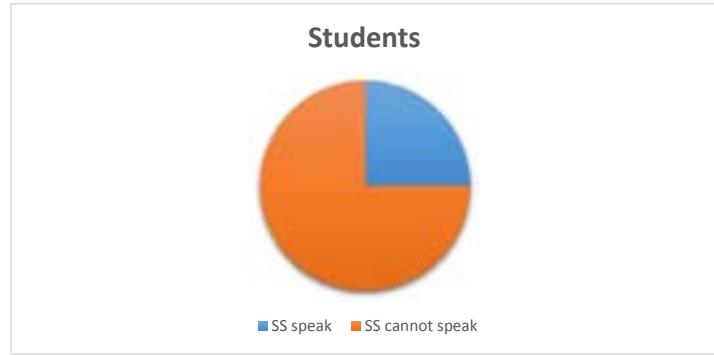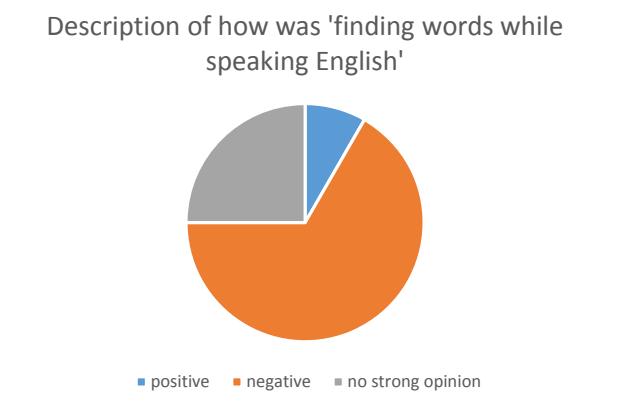
**Students**



It was found that out of 12 students only 3 of them agreed with the idea that they could speak in English easily in the classroom, while 9 of them thought they could not speak. That is, a clear majority of the students thought that they could not speak in English easily in the classroom.

Question 2: 'I cannot pronounce the words easily.'

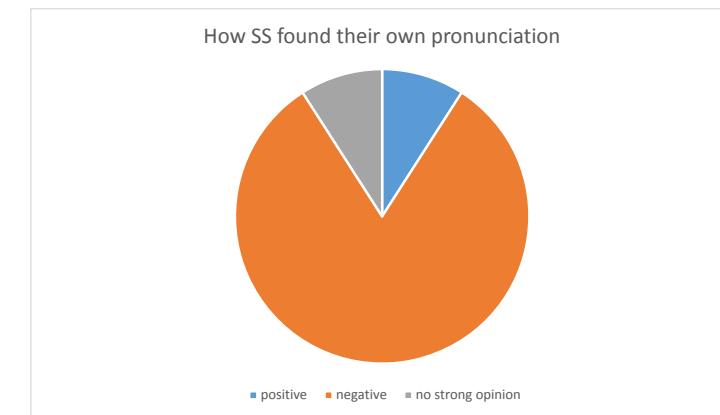**Students' pronunciation**
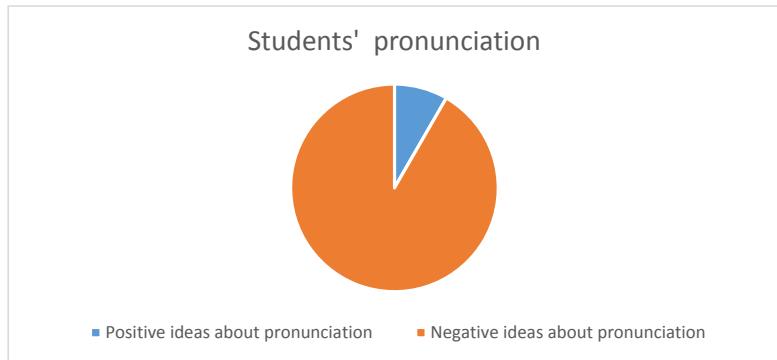


11 of 12 students thought that they could not pronounce the words easily. They gave negative feedback about their feelings. Only one of them thought that he/she could pronounce the words in English easily, and the feeling explained was positive.

Question 3:

Description of how was 'finding words while speaking English'



11 out of 12 students expressed that they could not find the right words while speaking. (91.6%). For the statement of ' Finding words while speaking in English is _____ for me.': More than half of them used negative adjectives meaning they found it difficult; a quarter of them used mild adjectives meaning a little difficult; and only a small minority used positive adjectives meaning it was easy.

Question 4:

How SS found their own pronunciation



A great majority of the students gave negative adjectives for how they found their pronunciation. Students expressing positive and no strong opinion answers were equal with the numbers of 1 student each.
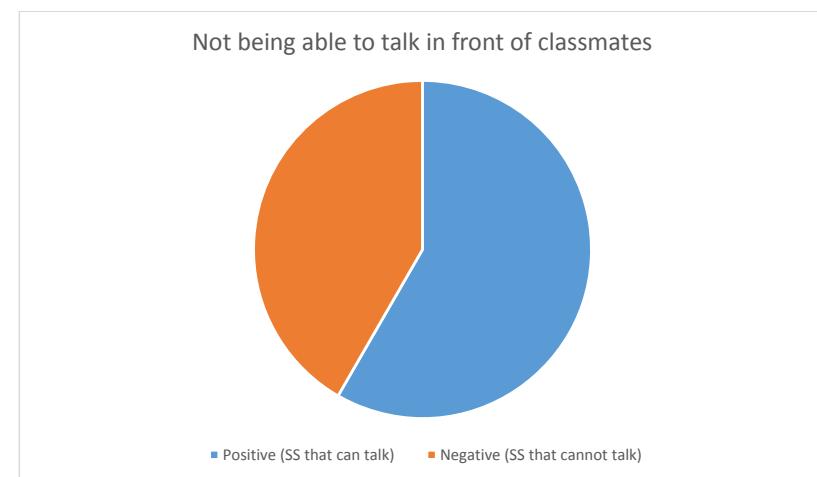
Question 5:

**Speaking fluently**



■ positive  ■ negative
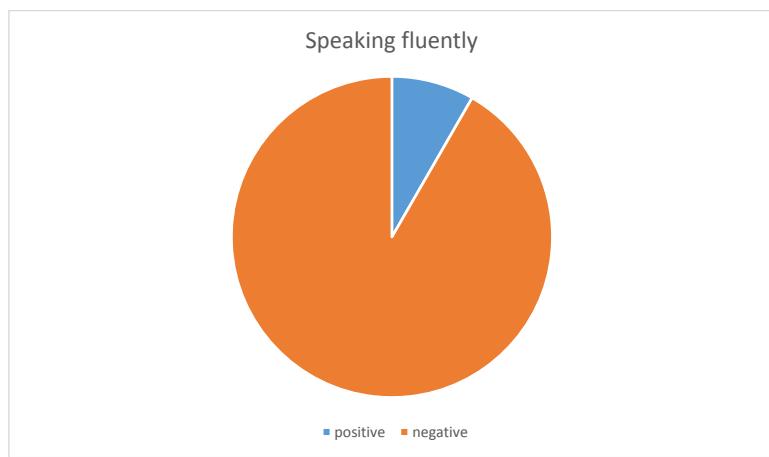
11 out of 12 students stated that they could not speak fluently. Only one of these students thought that he/she could speak fluently.

Question 6:
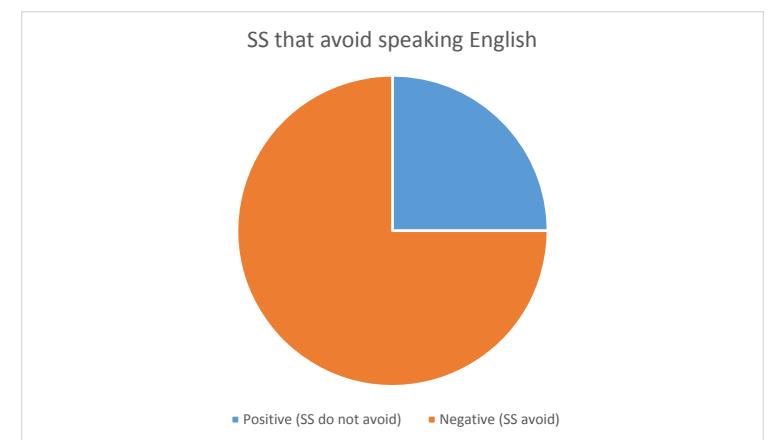
**SS that avoid speaking English**
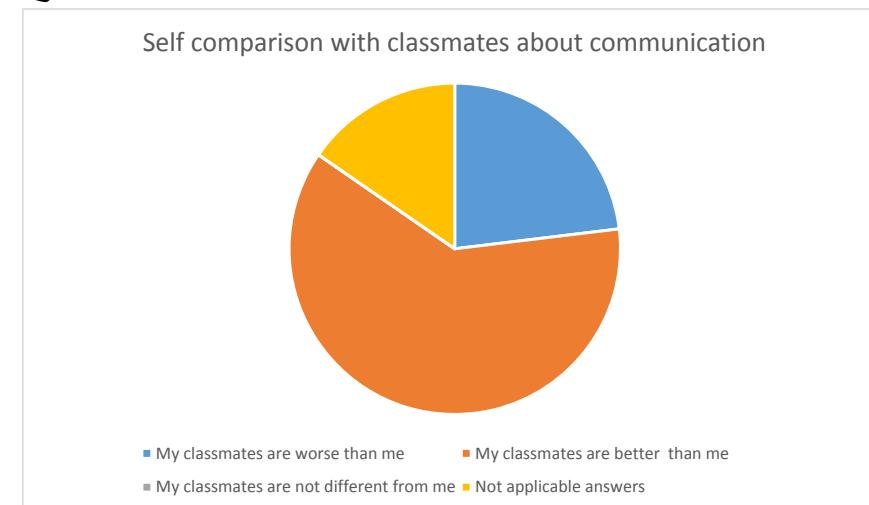


■ Positive (SS do not avoid)  ■ Negative (SS avoid)

The majority of the students agreed the idea that they avoided speaking in English. Only 3 of them stated that they did not avoid from speaking English.

Question 7:

**Not being able to talk in front of classmates**



■ Positive (SS that can talk)  ■ Negative (SS that cannot talk)

Less than half of the students thought that they could not talk in front of their friends in the classroom, while more than half believed that they could talk in front of their classmates.

Question 8:

**Self comparison with classmates about communication**



■ My classmates are worse than me  ■ My classmates are better  than me
■ My classmates are not different from me  ■ Not applicable answers

In this question it was searched that if the students thought their friends were better than themselves or not.

A clear majority of the students thought that their friends were better at communication than themselves; and that this affected many of them in a bad way while a small minority of them expressed that he or she was not influenced by it. Few of the students thought that their friends were worse than themselves; and that this made them feel good.

Question 9:
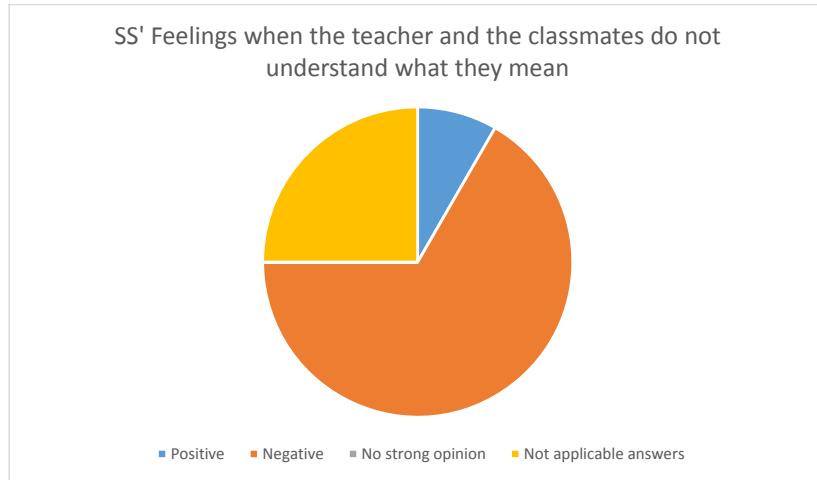


SS' Feelings when the teacher and the classmates do not understand what they mean

■ Positive   ■ Negative   ■ No strong opinion   ■ Not applicable answers

Most of the students stated that they felt bad when the teacher and their friends did not understand what they meant. A small minority of them expressed that they did not feel negatively since they believed that their friends were not better than themselves. There were three N/A answers.

Question 10:

All the students thought that they could not speak English the way they wanted. The reasons given by the students for this will be analysed in the second part of this section.

*Part II*

Some items of the questionnaire (items 5, 6, 7 and 10) were concealing some underlying anxiety factors. The students tried to explain the reasons behind their problems, and these were analysed using the three categories of factors referred to above. The problems or factors are categorized into three headings:

1. Cognitive Factors, which can be regarded as linguistic variables that show students' problems in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.
2. Affective Factors, which can be seen as non-linguistic variables that include psychological reasons, public speaking anxiety, social, socio-cultural anxiety, etc.
3. Other Factors, which can include teacher oriented variables, things related to classroom environment, learner beliefs, etc.
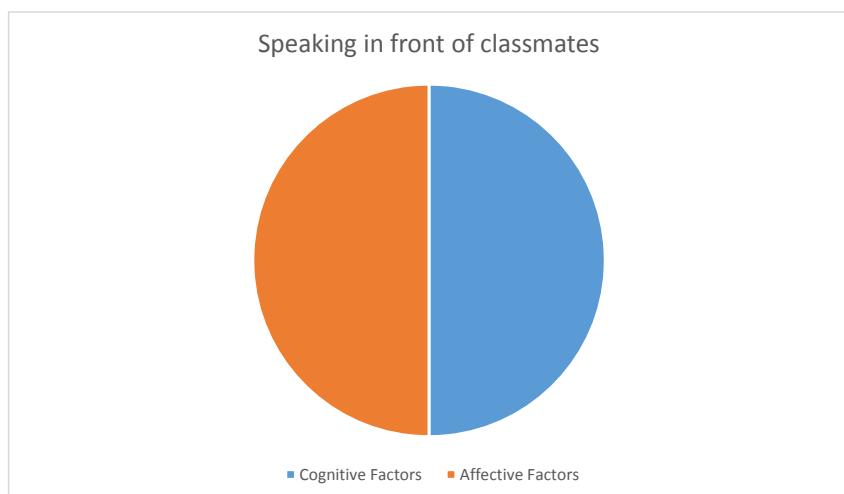
Question 5:



Factors why SS cannot speak fluently

■ Cognitive Factors   ■ Affective Factors   ■ Other Factors   ■ Not applicable Answers
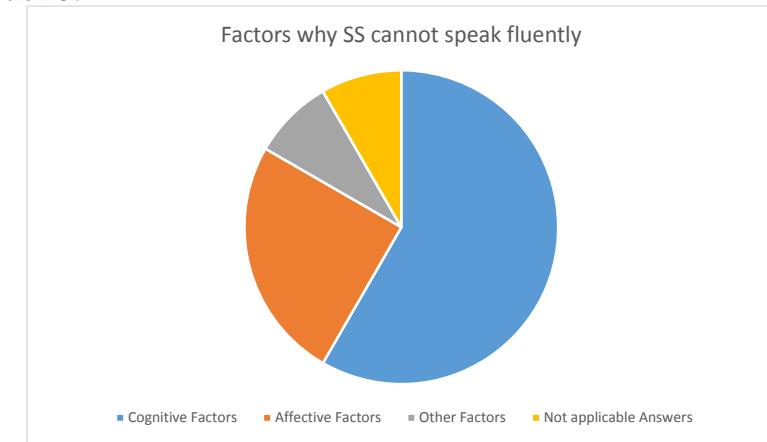
More than half of the students responded the questionnaire explained that they could not speak fluently because of linguistic factors. More than half expressed that it was because of non- linguistic factors particularly anxiety. There was only one student answer in other factors category. Finally, there was also another student that answered 'I do not know', which became a N/A answer.

Question 6:
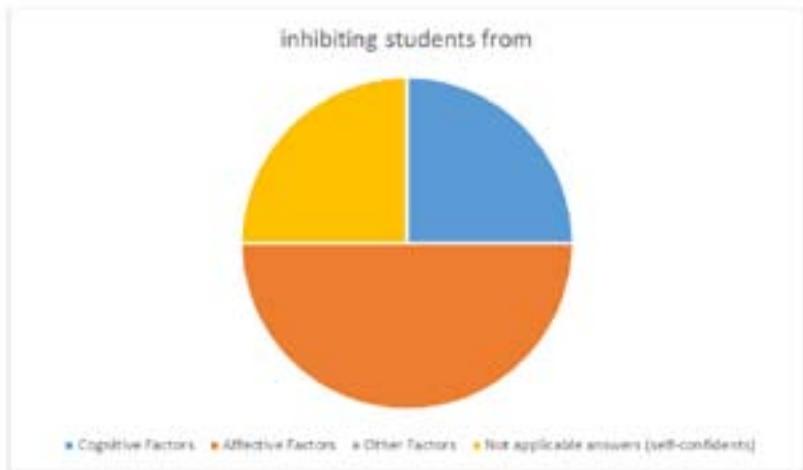


Half of the students answered the questionnaire showed Affective Factors (related to social, psychological, and public speaking anxiety) as reasons for avoidance while speaking. Students stated cognitive factors and students expressed themselves as self-confident were equal.

Question 7:



This question was analysing public speaking anxiety. Half of the students stated that they felt good when they were speaking in front of their classmates. The other half explained that they felt bad. As a result half of the students expressed Affective Factors as reasons.

Question 10:
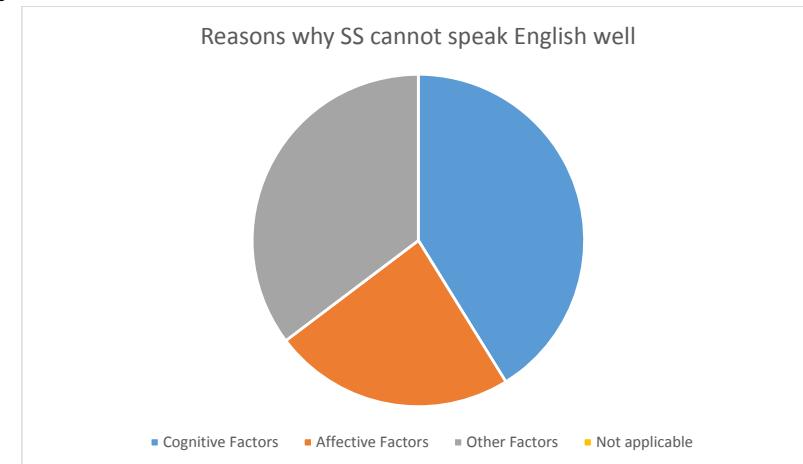


Most students focused on Cognitive and Other Factors categories. For the Affective Factors the number of students was less.

### *Part III*

After all the activities were completed, the second questionnaire was given to the students. Nine students answered the questionnaire since others were not in the classroom. The results of the second questionnaire and the comparisons of it with the results of the first questionnaire are as follows:

Question 1: 'I can speak in English easily in the classroom'.



**Students**

SS speak ■  SS cannot speak ■
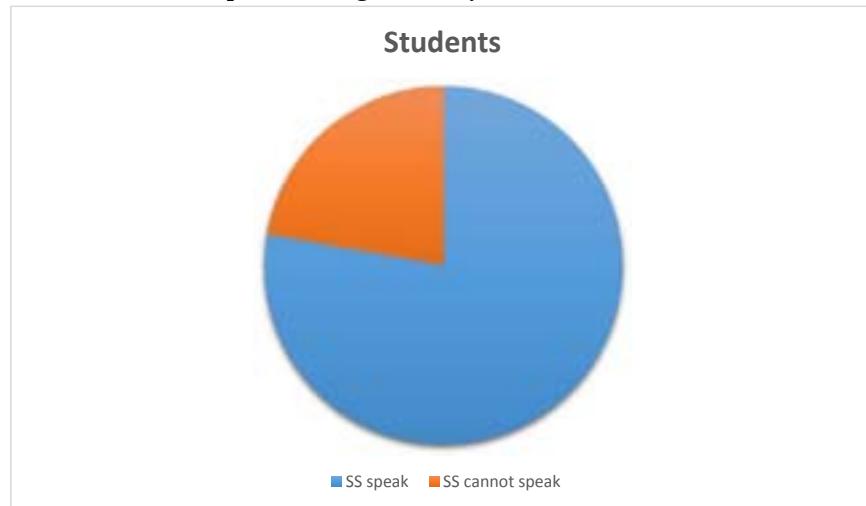
It was found that a great majority of the students agreed with the idea that they could speak in English easily in the classroom, while less than a quarter thought they could not speak. It can be seen that after the practices done in the classroom, a great change occurred in students' own beliefs and self-confidence when compared to the first questionnaire.

Question 2: 'I cannot pronounce the words easily.'



Students' pronunciation

■ Positive ideas about pronunciation    ■ Negative ideas about pronunciation    ■ No strong opinion
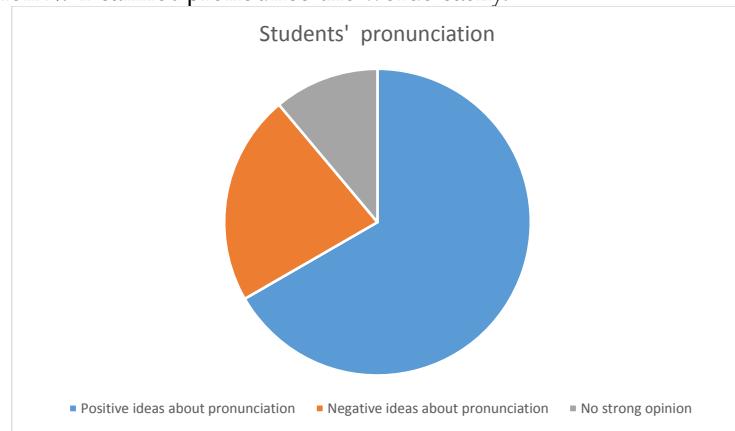
More than half of the students thought that they could pronounce the words easily. They gave positive feedback about their feelings. Less than a quarter thought that they could not pronounce the words in English easily, and the feeling explained was not much negative. Only one of the students showed no strong opinion.
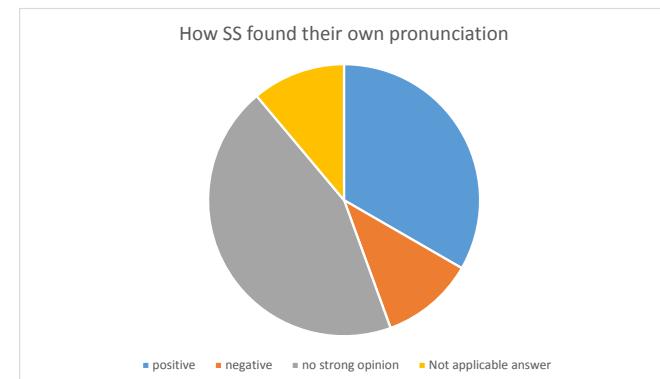
It is clear in this item again the practices changed student beliefs positively.

Question 3:
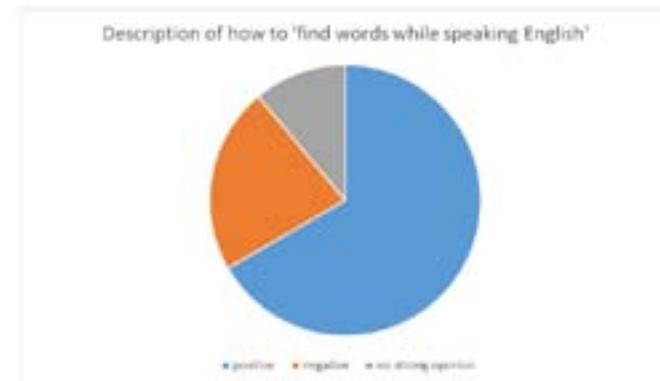


Description of how to 'find words while speaking English'

■ positive    ■ negative    ■ no strong opinion

For the statement of 'Finding words while speaking in English is _____ for me.': More than half of them used positive adjectives meaning they found it easy. Less than a quarter of them used negative adjectives meaning a little difficult; and only a small minority used weak adjectives meaning it was about difficult.

Question 4:



How SS found their own pronunciation

■ positive    ■ negative    ■ no strong opinion    ■ Not applicable answer

In this chart, it is seen that students' self-esteem went up. Only one of the students gave a negative answer. And one of the students did not answer the question; so it is shown in N/A category. Whereas positive answer was only one in the first questionnaire, the number of students was three for the second one.
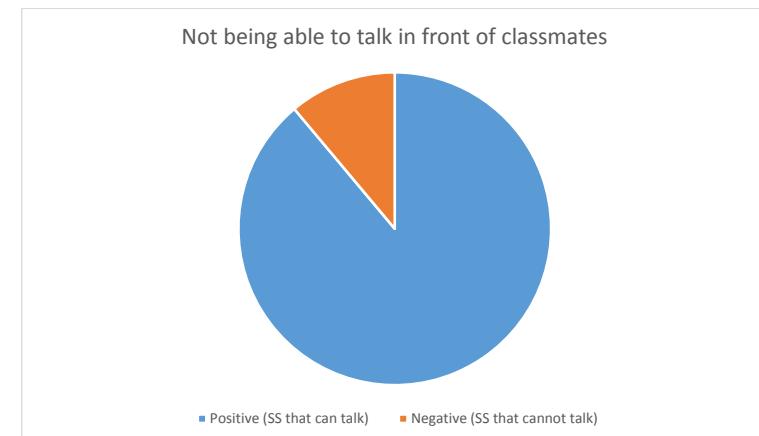
Question 5:



Speaking fluently

positive    negative
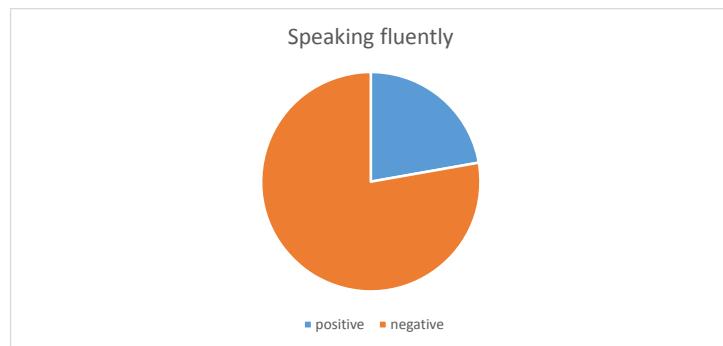
Although still a great majority of the students stated that they could not speak fluently, the pie chart shows the increase in the number of students that thought they could speak fluently. This shows the development of students' perception after the applied practices.

Question 6:



SS that avoid speaking English
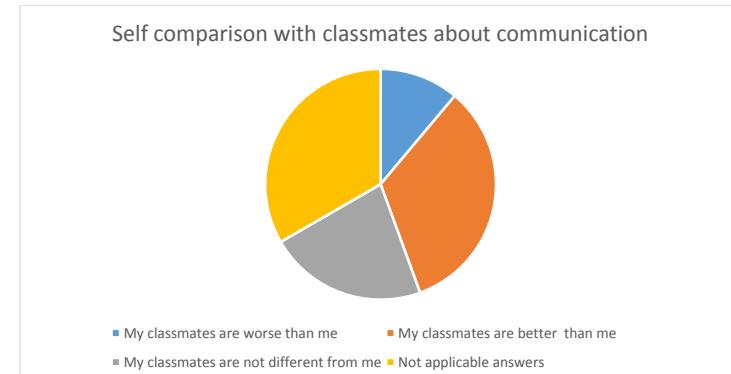
Positive (SS do not avoid)    Negative (SS avoid)
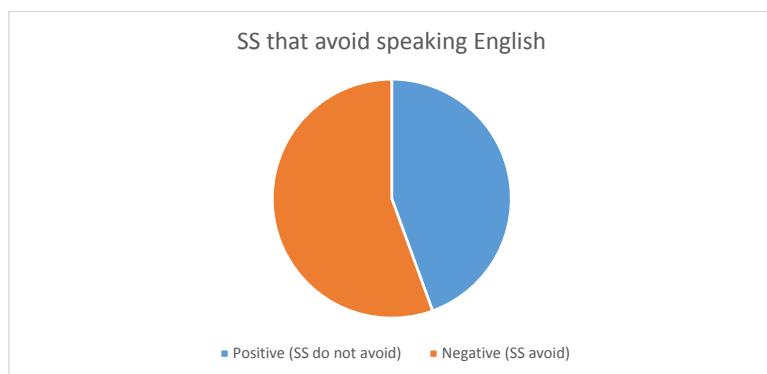
According to the first questionnaire, three quarters of the students agreed the idea that they avoided speaking in English. Only 3 of them stated that they did not avoid from speaking English. But in this chart it is seen that the rate of avoidance decreased after the practices.

Question 7:



Not being able to talk in front of classmates

Positive (SS that can talk)    Negative (SS that cannot talk)

After the studies done, the students who believed they could talk in front of their classmates increased in number. There were less students showing public speaking anxiety.
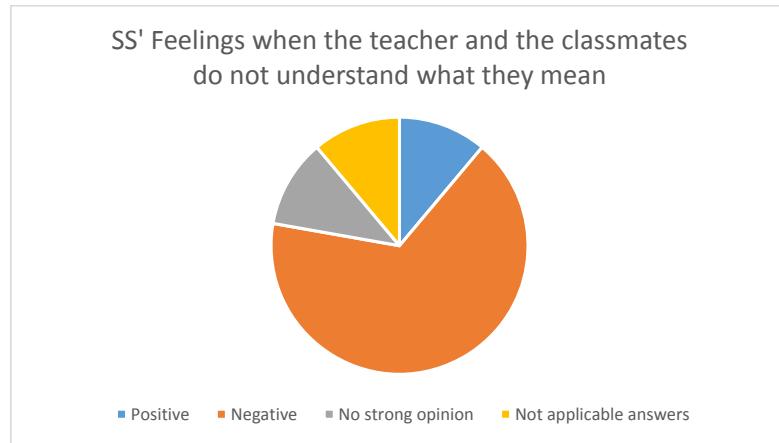
Question 8:



Self comparison with classmates about communication

My classmates are worse than me    My classmates are better than me
My classmates are not different from me    Not applicable answers

In this question it was searched that if the students thought their friends were better than themselves or not.

Students that thought their friends were better at communication than themselves and that gave N/A answers were equal. Less than a quarter thought that they were equal. Very few of them expressed that they thought their friends were worse than themselves. But only one of the students expressed that he or she was influenced badly by it. This shows that after the practices students developed confidence.

Question 9:



SS' Feelings when the teacher and the classmates do not understand what they mean

Positive   Negative   No strong opinion   Not applicable answers

Most of the students stated that they felt bad when the teacher and their friends did not understand what they meant. Students who felt relaxed, who had no strong opinion, and who gave N/A answers were all equal. This shows decrease in the number of students who felt bad.

Question 10:

One of the respondents answered that he/ she could speak in English; so that this student stated no reasons for not being able to speak English. The rest tried to explain the reasons as shown in Part II.
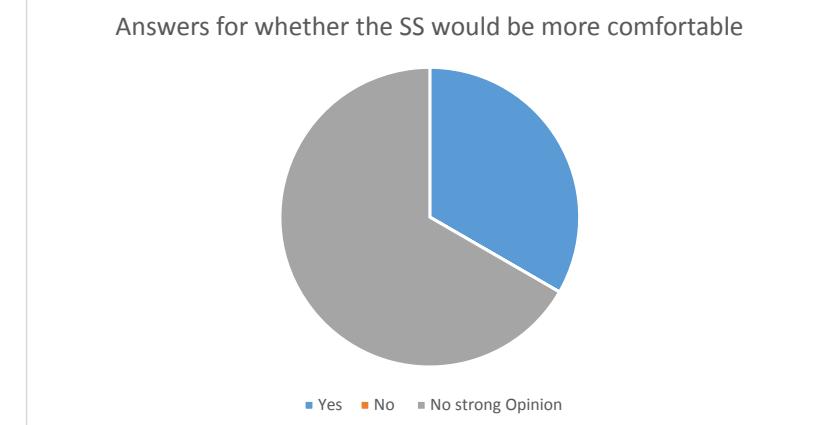
Question 11:



Answers for whether the activities studied in class helpful

Yes   No
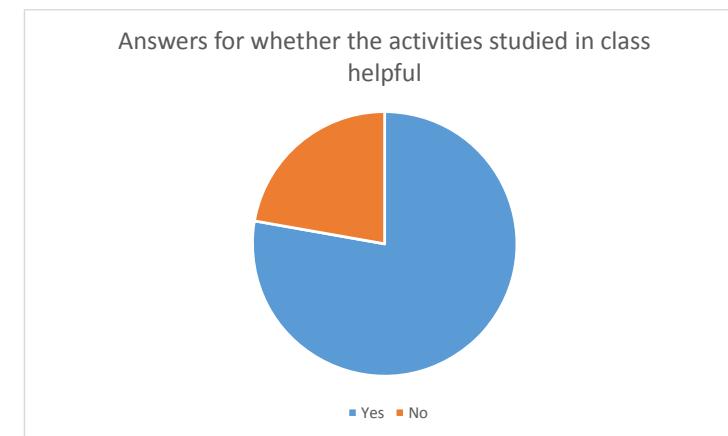
More than three quarters of the participants agreed that the activities they completed were helpful to them. Their comments about how it was helpful will be considered in part IV.

Less than a quarter of them disagreed with the idea that the practised activities were helpful.

Question 12:



Answers for whether the SS would be more comfortable

Yes   No   No strong Opinion

For the question of 'After all the activities we have done, do you think that you will be speaking in English more comfortably?', there were no negative answers. More than a quarter of the respondents expressed positive answers. Nearly three quarters of the respondents indicated no strong opinion by expressing they would be speaking English a bit more comfortably.

### *Part IV*

This part includes the factors of item 11 of the second questionnaire since it was not asked and answered in the first one.

Question 11:
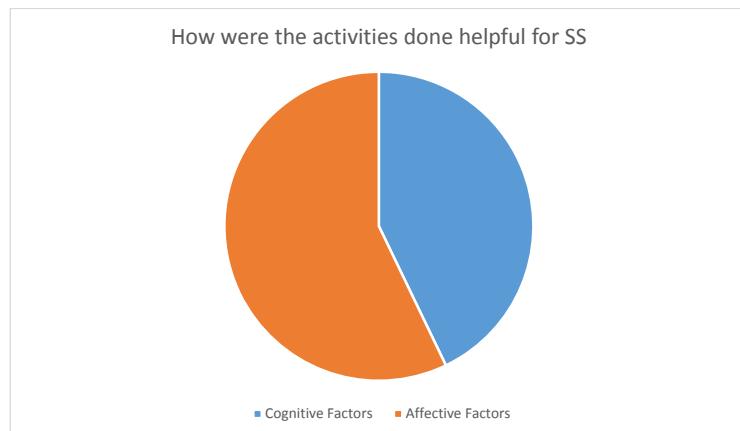


When the answers were analysed to the question of 'how?', it was seen that more than half of the students who thought that the activities were helpful for them expressed Affective Factors; namely words which showed self-confidence, realization of self-potential, development, relaxation, etc.

### Comment on results

On the whole, the study showed progress in students. Their attitudes, perceptions, and point of views changed. As a teacher, I also saw the changes in their confidence. According to this research, foreign language anxiety in the classroom is something that can be overcome

throughout practice. Different variations of these kinds of activities can be used by teachers in the warm-up sections or at the last minutes of language classes for any skills.

### Reflections

In the light of the research that I have done, I am glad that I did the survey. I have learned that if I have a question in my mind, I should go on the trials of finding the answers. I have realized that doing research brings a teacher better awareness. Practising this study helped me think from the point of my students, and to remember my own problems as a student. I noticed that doing action research helped me to gain a detailed perspective on our students through a process of finding and solving problems, improving strategies and knowledge. I also learnt that there were many other teachers like me with questions in their minds. I could find and get help from their studies. All of these were learning steps for me and they are helpful for my professional development in my career.

### Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A: the first Questionnaire used in the study

1.  I can speak in English easily in the classroom.
    Yes   O          No   O

2.  I cannot pronounce the words easily.
    Yes   O          No   O
    (If your answer is 'yes'): I feel _____ when I pronounce an English word.

3.  I cannot find the right words while speaking.
    Yes   O          No   O
    (If your answer is 'yes'): Finding words while speaking in English is _____ for me.

4.  I find my pronunciation _____.

5.  I cannot speak fluently.
    Yes   O          No   O
    (If your answer is 'yes'): Because I focus on _____while speaking.

---

6.  I avoid speaking in English.
    Yes   O          No   O
    (If your answer is 'yes'): I am afraid of _____ while I am speaking.

7.  I cannot talk in front of my friends and the teacher in the classroom.
    Because it makes me feel_____.

8.  Some of my friends in the classroom are _____ than me in communication. This makes me feel _____.

9.  When the teacher and my friends do not understand what I mean, I feel _____.

10.  I cannot speak in English the way I want.
     Yes   O          No   O
     (If your answer is 'yes'): what could the reasons be?
     _____
     _____ .

(Questions adapted from the works of M. Mahmoodzadeh and M. Ilkyaz)

## Appendix B: the second Questionnaire used in the study

1.  I can speak in English easily in the classroom.
    Yes   O          No   O

2.  I cannot pronounce the words easily.
    Yes   O          No   O
    (If your answer is 'yes'): I feel _____ when I pronounce an English word.

3.  I cannot find the right words while speaking.
    Yes   O          No   O
    (If your answer is 'yes'): Finding words while speaking in English is _____ for me.

4.  I find my pronunciation _____.

5.    I cannot speak fluently.
      Yes   O          No   O
      (If your answer is 'yes'): Because I focus on _____while speaking.

6.    I avoid speaking in English.
      Yes   O          No   O
      (If your answer is 'yes'): I am afraid of _____ while I am speaking.

7.    I cannot talk in front of my friends and the teacher in the classroom.
      Because it makes me feel_____.

8.    Some of my friends in the classroom are _____ than me in communication. This makes me feel _____.

9.    When the teacher and my friends do not understand what I mean, I feel _____.

10.    I cannot speak in English the way I want.
       Yes   O          No   O
       (If your answer is 'yes'): what could the reasons be?
       _____
       _____ .

11.    Do you think the activities we have done so far have been helpful to you? If yes, how?

12.    After all the activities we have done, do you think that you will be speaking in English more comfortably?

# 10 *Peer assessment as a way of developing presenting skills*

## *Sedef Fenik*

*"If we always do what we've always done,
we will get what we've always got."*
**-Adam Urbanski**

### Introduction

With the idea of activating higher order thinking skills, the focus of education has shifted to learner-centered discourses and practices. The movement of traditional methodologies and assessment levels to the involvement of learners in the learning process lies in the belief of developing learners' awareness and critical thinking skills. This perspective has generated the culture of learning rather than the testing of the knowledge. Thus learners have an active role both in learning and assessment processes. If language educators use the same methodologies and assessments they will always get the same results in terms of learning. As long as you dive deep into the sea you can see the real beauty and benefit of it. In the light of this learners should be diving to think deeply in the assessment performance and consequently deepen their learning actively and autonomously.

In this paper I present the view of peer assessment method and additionally share findings of research in which 13 students were involved in assessing each other's oral presentation as part of their oral portfolios. The aim of the study was to find out whether constant peer assessment develops learners' presentation skills, whilst focusing on these questions:

(1)   What kind of impact does peer assessment have on students' presentation skills?

(2)  Is peer and teacher assessment the same?

(3)  What do learners like or dislike about the evaluation process?

(4)  How does reflecting on the results of peers affect their improvement?

(5)  What are the weaknesses and strengths of learners according to their self-reflection?

## Literature review

The current assessment form in higher education is predominantly considered as summative and formative and done mostly by teachers and institutions. On the other hand, with the idea of learner centered teaching the need to change the assessment form is recognized both to enhance learners' ability and confidence in assessing each other's work and to raise learners' involvement in the assessing process. Involvement of students in the assessment process can be classified into two: self- and peer- assessment. Falchikov (2005) defines peer assessment as students' use of criteria and application of standards to the work of their peers to judge that work. In the light of this, self-assessment is the use of criteria and standards to evaluate their own work for future improvement. Peer assessment requires learners both to decide, in a class or group, who deserves what marks and why and to reflect on what learning has taken place and how (Cheng & Warren, 1999).

*Table 1: Strengths of peer assessment*

| | Authors | Quotes on Peer assessment |
|---|---|---|
| STRENGTHS | Özogul & Sullivan (2007) | • Leads to a more active involvement of students in their own learning process. |
| | Falchikov ( 2005) | • Is beneficial to involve learners in the assessment of presentations to develop their self-regulating skills. |
| | Topping (1998) | • Allows for higher learning performance, higher presentation confidence (self-efficacy) and the development of appraisal skills. |
| | Topping (2003) | • Highlights the economic benefits of adopting self- and peer assessment which leads to the reduction of the teaching workload. |
| | Schunk (2001) | • Is a learning monitoring process<br>• Helps learners to bring their behavior in line with their performance and goals. |
| | Hughes & Large (1993) | • Improves students' academic performance and provides them with experience in making assessments which will be useful to them in their future careers. |
| | Mangelsdorf (1992) | • Develops learner autonomy by transferring responsibility from teachers<br>• Improves student higher order thinking through the critical reading of peers' writing. |
| | Hattie (2009) | • Is formative in nature and has a clear potential of fostering the subsequent learning process. |
| | Kwan & Leung (1996) | • Promotes critical student reflection of their learning |

Table 1 demonstrates the strengths of peer assessment which are compiled from various articles in the literature. As they have highlighted, peer assessment improves learners' thinking skills while creating a more independent learning atmosphere. During peer assessment learners' critically doing self-reflection is also supported by Kwan and Leung (1996). It is critical to develop learners' self-observation skills as well as their self-reflection skills in order to help them gain a better understanding of their own development through the comparison of their performances.

*Table 2: Weaknesses of peer assessment*

| | Authors | Quotes on Peer assessment |
|---|---|---|
| WEAKNESSES | Nelson & Murphy (1993) | • ESL learners mistrust peer responses as English is not their peers' first language and view the teacher as 'the one who knows'. |
| | Sadler & Good (2006) | • Peer grading does not result in increased student learning |
| | Wilding (2006) | • Consideration needs to be taken with regards to the validity and reliability of assessment |
| | Elliot & Higgins (2005) | • There can be a tendency for students to initially under-mark |
| | Rowland (2000) | • Student-grading is to be closely related to tutor grading but generally lower |
| | Boud & Holmes (1995) | • There was a slight bias on the behalf of learners to over-mark |

Compared to its strengths, peer assessment has also been perceived as an assessment with some discrepancies in terms of validity and reliability. In table 2 it can be observed that all the weaknesses raised by different authors are all about marking issue which moots the validity of peer assessment. It is clear that this major concern on over- and under-marking is still under discussion.

*Table 3: Features of peer and teacher assessment*

| Assessment by peers | Assessment by a teacher |
|---|---|
| Involving assessing peers | Involving evaluation |
| Focusing on improvement | Focusing on judgement |
| Enhancing autonomous learning | Maximizing teacher dependency |
| Providing multiple perspectives | Providing a narrow perspective |
| Learning from and with peers | One way learning (from T to S) |
| Providing mutual feedback | Providing authority feedback |
| Leading to open-mindedness | Creating dependency and anxiety |
| Promoting critical thinking | Providing transmitted knowledge |
| Functioning formative | Serving as summative and formative |

In Table 3 what is assessment by peers and a teacher is depicted clearly focusing on its features to highlight the differences between them. The idea of peer assessment is compiled from an article called 'Self and peer assessment' (2008) reported by RMIT University. In contrast to assessment by peers, the features of assessment by a teacher are constructed as dichotomies to peer assessment through my own analysis of ideas. According to my perception of assessment by teachers it seems that when assessment is under the control of an authority it is more teacher- centered and limited in terms of perspective and knowledge improvement as peer assessment provides deep thinking including the participation of learners.

**Procedure**

As a part of a main course lesson the students were required to give an oral presentation on different topics every week to extend the students' period of active listening and speaking. The students did not receive training on how to present. Considering this fact, it was decided to implement peer assessment through a specific rubric for 4 weeks for students to understand key points of delivering a presentation. The rubric comprises 4 aspects on oral presentation which are presentation content, visual aids, performance and general items. There were 13 participants who regularly gave presentations for 4 weeks. Not only the students but also I as a teacher filled the rubric to evaluate each student weekly.

After the first 2 weeks' presentations the evaluation forms about each student were given to them to write a self- reflection about their performance and an action plan for later presentations. Then the last presentations of each student were videoed for the students to evaluate their final situation while giving a presentation. Following this they were asked to write a self-reflection once more. As a last step of gathering data I asked them to discuss their likes and dislikes about the evaluation process and the impacts of this process during one class hour. All the data gathered from different mediums, were analyzed and interpreted in detail with tables and comments.

It is necessary to highlight the position of this process and the participants as it is of immense importance in terms of Exploratory Practice suggested by Allwright (2004). In this process an oral presentation task is a requirement in B2 level. This means that I, as a teacher, did not arrange extra time which led to

a practice done during working time. The study was not designed to find a possible solution to a classroom problem; it aimed to improve both learners and the teacher's own understanding and deepen the thinking. When learners are in the participant position rather than the object or the subject of the research they are motivated to discover their learning and understand what is going on. The teacher is not the only one doing the research to understand and find a solution to problems. Allwright underlines this, 'Learners need (and want) to understand at least as much as teachers do.'

### Findings and discussion

The data Figure 1 demonstrates total results given by their peers weekly for each performance indicator, while Figure 2 is the evidence given by the teacher. The results are based on the total average of the students' grades from each performance indicator.
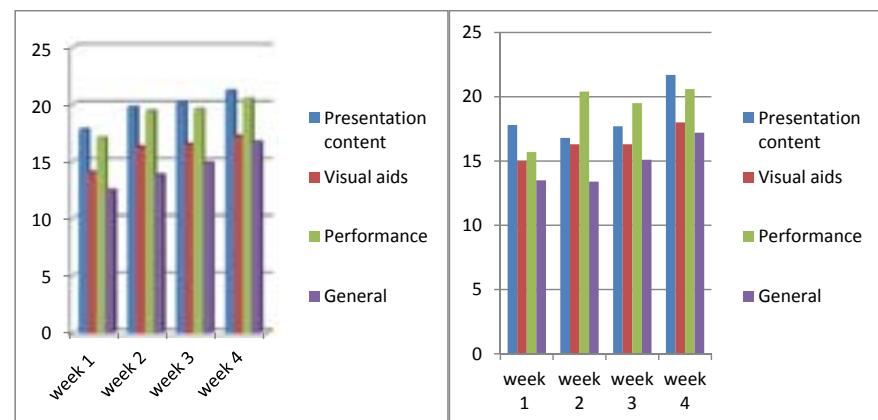


*Figure 1: peer assessment*              *Figure 2: teacher assessment*

Figures above reveal how much the students developed on a weekly basis. In Figure 1, it is clear that there was a gradual increase in four aspects of students' presentation performance. Although the success rate was good to start with, it seems that the slight rise was evidence of the success of the peer assessment process. The blue column representing presentation content shows the highest increase every week compared to the other presentation indicators.

The results of teacher assessment also demonstrate a rise in each section; however, they fluctuate slightly in four weeks. In spite of the fluctuation in teacher grades it is clear that the learners developed their skills.

It is important to highlight the higher grades in teacher assessment compared to peers. In the literature there are two contradictory ideas about peers' over-marking and under-marking during assessment. As opposed to what Boud and Holmes (1995) suggest in terms of over-marking, findings depict that learners have the tendency not to give high grades to their peers. These findings are supported by Elliot and Higgins (2005) study in terms of under-marking and accuracy in peer assessment.
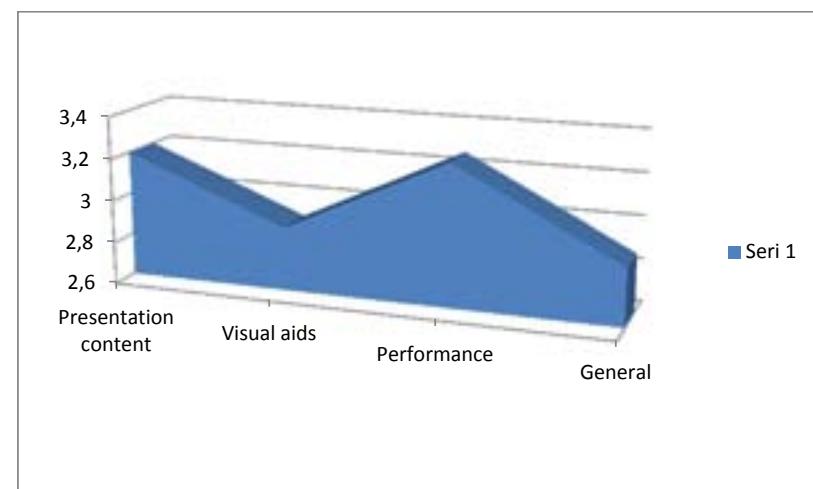


*Figure 3: Increase rate per content*

Figure 3 indicates how much improvement the students gained in their oral performance per content. As may be seen in the table their oral performance was assessed in four different aspects. It is clear that the highest increases were in their performance and presentation content. This result also coincides with the students' self-reflections which demonstrate their focus points were mostly on body gestures, eye contact, fluency and memorizing. Contrary to what the graph depicts regarding visual aids' rate, it has been observed that this was the result of their higher success rate at the beginning of their oral portfolio.

*Table 4: Students' areas of weakness after 1ˢᵗ and 4ᵗʰ self-reflection*

| Students' weak Areas | In 1ˢᵗ self-reflection | In 4ᵗʰ self-reflection |
|---|---|---|
| Eye contact | 66% | 27% |
| Gestures | 58% | 38% |
| Excitement | 50% | 50% |
| Memorizing | 25% | 11% |
| Timing | 25% | 0% |
| Voice and pacing | 25% | 22% |
| Visual aids | 16% | 11% |
| Organization of information | 16% | 0% |
| Asking and answering Qs | 16% | 22% |
| Fluency | 0,8% | 33% |

Table 4 demonstrates participants' areas of weakness in their reflections after the first two presentations and the last presentation. As may be seen in the table, the highest percentages are on eye contact and body gestures according to the learners' observations at the beginning. It is clear that there is decline in the rate which is the effective result of analyzing peers' assessments and observing their own performances from the videos. It is interesting to highlight that their excitement level remained the same which indicates that a normal level of anxiety is unavoidable during presentation. It can also be inferred that learners feel excited when they are being assessed by their peers. This means although they perceive excitement as a weakness, they take their duty seriously. Another striking result is the increase in fluency. Compared to other decreasing weaknesses, learners fluency seems to worsen. This is the result of the reflection done by watching their videos. Here it is essential to state the findings gathered while evaluating the results by peers differs from the findings while watching their own performance. While watching they observe their fluency easily as it is more obvious visually.

*Table 5: Students' areas of strengths after 1ˢᵗ and 4ᵗʰ reflection*

| Students' strength Areas | In 1ˢᵗ reflection | In 4ᵗʰ reflection |
|---|---|---|
| Organization of information | 25% | - |
| Eye contact | 0,8% | 22% |
| Clarity in speaking | 0,8% | 33% |
| Body gestures | 0,8% | 11% |
| Asking and answering | 0,8% | 22% |
| Visual aids | - | 11% |
| Fluency | - | 22% |
| Voice | - | 22% |

When compared with weakness areas, it can be inferred from Table 5 that students do not have the tendency to spot their strengths at first sight since they are more focused on their weaknesses for improvement. Although some areas like eye contact and body gestures mentioned as weaknesses show a considerable decrease between the 1ˢᵗ and 4ᵗʰ reflection in Table 4, they are not considered as strengths, which is strongly related to their focus on evaluation rather than appraisal.

*Table 6: Impacts of video recalling for self-evaluation*

| Impact Areas | Quotes from students |
|---|---|
| do self-reflection | I am still not doing the body gestures; I should motivate myself to do so |
| do self-assessment | In my belief my presentation is better than my previous presentations |
| do retrospective assessment | I thought if I didn't read from the paper, I would make better |
| give proactive decisions | I will also try to increase my voice |
| evaluate possible changes | I have to make eye contact |
| see strengths and weaknesses | I should manage my behavior carefully, but my voice was good. |
| match previous feedback with behaviors | Friends could understand clearly what I want to say |

In Table 6 the real data from students' reflections on their last performance can be seen. The data were analyzed according to the impact by students' own self-reports. As seen in the table, the data shows the cognitive process the students were passing through while self-reflecting, as the process requires critical thinking skills.

*Table 7: Impacts of peer assessment by students*

| Self-awareness | Social Skills |
|---|---|
| recognized mistakes | more self confidence |
| recognized positive behaviors | become more social |
| overcome our weaknesses | |

| Personal development | Skill development |
|---|---|
| learnt to speak in front of spectator | grammar improved |
| overcome excitement | fluency in speaking |
| improved eye contact | improved presentation skills |

Table 7 depicts the impact of peer assessment by students which can be considered predominantly as benefits. This data is the learners' reflection on peer assessment process at the end of the process. Thus, it is not a measurable one as they are the learners' perceptions and self-reports rather than assumptions. The gains they made were categorized in four different development areas: self-awareness, personal development, social skills and skill development. It seems that all participants developed their awareness and social skills without any explicit teaching of how to address a presentation.

These developmental areas are not the same as the rubric. It is apparent that coming up with valuable gains is apparent evidence of how this peer assessment process is successful in promoting learner's deep thinking skills and awareness in terms of their development in learning. This strength of peer assessment is also supported by Kwan and Leung (1996).

*Table 8: Categorization of likes and dislikes about assessment process by students*

| Likes | | Dislikes | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Awareness* | realized our skills | *Unreliability* | not objective in evaluations |
| | realized our mistakes recognized ourselves better | | giving more to close friends results may not be realistic |
| *Cooperation* | writing comments for friends giving feedback to others liked the way to correct my friends showed others their weaknesses | *Anxiety* | feeling stressed during evaluation misunderstanding of feedback |
| *Gains* | gained presentation experience gained criticizing experience | | |
| *Motivation* | attention during presentations feeling like a teacher fun | | |

As indicated in table 8, learners' likes and dislikes about peer assessment process are categorized and analyzed in terms of their content. This data also reflects self-reports of learners at the end. It is discernable that their likes outnumber their dislikes. Through peer assessment learners seem to like being made aware of themselves, cooperating with peers, gaining assessment experience and being motivated. One of the most striking issues among the dislikes is the reliability of peer assessment.

As stated in Table 2, reliability is still a concern which has been questioning by researchers. According to the data about dislikes, it reveals that over-

marking is a problem leading to unreliability and unreality. Another issue to be underlined here is anxiety. Even if the assessment is carried out by peers, learners feel anxious, which can be interpreted as taking their learning process seriously. Even though learners pointed out anxiety as a dislike, anxiety is an inevitable result of the assessment process.
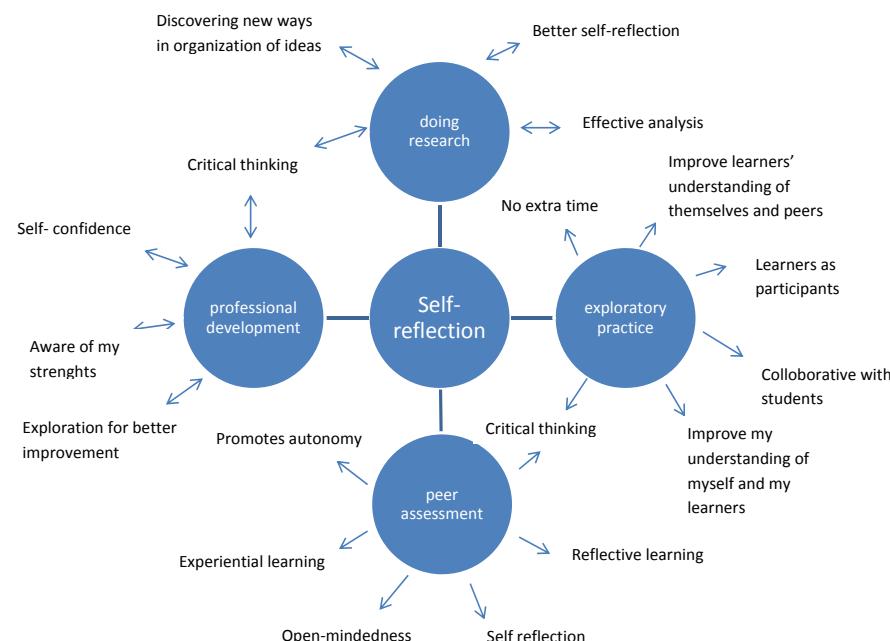
## Reflections



*Chart 1– Analysis of reflection*

As a consequence of this study I have gained a much better understanding of doing research, implementing exploratory practice, peer assessment and professional development. As chart one shows, I categorized my gains under four headings. To begin with, doing systematic research every year leads to different improvements on oneself each time. Coming up with a new area to research requires the discovery and trial of new ways in organization of ideas. In this way only you can contribute new perspectives to the ELT world and

yourself. Each time, I recognized that I am diving into deeper waters more, and consequently thinking more deeply. This critical thinking process results in effective analysis and better self-reflection on the area. Along with doing research I have gained knowledge about exploratory practice. Now I am more aware that for exploratory practice teachers do not need extra time apart from the classroom.

I have a better understanding of exploratory practice in which learners act as the participants. In terms of peer assessment I became more aware of what it actually is. As this was my first trial, along with the participants I experienced deep insight. I and my learners have both gained open-mindedness through reflective learning, self-reflection and critical thinking. These all result in promoting autonomy in class. This exploratory practice has put both the teacher and the learners in a deep, long way where the learners have to do more than the teacher during the assessment procedure ending up with priceless gains in terms of learning.

Finally, all the gains resulted from this research actually contribute to my professional development. After this research I am more aware of my strengths and I feel more confident. While considering all these, I pass through a critical thinking phase which promotes exploration for improvement.

All the four gain areas have one common essential point worth highlighting, which is critical thinking. Becoming aware of my weaknesses and strengths through understanding, applying, analyzing, assessing and creating has improved my quality of thinking and that of the learners as well. Doing self-reflection in itself requires thinking critically. Thus when you start thinking deeply, you become more aware of what you are doing, what the research can provide. Doing teacher-research is an ocean of experiences, the deeper you dive, the more you discover, experiment and learn.

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## 11 *Cross-checked problems in undergraduate academic writing*

### *Salim Razı*

### Introduction

Almost every language teacher would agree that developing the skill of writing is the most difficult one both for teachers and learners. My students and I are no exception to this. When we remember the natural order of language development we see that writing appears at the very end after listening, speaking and reading. Thus, schools are full of language learners who consistently complain about their writing tasks in addition to teachers who backbite their students due to their unwillingness in writing. When it comes to the development of academic writing skills in a foreign language then such complaints unsurprisingly double. This is why developing academic writing skills has been investigated by several researchers (e.g. Marlink, 2009); yet it is impossible to offer a single syllabus with reference to the relevant literature that fits all classes. This is simply related to the nature of teaching. As each class has its own dynamics the problems vary.

### Context and problem

To provide a basis for this research study I would like to familiarize the readers with my students. As the lecturer of *the Advanced Reading and Writing Skills Course*, I should acknowledge that spending the last decade teaching academic writing skills to hundreds of students at the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) has contributed a lot to my understanding of the concept. I can easily indicate that my students have been aware of the importance of developing (academic) reading skills related to their roles as teachers of English. However, they experience difficulty in understanding why they need to develop academic writing skills. Thus my duty as the lecturer starts with justifying the reasons for the practice of academic writing skills. To do this I

give examples from action research studies that they are expected to conduct as effective teachers in their teaching career. However, developing awareness on this does not necessarily mean that I solve all my problems. Indeed, as the nature of teaching requires, I need to confront several subsequent problems such as preventing plagiarism and providing effective feedback throughout the semester. Under those circumstances the most appropriate treatment in the course seems to be incorporating digital technology. This is why I have been creating virtual Turnitin classes for my students and enabling online assignment submission. In this way I make use of the essential features of Turnitin, namely Originality, GradeMark, and PeerMark.

### Feedback in writing

In this study, in addition to digital technology I also focus on assessment for learning since relevant literature indicated the positive impact of this (Davison & Leung, 2009; Fyfe & Vella, 2012). In this way I aim to provide a basis for using assessment rubrics as a teaching tool. The by-product of such an implementation is receiving a variety of feedback. It is clear that different types of feedback provided either by tutor or peer are beneficial (e.g. Comer, 2009; Topping, 1996). Fyfe and Vella's study could be one of the examples in which an assessment rubric was used as a teaching tool. The basic assumption of such an implementation is better development of written language skills (Davison & Leung, 2009) by integrating peer evaluation in process writing. This is believed to encourage the development of metacognitive skills that would result in becoming independent learners (Docherty, 2013).

Classroom-based assessment requires benefiting from self, peer and tutor review (Lam, 2013). With the help of feedback coming from several sources, learner autonomy develops much better (Hu & Lam, 2010). Actually these are the metacognitive writing strategies to reflect, criticize, and redraft their own papers as identified by Lam. They support learner autonomy that is known as an essential prerequisite of university students (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2013). On the other hand peer feedback is another complementary aspect since a peer makes the other one aware of the problems in the paper. Thus such interaction and collaboration could be related to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development.

## Methodology

My main aim in conducting this study was to identify problems my students encountered in writing their academic papers and which strategies they reported to be employing to find solutions to their problems. Related to the findings I had an expectation of revising my course content in accordance with the needs of my students. In the light of these I aimed at answering the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the self-reported difficulties that freshmen encounter in academic writing?

RQ2: What are the lecturer-reported difficulties that freshmen encounter in academic writing?

RQ3: What are the most commonly employed self-reported strategies to overcome academic writing problems?

RQ4: Are the self-reported difficulties, self-reported strategies and scores different with regard to academic years?

### Setting

I conducted the study in the ELT department of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (COMU), Turkey in the spring semesters of two consecutive academic years, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. The COMU ELT department was appropriate to conduct the study as the syllabuses suggested by Razı (2011) were followed in the Advanced Reading and Writing Skills Course.

### Participants

Although a total number of 515 students registered on the Advanced Reading and Writing Course in two consecutive years either as day or evening students, I did not include all of them in the study. In the first year I included repeating students, yet to avoid reporting the same students' responses for the second time I excluded repeating students for the second year. In addition I also excluded students who did not submit their assignments. Finally I identified a threshold level of 20% as suggested by Walker (2010) and excluded students who plagiarised extensively. In conclusion 272 students were included. As the ELT department is female-dominant, the number of female learners ($n = 187$) outperformed the number of male learners ($n = 85$). The participants' ages were 17 – 35, with an average of 21 at the time the data were collected. Table 1 provides detailed information about the participants.

*Table 1. Detailed Information about the Participants*

| Day / Evening | Gender | 2011–2012 | 2012–2013 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Day | Female | 29 | 40 | 69 |
| | Male | 11 | 17 | 28 |
| Evening | Female | 33 | 24 | 57 |
| | Male | 16 | 6 | 22 |
| Repeating | Female | 61 | - | 61 |
| | Male | 35 | - | 35 |
| | *Total* | 185 | 87 | 272 |

### Instruments

I developed two instruments to collect data. Firstly I used Academic Writing Difficulty and Strategy Inventory (AWDSI) that constituted of 42 items in two groups. The first group of 33 items aimed at revealing difficulties students experience, whereas the second group of 9 items identified my students self-reported strategy employment. Cronbach alpha test indicated a reliability of .90 for the 42-item AWDSI.

Secondly I used Transparent Academic Writing Rubric (TAWR) to score my students' academic papers. It included 50 items in 5 categories of *introduction* (8 items), *citation* (16 items), *academic writing* (8 items), *idea presentation* (11 items), and *mechanics* (7 items). In a previous study (Razı, 2013), I had already provided inter-rater reliability (Pearson's $r(55) = .97$, $p < .001$), intra-rater reliability (Pearson's $r(55) = .99$, $p < .001$), and Cronbach alpha score of .89 for the 50-item TAWR.

### Procedures of data collection

Advanced Reading and Writing Skills is a course over two semesters. For each semester of the 2011-2012 academic year, I followed the course content suggested in Razı, (2011). In the fall semester I provided academic reading materials to my students to enable the development of academic genre. In addition they also learned APA in-text citation rules and practised their skills in five individual assignments. For these five teacher assigned topics I asked them to peer review each other's papers by using the detailed checklists that I provide for each assignment.

On the other hand, in the beginning of the spring semester I asked them to choose an ELT related topic and write a review paper of 3.000 words during the semester. Throughout the semester, for five times, I allocated five-minute individual tutorial sessions for each student to provide feedback about the development of their papers. In addition, through lectures in the classroom, I dealt with the requisites of academic writing to enable the development of positive identity in writing (Lavelle & Zuercher, 2001). Figure 1 illustrates the process writing that I followed in the 2011-2012 academic year spring semester.
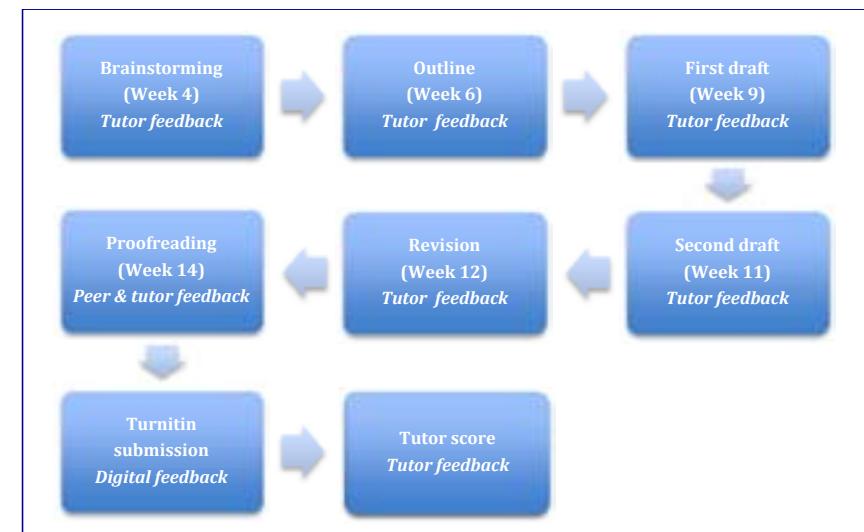


*Figure 1. The process writing and types of feedback in 2011-2012 academic year spring semester*

After submitting their assignments I asked my students to fill in AWDSI. Thus, after finalizing their process writing they identified both the problems they had experienced and strategies they had employed to overcome them. Moreover I evaluated and scored each of my students' papers by using TAWR. This allowed me to see the problematic parts in their papers. I would like to indicate however that before evaluating their papers I first pre-screened them by considering their length, the quotation ratios and similarity reports with the help of Turnitin. Details of the pre-screening process can be found in Razı (2013).

With reference to my students' answers in 2011-2012 academic year to the first three research questions I restructured the course content for the spring semester. My basic assumption in doing this revision was enabling better awareness of difficulties they experience. I believed that would result in the development of better academic writing skills. Thus at the end of the spring semester of 2012-2013 academic year I delivered a copy of TAWR to my students. With the help of previous years' assignments I modelled how to score papers in the classroom. Then I asked my students to evaluate their own papers by using TAWR. I hoped they would realize their weaknesses and correct them before submission. Next I asked them to ask a peer for proofreading by means of TAWR. This time I expected them to help each other in order to find the weaknesses in their papers. As in the 2011-2012 academic year I finally collected data by means of AWDSI and TAWR. Figure 2 illustrates the process I followed in 2012-2013 academic year spring semester. Please note that red boxes in the figure indicate additions to Figure 1.
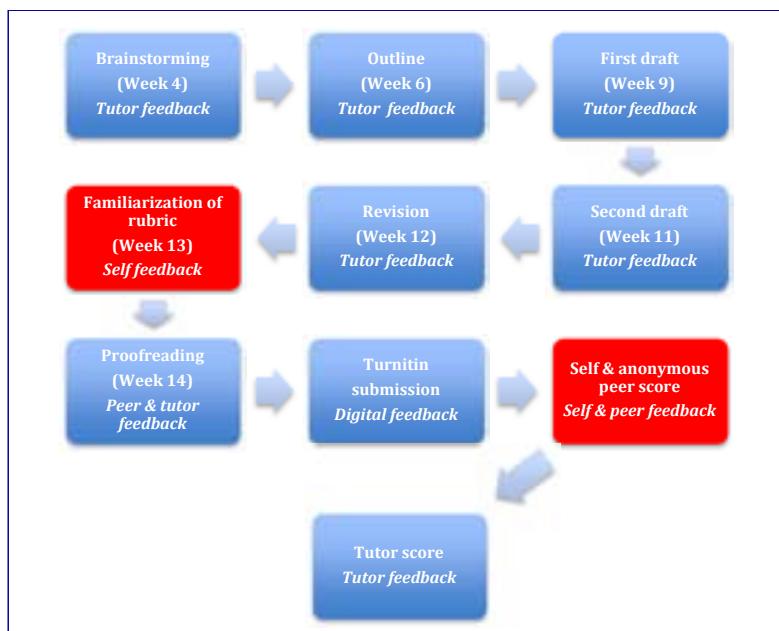


*Figure 2. The process writing and types of feedback in 2012–2013 academic year spring semester*

### Procedures of data analysis

I used SPSS 20.0 to analyse the data. I analysed students' demographic information and the items in TAWR by means of descriptive statistics. I administered independent samples t-tests to compare the results in two consecutive years.

### Limitations of the study

I would like to remind the readers about the limited number of participants since I specifically focused on my own classes. Thus the findings may not be generalizable due to the inclusion of a single university in the Turkish tertiary context. I do believe, though, that the results shed light on our understanding of developing academic writing skills in a foreign language.

## Findings and discussion

### Research question 1: What are the self-reported difficulties that freshmen encounter in academic writing?

My students in the 2011-2012 academic year indicated the greatest difficulties in 'cause of plagiarism', 'deciding whether citation is needed or not', and 'paraphrasing that results in over quoting'. Yet they explained the least difficulty in 'using block quotations'. The other least difficult three items were paraphrasing because of insufficiency in 'grammar', 'vocabulary', and 'in-text citation rules'. From these preliminary results a contradiction appears at this point as they regarded 'paraphrasing' both as a problematic and a less problematic skill. Figure 3 illustrates my students' mean values on each item of AWDSI Part 1.
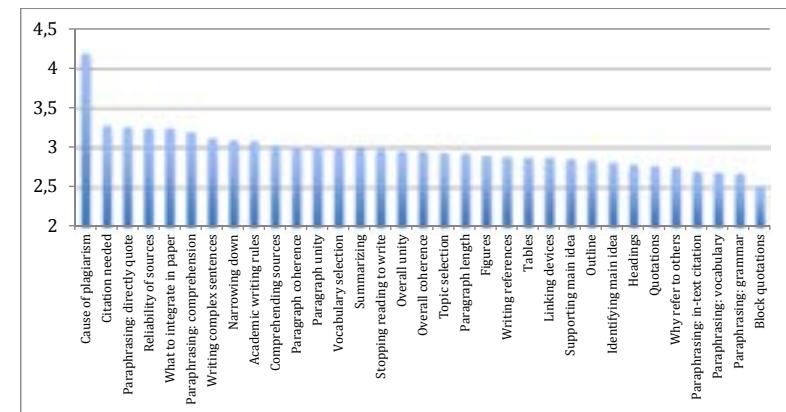


*Figure 3. Self-reported difficulties in 2011–2012 academic year (n = 185)*

On the other hand investigating my students' answers, as illustrated in Figure 4, in 2012-2013 academic year reveals that their reported difficulties are similar to the responses in the previous year. For example, again the greatest difficulty appeared in 'cause of plagiarism'. For once more they regarded 'paraphrasing that results in over quoting' as one of the most problematic skills whereas paraphrasing because of insufficiency in 'vocabulary', 'grammar', and 'in-text citation rules' appeared among the least problematic ones similar to the previous year's results. Although these results gave some impression about my students understanding of their problems they need to be approached with caution since they may not report their actual difficulties. That is why in the next RQ I compare their self-reported difficulties to their real difficulties that I reveal.
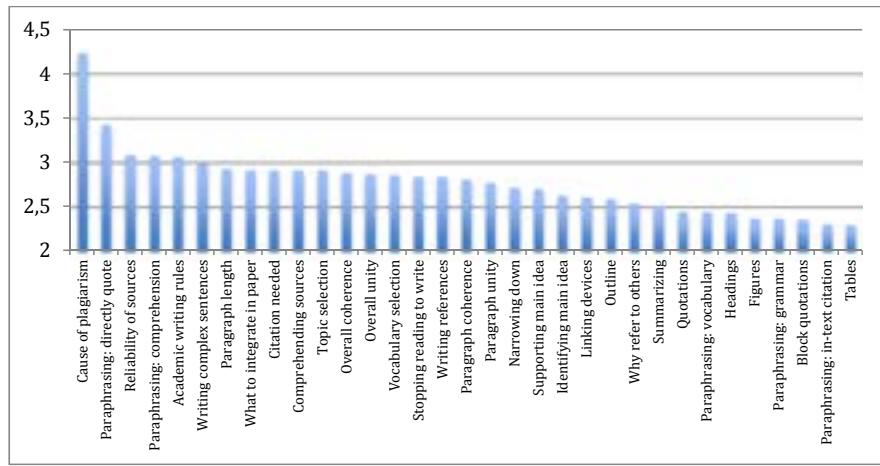


*Figure 4. Self-reported difficulties in 2012–2013 academic year (n = 87)*

### Research question 2: What are the lecturer-reported difficulties that freshmen encounter in academic writing?

To identify my students' problems in academic writing I examined their scores in each of 50 TAWR item. I had the assumption that the items on which they received high scores were less problematic as opposed to those on which they performed worse. Figure 5 illustrates their difficulties in 2011-2012 academic year by considering their performance according to TAWR items that is followed by Figure 6 related to the difficulties in 2012-2013 academic year. Each TAWR item carries 2 points to make 100 points in total.
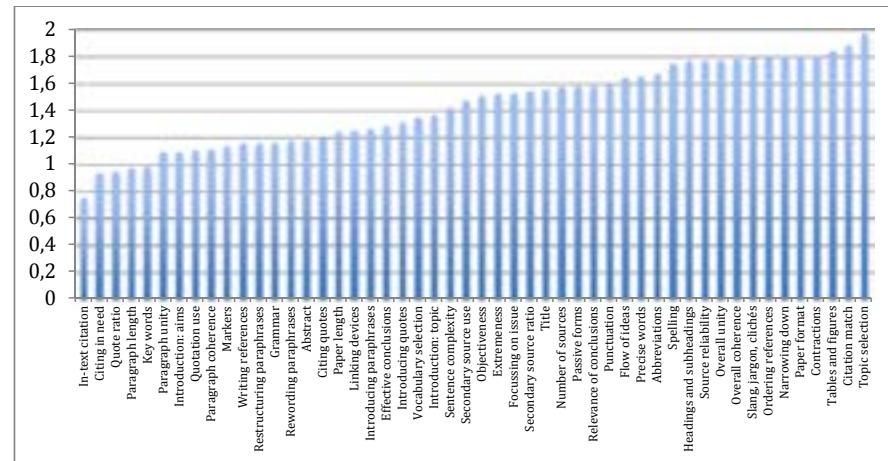


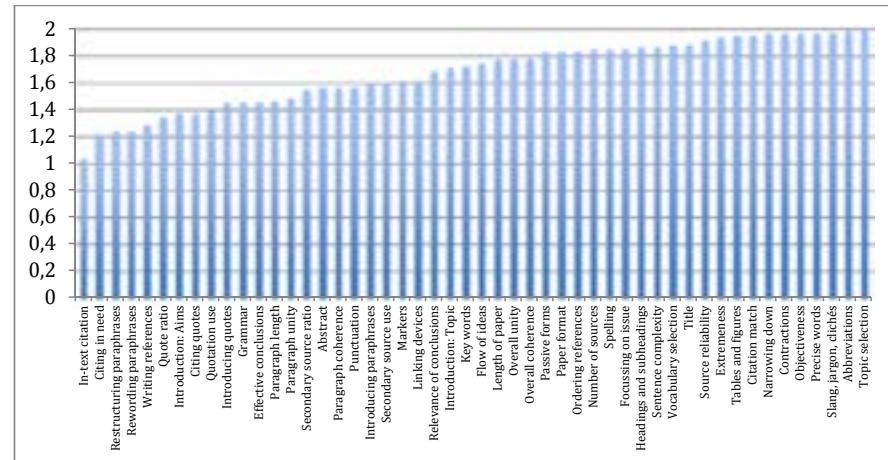*Figure 5. Lecturer-reported difficulties in 2011–2012 academic year (n = 161)*



*Figure 6. Lecturer-reported difficulties in 2012–2013 academic year (n = 87)*

The descriptive statistics revealed 'use of in-text citation rules' and 'citing when necessary' as the most problematic two items in each year. Similarly, in the previous RQ the students acknowledged both items as problematic ones. Although these two items hold their own places in the second year, the mean values of scores indicated better performances. Such progresses could also be observed in the other TAWR items. The results also indicated that their weaknesses in paraphrasing led them to over quote. In case of paraphrasing, they experienced difficulties both related to restructuring and rewording the expressions.

### Research question 3: What are the most commonly employed self-reported strategies to overcome academic writing problems?

Comparing students' answers in two consecutive years indicated that the strategy of 'checking vocabulary choice' appeared in the middle of the list each time. The remaining eight strategies can be grouped in two categories, namely the four most and least popular strategies. These remained in their original groups in the 2012-2013 academic year, yet there are slight changes in their order. The overall indication with regards to self-reported strategy employment is that my students benefit from academic writing strategies at a high level.
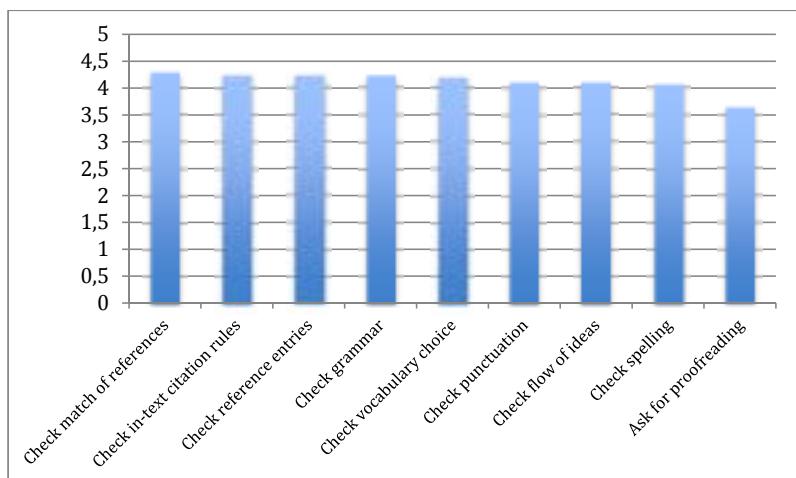
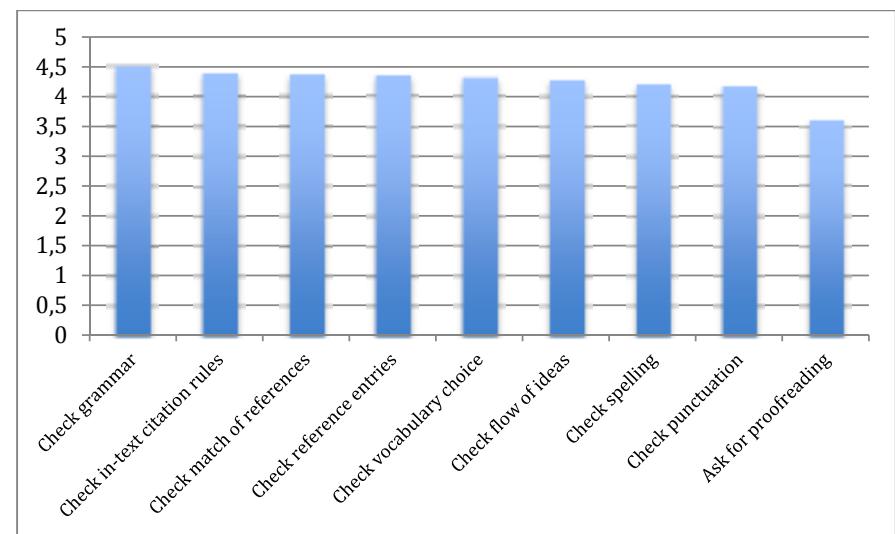*Figure 7. Self-reported academic writing strategies in 2011–2012 academic year (n = 185)*

*Figure 8. Self-reported academic writing strategies in 2011–2012 academic year (n = 87)*

### Research question 4: Are the self-reported difficulties, self-reported strategies and scores different with regards to academic years?

Before comparing the results in the two consecutive years I uncovered the time my students had spent on their assignment throughout the semester. To do this I used their responses in AWDSI related to each step of process writing. The students in 2012-2013 academic year (*M* = 44.05 hours) spent more time on their assignments in comparison to those in the 2011-2012 academic year (*M* = 38.88 hours). In the second year they indicated spending more time on their drafts. It is interesting to note that they reported spending less time on proofreading. This might be due to the facilitating role of using TAWR at the proofreading stage. It should be remembered that the numbers that I introduce reflect my students' own reports and I did not have any control over this. Figure 9 shows the time they spent on each step of their assignment in two years.
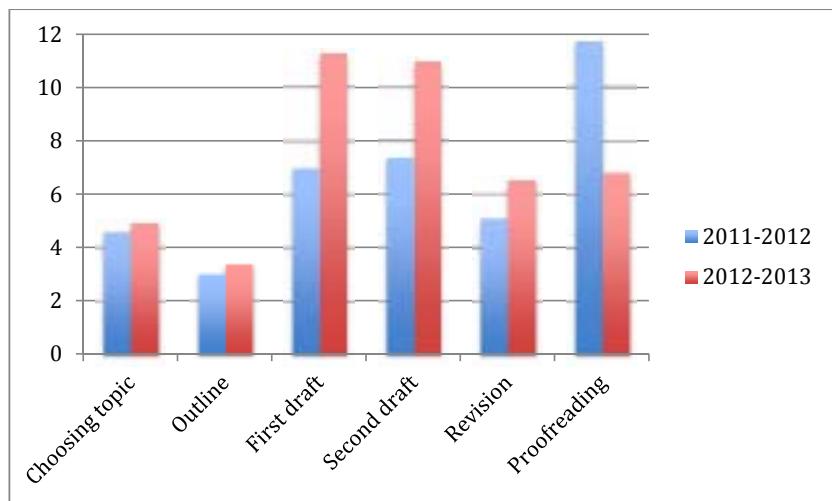
*Figure 9. Comparison of time spent at each step of process writing*

To compare the two groups I firstly administered independent samples t-test and checked self-reported difficulties. The results indicated significant differences between 2011-2012 ($M$ = 2.99, $SD$ = .60) and 2012-2013 ($M$ = 2.78, $SD$ = .57), $t(270)$ = 2.741, $p$ = .007 with small effect size ($d$ = .36). Thus, with reference to this finding it could be inferred that they experienced less difficulty in 2012-2013 academic year in comparison with 2011-2012 academic year.

Secondly, I administered independent samples t-test on their self-reported strategies. The results this time did not indicate significant differences between 2011-2012 ($M$ = 4.12, $SD$ = .67) and 2012-2013 ($M$ = 4.25, $SD$ = .59), $t(270)$ = -1.50, $p$ = .14. Since they reported high employment of academic writing strategies, it would not be wise to expect a significant difference in relation to strategy employment.

Finally, I administered independent samples t-test on assignment scores. The results indicated significant differences between 2011-2012 ($M$ = 71.96, $SD$ = 13.81) and 2012-2013 ($M$ = 84.02, $SD$ = 12.01), $t(248)$ = 6.92, $p$ < .001 with large effect size ($d$ = .93). As they experienced less problems in academic writing I expected better performance in 2012-2013 academic year and the results confirmed my expectancy. Thus, it seems to be clear that they benefited from both self and peer review with the help of TAWR.

## Conclusion and reflections

Notwithstanding the limitations the following conclusions could be drawn with reference to the results. Firstly it can be concluded that identifying the difficulties in academic writing is a challenging task for freshmen. The problems that they report may not indicate their real problems. Thus they should be assisted in identifying their real problems. Secondly, to overcome academic writing difficulties freshmen report their employment of academic writing strategies at a high level. Yet, relying on such self-report might be naive of a teacher since students may not be aware of their actual use of strategies. Thirdly, familiarization with the rubric seems to be beneficial for the development of better academic writing skills for novice authors. I would thus make more use of rubric in my course for the following years.

In terms of educational implications it could be inferred that students are not aware of their real problems in academic writing. Therefore they need to develop learner autonomy related to the *metacognitive skills* of *monitoring* and *evaluating*. Developing such skills will provide awareness on the control of their own writing processes so that they will identify their difficulties better. Thus for the following academic year I would model appropriate strategies in the classroom and provide *declarative*, *procedural* and *conditional* knowledge about them to my students. To enable maximum benefits of these strategies I will encourage my students to employ them after school while working on their assignments. In this way I have the assumption that they will be able to transform the strategies into skills. With reference to Cumming (1997), TAWR could be identified as an analytic type of assessment rubric since it enables in-depth analysis by dealing with essential components of writing. Moreover, analytic rubrics are known to aid students to become better writers (Dappen, Isernhagen, & Anderson, 2008). Encouraging my students to make use of TAWR will contribute to the development of metacognitive skills since analytic rubrics trigger critical thinking sub-skills (Saxton, Belanger, & Becker 2012).

In terms of methodological implications the present study reports the findings of an on-going research project. Interested readers might refer to Razı (2013) for the development of TAWR, Razı (2014a) for perceptions of plagiarism detectors and the impact of Turnitin on plagiarism incidents, and Razı (2014b) for the impact of anonymous peer review on developing academic writing skills.

As for further research, I intend to conduct interview sessions with my students to learn both the contribution of familiarization with the rubric and the contribution of several types of feedback such as self, peer, lecturer, and digital, with specific focus on *digital feedback* that is a relatively new term that (Razı, 2014b) introduces. In addition, I strongly believe that enabling peer review for every step of process writing on Turnitin would result in the development of much better academic writing skills. This will also assist my students to discard the negative impression of Turnitin as they simply regard it as a plagiarism detector rather than a device that facilitates writing. Thus, next year I will enable my students to benefit from this by integrating such feedback into process writing as illustrated in Figure 10. Red boxes in the figure indicate additions to Figure 1 whereas red typing shows additions to Figure 2.
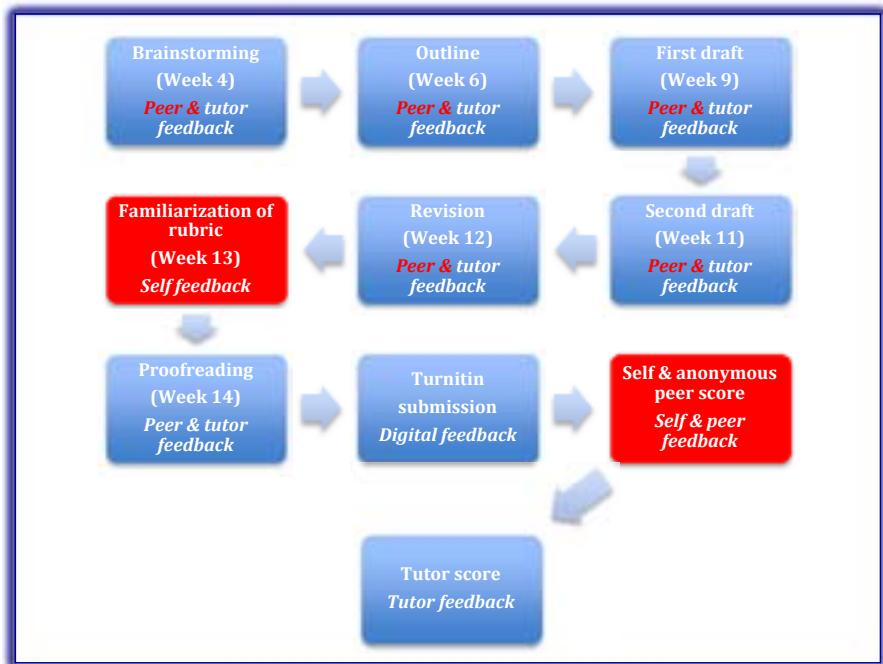


*Figure 10. The process writing and types of feedback to be followed in 2014–2015 academic year spring semester*

Finally, in this study I present self-reports of academic writing strategies that my students employ. I believe that investigation of the employment of strategies more carefully such as conducting think aloud sessions would be beneficial. Thus, I would like to benefit from research in the field of metacognition with specific interest into collecting data by considering the suggestions of Veenman (2011). Learning more about their actual strategy employment will assist me to revise my course content for the following years.

All in all, considering the last decade of my academic writing teaching experience with specific emphasis on the last two years, I clearly see how I have changed my way of teaching over time. I realize the contribution of recent technological advances in foreign language classes and such advances do not seem to have an end. This means that language teachers are in a vicious circle and should welcome changes in accordance with cutting edge technology. However, this does not necessarily mean we should incorporate any instructional technologies into our classes. What we are expected to do is find the most beneficial way of using recent instructional technologies that fit our teaching aims. The only way of succeeding in this aim seems to be conducting more action research studies.

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# 12 *Pair and group work activities: Keep them or leave them?*

*Vildan Sakarkaya*

## Introduction

It is widely agreed by most language teachers that pair and group work activities (hereon PGWA) enable students to involve in learning actively and provide the students with the opportunity to communicate with each other. Most teachers believe that there aren't any more convenient forms to have students work on and experiment with the language than such tasks. Most of them share the idea expressed by Scrivener (2012:224) that "Language learning is a process that involves lots of attempts and errors along the way, and so it is very important to give learners opportunities to try out the language to feel it on their tongue, to experiment with putting words together, to make attempts that turn out to be unsuccessful or only partially successful and not to aim all the time, unrealistically, only for supposedly perfect exam-ready sentences."

Most teachers agree that whole class teaching is less appropriate for communicative speaking activities and many students don't like speaking in front of their peers. Therefore, by many practitioners and researchers, PGWA are suggested as perfect solutions for getting students involved in speaking activities in class because they reduce the anxiety level of students when compared with whole-class activities. (Harmer, 2000:116; Woodrow, 2006: 323; Tunçay, 2013:36).

## Context and problem

Nobody can ignore the value of using PGWA to foster students' communicative skills in language classrooms. Having the same idea in mind, many coursebooks today contain suggestions for these activities. Being a strict follower of the idea that classroom interaction is an indispensable part of a good language classroom, I tried to include as many PGWA in my classroom practices as

possible, but having a class so unwilling to take part in them was a very big disappointment for me. The unwillingness of my students to take part in such activities urged me to investigate the effectiveness of PGWA in my classes. I started to think about the causes of the problem and decided that a study would help me find out my students' perceptions and attitudes towards pair work and group work activities and causes of their reluctance to engage in them more. With the help of my findings I thought I would be able to work on ways of developing more effective PGWA.

The present study focused on the reasons of my students' reluctance to participate in PGWA and aimed at finding out some solutions for the problem. My research questions were as follows:

1. What were the perceptions and attitudes of my students towards pair work and group work activities?
2. What were the causes of their reluctance to take part in these activities?
3. How could I motivate them to get involved in pair work and group work activities?
4. How could I design more effective pair work and group work activities?

**Literature review**

In recent years, with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teaching and learning practices in the language classroom have gone through a transformation period. As a result of the effect of CLT practitioners have started to place more emphasis on *interaction* in the classroom as a means of language learning and use. Fluency activities, where the focus of learners is primarily on the communicative message rather than on displaying control over a specific target structure (Ellis,1988) have become the main focus of language classrooms.

The fact that fluency building activities and interaction are at the core of the communicative classroom has led to the widespread use of PGWA in language classrooms. The advantages of these activities have been discussed by many practitioners and researchers. Ur (1996:232) defines such activities as "a form of learner activation that is of particular value in the practice of oral fluency", and explains the rationale behind using them as follows: "Learners in a class that is divided into five groups get five times as many opportunities to talk as in full-class organization". She also states that these activities fos-

ter learner responsibility and independence, and can improve motivation and contribute to a feeling of cooperation and warmth in the class. According to Long and Porter (1985:207-212), pair and group work activities:

- increase language practice opportunities
- improve the quality of student talk by shortening teacher talk(lockstep teaching) time
- help individualize instruction
- promote a positive affective climate
- motivate learners

However, besides these potential advantages, there are also difficulties or problems that teachers may have to deal with while applying these activities. Ur (1996:232-233) summarizes these potential problems as follows: "Teachers fear they may lose control, that there may be too much noise, that their students may over-use their mother tongue, and do the task badly or not at all. Some people – both learners and teachers – dislike a situation where the teacher cannot constantly monitor learner language." Harmer (2001:116-117) adds some more disadvantages to the list. According to him, the chances of misbehavior are greater with pair work than in a whole-class setting. He states that pair and group work activities are not always popular with students because they sometimes prefer to interact with their teachers rather than with another learner who may be a linguistically weak student. He affirms that, especially in pair work, the actual choice of paired partner can be problematic if students frequently have to work with someone they don't have a good relationship with.

Bearing these potential problems in mind, researchers have come up with some practical solutions and suggested some ideas to produce more effective PGWA in class. According to Ur (1996:233), the success of group work relies on the surrounding social climate, how habituated the class is to using it, the selection of an interesting and stimulating task and careful organization." According to Scrivener (2012:223), "Nowadays, most teachers can see a real value in pair and group work. But even when teachers are convinced of the reasons for pair and group work, students may not always see the point." According to Scrivener (2012:223), the reason for this may simply be that they have not thought through or understood the value of it.

Harmer (2001:119) suggests investing time in discussion of pair and group work activities in class to persuade reluctant students that PGWA are worth doing because they may have mixed feelings about working with a partner or about not having the teacher's attention at all times. He asserts that in this way, we, as teachers, can create "a joint code of conduct" and can come to agreement about when and how to use different student groupings. He adds that "when we know how our students feel about pairwork and groupwork we can then decide, as with all action research, what changes of method, if any, we need to make." Similar ideas are shared by many other practitioners like Raja& Saeed (2012:160), who state that students need to be trained to work in group settings and recognize the importance of communication in class.

It is most of the time the teacher's responsibility to show the value of an activity for language learning. As Dörnyei (2007:727) states, enhancing the learner's language-related values and attitudes does contribute to the motivation of the learner. Nobody can deny that the more motivated the learners are, the more eager they are to involve themselves in productive tasks. Ur (1996:274) states that learner motivation makes teaching and learning immeasurably easier and more pleasant, as well as more productive, and agrees with Girard's idea (cited in Ur, 1996:276) that it is an important part of the teacher's job to motivate learners. According to Dörnyei (Dörnyei 2001), "long-term, sustained learning- such as the acquisition of L2 – cannot take place unless the educational context provides, in addition to cognitively adequate instructional practices, sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in the learners." He claims that if we are not fortunate with the composition of our class group, student motivation will not be automatically there, and as teachers we need to try to actively generate positive attitudes toward L2 learning.

## Procedure

The main concern of this study was to investigate the attitudes of my students towards PGWA and identify the reasons of their reluctance to engage in such activities. In the light of the findings, the study aimed to find solutions to the most common problems, with the intention to exploit them during my prospective practices.

The research was conducted in an A1-level prep-class at İzmir Katip Çelebi University. A questionnaire including 5 open-ended questions was administered to 23 students from my main course class to find out the attitudes of my students. Considering their level of English proficiency and hoping to get more data, the questions were in Turkish. The data was analyzed by being put into categories depending on their frequencies in order to be able to identify the most prevailing ones. After the data analysis I developed some ideas which helped me improve my classroom practices related to PGWA and motivate my students to engage in such activities.

## Findings and discussion

### *Learners' background*

Of the 23 students in this study, eighteen were from Anatolian High Schools where English was an important part of the curriculum, especially in the 9th and 10th grades, during which they had English lessons for 10 hours a week. This number decreases in the 11th and 12th grades, during which they had only four hours of English a week. Two of the students under this category had the experience of private tutoring and private language schools. The other five were from normal high schools or vocational high schools where they had three or four hours of English during their first year and no English throughout the rest of their high school education.

### *Opportunity for pair and group work activities*

According to the results of the study, during the language training they had before their university education, fifteen students almost never had a chance to practise English in pairs or small groups. Seven students had these activities in their language classes some of the time during their previous education. All the students in this category came from Anatolian High schools. Only one student had these activities most of the time in his language classes and this student mentioned attending a private language school.

*Table 1: previous frequency of pair and group work experience*

|  | Number of students |
|---|---|
| Most of the time | 1 |
| Some of the time | 7 |
| Almost never | 15 |

The results showed that despite the fact that they didn't have much experience in PGWA, 19 students answered the question whether they enjoyed such tasks with YES. 4 students expressed that they didn't enjoy the activities at all.

### Reasons for enjoying pair and small group work activities

Ten students believed that these activities were a good opportunity for speaking practice. One student commented, 'Since we are learning English as a foreign language, we don't have much chance for speaking practice except for our classes. Having pair work and group work activities in class gives us a chance to practice the language in speaking.'

Eight students stated that they felt more confident and comfortable while working in pairs and small groups.

Five students believed that these activities were good for their fluency because they spoke freely without caring about their mistakes, which is also connected with speaking anxiety.

Six students mentioned that these activities were good for peer learning, peer correction and better learning. One of the students stated that when she was corrected by a friend she learnt better.

*Table 2: Reasons for enjoying pair and group work activities*

|  | Number of students |
|---|---|
| A good opportunity for speaking practice | 10 |
| Feeling more confident and comfortable | 8 |
| A good chance for peer learning, peer correction and better learning | 6 |
| Improve their fluency | 5 |

### Reasons for not enjoying pair and small group work activities

Four students wrote that they didn't enjoy these activities at all. These students thought that these activities were not are not taken seriously by students and they turn into a chat.

The students who expressed their dislike about pair and group work activities were all from Anatolian High schools. One of them had never tried these activities during his previous education. Two of them had these activities in their classes some of the time and one of them had these activities most of the time in his language classes.

*Table 3: Reasons for not enjoying pair and group work activities*

|  | Number of students |
|---|---|
| Little value to learning English | 4 |
| Noisy and chaotic classroom environment | 2 |
| The gap between the levels of students | 1 |
| Speaking anxiety | 1 |
| Not having enough knowledge about the topics | 1 |

### Reasons for engaging in pair and group work activities in my lessons

*Table 4: Frequency of participation in pair and small group work activities in my lessons*

| Frequency of participation | Number of students |
|---|---|
| Every time | 2 |
| Most of the time | 11 |
| Some of the time | 10 |

*Table 5: Reasons for engaging in pair and group work activities most of the time*

| Reasons | Number of students |
|---|---|
| A good opportunity to practice and improve their fluency | 10 |
| Feeling more comfortable in small groups | 5 |
| CPG | 2 |

Those students who stated that they always participated in these activities expressed that they really wanted to be able to speak English, and not only to learn grammar. They wanted to be able to improve their speaking and these activities were a good opportunity to practise speaking and they felt more relaxed with a small group.

The very same reasons were given by the students in the second category, who stated that they took part in these activities most of the time. Eight students stated that they wanted to be able to speak English and these activities were a good opportunity for speaking practice and improving their fluency. Five students stated that they felt more comfortable in small groups and pairs, but they expressed their preference to work with a partner with whom they had a good relationship.

One of the students who expressed her dislike towards these activities stated that she involved herself in these activities just for a good CPG (Classroom Participation Grade). This was also shared by another student with the same dislike, who answered the question with "some of the time".

### Reasons for not engaging in pair and group work activities in my lessons

*Table 6: Reasons for not engaging in pair and group work activities*

|  | Number of students |
|---|---|
| Personal characteristics | 1 |
| General negative attitude towards learning English | 2 |
| Speaking anxiety | 2 |
| Peer effect | 4 |
| Boring activities | 6 |
| Distracting and noisy classroom environment | 4 |

Those students who mentioned having speaking anxiety also expressed that they wanted to be able to speak English and they felt better in small groups, but they insisted on the importance of knowing their partners well.

While answering the question here four students wrote about the importance of the effect of their partners, which was also a reason for the distracting and noisy classroom environment. One of the students commented, 'My par-

ticipation in the activities depends on my friends. If my partner is not willing to participate into the activity and doesn't take the activity seriously, I most of the time join him/ her and I lose my interest in the lesson.'

Another student commented, 'When I do these activities with a friend that I have a good relationship with, I can easily speak to him/ her comfortably and self-confidently despite the fact that my English is not so good and this makes me feel good. However, if I have to do the activity with someone I don't know well, I can't feel comfortable and can't speak easily.' For those students who were not confident enough, I used two techniques taken from Scrievener (2012, p.210). One was to start the activity in whole class format and then hand over to groups and the other one was to give them time to think about the topic. This silent rehearsal time helped students feel a bit more confident in speaking.

Another student mentioned that everyone had a different level of proficiency. When, for example, he was paired with someone whose level was lower or higher than his, these kinds of activities didn't work. He wrote that the partner with the lower proficiency level felt bad. He commented, 'If the levels of everyone were similar to one another, everyone would take these activities seriously, and they might work.' In order to solve the problem related to pairs, I got an idea from Wilson (cited in Scrievener, 2012, p.201), who suggests using threesomes rather than pairs and I observed that it worked well in class.

### Implications

The findings of this study showed that if those students had been given the opportunity to practice speaking in pairs and small groups during their previous language studies, more students might have engaged in those activities. One of the students stated "before university, I didn't have a chance to do this because my teacher didn't give importance to it, but I wish I had." Therefore, teachers at high schools should include PGWA in their lessons more. This also may be one of the reasons why some of my students were reluctant to engage in these activities. Such activities were not something that they were accustomed to. In the light of my findings, and bearing in mind that students might not be used to pair and group work activities, I realized that I should follow a step by step procedure to get my students to become accustomed to and internalize these activities. This means long and careful planning before the lessons. It was also surprising to find out that the students were highly aware of the rationale behind such activities in spite of the fact that they were not used to such activities because 19 students responded that they enjoyed these activities.

The results also indicated that including PGWA in lessons is also an effective way to help students cope with their speaking anxiety. One student commented, "I like these activities, and they are better than speaking in front of whole class because I feel a bit anxious while speaking in front of the whole class. I forget about everything when I have to speak in front of a large group." Therefore, as teachers, we should try to include as many PGWA as possible in our classroom practices and should never give up on them as it is stated by Scrivener (2012:206), "Even if half of the students are not working as directed, that still leaves many who are. As a result, instead of one or two students doing something useful while the others sit back, 10 or 20 students are working constructively. Teachers must not drop pair work just because it is not successful for all students all the time." It shouldn't be ignored that PGWA help students build fluency by decreasing the anxiety level that they would have in front of a large group.

Contrary to my conclusions based on my observations in class, only a limited number of students had negative attitudes towards such activities. This negative attitude of those students might be owing to the fact that they could not see the merit in pair and small group work activities. They felt that these activities were not worth doing because they believed that they were not taken seriously by students. At this point, I realized that it was the teachers' responsibility to convince the students to take part in these activities and help them see their value. As Harmer (2001, p.119) suggests, investing some time in discussion of pair and group work activities in class to persuade reluctant students that pair and group work are worth doing may help teachers a lot.

When it comes to my own lessons, although the vast majority of the students (18 out of 23) expressed positive attitudes towards such activities, the percentage of students engaging in them most of the time (13 students) decreased. This indicated that there were some problems related to my classroom practices besides some reasons related to other factors. It is a bit hard for a teacher to face and admit, but the results showed that the activities I applied in class were boring for my students and so they didn't want to take part in them. Dörnyei (2007, p.719) emphasizes the importance of providing sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in learners in every educational context by stating, "If the educational context cannot provide sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in learner and unless we are singularly fortunate with the composition of our class group, student motivation will not be automatically there." I had lost some of my stu-

dents because of having lessons lack of enjoyment. I realized that my pair and group work activities had turned into a routine and were predictable, maybe sometimes because of strictly following the course book. This urged me to add an extra element to help encourage students to participate willingly and actively. Especially adding a competitive element to work increased the motivation of my students.

Additionally, those students with a negative attitude towards such activities complained about the noisy and distracting classroom environment. For teachers, these activities are a major challenge in terms of classroom management skills. These are the times that we must be really alert about what is going on in our classrooms because the chances of misbehavior are greater with PGWA than in a whole-class setting. I had to revise my classroom management skills and monitoring techniques. Also, I realized the importance of convincing our students that having a considerable amount of noise in class during pair and group work activities is in the nature of such activities.

Also, when giving reasons for not engaging in such activities, students mentioned the effect of their partners. I realized that I should be really careful while pairing and grouping our students. As teachers we should be very careful about the composition of the pairs and groups, by giving them a chance to experience the activities with a variety of group settings and not forcing them to work in a setting that they don't feel comfortable with. Teachers should form a clear profile of the relationships in their classes from the very first day, maybe by keeping notes about things happening in class.

It was interesting to see that one of the students who expressed her dislike towards pair work activities stated that she got involved in these activities just for CPG (Classroom Participation Grade). This was also shared by another student with the same dislike, who answered the question related to engaging in these activities with "some of the time". This indicated that including in-class performance evaluation criteria in our end of term assessment criteria was effective to push some reluctant learners to engage in such activities in class. Also, having a checklist related to the performance of students throughout PGWA may push some reluctant learners to get them engaged in such activities.

## Reflections

Through this study I learnt that without a systematic look at the things going on in our classes we miss points and may have false beliefs and prejudices towards

our students. Prior to my study I had thought that my students had negative attitudes to PGWA and didn't want to participate in them. I realized that I had misinterpreted what was going on in my class. I came to the realization that they actually see the merit in such activities and they really want to take part in them. With the help of my research project, I had the chance to learn what they thought and how they felt, and identified the real source of the problem so as to be able to move towards excellence in my teaching practices. I had the chance to revise what I had already known and applied in my classes and added new techniques to my repertoire related to the application of pair and group work activities. I also realized that an enjoyable and stimulating learning environment is as important as providing students with cognitively adequate instructional practices. It would have been a huge fallacy if I had given up on pair and group work activities just depending on some false beliefs and prejudices.

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# 13  *Team-teaching for teacher training*

### *Nicholas Velde*

## Context and Problem

New teachers often struggle with numerous aspects of such a demanding career. Frequently, these teachers rely on their recent training in order to make sense of the issues they face in and out of the classroom. As an attempt at better preparing teachers for such difficult instructional decisions, training programs often include a practicum component in which teachers engage in actual teaching either by themselves or under the supervision of an experienced teacher. This method of teacher training has been strongly supported as a means for enabling pre-service teachers in handling real demands of teaching in the classroom in both English as a foreign (EFL) and second language (ESL) settings (Farrell, 2001; Slagoski, 2007). Although the practicum is purported as an effective method in teacher training, little research investigates its effects on pre-service teachers, and even less research has been devoted to examining particular aspects of team-teaching and handling critical incidents (CIs) (e.g., student misunderstanding, teacher mistakes, problematic activities) during a practicum course.

During my time in an American MA TESOL program, I was able to conduct a course for adult learners of English with a colleague from the same degree program. The practicum requirement presented a unique opportunity to work closely with another pre-service teacher to plan and conduct lessons for the course in a deeply collaborative fashion. Though my practice teaching at the time had benefited from my training in the degree program, I was quite interested in the ways in which a team-teaching scenario might present learning opportunities absent from an individual teaching experience. In particular, I had been struggling with how to handle the CIs occurring in class and thought I might benefit more from teaching with and reflecting with someone else to see how we both observe and react to CIs in the classroom.

This article aims to provide information concerning an action-research project in which I investigated the issue of CIs in the classroom and the effect of team-teaching on learning to mitigate such incidents during an ESL practicum course assignment. The issue at hand was that of learning to handle CIs in the classroom through a practicum experience. More specifically, the action research was aimed at answering the following questions:

1. In what ways does team-teaching contribute to a pre-service teacher's learning to mitigate critical incidents in the classroom?
2. How does team-teaching influence the teaching of a lesson generally?

## Literature review

During training, pre-service English language teachers are encouraged to engage in reflective practice during teaching. This type of practice can either be adopted in weak or strong forms. In a weak form, a teacher simply ponders teaching issues upon completion of lessons with no written document created for later reflection. However a strong form is more often encouraged as a more focused approach, wherein teachers systematically reflect on the issues they face in and outside the classroom using self-created tools to document such reflection (Farrell, 2008). One training experience that has been repeatedly suggested as grounds for such reflection is that of a practicum course in English language teaching certificate and master's programs.

Practicum experiences have been investigated to some degree in the field of TESOL. Farrell (2001) examined the role of a teacher trainee in order to determine the ways in which pre-service teachers are socialized into the field of language teaching through a practicum experience. The study utilized a practicum model in which the trainee worked under a supervising teacher and assisted with instruction. Through the case study, Farrell suggested that clear roles should be determined concerning who is in charge of the trainee's growth as a professional, and supervising teachers must also be trained to handle the challenges of working with pre-service teachers. Another study revealed the effects of a collaborative action research project during a practicum course for pre-service teachers. Ho (2013) found that teachers gained critical experience handling student learning issues and teaching decisions when they worked together to identify problems and choose specific actions to take as teachers in order to observe effects among students and teachers alike. Canh (2013) also

investigated the effects of collaboration between pre-service teachers during a practicum course and found that teachers much preferred working with peers to apply the theories and principles learned in their teacher training program as opposed to tackling such a difficult challenge alone. Practicum research lends credibility to a TESOL training program and also supports cooperative learning amongst pre-service teachers.

Outside a practicum situation, team-teaching has also been directly investigated in the TESOL field, but minimally. Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) investigated journal sharing amongst language teachers and found they provided context for sharing teaching ideas, problems with L2 writing, and reflection on development as a teacher. However, no study to date has actually investigated the experiences of teachers collaborating inside a language classroom as well as outside.

CIs are another area of language teaching that have received emphasis in teacher training programs. CIs are defined as unplanned incidents occurring during teaching that serve to trigger insights about teaching (Farrell, 2008). Analysis of CIs can lead to solutions for problems, build collegiality amongst teacher peers, encourage questioning norms and routines, help teachers pose critical questions about teaching, and help bring teaching beliefs to a higher level of awareness (Richards & Farrell, 2005). New teachers certainly encounter a multitude of CIs during lessons, and CIs should be strongly focused on during pre-service training.

In the realm of K-12 mainstream education, some research has been conducted to highlight the usefulness of reflection on CIs amongst pre-service teachers. Griffin (2003) found that the pre-service teachers' documentation of CIs indicated an increased orientation by participants towards growth and inquiry as professionals. The participants also moved away from thinking concretely and began to show evidence of thinking more pedagogically in their reflections. Work has also been done in the English language teaching (ELT) field. In her case study involving reflection on CIs by Malaysian secondary teachers of English as a second language (ESL), Thiel (1999) found that teachers professionally benefited from documenting case studies of critical incidents. However, the research was not thorough in exactly how the teachers benefited and instead offered a surface-level perspective on reflective practice and the role of CIs in such reflection during teacher training. Current research highlights CIs as important learning opportunities for new and experienced

teachers, but it fails to reveal the learning utility of CIs during practicum experiences for pre-service English language teachers in a team-teaching environment.

Research gives credence to utilizing a practicum during teacher training, and also supports collaboration as it is preferred amongst pre-service teachers. However no research has documented the practicum experience of teachers collaborating together inside the classroom and the effect of such a practicum design on teachers' ability to reflect on and learn from CIs. Therefore, the following study aims to fill this gap in research while answering the posed research questions in order to benefit teacher training programs simultaneously.

## Procedure

### *Participants*

The two pre-service teacher participants involved in the research included the author of this article and one other teacher. Both participants were enrolled in a Master's degree program for teaching English as a second language in an American university. Both teachers were in their mid-twenties, one male and one female. The data collected concerned actions taken in an ESL course offered through a partnership between the university and a local non-profit organization offering English tutoring to residents in need. 12 to 15 students attended each lesson, and the course was designed to assist the students in speaking with the teachers of their children about school-related issues, but also included English helpful for communication in general. Students' names and information were not included in the collection of data in order to exclude them from any formal participation in the action research.

### *Materials*

It has been suggested that action research remain practical and organized in a way to be most helpful for solving the inherent problems at hand (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). In this spirit, the primary tool utilized for collecting data was designed to be used with ease and to be adaptable should issues arise during the research project. Initially, a reflection form consisting of five questions was

used (see Appendix A). Half-way through the data collection period, it was determined by both participants that the form was not addressing the research questions appropriately and was subsequently adapted to better answer the research questions (see Appendix B). Essentially, the forms required both teachers to reflect on personal emotions, thoughts, and actions, and it also involved reflection on the partner teacher's actions. Finally, the second form included a question devoted to how the team-teaching aspect of the course was influencing instructional decisions in general as opposed to only during a CI.

### *Methods*

The teaching situation for this research project was unique because it involved two teachers collaborating in and out of the classroom in order to provide lessons to adult learners of English. During any given lesson, one teacher had prepared the lesson plan with assistance from the other teacher, and was teaching that lesson as the primary instructor (PI) with occasional assistance from the other teacher, the secondary instructor (SI). The responsibility for writing the lesson plan and giving the lesson was traded between the two teachers every week. Every lesson featured these circumstances, and it was these circumstances that drove the research questions in the first place.

In order to answer the research questions, the participating teachers completed the teaching reflection form on a weekly basis soon after completing a lesson together. A total of 20 reflection forms were collected over an academic semester. Each teacher contributed 10 forms individually. The teachers agreed to complete the reflection forms as soon as possible after a post-lesson discussion taking place immediately after each lesson. During the post-lesson discussion, the teachers both agreed on a particular CI to reflect on for research purposes. This process was followed every week during the semester of action research.

Following the collection of data, responses were grouped by the question they addressed and were analyzed for emerging patterns. According to Burns (2010), this method of inductive coding can help to bring out the connections between collected data and the 'big picture' or research area being investigated. Essentially, the action researcher attempts to become deeply acquainted with the data in order to identify the patterns in which answers to research questions exist.  Following an extended period of becoming acquainted with the

responses provided by the participants concerning CIs, some clear patterns emerged.

## Findings and discussion

Upon examining the reflection responses, two major trends emerged. The responses were grouped by the types of CIs they discussed. These types fell into particular categories: teacher, student, and language-oriented CIs. Additionally, the responses were re-grouped according the teacher roles occurring during CIs uncovered. These role categories included assistive, symmetrical, requesting, and consultative. See Tables 1 and 2 for examples of reflection responses for each category. The following section discusses both the CI types and the roles that the teachers adopted during those CIs in order to address each research question posed prior to data collection.

The three types of CIs encountered over the semester help to highlight how the teacher participants learned to handle CIs. A large number of the CIs encountered during the research were teacher-oriented. Teachers were often focused on their own actions as opposed to the students or the language being taught. The responses included mention of methods for giving directions, planning for lessons, execution of activities, use of visuals or a whiteboard, and reflective practice prior to a lesson. Responses to our first question on the reflection form concerning what occurred during the CI helped to highlight the type of CI that occurred. In addition to teacher-oriented CIs, some student-oriented CIs also occurred. Responses regarding these CIs included mention of students' use of their first language (L1), and the discrepancy of proficiency among the students of the class. This type of CI was much less frequent in our data, and even overlapped with the teacher-oriented CIs because some CIs were too difficult to classify as only one type. However, this type of CI is important because students are an integral part of the lesson. Finally, there was one CI in which language was the primary focus. In particular, teaching the present continuous grammatical feature presented itself as a more challenging topic for our students. Overall, these three major types of CIs emerged and helped to narrow the focus of our attempt at answering our first research question.

*Table 1. CI Category Examples*

| Teacher-Oriented | Student-Oriented | Language-Oriented |
|---|---|---|
| One portion in particular was sample sentences to elicit Ss asking for clarification. The point came where I needed to introduce words Ss didn't know in a sentence to elicit their use of asking what a word means. I was stumped. | During tonight's information gap activity, the several of the students slipped into Spanish even though we had asked them to stick to English. While walking group to group, we had to remind them to speak English. | The critical incident occurred when we realized (I realized?) that the past progressive is much harder to teach than previously thought. |
| While giving directions for the first activity (greetings), I accidentally got ahead of myself and told students to pair up, but the activity was designed to be solo. | The past two weeks, we have had students whose L1 was Spanish, but this week, we also had a student whose L1 was Chinese. | |

*Table 2. Teacher Role Category Examples*

| Assistive | Symmetrical | Requesting | Consultative |
|---|---|---|---|
| My reaction was to help [SI] come up with words. I ended up not walking around to help students during one activity so I could make that list. | [PI] explained it in another way, which seemed to work for most students, but a few were still asking questions … | Actively, I asked [SI] if we should go ahead and do writing instead, and he suggested staying with the pairs. | I decided to take charge a bit and to establish with her what I would do in order to prepare Ss for the task (language in and for it). |
| When I realized which sentence [Student] needed, I told [PI] to go ahead and erase the rest and move on because I (luckily) had that one memorized. | [SI] seemed to be doing much the same as I was. She walked around and did not seem angry or nervous, but just really calm. | [PI] clearly had issues with not being able to see the students … She voiced this and consistently asked for assistance in knowing when to move on. | [SI] was asking questions about what I had planned and we just went from there. |

Note: *PI*, *SI*, and *Student* were used for maintaining anonymity.

The most frequent type of CI involved teachers' actions before or during

a lesson and the reflections yielded important information about how team-teaching influenced handling this type of CI. Teacher-oriented CIs seemed helpful for teachers to examine their own actions and also afforded interesting reflections on emotional and active responses during a lesson. The PI often responded in an emotional way. Answers including words like "surprise" and "dang-it moment" indicate that it was quite normal for the PI to initially re-act with emotion rather than action. However, the SI's responses during CIs helped to highlight the assistive role a co-teacher played during our lessons. The actions often included filling gaps in teaching left by the primary teacher. These actions included giving more direction, explaining language more thor-oughly or with visual aids, providing examples for the other teacher, giving some direction to the other teacher to help improve instruction immediately, assisting individual students with completing activities, and making important decisions before a lesson to improve the likelihood of a successful activity or lesson. It is important to note that our data suggest a pattern of one teacher re-acting with surprise or embarrassment while the other teacher reacted with ac-tion. Additionally, the responses from PIs concerning the SI's reactions often uncovered feelings of gratefulness and 'noticing the gap' that was left by their own teaching. This particular feature of our data indicated that both the pre-service teachers observed an actual model of taking action to solve problems in teaching demonstrated by their co-teacher. This type of observation seems quite apt for learning how to handle CIs as the emotions connected with each incident provide for a more vivid memory of a teacher's own reactions during teaching juxtaposed with the more actions of their co-teachers. In conjunction, these results indicate that a real-life model of handling CIs occurred during the lessons in question and teachers left the experience with tangible exemplar teaching moments which they may rely on in future handling of CIs in the classroom.

Less often, the responses indicated that the PI took action to mitigate a CI and the other teacher imitated that action. For example, one CI involved a PI seeing that directions were simply unclear for students. The PI proceeded to move throughout the classroom to offer more specific or clearer directions, and the SI followed this action by doing the exact same thing. Furthermore, during a different CI, a PI felt it was necessary to use the students' L1 to help clarify a teaching point, and the SI proceeded by using the L1 with a smaller group of students in the class. This type of symmetrical teaching helped to

highlight that a PI also compensated for gaps in his/her own teaching, and the SI observed and imitated the actions taken by the PI to mitigate the CI. In-terestingly, the benefit seemed to switch direction during these particular CIs. The PI demonstrated proper handling of a CI while the SI was able to observe how to handle a CI and actually assist in handling the CI by simulating the action demonstrated by the primary teacher.

Another way in which teachers took action was to actually request assis-tance from the other teacher during a CI. This happened when a teacher was at a loss for examples, or simply needed help in giving clear instructions. Though this type of reaction to CIs seemed helpful during the lesson, it did not pro-vide a means for learning how to mitigate CIs as an individual teacher. With another teacher in class it was easier for the participants to request help rather than to deal with the CI themselves. Unfortunately, this option is never pres-ent during a normal lesson in which no SI is present. Still, this type of reaction to a CI was much less frequent. Furthermore, that these incidents occurred and were reflected on helped to highlight the gaps in a teacher's repertoire. In reflecting on these CIs, one teacher indicated the effect of little planning influencing the activity, but also provided insight by mentioning that the rest of the lesson was consequently changed. This reflection in particular indicated a deeper reflection on how one CI influenced a lesson, and in many ways, this type of reflection was likely helpful in both teachers seeing the true effect of CIs with a broader perspective.

The last role that participant teachers found themselves in was that of a consultant to the other teacher. This happened solely for the SI, who had not prepared the lesson and was simply there to assist and observe during the lesson. In particular, this reaction occurred just before one lesson when both teachers realized that a portion of an activity was not quite planned out and directions were not clear enough as they were in the lesson plan. This was the only instance in which one teacher offered the other teacher assistance in how to teach a particular portion of their lesson. Though this consultative aspect of handling a CI was infrequently observed during the semester, the CI and reactions by the teachers helped to show that some cooperative learning was occurring concerning a preemptive approach to handling CIs by both teachers. In many ways, the responses indicated a trend towards learning from prior CIs and attempting to prevent the repetition of those CIs through careful plan-ning. With more data, we might see evidence of this type of learning from past

mistakes recurring in the teacher reflections.

Regarding our second research question, the final question added to the reflection form half-way through the semester helped to more directly answer how team-teaching contributed to giving the lessons in general. Patterns concerning emotions, enhancing the activities in the lesson, and filling gaps left from the PI all emerged from our responses to the reflection question.

Through team teaching, both teachers' training experience was enriched in some way. It was noted that the PI often felt worse emotionally about the lesson than the SI. Additionally, one teacher had a bit less experience teaching language learners prior to the research and felt much more useful as a teacher as a result of being the SI for a lesson. Finally, one teacher commented that rapport seemed to be much stronger between the other teacher and students later in the semester when compared to the first lesson. Overall, team-teaching seemed to provide some emotional support for teachers during an important time in their training.

In addition to emotional benefits, the teachers both commented on the use of team-teaching to enhance activities. In one lesson, a teacher felt an activity was much more communicative and contextualized as a result of team-teaching. In another lesson, a PI mentioned the benefit of having the SI teach one activity. Finally, a response included information about the flow of the lesson being improved as a result of team-teaching. It seems that the delivery and addressing of goals during lessons were deeply impacted by team-teaching.

As mentioned, we often struggled with lessons and this resulted in gaps left by our teaching. Both teachers commented on the ability to compensate for the problems of the other teacher due to the team-teaching nature of the lessons. These gaps included filling in a late-arriving student on the things she missed while the PI taught new language, giving more explanation and scaffolding before activities, and providing more needed practice to students when the PI might have moved on. The responses provided in both the initial questions about CIs and the final question on our reflection form helped to show that both teachers benefited greatly from identifying gaps in teaching and taking action to fill them.

## Reflections

In hindsight, the action research was quite successful in answering the research questions and highlighting the learning that occurs in a team-teaching environment for pre-service teachers. Clearly, the types of CIs and the roles adopted during them by the PI and SI helped the teachers to see gaps in teaching and the ways in which those gaps could be filled. Interestingly, the learning curve for the participant teachers was observed all within one semester. The teachers began to address the incidents they had experienced earlier in the semester by working together to prevent them later in the semester. The collaboration certainly helped in this process and it is unknown whether a single teacher would so quickly be able to address such CIs by merely reflecting alone on their experience.

Aside from the answering of research questions, it is clear that a team-teaching practicum experience can deeply affect the learning of teaching. The two teachers were able to directly influence their perspectives on their own teaching due to the team-teaching they conducted while providing free classes for community members in need. By working to connect pre-service teachers with such community members, practicum team-teaching becomes much more feasible while providing all parties with a means for learning in a positive and educational atmosphere. It is highly recommended for teacher-training programs to adopt such a method for meeting needs of many with little to no time and financial cost. In this way, pre-service teachers can engage in team-teaching without the burden of payment obstructing their chance to work towards mastering the complex craft of language teaching.

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Appendix A

Reflection Form 1

| | |
|---|---|
| Briefly explain the critical incident, what led up to it, and what followed. | |
| What was your reaction? (Affect, Action, or Both) | |
| What was your team-teacher's reaction? (Affect, Action, or Both) | |
| How did you and your team-teacher react together? | |
| Did team-teaching contribute to or mitigate the incident? | |

Appendix B
Reflection Form 2

| | |
|---|---|
| Briefly explain what led up to the incident and the incident itself. | |
| What was your reaction? (Affect, Action, or Both) | |
| What was your team-teacher's reaction? (Affect, Action, or Both) | |
| Did team-teaching contribute to or mitigate the incident? Briefly explain. | |
| Did team teaching support the teaching of the lesson in any other way(s)? Briefly explain. | |

# 14 *Hey, teacher, leave those kids alone! Beliefs of students and instructors about learner autonomy*

*Merve Güzel*

## Context and Problem

Learner Autonomy has been the main concern of EFL teaching environments in recent years. This is because it is believed to result in permanent, life-long learning. However, it is a well-known fact that the Turkish education system is based on traditional teaching methods which control students too much and hinder autonomous language learning. Even so, there are so many professional development conferences and workshops all over the country and the tendency towards autonomous learning directs the EFL teachers to learner-centred, communicative activities both inside and outside the classroom.

The concept of learner autonomy was introduced by Holec (1981) and has been defined in many ways since then. Holec defined it as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning", and referring to this ability "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way" (1981). In accordance with the same perspective, Boud (1988) defined the term as "an approach to learning … that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction". Another important definition was provided by Little (1991) who viewed autonomy as "a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action."

The definitions above show us that the main focus of learner autonomy is taking responsibility for one's own learning along with being reflective, independent and able to make decisions. Even though these key points imply that learner autonomy is a self-generated quality, it is an undeniable fact that teachers have a great role in fostering this quality. According to Little learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy and teachers cannot be expected to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they do not themselves know what it is to be an autonomous learner (1995). Moreover, in all their pedagogical

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actions teachers must be able to exploit their professional skills autonomously, applying to their teaching those same reflective and self- managing processes that they apply to their learning. (1995). As understood from these remarks, teachers themselves should have autonomous skills so that they can guide their students and foster learner autonomy both inside and outside the classroom.

As mentioned before, applications of the Turkish education system impose autonomy-hindering beliefs upon both teachers and students. With this problem in mind I wanted to see to what extent learner autonomy finds its place in the Turkish EFL context and decided to get both EFL instructors' and students' perspectives about the issue.

The main aim of this study was to explore via questionnaires and interviews the views of Gediz University Prep School students and instructors regarding the concept of learner autonomy. The participants were 52 A2 students and 10 EFL instructors. Research questions were as follows:

1. What does learner autonomy mean to EFL instructors?
2. To what extent do the EFL instructors find their students autonomous?
3. What activities are used most by teachers to foster autonomy?
4. What are the constraints that prevent the teachers from fostering autonomy sufficiently?
5. What are the beliefs of students on learner autonomy?
6. What type of activities are done by the students claiming to be autonomous?

## Literature review

Since learner autonomy is a highly popular concept, thus far many studies have been conducted by scholars and researchers, some of which have focused on beliefs and attitudes of EFL learners and instructors. For instance, Cotterall (1995) carried out a study to investigate learner conceptions and effects of them on readiness for autonomy. In order to collect data students were given a questionnaire on learner beliefs about language learning. The results of the study showed that learner beliefs regarding such factors as role of the teacher, role of feedback, learner independence, learner confidence in study ability, experience of language learning, and approach to studying have an important role in promoting learner autonomy. Results also indicated that learners and teachers can hope to construct a sharing understanding of the language learning process, and of their roles in it. (Cotteral, 1995)

Holden and Usuki (1999) carried out another study to explore the views of Japanese students. They utilized 10 open-ended interview questions to get students' perceptions about learner autonomy and their teachers' attitudes. At the end of the study, they pointed out that students simply do not have adequate opportunities to develop their autonomy because they usually learn English in teacher-centered classes.(1999) Moreover, results revealed that students prefer teachers who play non-traditional roles rather than teachers who simply lecture or transmit their knowledge.(1999)

Chan (2003) examined teacher's perspectives of learner autonomy at Hong Kong Polytechnic University who noted that "teachers felt mainly responsible for the methodological decisions within the classroom" (in Barillaro, 2011). Furthermore, "respondents reported a clear awareness of autonomy as a goal of teaching and felt fairly positive about students' decision-making abilities in aspects of the language learning process. Teachers did feel, however, restricted by curriculum constraints and consequently did not provide decision-making opportunities for learners in areas of autonomous learning (e.g. learning objectives, activities)" (Barillaro, 2011).

Durmuş (2006) investigated EFL teachers' perceptions on promoting learner autonomy at Anadolu University. Participants of the study were 116 EFL teachers at the School of Foreign Languages Basic Languages Department. Different forms of questionnaires were used as data collection tools. Results showed that the majority of the participants supported learner involvement in realistic and achievable objectives.(2006)

## Procedure

The present study sheds light on the perceptions of Gediz University Prep School students and instructors on learner autonomy. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used as research methods. Data were collected through a five-point Likert questionnaire developed by Egel (2009) and open-ended questions. The overall tendency of students towards autonomy was researched and also the views of the students and teachers were analyzed in detail. Participants were fifty-two B2 students from three different classes and ten EFL instructors at Gediz University. In order to collect data, students were asked to complete a frequency-scale questionnaire to get their views on different autonomous behaviors and other related variables. Moreover, both students and instructors were asked five open-ended questions each.

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## Findings

This study was shaped by both qualitative and quantitative data which helped me answer six research questions. The data gathered bore fruitful outcome and I came up with valuable findings about the general tendency of students towards learner autonomy, common aspects of autonomous students, most often used autonomy-friendly activities (by both teachers and students), constraints hindering the promotion of autonomy.

### Research question 1: What does learner autonomy mean to efl instructors?

The first research question was aimed at finding how EFL instructors take learner autonomy. Instructors were asked what learner autonomy means to them and what the common aspects of autonomous learners are. Through their answers, the common aspects of autonomous learners were categorized under nine broad items including control over learning, independency, awareness, motivation, collaboration, cognition, metacognition, socio-affectiveness, and responsibility. The table below shows the frequency of these items among the teachers' answers. However, I will discuss top three with regard to their frequency scores.

### Metacognition

Metacognition was the top quality of autonomous learners by EFL instructors at Gediz University. As shown in both Table 1 and Figure 1, metacognition got a frequency score of 15 out of 63. This reveals that the instructors consider students utilizing metacognitive skills as autonomous. According to the answers of teachers, metacognitive skills such as knowing how and where to learn and what tools to use, evaluating their own progress and language learning process, setting language learning goals, choosing language learning methods, techniques, materials and content to be learned are signs of autonomy.

### Cognition

Cognition was the second most common quality of autonomous learners by the teacher-participants with a frequency score of 8 out of 63. This outcome shows that cognition is also a clear sign of autonomy for EFL instructors at Gediz University. In the light of the findings, autonomous learners are sup-

posed to like analyzing, questioning and discussing. Moreover, they are reported to retain the meaning from the context through critical thinking and association of ideas. Namely, they try to explore things themselves.

### Independency

Independency is another common quality of autonomous learners according to the teacher-participants. The item got a frequency score of 8 out of 63, which shows that relying less on the teacher is an important sign of being autonomous according to the participant instructors. In this sense, autonomous learners are less dependent on their teachers as they prefer to discover things first rather than be spoon-fed. They don't necessarily need a teacher to learn every single thing but they need the guidance of a teacher.

*Table 1: Common Aspects of Autonomous Learners*

| Categories | Frequency (63) | Illustrative Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Control over learning | 6 | *Taking the ownership of learning Playing an active role in the process. Being in the center of language learning.* |
| Independency | 8 | *Relying less on the teacher. Learning things without the need for a teacher. Not needing to ask many questions and try to discover first.* |
| Awareness | 6 | *Aware of what they are doing in the classroom Aware of their skills and learning styles Aware of their strengths and weaknesses* |
| Motivation | 4 | *Desire to learn Self-motivated Intrinsically motivated* |
| Collaboration | 3 | *Liking to collaborate with their friends to use the language. Asking the teacher for guidance. Working cooperatively with others* |

| Metacognitive | 15 | *Knowing how to learn and what tools to use* *Evaluating his language learning process* *Setting language learning goals* |
| Cognitive | 8 | *Liking analyzing, questioning, discussing.* *Retaining meaning from context,* *Trying to explore things themselves* |
| Socio-affective | 6 | *Learning in formal and informal environments.* *Questioning the purpose of deeds.* *Not hesitating in asking questions to the teacher* |
| Responsibility | 7 | *Not expecting the teacher to assign something to study* *Being responsible for their own learning.* *Taking responsibility for their own learning* |

Figure 1 shows the emerging themes from the data and their frequency levels among the participant instructors' answers. As can be seen, utilizing metacognitive and cognitive skills, and independence from the teacher are the top three qualities of autonomous learners.
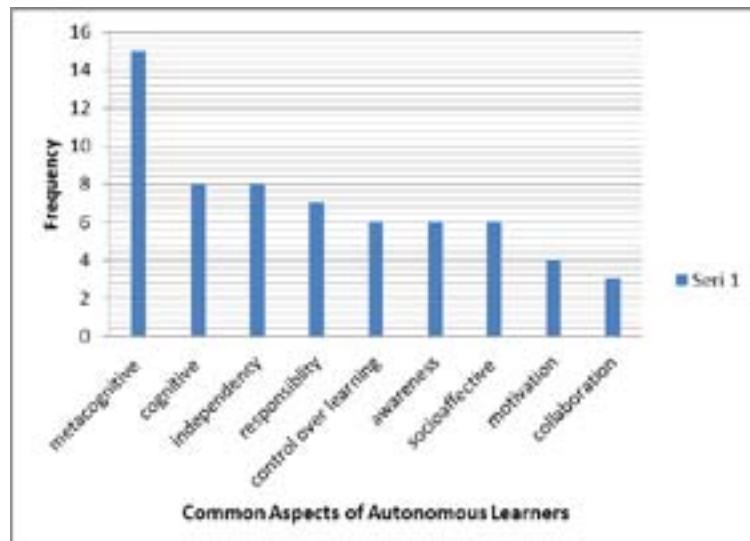


*Figure 1: Summary of Common Aspects of Autonomous Learners*

### Research question 2: To what extent do EFL instructors find their students autonomous?

The second research question was a very direct one aimed at finding out to what extent the EFL instructors think their students are autonomous. As can be seen in figure 2, seven out of ten participant teachers have responded that they don't think their students are autonomous at all, and the other three have said only few of their students sometimes show autonomous behavior.
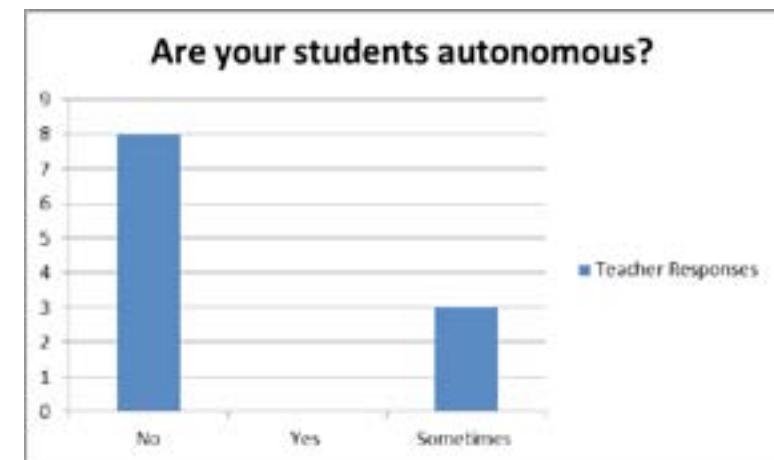


*Figure 2: Beliefs of Teachers about Students' being Autonomous*

### Research question 3: What activities are used most by teachers to foster autonomy?

The third research question explored common activities used by teachers with the aim of fostering autonomy. Instructors were asked how they promote autonomy and what activities they utilized most to make their students more autonomous. Through their answers, the mostly-used activities were classified into six strategies including guidance, giving responsibility, promotion of self-study, metacognitive training, promotion of interaction pattern, promotion of discovery learning. The table below shows the frequency of these six items among the teachers' answers. However, I will discuss the top three with regard to their frequency scores.

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*Table 2: Most Used Strategies Fostering Autonomy*

| Mostly Used Strategies Fostering Autonomy | Frequency (24) | Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Guidance | 3 | Acting like a facilitator rather than a controller<br>Guiding them how to do certain tasks |
| Giving Responsibility | 5 | Giving students more responsibility.<br>Giving students more responsibilit.<br>Letting the students choose their own materials, activities and topics.<br>Promoting creativity by letting them decide on what topics to choose for projects.<br>Giving them tasks to complete independently. |
| Promoting Self-Study | 4 | Encouraging them to go to libraries for outside class research.<br>Suggesting websites,blogs,podcasts.<br>Suggesting students films and TV series |
| Metacognitive Training | 6 | Promote critical thinking and reflection on learning<br>Raising and awareness in learners' thinking processes.<br>Raising awareness about learning styles and strategies<br>Teaching them how to learn. |
| Promoting Interdependence | 4 | Promoting peer correction.<br>Promoting group works and projects in and outside the classroom.<br>Giving the the sts more interdependent duties and tasks to work collaboratively. |
| Promoting Discovery Learning | 2 | Getting the sts to answer their own questions through eliciting.<br>Getting them to use reference books or dictionaries so that they can answer their own questions themselves. |

Figure 3 shows strategies the participant instructors utilize most to foster learner autonomy in and outside the classroom. As can be seen, metacogni-tive training, giving responsibility and promoting self-study are the top three strategies used by our instructors.
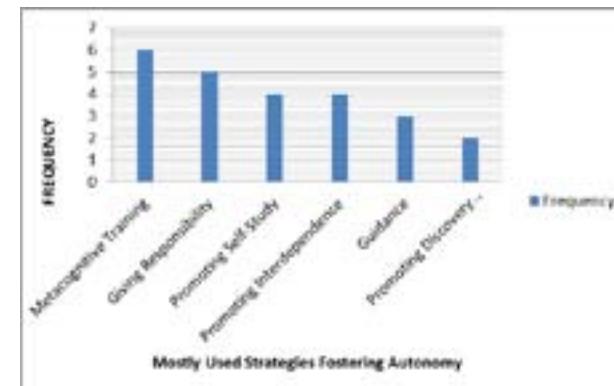


*Figure 3: Summary of Most Used Strategies*

### Metacognitive training

Metacognitive training was the most common strategy used by EFL instructors at Gediz University. As can be seen in both Table 2 and Figure 3, the item got a frequency score of 6 out of 24, which shows that most teachers try to improve their students' metacognitive skills by raising awareness about learning styles, strategies and thinking processes. Moreover, they claim to promote critical thinking and reflection on learning so as to be able to teach them how to learn.

### Giving responsibility

Giving students more responsibility is another important way used by teacher-participants to foster autonomy. The item got a frequency score of 5 out of 24, showing that the teachers consider responsibility as one of the key points in promoting autonomy. Accordingly, they let the students choose their own materials, activities and topics and they also give them tasks to complete independently so that they help their students become more autonomous.

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### Interdependence

Promoting interdependence, which means students' being mutually dependent on each other, is one of the top three strategies utilized by Gediz University instructors to foster learner autonomy. The term got a frequency score of 4 out of 24, making us understand that teacher-participants know the importance of interdependent tasks which help students learn from each other. Suitably, they encourage their students to work collaboratively through pair works, group works and projects in and outside the classroom.

### Research question 4: What are the constraints that prevent the teachers from fostering autonomy sufficiently?

The fourth research question aimed to find out the drawbacks that hinder the teachers from promoting autonomy sufficiently. In order to answer this question, participants were asked to count the constraints they experience, and their responds were categorized into seven broad items including previous experience, Turkish education system, materials, teaching and teacher- related problems, motivation, syllabus and time. The table below shows the frequency of these seven items among the teachers' answers. However, I will discuss the top three with regard to their frequency scores.

### Previous Experience

According to the responds of the teacher-participants, students' previous learning experience was the most common constraint on fostering learner autonomy with a frequency score of 8 out of 23(Figure/Table). In order to clarify this point, the Turkish education system and the Turkish students' learning habits should be briefly mentioned.  It is well known by everyone in Turkey that the Turkish education system is based on memorization. Moreover, students are used to being spoon-fed rather than discovering for themselves. Therefore they lack such skills as thinking critically, learning independently, and working interdependently. As a consequence, most students resist learning autonomously since it is difficult for them to give up their previous learning habits.

### Teaching and Teacher-Related Problems

The second most common constraint hindering teacher-participants from fostering autonomy is teaching and teacher-related problems. This constraint may easily be associated with the first one. That is to say, there seems to be a clear con-

nection between Turkish students' learning habits and teachers' teaching habits. In this sense, teacher-participants claim that the education system prevents them from giving control to the students, incorporating more practice into the lessons and using more communicative activities. Moreover, some teachers even claim their colleagues enjoy and find it easy to spoon-feed students.

### Time Constraints

Another important constraint for Gediz University instructors is time-related problems. The teacher-participants claim that they don't have enough time to spare for autonomy-friendly activities due to their busy schedule and the rushing pace of the syllabus.

*Table 3: Constraints Hindering Teachers from Fostering Autonomy Sufficiently*

| Categories of constraints | Frequency (23) | Illustrative Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Previous experience | 8 | students' educational background<br>previous learning style<br>their beliefs about how to learn<br>learner strategies to learn<br>learning styles of my students<br>understanding language learning |
| Turkish education system | 3 | education system |
| Materials | 1 | material- course books |
| Teaching and Teacher- Related problems | 5 | teachers' not wanting to give the control to learners<br>teachers' not incorporating more practice<br>teachers' not using more communicative activities<br>not giving more freedom to students<br>teachers love and use spoon-feeding |
| Motivation | 2 | lack of intrinsic motivation<br>student motivation/desire |
| Syllabus | 2 | hectic schedule<br>rushing pace of the syllabus |
| Time | 4 | time constraints |

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Figure 4 shows the categories of constraints hindering participant instructors fostering autonomy sufficiently. As can be seen, students' previous experience, teacher and teaching related problems and time constraints were the main ones.
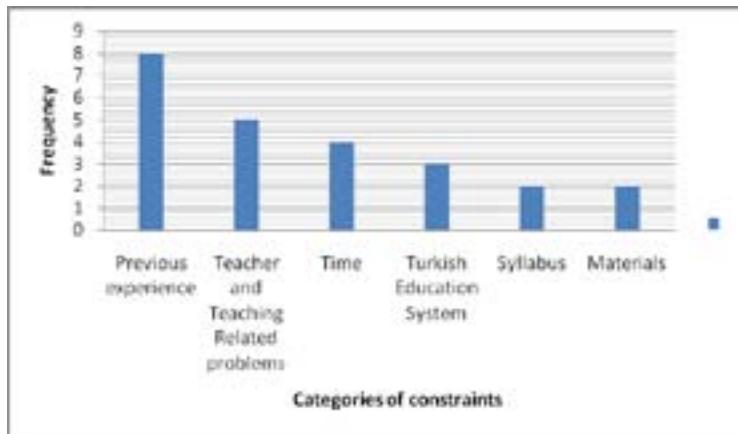


*Figure 4: Summary of Constraints*

### Research question 5: What are the beliefs of students on learner autonomy?

The fifth research question was aimed at finding EFL students' general tendency towards autonomy. In order to answer this question, a frequency-scale questionnaire on learner autonomy was given to 52 A2 students in three different classes so as to get their views on different autonomous behaviors and other related variables. For ease of data analysis the (number) questions in the survey were categorized under five titles including taking the responsibility of their own learning, enthusiasm for group-work projects, self-study, dependence on teacher and exam orientedness. As can be seen in both table 4 and figure 5, the item related to responsibility got a mean score of 2.1 out of 5, which shows that most of the participant students think they don't take responsibility for their own learning. Accordingly, the third and fourth items got similar mean scores of 2.2 and 2.3, revealing that only some students assume themselves to be enthusiastic for group work and they apply to self-study as a way of learning. The second item got a mean score of 3.7, showing that most

students think they are dependent on their teachers to a large extent. The first item in the survey was exam-orientedness which got the highest mean score in the survey. The high score of this item reveals that though some students claim they apply to self- study as a way of learning, they cannot give up their exam-based study habits. That's to say, most of the students study English only when they have forthcoming exams and quizzes.

*Table 4: General Tendency of Students towards Autonomy*

| Dimension of Learner Autonomy | Average (Out of 5) |
|---|---|
| Taking the responsibility of their own learning | 2.1 |
| Enthusiasm for group work- projects | 2.2 |
| Self-Study | 2.3 |
| Dependence on Teacher | 3.7 |
| Exam Orientedness | 3.8 |

Figure 5 shows the general tendency of students towards autonomy. As can be seen, most of our students are exam-oriented and their level of dependence on teacher is relatively high.
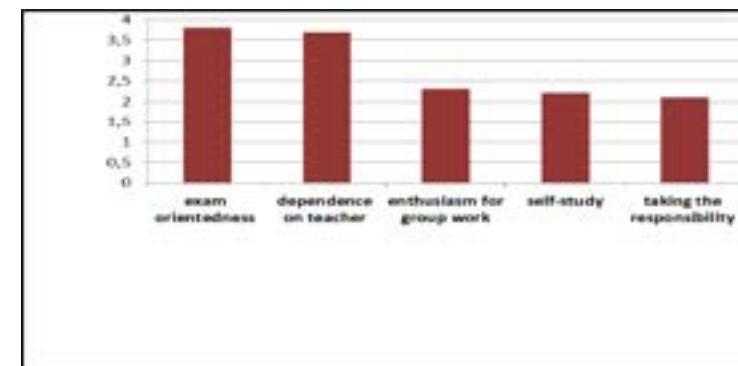


*Figure 5: Summary of Students' Beliefs on Autonomy*

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***Research question 6: What type of activities are done by the students claiming to be autonomous?***

The last research question of the study was aimed at finding out and categorizing the activities utilized by students who claim to be autonomous. Participant students were asked open-ended questions and according to their answers, the activity types were classified into three: media enhanced learning, self-linguistic study and social-interaction based activities. As can be seen in table 5, students mostly apply to media-enhanced learning which involves such activities as watching films and series, listening to talks and utilizing the internet for various purposes. Self-linguistic study on vocabulary and grammar is another way utilized by students claiming to be autonomous. As for the third category, participant students reported that they apply to social-interaction based activities such as practicing speaking with their foreign friends and teachers.

*Table 5: Most-Utilized Activities By Autonomous Learners*

| Categories of responses | Frequency of responses |
| --- | --- |
| Media Enhanced Learning | 11 |
| Self-Linguistic Study | 4 |
| Interactive Activities | 3 |

Figure six shows the categories of activities used by students claiming to be autonomous. As can be seen, the most utilized activities are technology-based ones.
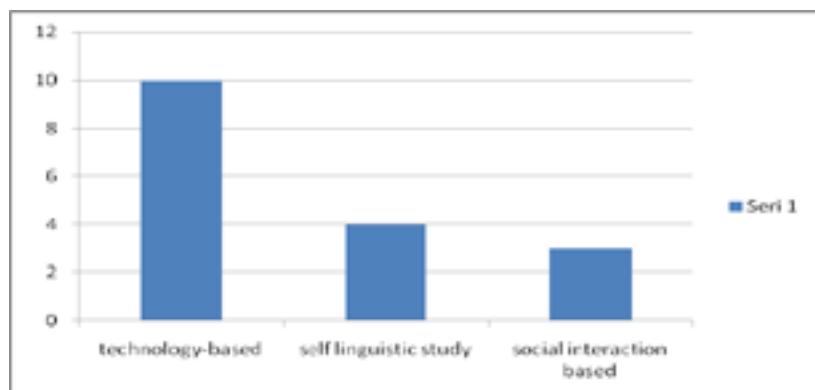


*Figure 6:  Categories of most utilized activities by autonomous learners*

## Discussion

Through this teacher-research I aimed to get both EFL teachers' and learners' views on autonomy. The six research questions which gave shape to my study provided me with valuable data which are open to discussion and commentary. Accordingly, in this part of my study, I aim to reflect and comment on the results, make references to the literature and give suggestions for further studies.

The findings of the first research question revealed that for the participant EFL instructors, the top qualities of autonomous learners are cognition, meta-cognition and independency. This result is important in that participant instructors see a direct relation between autonomy and using cognitive/metacognitive strategies and being independent. When the literature is scanned, it can be easily recognized that there is a certain parallel between the opinions of participant instructors and many scholars. According to the literature the uppermost quality of autonomous learners is taking responsibility for one's own learning, and in my opinion, one needs to utilize his/her cognitive and metacognitive skills independently in order to take charge of his/her learning.

As for the second research question which was aimed at finding out whether participant instructors think their students are autonomous or not, most of them responded that they don't find their students autonomous at all. This result shows a parallel between the results of the student survey used to answer the fifth research question exploring students' general tendency towards learner autonomy. According to the results of this survey, while some students claim they apply to self-study as a way of learning, most see themselves as exam-oriented and teacher dependent students.

The findings of the third research question exploring the common activities used by teachers to promote autonomy showed that participant teachers apply activities which stimulate metacognition, responsibility and interdependence. This result is significant in that participant instructors know the importance of activating learners' metacognitive skills, giving them responsibility and utilizing interdependent activities which are considered by many scholars as key points in fostering autonomy. In particular, interdependence which lets learning occur via collaboration and interaction between learners is seen by Boud (1988) as a more developed stage of autonomy than independence.

As for the results of the fourth research question, the constraints revealed bear importance in terms of many aspects. First of all the students' previous experience which is seen as the top constraint by the participant teachers shows

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us that Turkish EFL learners have been educated in an atmosphere where they have been seen as passive recipients of the knowledge. For this reason, they are used to being spoon-fed and lack skills helping them to be autonomous. Consequently, most students resist learning things autonomously since it is difficult for them to give up their previous learning habits. Second constraint is about teaching practices. According to the participant teachers, the education system, rushing syllabus and time constraints prevent them fostering autonomy sufficiently in the classroom. Here comes up the general problem of EFL classrooms in Turkey: exam-oriented classes, spoon-feeding teachers and passive students. At this point, it can be understood that the syllabi for EFL classrooms should be designed in such a way that there is enough time for communicative, autonomy-friendly activities.

As for the findings of the last research question (the fifth one has already been discussed), the results provided me with valuable information on activity types utilized by autonomous learners. The findings show us the importance of technology and internet. It is clear that most of the students tend to use internet so as to improve their language skills. In accord with this result, I suggest that we EFL teachers should assign more online tasks and utilize blogs, log books, social networking sites etc. to promote learner autonomy.

All in all, my study showed that though Gediz University instructors try their best to promote learner autonomy, there are some constraints that hinder them from doing so. As for the students, they are well aware of their non-autonomy and exam orientedness. However, there are some who try to rely less on their teachers, utilize their meta-cognitive skills and take charge of their own learning, which is a big step towards autonomy. As a last word, EFL teachers should never forget that if we are not autonomous themselves, we cannot expect our students to be so. If we avoid being over-controlling, prescriptive teachers, we can give more freedom to our students so that they can become active learners rather than passive recipients.

## Further Suggestions

1. EFL teachers should be flexible about classroom practices. Though all of us try to comply with the syllabus, we may create some time for task-based activities which help students improve their metacognitive and cognitive skills.

2. We shouldn't always give students what they want. Though they generally expect us to spoon feed them, we should guide them about learning how to learn.

3. We should help our students understand that what they learn has a meaning and function rather than passing the exams.

4. We shouldn't be disappointed with students' resistance to autonomy-friendly activities such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, pair-works, group-works, projects and tasks. They will get used to those activities in time.

5. As data showed, students mostly utilize technology-based activities outside the classroom, so we should suggest blogs, log-books, online journals, web-sites, games, videos, films and series so that they can integrate English into their daily lives

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# 15 Enhancing a learning-centered classroom rather than a teacher-centered one

*Kevser Özdemir*

*"I forget what I was taught. I only remember what I've learnt." Patrick White*
*"You are given the experiences you need to understand the world." Paulo Coelho*

## Context and problem

The aim of this study was to measure the impact of using learning-centered techniques on students. This study also intended to investigate the idea that successful learners assume a certain degree of responsibility for their own learning and refute prejudgments that teachers make before considering all of the facts about what learners want and need. To begin with, I'd like to mention the initial motivation which influenced me to carry out this research. I was taught by traditional teachers at school, most of whom sat at their desks throughout the whole lesson and just taught English grammar rules deductively without giving us any chance to practise them. Sadly, it didn't change when I was at university. I recall an incident where one of our instructors left the classroom crying as I told her that I could have done the same thing as she did. While I was doing the CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) I realized that I was nowhere near being student or learning-centered in the first years of my career. I hadn't been aware of the enormous amount of talking time which was done by me but not my students. I had never looked for proof of whether the target language was acquired by the students or the aim of the lesson was achieved. I must admit, hardly ever did I have an aim for each lesson.

Given the conversations I have with my colleagues, teachers always find it easier to blame students when learning does not take place effectively. I personally believe that rather than considering teaching from the perspective of our students, we tend to act in a more controlling way. We claim that creation of a positive pedagogical environment which facilitates learning seems to be

far-fetched due to several reasons such as failing to prepare students for the end of term tests, the risk of losing control over the learners, the hard work that we would have to take on while preparing our lessons. We assume that learning would be a product of teaching but unfortunately that's not necessarily the case. We put much of our energy into catching up with the syllabus, asking and answering our own questions, putting ourselves in the centre of our lessons, and so we neglect to focus and concentrate more on all the factors related to learning, what is learned and how it is learned. The exams we give become the major means of measurement of what is learned.

Enhancing a learning-centered classroom rather than a teacher or a learner-centered one has recently become quite a popular aim among language teachers worldwide. Does a learning-based attitude help learners communicate better in English? It is an unfortunate fact that teaching grammar constitutes a great part our curriculums and we are supposed to teach many different structures by the time the course has ended. But the question is "Do they really learn what we teach?" Is it possible to claim that being able to do well in an exam means that students have achieved their goals and that they are capable of using the language effectively for different purposes? The answers to these questions were sought in this research by observing two prep' classes at Izmir Katip Çelebi University School of Foreign Languages on a regular basis. Students were initially asked to fill in a survey about their previous learning context. They were next given another survey to compare their experiences of a teacher-centered classroom compared with a learning-centered one and to share their feelings about the current learning environment where stimulating activities and techniques were implemented to encourage them to get actively involved in the learning process. The extent to which they had found learning-centered lessons more useful or not was investigated in this second survey. Another survey was given to the instructors who work at Izmir Katip Çelebi University School of Foreign Languages to see what they think of a learning-centered classroom and if they are able to run a learning-centered environment in their classes.

## Literature review

The concept of learner-centeredness has been invoked with increasing frequency in recent years. What does the term mean? Nunan & Brindley (1986) state that, Learner centered classrooms are those in which learners are actively involved in their learning processes. The extent to which it is possible or desirable for learners to be involved in their own learning will obviously vary from context to context and from learner to learner. If learners are to learn anything at all, they have to do the learning for themselves so they should be involved in their own learning. In an ideal learning-centered context, not only will decisions about what to learn and how to learn be made with reference to the learners, but the learners themselves will be involved in the decision making process. Each element in the curriculum process will involve the learner, as Table 1 shows.

*Table 1 – Learner roles in a learner-centered curriculum (Nunan & Lamb (1996). The self-directed teacher. Managing the learning process, 9.)*

| Curriculum stage | Role of learner |
| --- | --- |
| Planning | Learners are consulted on what they want to learn and how they want to learn and how they want to go about learning. An extensive process of needs analysis facilitates this process. Learners are involved in setting, monitoring and modifying the goals and objectives of the programs being designed for them. |
| Implementation | Learners' language skills develop through the learners actively using and reflecting on the language inside and outside the classroom. They are also involved in modifying and creating their own learning tasks and language data. |
| Assessment and evaluation | Learners monitor and assess their own progress. They are also actively involved in the evaluation and modification of teaching and learning during the course and after it has been completed. |

Cross, (2000), writing about the learning process, makes the point that "We cannot transfer our knowledge ready-made into our students' minds" (Cross, 2000, p. 10). Gardner (1999) captures the concern for differences in learners when he writes, "Human minds do not all work in the same way, and human beings do not have the same cognitive strengths and weaknesses" (p. 166). This focus on the learner and the learning process is at the heart of the learning versus teaching debate.

The debate in higher education is further described by Barr and Tagg (1995) as a need to shift from an instructional (focus on teaching) model to one where learning is the major concern (focus on learning). This debate in higher education is further described by Barr and Tagg (1995) as a need to shift from an instructional (focus on teaching) model to one where learning is the major concern (focus on learning). At college level, Boggs (1996) supports this shift by suggesting that "We need a new paradigm for community colleges, one which defines the colleges as learning rather than teaching institutions" (p. 25).

Barr and Tagg (1995) believe that the chief agent in the process is the learner. Thus, students must be active discoverers and constructors of their own knowledge" (p. 21) Rogers (1969), further supports the need for learners to take control over the learning. Rogers points out that learners must be trusted to develop their own potential and encouraged to choose both the way and direction of their learning. According to Reynolds, J. (1998), learners should have meaningful control over what and how things are learned, plus how the learning outcome is measured. This concern for the learner acquiring meaningful control of the learning process has been called "student centered" or "learner centered" but more appropriately should be called *learning-centered learning*.

The learning-centered concept is also supported by a study begun in the early 1990s by the American Psychological Association (APA). The nature of the learning process is dealt with in the APA (1997) report and it is stated that "successful learners are active, goal-directed, self-regulating, and assume personal responsibility for contributing to their own learning (APA, 1997, p.7).

Barr and Tagg (1995) see the teaching model as one where the purpose is to provide and deliver instruction through courses and programs. A typical example could be where the teaching is structured around classes (50 minutes lectures and 3 unit courses), covering course content and the use of an end-of-course assessment. In this type of model, little concern may be given to learning outcomes or how that learning is produced. The teaching model is further described by Wagner and McCombs (1995) when they write, "Teachers decide for the learner what is required from outside by defining characteristics of instruction, curriculum, assessment, and management to achieve desired

learning outcomes" (p. 32). The teaching model seems to place much of its energy on the process or ways of teaching and less concern on what is learned or how it is learned.

According to Reynolds, (1998), one might assume that learning would be a product of teaching and that the purpose of teaching would be for learning to occur. If one looks at the process, learning and teaching can each be defined in its own way. Learning can occur without teaching and that teaching doesn't ensure learning. That is not to say that learning cannot occur from teaching activities. The debate is not over the need or value of teaching activities, but over the need to focus and concentrate more on all the factors related to learning.

Bunce et al. (2010) measured the average length of the students' reported attention lapses, and also examined the relationship among attention lapses and various pedagogical methods used by two different instructors. The most intriguing finding of this study was a relationship between the timing of active-learning, or "student-centered," pedagogies and the pattern of reported lapses in attention. If we could design our classes according to our students' needs and interests and if we established positive, constructive rapport with them, they would be more engaged and involved.

## Procedure

The first step of the study was to give students a survey to get their ideas about the usefulness of their MC lessons in Semester one. Instead of interviewing the students, I preferred to give them a survey so that they could have more time to think about the questions. The students were asked to give their surveys back in three days. The questions in the survey were in Turkish because the aim of the survey was not to assess the students' proficiency, but to get them to share their ideas more comfortably without stumbling upon the language barrier. Except for a few, most of the students handed their surveys in on time. Since the word 'dominate' was misinterpreted by the students, the third question could be called a problematic one. Almost all of the students associated domination with teacher's discipline and classroom management and most of them said their instructor was dominant in the classes.

**Survey 1**

1. Did you find Main Course lessons in Semester one useful? Why/Why not? In what ways could MC lessons be made more useful?
2. Do you think MC lessons helped you to improve your English? If yes, in what ways?
3. To what extent were the lessons dominated by the teacher and how did you feel about this? How could this be changed?
4. What did you most enjoy about the Main Course lessons in Semester one? Why? And (if applicable) what did you least enjoy?
5. How much opportunity in Main Course lessons in Semester one did you have to practise your own spoken English? How could this be improved?
6. Would you rather be more actively involved in the lessons? If yes, in what ways do you think you could be more involved?
7. How useful do you think pair-work activities are in your current Main Course teacher's lessons?
8. Do you find pair-work activities boring or fun?
9. Do you think there are **not enough/enough/more than enough** pair-work activities*?*
10. What are your thoughts about my never using Turkish with you?

The second step of the study was to prepare lesson plans enriched with learning-centered activities. For the next two weeks, games chosen according to different learning styles, pair-work and group activities, songs, role-plays, pronunciation and drilling activities were all implemented in my MC lessons. Grammar was taught by using inductive method, thereby giving the students the chance to generate structures by themselves. Tips about how to improve their English were given with examples. I tried to minimize teacher talking time by keeping students busy with pair and group-work activities. Instead of answering my own questions, I asked provoking questions to stimulate the students' thinking process. I used concept checking questions to teach grammar and vocabulary and brought various kind of games which suit different learning styles to revise particular subjects.

Another survey was given to the instructors who work at Izmir Katip Çelebi University School of Foreign Languages. The aim of this survey was to evaluate the instructors' own attitude toward the concept of learner-centeredness. They were asked to indicate their attitude to the concept of learner-centeredness by rating the following statements from 1 (totally disagree) 2 (disagree slightly) 3 (neutral) 4 (agree slightly) to 5 (totally agree). 24 instructors answered the questions as shown in the table. The numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of the instructors.

**Survey 2**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Learners have a right to be involved in curriculum decision making (e.g., selecting content, selecting learning activities and tasks). | totally disagree (1) disagree slightly (6) neutral (13) agree slightly (3) totally agree (1) |
| 2. Learners learn best if the content relates to their own experience and knowledge. | totally disagree (0) disagree slightly (0) neutral (2) agree slightly (3) totally agree (19) |
| 3. Learners have fixed ideas about language learning that need to be taken into account in developing language programs. | totally disagree (0) disagree slightly (2) neutral (6) agree slightly (8) totally agree (8) |
| 4. Learners who have developed skills in 'learning how to learn' are the most effective students. | totally disagree (0) disagree slightly (0) neutral (0) agree slightly (7) totally agree (17) |
| 5. Learners are less interested in learning for learning's sake than in learning in order to achieve immediate or not too far distant life goals. | totally disagree (0) disagree slightly (0) neutral (4) agree slightly (7) totally agree (13) |
| 6. Learners have different learning styles and strategies that need to be taken into consideration in developing learning programs. | totally disagree (0) disagree slightly (0) neutral (0) agree slightly (5) totally agree (19) |
| 7. Learners who have developed skills in self-assessment and self-evaluation are the most effective students. | totally disagree (0) disagree slightly (0) neutral (6) agree slightly (6) totally agree (12) |

In the second part of the survey, they were asked to indicate their attitude to the concept of learner-centeredness by rating the following statements from 1 (never) 2 (rarely) 3 (sometimes) 4 (usually) to 5 (always) with a reference to a teaching context they were familiar with.

| Considering my teaching experince… | |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Learners are involved in curriculum decision making (e.g., selecting content, selecting learning activities and tasks). | never (9) rarely (10) sometimes (5) usually (0) always (0) |
| 2. Learners are given the chance to relate to their own experience and knowledge. | never (1) rarely (2) sometimes (10) usually (8) always (3) |
| 3. Learners' fixed ideas about language learning are taken into account in developing language programs. | never (3) rarely (4) sometimes (11) usually (5) always (1) |
| 4. Learners are encouraged to develop skills in 'learning how to learn' | never (3) rarely (4) sometimes (5) usually (10) always (2) |
| 5. Learners are encouraged to be more interested in learning for learning's sake than in learning in order to achieve immediate or not too far distant life goals. | never (2) rarely (2) sometimes (9) usually (9) always (2) |
| 6. Learners' different learning styles and strategies are taken into consideration in developing learning programs. | never (1) rarely (5) sometimes (9) usually (7) always (2) |
| 7. Learners are encouraged to develop skills in self-assessment and self-evaluation. | never (1) rarely (6) sometimes (11) usually (5) always (1) |

The final step was to give students another survey to see how useful they found the first two-week period of MC lessons in which learning-centered classroom activities were prevalent. Some typical student comments were provided in the analysis of the survey. The questions in the survey were:

**Survey 3**

| |
| --- |
| 1. Did the activities and games carried out in the first two weeks raise your interest and motivation? 2. Was it you or your teacher who was doing most of the speaking? Who do you think was more active during the lessons? 3. Do you think you were encouraged to be more active? 4. Are you conscious of the learning style that best suits you? (visual, audio-lingual…) 5. Do you think your learning style was taken into consideration by your teacher? 6. Indicate your positive and negative thoughts about the lessons which took place in the first two weeks. 7. Do you think you were counselled by your teacher on how to learn better? 8. Do you learn English in order to achieve immediate or not too far distant life goals? |

## Findings and discussion

### Analysis of student survey 1

To the questions in the first survey, twenty-five students in total gave the answers below:

**Question 1.** Five said they didn't find the Main Course lessons in Semester one useful. 20 students said they were useful but boring. Almost half of the students said they lost their attention when the teacher just relied on the book. "The lessons could have been more active and interesting. Relying on the book all the time distracts me."

**Question 2.** Only one believes the lessons helped him to improve his English in every skill. The others think the lessons contributed little if none in listening and speaking. They say they can understand when the teacher speaks English but they can't understand a native speaker nor are they able to communicate using English.

"I still have difficulty in understanding and speaking."

**Question 3.** Twelve stated that the domination was equally shared by them and the teacher. 13 students think the teacher was more dominant and except for the pair-work activities they didn't have the chance to be active.

**Question 4.** The students enjoyed the videos in Practical English parts, song activities, speaking activities and games. They think that the lessons were slow-moving, and not appealing. Teacher's depending on the book, listening activities and grammar lessons led them to lose their interest.

"Having conversations with our teacher in English was very useful. Games and activities were quite fun and they engaged my interest."

**Question 5.** Only four believed they had to practice their own spoken English. Some believed they have to be at upper-intermediate level to be able to speak English. Some students complained about their friends' speaking Turkish all the time whereas others expressed their not feeling at ease when speaking English.

**Question 6.** Eighteen want to be actively involved in the lessons. While three didn't answer this question, twenty-three want to be active in pair-work activities and games. 1said she doesn't want to be active due to her fear of making mistakes in front of other students.

"I don't how to be more active but if being active means communicating better in English, I would love to play a more active role in lessons."

**Question 7.** Six find pair-work activities useless as they only speak English when the teacher is around. Otherwise, they do not speak English. Besides, they believe it is more useful to speak with the teacher.

"We start speaking English only when we see the teacher is coming over to us."

**Questions 8/9.** Only one finds pair-work activities boring and more than enough.

**Question 10.** Only two believe that my not using L1 is an obstacle for them.

Taking their answers into consideration, it could be inferred that students complain about the pace of the lessons which they find boring and tiresome. Unfortunately, they don't believe that they were encouraged to use the language in a creative, meaningful and communicative manner.

The answers that students gave in the survey reveal that they learn better when they are actively involved in the learning process and that they want the lessons to be more student-friendly. They want to be given the chance to put what they've learned into practice. They are not opposed to learning grammar but they believe learning would take place more effectively if it was taught in a more fun way rather than traditional inductive ways. They also state that pair-work activities help them speak more freely as they are afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers. Almost all of the students' desire to be actively involved in the learning process requires a lot of thinking while planning our lessons.

### Analysis of instructor survey

**Question 1.** More than half of the instructors are not sure about giving the right to learners to be involved in curriculum decision and none of them do so.

**Question 2.** Nineteen said learners learn best if the content relates to students' own experience and knowledge but only three give that chance in their teaching experience.

**Question 3.** Although eight strongly agree and eight slightly agree that learners' fixed ideas about language learning need to be taken into account in developing language programs, only one always does so.

**Question 4.** Despite the fact that all instructors believe that learners who have developed skills in 'learning how to learn' are the most effective students, half the instructors do not usually or always encourage them to do so.

**Question 5.** Twenty agree that learners are less interested in learning for learning's sake than in learning in order to achieve immediate or not too far distant life goals. However, thirteen said they do not encourage their learners to be more interested in learning for learning's sake.

**Question 6.** Twelve strongly and six slightly agree that learners who have developed skills in self-assessment and self-evaluation are the most effective students. Nevertheless, fifteen do not usually take their learners' different learning styles into consideration in developing programs.

**4.3 Analysis of student survey 2**

To the questions in the second survey which was given to the students, thirty-five in total gave the answers below:

**Question 1.** Thirty-two said they were more motivated whereas three said they weren't.

**Question 2.** Eighteen said the instructor was more active, fourteen said they were more active and three said both the teacher and students were equally active in the lessons.

**Question 3.** Thirty-three believe they were encouraged to be more actively involved whereas two do not think so.

"I normally either spend time on social network or sleep during the lessons, but in that two-week period I didn't find it difficult to remain engaged in three lessons in a row. I learned a lot while having fun."

**Question 4.** Thirty-four said by listening, taking notes and being actively involved, one said he got distracted when he lost interest.

**Question 5.** Twenty-eight said their learning style was taken into consideration in the lessons while two said no importance was given to their learning style. Two said occasionally and 1 said none of the teachers take our learning styles into consideration. One said Teachers could have been more aware of our different learning styles. One said the instructor merely used her own techniques regardless of our different learning styles.

"As long as I am not bored, I feel like it is taken into consideration."

"None of the teachers take our learning styles into consideration because the only thing that matters is just preparing us for the exams."

**Question 6.** Students generally found the lessons useful, effective and fun. They particularly liked role-play activities and having been given the chance to practise. One student said the teacher could have spoken Turkish upon seeing one subject had not completely been comprehended. One said there was no communication and harmony among the teachers which caused adaptation problems among the learners.

"All students learn better when they have fun."

**Question 7.** Twenty-six said yes while nine said no.

"What she says is just cliché."

"She always tells us how to learn more effectively especially how to improve our listening skill."

"She gives us individual support during the lessons which I find very useful."

**Question 8.** Twenty-four said they were learning English with long-term purposes, nine learn a language for the sake of learning a language and two said both.

Even though there was no guidance for question number 4, it was very interesting to find almost all students giving the same answer. They all said they learn better when they are active and when they listen to the teacher. Note taking is also found very helpful to learn better. Apparently, all students enjoyed being at the center of the learning process and getting individual help and support about how to learn better.

## Reflection

### *Reflection on the literature review*

While I was going through the literature, one of the most interesting things that I learned was that learners should have meaningful control over what and how things are learned, plus how the learning outcome is measured. I had never thought about giving students a chance to be involved in the assessment process and now I'd like to learn more about this issue. The literature provided me with more information about learners' language skills which seem to improve when they use the language actively and when they are encouraged to reflect on the language inside and outside the classroom. The answers that were given by the students also support the idea that students feel the necessity to practise the language inside and outside the classroom but they neither know how to, nor do they have a chance to do it. Therefore, I would like to know more about how I can help students to reflect on what they have learned inside and outside the classroom.

When we look at the literature on learning-centered classrooms, it shows that if learners are to learn anything at all, they have to do the learning for themselves so they should be involved in their own learning. However, 26 students out of thirty-five said they want to learn English for long-term goals such as academic purposes or to have a successful career. This finding made me think that if students were more engaged and involved in learning, they might be learning English for the sake of learning a language not for specific purposes.

### Reflection on the instructor survey

The answers given by the instructors to both surveys were really intriguing as they reveal a huge conflict between what has to be done and what is really done. More than half of the instructors believe that learners need to be consulted on what they want to learn and how they want to learn and how they want to go about learning, but in reality very few can put these ideas into practice in their lessons. Although most of them admit the necessity of designing lessons according to learners' different learning styles and strategies, almost half of them do not usually put it into practice. Whatever the reasons are, there seems to be an active disagreement between theory and practice. Therefore, what students said in the survey about instructors' being indifferent to their learning styles might be true.

### Reflection on the student surveys

This study clearly showed me that I need to refocus my attention from teacher to learner. I realized that I hardly give any chance to the students to express their needs and interests about what they want to learn and how to learn. In my following teaching practice, I'd like to give my students more opportunity to lead the flow of lessons. I had a misconception that most students are not aware of the learning style that best suits them, but the survey revealed that almost all of the students are conscious of how they learn better. Except for the timid students, they all want to be actively involved in the learning process. They want to improve their speaking skill by talking to either their instructor or their peers. I'll have to do more thinking about how to give them opportunity to be more active. It was very surprising to learn that shy students do not want to be actively involved in order not to get embarrassed in front of their classmates. These students clearly stated that they prefer to practise with their partners, listen to songs and watch videos. They believe talking to a partner in a pair-work activity helps them to correct one another's mistakes and to talk more freely. Considering the fact that most students find pair-work activities useful and fun, I will definitely allocate more time for pair and group-work activities.

I can see the connections between the typical student's attention span which is about 10 to 15 minutes long and loss of interest and motivation. Bearing this in mind, I personally believe that eliminating the distractors would not necessarily engage our students in the lessons. Instead of collecting their cell phones, raising our voice or waking up the sleepers, we need to come up with various strategies to prevent them from losing their interest.

The most intriguing finding of this study was 21 students said that I was more active in the lessons. Although I tried to minimize the talking time by using games and activities through which the students could be more active, it turned out that it was still me who was more dominant. I need to work really hard on this issue and restrain myself from doing most of the talking. I need to focus on the experience for learners, rather than what I want to say.

On the other hand, after carrying out this research I've become more confident about using solely English in the lessons because except for three students, all of them stated their positive feelings about my using English all the time. Regardless of the question, they mentioned how useful it was to engage them in the lessons. Since every single student's opinion matters, I need to improve myself in diagnosing students who have difficulty in understanding and equip myself with different strategies to be able to reach those students as well.

Both the surveys answered by the students have revealed the fact that they do not appreciate lessons which are led by the teacher depending solely on the course book. They find it difficult to follow the lesson once they get bored and they turn off. Hence, it's not hard to draw the conclusion that if we could design our classes according to our students' needs and interests and if we established positive, constructive rapport with them, they would be more engaged and involved. Therefore, I strongly believe that we need to have long sessions while preparing our curriculums to enrich our lessons according to the learners' needs since almost all of the students mentioned in the second survey that not being dependent on the book was a real asset for them.

While carrying out this research my biggest challenge was to design lessons which would appeal to different learning styles and strategies. Taking into ac-

count what students wrote in the first survey, I tried to improve the ambience of the classroom so that none of the students would turn off, but it turned out that it wasn't very easy as I had to devote a lot of time and thinking to come up with ideas which would appeal to all learners including the timid ones. The activities had to appeal to different learning styles but also they had to be meaningful and help students to connect new learning with the old. Seeing how difficult it is to prepare such language programs in which learners are encouraged to be more active and engaged, a professional resource centre should be in service in our school. Apart from activities to implement in classes, every teacher whether novice or experienced needs consultation and support and needs to be provided with ideas about how to create a learning-centered context in his/her classroom.

Based on what students said in both surveys, I came to the conclusion that we shouldn't act like leaders. On the contrary, we should never forget that we are only there for guidance. Instead of appointing ourselves as assessors, we have got to let our students monitor and assess their own progress. Unless they are actively involved in the evaluation, we cannot claim to have students who are responsible for their own learning. Therefore, I would like to learn more about how to involve my students in the assessment and evaluation process.

All in all, it's obvious from the findings that being flexible according to their needs or tendencies doesn't mean that they're taking over our classes. Our mission shouldn't be viewed as simply to offer instruction and evaluation but instead to produce learning as an outcome. It is a must for teachers to come up with ways to raise their learners' interest and motivation, to provide enjoyment and relaxation and make the lessons not only effective but also fun.

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# 16 *Does keeping 'learning diaries' increase students' use of learning strategies and academic success in the classroom?*

## *Huriye Jale Güneş Coşardemir*

### Context and problem

Learning strategies have increasingly become the centre of attention and gained great importance in the teaching-learning process. Oxford (1990, p.8) defines learning strategies as "the specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferrable to new situations".

When scientists analyse the behaviour of successful language learners, they see that they apply different types of learning strategies. "The language learners,who are able to use a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately, are better equipped to improve their language skills" (Federholt, 1997, p. 1). "However, being able to use the best strategies out of a carefully cultivated range does not always come by itself" (ibid.). Students need guidance in learning how to learn. "As language teachers, we should be able to help students recognize the various components which make up the learning process" (ibid).

In my action research, I focused on the effect of using learning strategies on academic success. I had two classes of students who had failed the previous track. None of the students lacked motivation. On the contrary, they were serious students who spent a lot of time trying to learn English but nevertheless had failed for some reason. Therefore, I wondered whether these students were aware of learning strategies and if using these strategies could be a solution to their problem. I wanted to research whether helping students to apply these strategies in their learning process would increase their autonomy and success in English. One way of developing these skills is through the use of diaries, in which students keep a record of their language learning strategy development. Therefore I designed and implemented a small-scale research project that intended to introduce students to the concepts of adopting learn-

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ing strategies through the use of diaries and then analysed the effects on their success and learner autonomy.

## Literature review

### *Language learning strategies*

Research on language learning strategies started in the 1970s. Various definitions of language learning strategies (LLS) have been used by key figures in the field within foreign language education. Tarone (1981, cited in Algan, 2006, p. 67) defined a language learning strategy as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language … to incorporate these into one's interlanguage competence". Rubin (1987, p. 22) later stated that LLS "are strategies that contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly". Finally, in her book for language teachers, Oxford (1990, p.8) provides specific examples of LLS (i.e., "In learning ESL, Trang (a foreign learner of English) watches American TV soap operas, guessing the meaning of new expressions and predicting what will come next") and a comprehensive definition:

> …language learning strategies are … specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing  communicative ability (p.8).

Despite there being various definitions of LLS, there appears to be a shared view that they are conscious or semi-conscious thoughts, actions and behaviours that are employed by the learners to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information (Algan, 2006, p. 26).

Rubin (1975) was one of the earliest researchers in this field who provided a very broad definition of learning strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p.43). Later, in 1981 she identified two kinds of learning strategies: "those which contribute directly to learning and those which contribute indirectly to learning" (pp.124-126). She divided the direct learning strategies into six types as: clarification/ verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/ inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning and practice. The indirect learning strategies were divided into two types as creating opportunities for practice and production tricks.

Afterwards, several scientists such as Brown (1980), J. Michael O'Malley, Anna Uhl Chamot, Gloria Stewner-Manzanares, Lisa Kupper and Rocco P. Russo (1985),

Ellis (1986) and Oxford (1990) made some additions and amendments to Rubin's definition and classification of learning strategies. Among these definitions and classifications, the most comprehensible one for the students in this research belonged to Oxford, so in this paper her definition is followed.

Oxford (1990) defined language learning strategies as "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information" (p.8). She classified learning strategies into six groups, attempting a remedy for the perceived problem that many strategy inventories appeared to emphasise cognitive and metacognitive strategies and to ascribe much less importance to affective and social strategies (p. 16):

1. Memory strategies, which relate to how students remember language.
2. Cognitive strategies, which relate to how students think about their learning.
3. Compensation strategies, which enable students to make up for limited knowledge.
4. Metacognitive strategies, relating to how students manage their own learning.
5. Affective strategies, relating to students' feelings of anxiety.
6. Social strategies, which involve learning by interaction with others.

### *Learner autonomy*

Learner autonomy is described as a capacity for active, independent learning but, like language learning strategies, it has been defined differently by many researchers. Among these scientists, Little (1991), for example, sees autonomy as a "capacity—for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action" (p. 4). The key factor of learner autonomy is that the learner is responsible for his/her own learning. "This acceptance of responsibility has

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both socio-affective and cognitive implications: it entails at once a positive attitude to learning and the development of a capacity to reflect on the content and process of learning with a view to bringing them as far as possible under conscious control" (Little, 1991, p. 4). When students have the chance to control what, how and when they learn, they are more eager to set their goals, plan their work, develop strategies to cope with new situations and unforeseen problems, evaluate and assess their own work and be more aware of their process. They are able to learn how to learn from their own successes and mistakes in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future (Crabbe, 1993).

In this study, learning diaries are used to encourage students to take more initiative and control of learning, to find relevant language learning strategies to cope with difficulties and to reflect on their learning. Thanks to these advantages, keeping a learning diary a useful tool for fostering learner autonomy.

## Procedure

The present study was conducted with 40 pre-intermediate level students who study at Yaşar University Prep Class and it lasted for one track of 8 weeks. At the beginning of the track, I talked briefly about what language learning strategies were and their advantages and asked the students to keep a Language Learning Strategy diary. Before starting on the diaries, students were encouraged to speak in English about what language learning meant to them, how they learned language, and what their perceptions of themselves as language learners were. In the discussion part it was obvious that the students did not plan when they would study English or how they should study. They did not monitor their own progress, and evaluation was expected to be carried out only by the teacher.

Furthermore, they used very fixed, limited strategies which they had not evaluated for effectiveness. For example, most students said that in order to memorize words, they wrote them down many times, but when asked why they used this method and not another, they had no concept of alternative ways of doing it. There was a noticeable discrepancy between what students said would be helpful, such as speaking with speakers of English and listening to tapes, and what they actually did. Furthermore, some strategies, which seemed to be superficially good techniques, such as listening to tapes, were

imperfectly developed. Apart from switching on the radio or putting a cassette in a tape deck, it was apparent that students had no clear idea as to how to listen efficiently and effectively.

In general, students had limited understanding of the components of language learning, and very little awareness of their roles as language learners. To help them, I gave a short, simplified orientation to the three main groups of LLS set out by Oxford (1990, p. 16):

1. Metacognitive strategies, which deal with self-management: setting goals, monitoring, and self-evaluation.
2. Cognitive strategies, which deal with actual information: how to obtain it (by asking for clarification, repetition, etc.); inferencing meaning from context; using dictionaries and grammar books; retaining it through memorization, repetition, mnemotechnic tricks, and writing things down; and retrieving it.
3. Socio-effective strategies, which include co-operating with classmates, friends, teachers, or speaking English with other speakers of English.

After the orientation, the students started keeping their learning diaries by defining the last problem they had in the learning process and which strategies they planned to use to overcome the problem. This procedure continued every day in the last 10 minutes of the lesson and when the lesson finished I collected their dairies daily. Every two weeks, the students also included their comments about the effectiveness of the strategies they applied.

When I collected the students' diaries I did not pay attention to the language mistakes but I gave comments on what students had written. Also, every Friday for 30 minutes, I mentioned some contents of the journals in class and provided feedback on them, or solutions if necessary.

## Findings and discussion

In this part, representative examples of diary entries will be given to show how some students negotiated the various steps involved in developing their LLS and learner autonomy. As with all things, some students were quicker at being able to utilize various strategies effectively. Others needed more guidance for a longer period, either through my comments in connection to their diary entries or by talking with me outside of class.

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When parts of the journals are quoted in this paper, the language mistakes are not corrected if they do not affect comprehension in order for the material to be authentic for readers.

*Student A:*

*Identified Problem: To overcome my shyness and being ashamed of my English.*

Strategies: Ask questions in English, Talk English with people, Attend speaking classes more

After defining his problem and ways of overcoming it, there were diary entries from the same student describing what he did:

*…I talked to one of the International students in our class in English.*

*I was active in Speaking Class.*

*I was late to the 1. Lesson and I told my problem in English….*

The same student wrote a few days later:

*… still I am shy. I am not comfortable speaking…*

The student applied a socio-affective strategy but the diary entry does not seem very optimistic. Yet, I made a note in his diary that things take time, and it is not possible to change his character over a night. I also praised him for thinking about this problem, and working to solve it. During the process I tried to be as constructive as possible.

Other diary entries included reflections such as the following:

*Student B:*

*Identified Problem: I can't understand the reading passages in the exam.*

*Strategies: I will read funny things, I will look the dictionary less, I will scanning and skimming, I will play strategy games in English.*

This student applied cognitive strategies to sort out his problem. He started reading comics and playing a computer game called *The Bonte Room* (http://bartbonte.com/bonteroom/). This game requires a lot of reading because to get out of this room, the student needs to read and understand the clues well. A few weeks later he wrote in his diary;

*….the reading lesson is more fun now. Reading is more easy now. I learned a lot of words, I will find others strategies for other lessons…*

Seeing there were more enjoyable ways to overcome his difficulties motivated the student to apply the learning strategies more. In addition, the fact that he is trying to identify his weaknesses shows he is on the right path to increasing his autonomy.

*Student C:*

Identified Problem: I couldn't understand much the listening parts.

*Strategies: I will listen to English songs and I will try to write the words in it. I will watch English films with and without subtitles.*

Two weeks later she wrote;

*I liked practicing songs. I learned words and saying them. Also, I started Gossip Girl. First, in English, after in Turkish. I still don't understand all but I can follow it in English now.*

By keeping a learning diary, she practiced her self-evaluation and self-monitoring skills. This practice helped her to be more aware of her own learning process so next time she can be better at making decisions regarding the planning, effectuation and appraisal of their efforts.

*Student D:*

*Identified Problem: I find vocabulary difficult, especially word formation.*

*Strategies: I will revise school at home and do some practice. Then I will come to the office hour to ask the teacher.*

2 weeks later the same student wrote:

*…I didn't need see the teacher. I practiced adjectives and adverbs. I looked a, an, the and nouns. I did the word formation exercises from internet. It is easy now…*

The student chose a memory strategy to remember the words he learned at school. He revised what he did at school and searched relevant resources to compensate his weakness. As a result, he could find a way to deal with his problem and his case shows that being able to use the learning strategies leads learners to be more autonomous. Even though he had intended to see the teacher about the problem, he was less dependent on her after he applied the strategies.

*Student E:*

*Identified Problem: learning words is really hard.*

*Strategies: I will have a vocabulary notebook. I will write new words and example sentences.*

2 weeks later;

*… vocabulary notebook is boring and not pratic but good. For new words I wrote sentences about my boyfriend and make pictures. It is easy to remember. Is there easy way?..*

This student applied memory strategies to learn and remember the new words. By using the words in sentences from her personal life, she will be able

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to internalize the new input and send it to her long term memory. By creating sentences, she was trying to contextualize the target words, and by making sentences about her boyfriend, she was trying to create a mental linkage.

*Student F:*

*Identified Problem: I didn't understood Relative Clauses in class.*

*Strategies: I will revise at home and do practice in a grammar book. I can ask friends.*

2 weeks later;

*…my friend İ… studied me about who, which and that. After, we solved questions about it. I did all questions correct.*

This student applied social strategies to overcome her problem. In this case, learning took place by working together.

*Student G:*

*Identified Problem: My English bad.*

*Strategies: I will listen.*

As for this student, there were some who needed guidance to become more specific about what they were doing. For example, did she listen for general understanding or specific points, to improve vocabulary or check grammar in practice? As for learning strategies, I asked her to think about what she was doing while listening. Was she listening to the tape in its entirety, or was she stopping it after a few sentences, making notes, and repeating what she heard?

## Reflections

In my action research, I focused on the effect of using learning strategies on academic success. I had two classes full of failed students from the previous track and I felt a great desire to teach something useful to them. I wanted to teach them how to fish, instead of feeding them with a fish. I wanted to teach them strategies to help them better find their own ways throughout their educational life, instead of teaching just words or grammar rules for their exams. After the students became convinced that what they were doing was for their own good, they were more eager to take part in the study and seeing their enthusiasm made me feel like a real teacher.

In my action research, I was curious about the development of language learning strategies and I saw how easy it was to implement even in one track. At the end of the experience, I saw my students make higher level progress as

more autonomous learners who had clearer ideas on how to be better language learners by using very simple strategies.

From this teacher- research project I learned that even the weakest student in the class can be better aware of his learning process and he can improve his language skills by using learning strategies. Now, I strongly believe that good language learning strategies are essential, and I will continue to work on refinements that will help students become better learners.

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# 17 From TEFL to ELF-aware pedagogy: lessons learned from an action-research project in Greece

*Stefania Kordia*

## Introduction

Over the last years, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the significance of action research in terms of improving teaching and learning practices based on the particular needs of one's learners and the requirements of the teaching context. In this regard, following a cyclical process involving planning, acting, observing and reflecting is absolutely necessary in order to construct a personal theory of effective teaching in one's own classroom (Koshy, 2005; Pine, 2009).

Along these lines, the purpose of this paper is to describe an action research study which I have carried out in one of my classes at a primary school in Crete, Greece. Twenty-two twelve-year-old learners attending the sixth-grade were involved in the study, which focused on the way that my practices could be modified so as to meet the needs of my learners who wished to be eventually able to communicate successfully with other non-native speakers (NNSs) using English as a lingua franca (ELF). This research was undertaken within the framework of the 'ELF-TEd Project', a pioneer teacher education programme organized by Bogaziçi University (Istanbul, Turkey) and Hellenic Open University (Patras, Greece) aiming at raising in-service teachers' awareness of the pedagogical implications of ELF.

After discussing what motivated me to carry out this research and presenting a brief review of the literature that has informed my decisions while conducting it, the steps I followed are described with reference to the methodology and the material that I used in order to address the needs of the particular learners. The paper concludes with the lessons I have learned out of this experience, hoping that they might inspire other teachers to conduct a similar action research project in their own contexts.

## Motivation for the research

Broadly defined as the preferred language of communication among people who do not share a common linguistic and cultural background, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is nowadays used internationally, especially in expanding-circle countries such as Turkey and Greece where most English-medium communication people participate in involves other non-native users. In Greece, in particular, where this research has been carried out, ELF is being used for several communicative purposes by increasingly more people, including English language learners of all ages and grade levels.

This situation is also true as far as my own students are concerned; despite their young age and their relatively low level of proficiency, they often use English outside the classroom environment while, for instance, playing interactive games on the internet or chatting with friends from abroad. The fact, however, that they sometimes complain that their conversations with other NNSs have resulted in a 'communication breakdown' has urged me to think that modifications in my teaching practice were necessary in order for my learners to be eventually able to establish effective communication in lingua franca contexts.

To that end, studying about ELF and trying to realize how developments in this field can be integrated in teaching and learning was more than necessary; in this respect, deep reflection on my teaching practices in relation to the pedagogical implications of ELF in which I was engaged throughout the 'ELF-TEd Project' (Bayyurt and Sifakis, in print) has made me realize that my teaching needed to be re-directed from adopting the traditional Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) paradigm towards adopting ELF-aware pedagogy.

Therefore, I decided to carry out an action research study in my classroom so as to see how such a shift could actually be brought about. Taking into consideration that what matters most is addressing my learners' particular needs, this study aimed at providing answers to the following questions:

a)  Is the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy an appropriate choice in this context based on the learners' learning purposes and attitudes?
b)  If so, what kind of adaptations need to be made as far as teaching methodology and syllabus design are concerned?
c)  What lessons can be learned from the implementation of ELF-aware teaching in this context?

After clarifying what this kind of re-orientation of teaching and learning means to me from a theoretical perspective, a description of the steps I followed throughout this study is provided.

## ELF and ELF-aware pedagogy

As previously mentioned, ELF primarily refers to the language that non-native speakers of English use when they need to communicate with each other. In fact, even though a comprehensive linguistic description of ELF has not been provided yet, research carried out in this field has already highlighted that communication in lingua franca contexts displays several distinctive characteristics which illustrate that successful interactions between NNSs are typically determined by criteria other than those associated with the language as it used by native speakers (NSs; for more information on ELF see e.g. Cogo, 2012; Cogo and Dewey, 2006; Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2009, 2011).

Presenting a thorough analysis of the findings of ELF research lies beyond the scope of this paper, but, nonetheless, discussing those which, from a pedagogical point of view, are most significant is essential in terms of the action research I carried out. In this respect, it has been established that successful intelligibility among NNSs is the most important criterion determining the effectiveness of ELF communication; typically referring to "the extent to which a speaker's message is understood by a listener" (Rajadurai, 2007, p.88), intelligibility in lingua franca contexts actually entails a collaborative interactional process where both interlocutors share responsibility in achieving mutual understanding. In fact, while they jointly negotiate the meaning, they sometimes use several linguistic forms which do not conform to NS norms, regarding, for instance, pronunciation and grammar; when not impeding intelligible communication, such 'deviations' are, however, not viewed as 'errors' but, rather, as manifestations of the creativity and variation inherent in ELF discourse, illustrating the interlocutors' ability to de-construct and re-construct the English language according to their communicative purposes (Cogo and Dewey, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2009).

Furthermore, research has shown that effective communication in lingua franca contexts involves the use of strategies and skills which "are different from those of native speakers" (Graddol, 2000, p.13) and are crucial in terms of maintaining the flow of conversation. In this regard, the process of accom-

modation, referring to the various ways in which ELF speakers use the language in response to the ways that it is being used by their interlocutors (Cogo and Dewey, 2006; Jenkins, 2006), has been highlighted; according to research findings, typical ELF-based communication strategies and accommodation skills include asking for clarification, repeating a problematic utterance, making repairs, rephrasing and paraphrasing, adding contextual information, code-switching and language mixing, backchannelling and so forth (see e.g. Matsumoto, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2004).

Taking into account that most communication nowadays takes place in lingua franca contexts, the pedagogical implications of these findings are indeed crucial and, in my view, they indicate that there is a striking discrepancy between the way the language is taught and learnt –in Greece at least– and the way it is actually spoken around the world. This, in turn, highlights the urgent need for re-orientation of teaching and learning in response to the status of English as *the* global lingua franca of our times.

To this end, challenging, and perhaps abandoning, various traditional assumptions underlying the TEFL paradigm is necessary. As several scholars have argued, TEFL has been dominated by a pervasive ideology –described by Holliday (2006) as 'native-speakerism'– according to which, on the one hand, native speakers are considered the "ultimate authority" (McKay, 2002, p.42) and the most legitimate reference point regarding language use, while non-native ones, on the other, are regarded as "permanent learners" (Hülmbauer, 2007, p.6) who can never claim they own this language. Aiming, therefore, at helping the learners achieve native-like competence by emulating the linguistic behavior of NSs, great emphasis is placed on elements such as 'proper' pronunciation and grammatical accuracy, while any deviation from the 'proper' NS norms is treated as an 'error' which should eventually be 'corrected' (Seidlhofer, 2009). Accordingly, ELF-based skills and competences which are essential in establishing intelligible communication with other NNSs get typically ignored.

In the light of the above, moving towards *ELF-aware pedagogy* may indeed be more appropriate in contexts like Greece where ELF is used as a medium of international communication. Based on the premise that the most significant question is how developments in the field of ELF can be integrated in the teaching and learning process, ELF-aware pedagogy essentially entails a "change in mindset" (Jenkins, 2007, p.238) as far as language teaching is concerned, prioritizing the promotion of skills and competences that enable one

to address the challenges associated with communication with other NNSs in lingua franca contexts; in other words, it involves adopting a "modified pedagogic stance" (Sifakis and Fay, 2011, p.291) by enriching the teaching process with insights gained from ELF research rather than trying to teach ELF as a variety in its own right or even as an alternative to TEFL.

The issue of the ownership of language (cf. Widdowson, 1994) and the corresponding determination of the target model of language use are, therefore, given great emphasis within this perspective. By recognizing that English does not 'belong' only to its native speakers but rather to everyone who uses it and by setting the successful ELF speaker, rather than the native speaker, as the target model for the learners, ELF-aware pedagogy actually aims at helping the learners raise their self-confidence as non-native speakers and make the language their own.

In this regard, after determining whether implementing an ELF-aware pedagogy is indeed appropriate in a specific context, the first step towards achieving this goal necessarily entails raising the learners' awareness of the variety and richness of English language use around the world; this essentially means that learners need not only to be exposed to "as many different authentic NNS ways of communicating as possible" but also to be engaged in actively participating in, and reflecting on, real-life communicative situations (Sifakis, 2004, p.245).

## The action research

Having briefly discussed the motivation for this research and its theoretical underpinnings, the way that I have tried to incorporate an ELF-aware perspective in my own teaching practice through this action research is described in this section.

### *The research context and the participants*

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the action research study was carried out with the sixth-grade class of a primary school in the island of Crete which consisted of twenty-two twelve-year-old learners.

More specifically, the learners' level of competence varied from A1+ to A2+ according to CEFR, and, fifteen of them shared Greek as their mother tongue, while seven were bilingual in Greek and Albanian or Serbian; apart from

state school, where English instruction begins at the 3ʳᵈ grade, they had also been learning English at private language institutions for four years, as well as French or German which are compulsory subjects at Greek state primary schools. Besides being a multilingual and multicultural class, what is highly significant is that the learners did already have some experience in ELF communication, since, as previously noted, they used English with other NNSs outside the classroom environment to a great extent. Furthermore, the fact that I had been their English teacher –and even their personal friend– for four years was more than important in terms of gaining their trust and support and increasing their engagement in this study.

As far as courseware is concerned, state-provided textbooks are used in every state primary school in Greece reflecting the traditional NS-oriented TEFL paradigm; in the one addressed to sixth-grade learners in particular, grammatical accuracy is overemphasized while really few opportunities are provided for developing ELF-based skills and competences. Furthermore, even though non-native speakers are sometimes included in the listening input the learners are exposed to, their discourse is, more often than not, scripted, and hence the variation inherent in ELF talk is not illustrated. As a result, modifying the activities my own learners would be engaged in was necessary, which is actually encouraged in Greek state schools as long as the learners' needs are addressed.

### The research phases

Based on the research questions, this research was undertaken in three main phases, the first one of which aimed at determining whether the learners' learning purposes and attitudes towards ELF-related issues indeed justified the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy in this context. To that end, using semi-structured focus-group interviews (Appendix I), exploratory research was carried out and content analysis of the obtained qualitative data was then conducted, creating categories reflecting the learners' responses.

The findings of this research were highly interesting. In fact, apart from listening to music, watching films, using technological devices such as mobile phones and eventually having a successful academic and professional career, the learners stated that they learned the language in order to be able to communicate with native and especially with non-native users while, for instance, travelling abroad or carrying out business transactions; in addition, talking

with friends from other countries face-to-face or over the internet was found to be a key motivational factor for them, highlighting the need for helping them address the challenges of ELF communication.

Concerning their attitude towards ELF-related matters, special emphasis was placed on the issue of the ownership of the English language. Due to their background knowledge perhaps, not only did they seem to comprehend what this fairly abstract concept means, but also they displayed a surprisingly open-minded attitude towards it; some of them actually argued that claiming that a language belongs only to its native speakers is not "*fair*", since non-native speakers who "*use the language well enough so as to be able to express themselves*" also have "*the right to say that they own the language*".

Furthermore, while discussing the aspects of teaching and learning that, in their opinion, should be modified, most of the learners stated that the emphasis being placed on grammatical accuracy and 'proper' pronunciation usually made them feel "*stressed*"; most significantly, however, they argued that they would like to be exposed to NNS discourse more often, further justifying the need for the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy in this context.

The findings of this exploratory research were actually more than useful not only in terms of realizing that my past teaching practices were rather unsuccessful but also regarding the way I could try to raise their awareness of ELF communication through this action research. The second phase of the case study, therefore, involved designing and implementing two appropriate ELF-aware lesson plans tailored to the learners' learning purposes and views.

Based on the knowledge I had gained while studying ELF literature, as well as on the outcomes of the focus-group interviews, I decided that, at the first lesson, the learners should be exposed to real-life NNS-NNS interactions and be engaged in identifying key features of ELF communication (Appendices II-III). To this end, a pre-/while-/post-listening sequence was followed. More specifically, the pre-listening stage aimed at activating the learners' background knowledge by inviting them to think about their own experience in ELF communication; key features of ELF discourse, like the use of grammatical 'errors' and of pronunciations reflecting L1 norms, were thus elicited through whole-class discussion. In fact, this stage took slightly more time to be completed than initially expected, since the learners got really excited while remembering communicative situations they had participated in reflecting such ELF-based elements.

At the while-listening stage, the learners were exposed to two authentic extracts of interviews with NNSs displaying French and Turkish ELF respectively which I found on the internet. Two activities were included therein, the first one of which was a simple multiple-matching one, where they had to match each speaker to information mentioned at their interviews; the purpose of this activity was, actually, to help them realize that, despite 'mistakes' or 'strange' accents, they could indeed comprehend the message that these ELF users conveyed. That being said, the learners seemed to find French ELF easier to comprehend than Turkish ELF, possibly due to the fact that they were more familiar with French pronunciation. After listening the extracts, though, for the third time, they got accustomed to Turkish ELF as well and managed to answer the question correctly.

The second while-listening activity, which was more demanding, included six multiple-choice questions that engaged the learners in *noticing* specific ELF features displayed in the listening extracts. Their attention was drawn, among others, to the role of intelligibility in effective communication and to the communicative strategies the speakers used while talking; in this respect, they were asked, for instance, to deduce the reasons why the speakers repeated a particular utterance or how they used paraphrase to express their message more appropriately. Not surprisingly, the only question they found rather difficult was the fourth one illustrating that unfamiliar pronunciation may indeed cause intelligibility problems.

Such issues were further elaborated on at the post-listening stage, where, in order for them to link background knowledge to new information, they were asked to think of situations in which the wrong answers in the multiple-choice questions could have been acceptable. Fruitful discussion took place in this stage as well; in order to show how they would use these strategies, for example, some learners performed the roles of ELF speakers in a spontaneous role-playing activity, which actually made me realize how I should design the second ELF-aware lesson.

On the grounds of the first lesson plan, therefore, the second one (Appendices IV-V-VI) aimed at engaging the learners in practicing the strategies they were previously exposed by adapting specific coursebook activities. More specifically, focusing on developing their speaking skills, as well as on helping them practice the Present Perfect tense through game-like activities as the syllabus specified, a role-playing game was designed inviting the learners to participate in ELF communication within the safe classroom environment.

Concerning methodology, Task-Based Language Teaching was adopted in this case, modifying its typical pre-task/task-cycle/language-focus sequence to incorporate, at the end, a specific component where instruction about ELF-related issues could take place. In view of that, both during the game and after it, special emphasis was given on the extent to which intelligible communication among the learners was established; to this end, a member of each group playing the game acted as an 'observer', focusing on the way the players tried to achieve mutual understanding and complete the task successfully. It should also be mentioned that, at the language-focus stage, in order to direct the learners' attention to 'form' regarding Present Perfect, sentences they themselves had employed during the game were used, thus highlighting how their use of the language facilitated or impeded effective communication.

As a matter of fact, while monitoring the way they interacted with each other, I was really happy to realize that they managed to negotiate the meaning quite successfully by employing a range of strategies, such as asking for clarification or repeating problematic utterances. Furthermore, they seemed to enjoy this game and their motivation was not affected by any difficulties they faced during the task, indicating that challenging and meaningful activities need to be used when implementing an ELF-aware pedagogy.

## Lessons learned

Based on the research questions, the third phase of the study involved reflecting on the outcomes of the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy and drawing relevant conclusions. First of all, I should highlight that the learners' positive response throughout the two ELF-aware lessons has actually demonstrated, in my view at least, that not only developing ELF-aware pedagogy is appropriate in this context but also that this action research should perhaps have been carried out a lot earlier. In this regard, helping the learners further develop their ELF-based skills and competences so as to be even more effective in the future is highly important and, therefore, it is essential that I carry out more action research focusing on this issue.

To this end, the knowledge I have gained out of this experience could indeed prove quite useful. In fact, it has been shown that using motivating and meaningful activities that build on the learners' background knowledge and focus on real ELF communication is essential; starting, perhaps, with listening activities that depict ELF accents the learners are more familiar with and, pro-

gressively, engaging them in more demanding communicative situations where the use of more complex strategies is necessary, the bases can be set for helping the learners establish intelligible communication with other NNSs. That said, this action research has made me realize that the sooner one starts incorporating an ELF-aware component in their teaching, the better outcomes will be achieved in terms of the learners' ELF-based performance.

The ELF-aware teacher has thus a quite difficult, yet crucial, task to perform. Indeed, based on my own limited experience in developing and implementing ELF-aware pedagogy, helping the learners become successful ELF speakers requires a lot of time and effort, as well as systematic planning; it entails translating the findings of ELF research into teaching goals according to the particular needs of one's learners and, then, designing appropriate teaching material that aim at raising the learners' self-confidence as non-native speakers. Most importantly, though, it entails recognizing the reasons why one's teaching practices need to change in view of the status of English as a global lingua franca; the significance of ELF teacher education programmes –such as the 'ELF-TEd Project' in the framework of which this study was undertaken– needs to be highlighted.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to describe an action-research study conducted in a primary school classroom in Greece, and to illustrate the way that ELF-aware pedagogy was developed and implemented in this context. In this regard, it has been argued that taking into consideration the learners' background knowledge and engaging them in real ELF communication are crucial in terms of helping them establish effective communication with other non-native speakers.

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**Appendix I – Focus group interviews**

Topics addressed

1. Language learning purposes
   a) reasons for learning English
   b) contexts within which they expect to use English in the future

2. Attitude towards ELF-related issues
   a) Ownership of language
   b) aspects of teaching and learning that they think need to be modified

Procedure
- focus groups consisted of 4 or 5 learners
- Greek was used throughout this research and the questions addressed to the learners were formed in quite simple language; parts of the interviews quoted here have been translated into English, keeping the tone and style as close as possible to the original version
- a non-threatening environment was created, encouraging the learners to openly express themselves

**Appendix II – ELF-aware Lesson 1**

| PROCEDURE | OBJECTIVE | MAT. | INT. | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PRE-LISTENING STAGE** | | | | |
| Step 1 The T welcomes the SS and informs them that they will be having a 'different' lesson this time. She informs them that, after a short introduction, they are going to listen to two short interviews. She highlights that the way people in the interviews are speaking resembles the way they themselves are speaking.[1] | To introduce SS to the topic of the lesson To motivate SS and make them feel comfortable | — | T-SS | 2 mins |
| Step 2 The T presents a world map on the I.B; countries where English is spoken as an L1 are blue, countries where it is spoken as an L2 are orange, while countries where it is spoken as a FL are green. She then asks the SS to identify what is the common element in each set and, if necessary, elicits the answer. | To help SS realize that English is used around the world and raise their awareness concerning the concept of 'English as a global language' | Pic. 1 | T-SS | 3 mins |
| The T holds a purple pen and tells the SS that it represents the way English is used today. She then draws purple lines across the map connecting different countries (e.g. connecting a blue country with a green one, a green one with an orange one etc). She then asks the SS to guess what these lines represent and, if necessary, elicits the answer. | To raise the SS' awareness concerning NS-NS, NS-NNS and NNS-NNS English-medium communication | Pic 1 Pens | T-SS | 3 mins |
| Step 3 The T asks the students to think about situations where they have needed to use English in the past. She asks them to focus on the nationality of their interlocutor and the purpose of their communication. Whenever a student mentions a different country, the T draws a purple line connecting that country with Greece. | To activate the SS' background knowledge and motivate them To raise the SS' awareness concerning communication in lingua franca contexts | — | T-SS | 4 mins |
| The T asks the SS to think about the way non-native speakers use the language. The T focuses their attention on 'mistakes' in language use, in 'strange' pronunciations and in the importance of getting across or understanding one's message | To raise the SS' awareness concerning ELF talk and the importance of mutual intelligibility | | | 4 mins |

[1] Retrieved from the internet site 'BackBone Pedagogic corpora for content & language integrated learning' at http://webapps.ael.uni-tuebingen.de/backbone-search/faces/search.jsp

| PROCEDURE | OBJECTIVE | MAT. | INT. | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **WHILE-LISTENING STAGE** | | | | |
| Step 1 – Introduction<br><br>The T asks the students to listen to the interviews that two non-native speakers of English gave to a reporter. They are then informed that they are going to listen to each of the interview three times; the first time they are going to do Activity 1, while, for Activity 2, they are going to listen to the interviews twice. She also discusses the rubrics of the activities briefly so as to make sure that SS have understood what they are expected to do. | To inform the students about the procedure of the lesson | --- | T-SS | 2 mins |
| Step 2 – Activity 1<br>The T hands out copies of Activity 1 to the SS. She asks them to read the question and she provides clarifications if necessary. | | Act. 1 | T-SS | 1 min |
| Activity 1 is a simple multiple-matching activity, where the SS are asked to match sentences with the speakers' names, based on what they are saying in their interviews. The purpose is not so much to check their understanding but rather to help them realize that, despite grammar 'mistakes' or 'strange' pronunciations, a) they do understand what these people are saying and b) the speakers are getting their message across | To expose SS to uses of English besides NS ones, i.e. to real ELF talk | Act.1 | S | 8 mins |
| After the SS have finished this Activity, the T goes quickly through the answers with the class and proceeds to Activity 2 | | Act.1 | T-SS | 3 mins |
| Step 3 – Activity 2<br><br>The T hands out copies of Activity 2. The SS are given 5 minutes to go through the questions and the T clarifies any ambiguities if necessary. She informs them that they are going to listen to the same interviews twice. | Overall<br>To raise the SS' awareness of specific features of ELF talk and of communication strategies ELF speakers employ | Act. 2 | T-SS | 5 mins |
| There are 6 questions in Activity 2. All of them are multiple choice ones, except Question 4 where SS are asked to fill in blanks in a text and complete a table. In addition, an extract from the interviews accompanies each question. | Question 1<br>To help SS realize that 'mistakes' in language use do not always impede effective communication | Act. 2 | S /<br>S-S | 25 mins |

| At the end, the SS are given 5 more minutes to check their answers with their partner. | Questions 2 and 3<br>To help SS realize the value of repetition and of collaboration in establishing mutual understanding<br><br>Question 4<br>To help SS realize that pronunciation may sometimes cause intelligibility problems<br><br>Question 5<br>To help SS realize that sometimes 'different' pronunciation does not cause intelligibility problems<br><br>Question 6<br>To help SS realize that, there are various ways in overcoming problems that arise when you lack a word and thus maintain the flow of the conversation | | | |

| PROCEDURE | OBJECTIVE | MAT. | INT. | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **POST-LISTENING STAGE** | | | | |
| The T discusses the questions and answers (both right and wrong options) of Activity 2 with the class and, if necessary, she lets the SS listen to the parts of the interviews again that are referred to in the questions. She directs their attention on the features of ELF talk that are illustrated on the interviews and on the strategies that ELF speakers use to achieve mutual understanding.<br><br>When it comes to Question 4 in particular, she asks them to think how they would react in case they were talking to someone and didn't understand a word that person used because of a 'strange' pronunciation. Also, when discussing Questions 1, 2, 3 and 6, the T asks the SS to think of situations where the alternative options (i.e. the wrong answers in these questions) could have been acceptable. | To raise the SS' awareness of specific features of ELF talk and of communication strategies ELF speakers employ | Act. 2 | T-SS | 20 mins |

**Appendix III – ELF-aware Lesson 1: material**

THEY HELPED HELPFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF HUMAN LANGUAGE THE AROUND THE WORLD



Picture 1

### WHILE-LISTENING ACTIVITIES

#### Activity 1

You are going to listen to two interviews with people whose English is not their mother tongue. As you listen, match the phrases on your right with the name of the speaker on your left.

is from France

travels a lot because of her work

works as a schedule manager

loves horse riding

is from Turkey

has been to the French Guyana

works at an export company

has been to Russia

Fanny

Basak

#### Activity 2

You are going to listen to the same interviews <u>two</u> more times. As you listen, try to answer the following questions. You should <u>focus on specific parts of the interviews</u> now, so make sure you understand what each question asks you to do. You have 5 minutes to read the questions and think about them before you listen to the interviews. At the end, you will have 5 more minutes to check your answers in pairs.

---

**Question 1: Fanny's interview**

At the beginning of her interview, Fanny says:

Funny:     I live in the Jura and I love this region because we can... we can do a lot of activities in winter and in summer. We can... we can skiing, fishing, swimming on the lakes and it's a very beautiful region.

As you can see, Fanny has made some 'mistakes' (e.g. in grammar). What is the reporter's reaction? Circle a, b or c.

a) he tells her that she has made some mistakes and corrects her

b) he seems surprised that Fanny can't speak English very well

c) he does not pay attention to the mistakes and continues the interview

---

**Question 2: Fanny's interview**

A few seconds later, Fanny and the reporter are talking about her horse.

Fanny:     It's a Camargue, like the region in the south of France. And it' a very... she's got a very strong character and she's seventeen.... <u>seventeen</u>?
Reporter:  Seventeen years old?
Fanny:     Years old, yes.

Why do you think Fanny repeats the word "seventeen"? Circle a, b or c.

a) she does not know what "seventeen" means and asks the reporter to tell her

b) she does not remember how she could say "seventeen years old" and asks for the reporter's help

c) she wants to check if the reporter is paying attention to what she is saying

---

### Question 3: Fanny's interview

Afterwards, Fanny says that she has gone horse riding in a lot of countries, like England, France, Tunisia and French Guyana. When the reporter asks if her own horse was with her all these times, Fanny says "no".

Reporter:    Every time with your horse?
Fanny:       No.
Reporter:    No.
Fanny:       No, because I can't travel with my horse.

Why do you think the reporter repeats the word "no"? Circle a, b or c.

a) He wants to show Fanny that he understands what she is saying

b) He wants to show Fanny that he does not understand what she is saying

c) He wants to show Fanny that he does not like what she is saying

### Question 4: Basak's interview

At the beginning of her interview, the reporter asks Basak to tell him something about herself. This is what Basak says. There are some words missing from the text.

Basak:       Ok. My name is Basak. I am from Turkey, from Kayseri. I graduated from Erciyes 1) _____, Russian Language and Literature. After than, I got a scholarship from Russian government, and I lived and studied one year in Russia, in Moscow. Then I came back 2) _____. I started to work as a export 3) _____, and I have been working two years in our company, Kaysu Company.

Can you find out which words are missing from the text? Write them on the spaces below.

1) _____    2) _____    3) _____

If there is at least one word you haven't found, put a tick ✓ in the appropriate box.

|  | I didn't understand what she was saying because… | | |
|  | Her accent was 'strange' | I hadn't heard that word before | Other reason |
|---|---|---|---|
| Word 1 | | | |
| Word 2 | | | |
| Word 3 | | | |

### Question 5: Basak's interview

A few minutes later, while talking about her job, Basak uses the words "both" and "month". Pay attention to the way she pronounces these words. What do you think?

Basak:       We are the first company in the world which produce minibar and bottle cooler. The other companies only producing bottle cooler or chest freezer both, but we are producing bottle cooler, chest freezer and minibar.

                       ........

Reporter:    And do you have to travel for your job?
Basak:       Yes, especially for two months I traveled a lot. I went in a month two times to Germany.

Choose the sentence which best describes what you think. Circle a, or b.

a) She pronounces these words in a different way but I didn't have any problem with that. I understood what she said.

b) She pronounces these words in a very different way and I wouldn't understand them if I hadn't read them in the text above.

### Question 6: Basak's interview

At the end of her interview, Basak talks about her education in Moscow.

Basak:       They have a good education in university also. They have a good quality. Teachers are very…

At this point, Basak wants to say that teachers in Moscow are very experienced but she can't remember the 'right' word in English. What does she do then? Circle a, b or c.

a) She asks the reporter to help her.

b) She says what she wants in another way.

c) She uses the 'right' word in Turkish.

**Appendix IV – ELF-aware Lesson 2**

| PHASE | | PROCEDURE | OBJECTIVES | MAT | INT | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre – task | | The T welcomes the Ss and informs them that they will play a game in this lesson. She lets them know that, in order to play this game, they will need to keep in mind what they've learnt in the previous lessons (cf. 'teaching sequence' above). The T distributes handouts with task instructions to each student. She explores the purpose and content of the task with them and helps them understand what they will be required to do. The T draws the Ss' attention to the Poster on the wall and highlights the info contained therein. The T elicits and highlights useful words and phrases they may have to use in the task and, if necessary, she provides an example of the kind interaction required (i.e. she plays the game with one of the students). | • To introduce Ss to the task and motivate them <br><br>• To activate relevant topic or lexical schemata and background knowledge <br><br>• To remind the Ss of the use of Present Perfect Simple and of ELF-related issues they've been exposed to in previous lessons <br><br>• To reduce the cognitive load of the task | Task instructions Poster | T-Cls | 15 mins |
| Task cycle | Step 1 Task planning | The T distributes handouts of the Poster to each group. The Ss of each group decide which of them will play the game and which will be the 'observer'. Then, Students 1, 2 and 3 of each group pick their card from the deck randomly and Student 4 is given his/her 'observer card'. Students 1,2,3 of each group Each one reads his/her card carefully and plans the way he /she will ask and answer questions. Students 4 of each group The T gathers them and makes sure they understand their role in the game. | • To provide time for the Ss to prepare for the task and think of the kind of language required for asking and answering questions <br><br>• To direct Ss' focus on meaning and task completion <br><br>• To further reduce the cognitive load of the task | Task instructions Poster Cards | Ss-Ss <br><br> S <br><br> T-Ss | 5 mins |
| Task cycle | Step 2 Doing the task | Ss 1, 2, 3 of each group engage in the role-playing activity and use any language they can muster to reach their outcome. S 4 of each group observes and keeps notes on his/her observer card. The T monitors the interaction occurring in each group and acts as a facilitator. She encourages all attempts to communication and does not correct any mistakes. | • to engage Ss in a problem-solving activity <br><br>• to help the Ss promote their turn-taking skills <br><br>• to practice the Present Perfect Simple tense <br><br>• to engage Ss in using ELF communication strategies | Poster Cards | Ss-Ss | 20 mins |
| Task cycle | Step 3 Preparing the report | At the end of the game, the members of each group prepare a report on the way they carried out the task and on what their outcome was. Ss are encouraged to keep notes at the back of their card if they find it necessary in order to organize their ideas. | • to promote critical thinking and enhance metacognitive skills <br><br>• to reflect on task performance | Cards | S | 5 mins |
| Task cycle | Step 4 Report | The Ss in groups present their report to the class Discussion and opinion-exchange follows on possible differentiations in the ways the task was completed T acts as a chairperson and provides a summary of the conclusions at the end | • to engage Ss in explaining and justifying their choices <br><br>• to discuss communication problems | Poster Cards | T-Cls | 10 mins |

| PHASE | | | PROCEDURE | OBJECTIVES | MAT | INT | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Post-task | Language focus | Analysis | The T provides feedback on the learners' language performance at the previous stages. The T focuses on the form and use of the Present Perfect Simple employing sentences the Ss used during the task as examples. The T asks the Ss to have a look at Activities A and C on page 76 of their coursebook (Grammar Boxes) and elicits the differences in the way that the Present Perfect Simple and the Past Simple tenses are formed and used. The T then asks the Ss to complete Activity D on p 76 and checks the answers with the class. | • to direct Ss' attention to form and provide opportunities for explicit language instruction | Course book p. 76 | T-Cls | 7-8 mins |
| | | Practice | Ss are invited to form more sentences using the Present Perfect Simple tense based on information contained in the Poster. The T writes their sentences on the board and asks the Ss to write 2-3 of these sentences at the empty spaces on p.76 of their coursebook. | • to offer practice to specific language structures and forms and develop accuracy | --- | T-Cls | 2-3 mins |
| | ELF awareness | | Drawing from the notes that Student 4 of each group has written in his/her 'observer card', the T draws the Ss' attention on features of ELF talk (e.g. 'mistakes') and on communicative strategies that ELF speakers employ (e.g. repetition, collaboration and negotiation of meaning, compensation strategies, accommodation etc). The T explores the way the Ss employed these strategies during their task and invites them to think how their interaction with their partners could have been even more successful. | • to raise the Ss' awareness of key features of ELF talk and of communication strategies ELF speakers employ <br><br>• to help Ss realise that they are ELF speakers themselves, responsible for establishing effective communication with their interlocutors | Cards | T-Cls | 15 mins |

Abbreviations: T = Teacher; Ss = students; Cls = whole class; MAT = teaching material; INT = classroom interaction

## Appendix V – ELF-aware Lesson 2: material

GUESS WHO? POSTER
[extract]

Name: Susan
Nationality: Croatian
Job: teacher
Hobbies: cycling, reading, gardening, playing the piano, taking photos
Other info: has taken part in a safari trip in Africa, has shaken hands with a gorilla, has read more than 100 books

Name: Pablo
Nationality: Spain
Job: musician
Hobbies: playing video games, cycling, watching TV, swimming
Other info: has learnt how to play 10 musical instruments, has written music for 3 films, has taught music to children

Name: Alison
Nationality: Hungarian
Job: journalist
Hobbies: travelling, going to the cinema, reading, swimming
Other info: has visited more than 20 countries, has learnt 4 languages, has written 2 novels

Name: Yuri
Nationality: Russian
Job: doctor
Hobbies: playing tennis, listening to jazz and classical music, surfing the net
Other info: has flown a helicopter, has been to the Doctors without Borders, has worked in Africa

Name: Kathleen
Nationality: Nigerian
Job: actress
Hobbies: going to the theatre, reading, writing novels, swimming
Other info: has lived in New York for 4 years, has played in 2 films and one theatrical play, has learnt 3 languages

Name: Hiroto
Nationality: Japanese
Job: University student
Hobbies: surfing the net, playing the violin, writing music, travelling
Other info: has acted in one theatrical play, has been in South America, has received 2 awards

[* The photos have been retrieved from *Google pictures* – no copyright infringement intended]



Card for Students 1, 2, 3
(example)

This is your card! Read it carefully and try to play your role as best as you can! Remember, this person is not a native speaker of English so it's OK if you make 'mistakes'. However, if you can, try to help your partners understand which person you are (e.g. with your 'accent', body gestures etc.).

When you answer your partners' questions:
* Do not tell them about your nationality. They will find out who you are in a second!
* If you don't understand what they are saying, let them know (e.g. you can repeat their phrase, ask them to say it in another way etc.)
* If you don't know the answer to their question, you can say, for example, "I don't know…", or "Perhaps… ask me more about that issue"

When you ask your partners questions:
* Make sure that they understand what you are asking (e.g. you can repeat the question or ask it in another way)
* Try to concentrate on 2 or 3 photos. This means that you will have to find out first which people they are NOT. For example, your first question can be if they are a man or a woman.
* Make sure that you ask at least 3 questions on their hobbies and 3 on the other information under each photo.

At the end of the game, put a tick (✓) or a cross (✗) in the box.

Name: Nina
Nationality: Finnish
Job: journalist
Hobbies: reading, writing stories, listening to jazz, watching films, travelling
Other info: has received one award for her stories, has worked for a lot of newspapers around the world

Card for Student 4

Observer Card

While the other members of the group are playing the game, you should:
* try to focus on what they are saying and on the way they speak
* try to be silent – do not try to help them when they talk
* remember that English is not their mother tongue – it is not the mother tongue of the people on the photos either.
* remember that your role in the game is very important – try to be as objective as possible.

Read the following questions carefully. While your partners are talking, try to think about the issues that each question asks you. Circle YES or NO and write notes on the lines.

1) Although they made some 'mistakes', did they understand each other in most of the cases?   YES   NO
2) Did they help their partners understand what they were saying? (e.g. by repeating some phrases, saying things in a different way etc.)?   YES   NO
   If yes, how did they do that? _____
3) Did they help their partners understand which person they were (e.g. by using a different 'accent', using body language, giving emphasis on specific words)?   YES   NO
   If yes, how did they do that? _____
4) When they didn't understand, did they let their partners know that? (e.g. by asking their partner to repeat or use other words)?   YES   NO
   If yes, how did they do that? _____

In general, do you think they managed to communicate successfully?
Put a tick (✓) or a cross (✗) in the box.

**Appendix VI – ELF-aware Lesson 2: coursebook activities**

UNIT 7

2. Grammar

A. SIMPLE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE

Do you remember?

HE HAS ACHIEVED SUCCESS WHO HAS LIVED WELL, LAUGHED OFTEN, AND LOVED MUCH.
Bessie A. Stanley

**Grammar Box**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| POSITIVE | I / you/ we / they | have | watched | a musical on TV. |
| | He / she | has | watched | a musical on TV. |
| NEGATIVE | I / you/ we / they | haven't | watched | a musical on TV. |
| | He / she | hasn't | watched | a musical on TV. |
| QUESTION | have | you/ we / they | watched | a musical on TV? |
| | Has | he / she | watched | a musical on TV? |

B. Complete the sentences about Ian Thorpe and the 'Phantom of the Opera':

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ian Thorpe | has _____ | | an Olympic gold medal swimmer. |
| He | **has won** | | both the 200m and the 800m races. |
| He | has _____ | | Australian relay teams to success. |
| He | _____ | broken | _____ so far. |
| He | _____ | | five Olympic gold medals. |
| 'Phantom' | _____ | become | the _____ in Broadway history. |
| It | _____ | | $3.2bn (three point two billion dollars). |

C. Study these examples:

| | | Action | | Time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Present Perfect Simple | Ian Thorpe | **has dominated** | the 400m freestyle. | X |

| | | Action | | Time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Past Simple | Ian Thorpe | **won** | the 400m freestyle. | in 2004 Athens Olympics. |

D. Now fill in the rule with the following phrases:
**we don't know**
**we know exactly**
**we are not interested**

We use the **Simple Present Perfect Tense** to talk about past activities for which we _____ or _____ in exactly when they happened.
We use the **Simple Past Tense** to talk about past activities for which we _____ when they happened.

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3. Practice

A. PAIR WORK
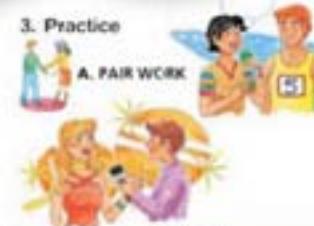
**Student A**
Imagine you're an Oscar winning actor/ actress. Look at the list of activities below and tick two things that you have done but don't tell your partner.
• play Romeo / Juliet
• perform on stage
• play in soap operas
• take part in adventure films
• be on a magazine cover

**Student B**
Imagine you're an Olympic Champion. Look at the list of activities below and tick two things that you have done but don't tell your partner.
• win gold medal(s)
• lose a game/ race, etc.
• make a world record
• be injured during a game/ race, etc.

Have you played Romeo/ Juliet?

Yes, I have. / No, I haven't.

Take turns to ask and find out about each other.

B. THE HOT AIR BALLOON COMPETITION

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE IN YOUR LIFE? WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPERIENCE A TRIP IN A HOT-AIR BALLOON BASKET OVER DISNEYLAND? ENTER OUR COMPETITION! KIDS-HAVE-FUN CLUB

Your class is going to enter the *Hot Air Balloon* competition. Work in groups of 4, take turns and tell the others what you have achieved in your life so far (using the Present Perfect). At the end of the discussion, write on a piece of paper which one should go on the trip. (Don't vote for yourself). Discuss your reasons afterwards.
E.g. I believe John should go because he has...

C. LET'S PLAY!
Go round the class. Ask the other pupils: "Have you ever...?" and complete the game Cards on p.140. Put ONE NAME ONLY in each square. The first one to complete all the squares shouts "Bingo!" and is the winner!

# 18 *Developing error-correction in teaching pronunciation*

*Ezgi Çetin*

## Context and problem

Considering a language cannot be completely taught without any emphasis on the sound system making up the language, teaching pronunciation constitutes a crucial part of ELT. It is a key component in facilitating learners to become more skilled and fluent users of English, and it is surely as essential as any other skill in the acquisition of the language. Studying individual sounds, connected speech, stress and intonation are the areas an EFL learner should be aware of and use effectively to utter phonologically correct speech. Pronunciation was at the center of language teaching when the Audiolingual Approach was popular, with several techniques (such as drills, use of minimal pairs, role-plays, and memorization) developed for getting learners to perceive and identify differences between single sounds at the time (Lightbown and Spada, 2013, pp. 68-71). However, with the introduction and popularity of the Suggestopedia and, afterwards, the Communicative Approach, focusing more on communication and interaction than form, teaching pronunciation seems to have started to fall behind other skills of language teaching, though not fully disregarded. Personally, as a researcher, pronunciation has always been a key aspect of my English language learning and teaching philosophy. This point leads me to carry out research in this area.

The age at which I began to learn English was eleven, fortunately the critical age of puberty helping me to grasp the language in a more natural way. Having become aware that the pronunciation of words was variable thanks to our English teacher at high school, the Phonetics and Phonology course I took at university turned out to be a milestone in my interest in pronunciation. Our teacher's teaching styles and techniques were very efficient in supporting us on the path to become more proficient learners and speakers of English as well as my peculiar enthusiasm about eliciting individual sounds composing a word.

Since that time I have been putting emphasis on pronunciation of English not only as a learner but also as an English teacher and I believe it is an indispensable part of communicating in English more clearly and freely. As Setter and Jenkins (2005) state, "Pronunciation is the major contributor to successful spoken communication, and how anyone learning a language can expect to be understood with poor communication skills is outside of our comprehension."

This research study aimed to evaluate error correction in pronunciation in preparatory classes and to gain insight into the views of novice English language instructors teaching Main Course at preparatory classes at Izmir Katip Çelebi University on the use of pronunciation in their classes. The research questions are as follows:

(1)    What are the error correction strategies used by novice teachers for teaching pronunciation in the classroom?

(2)    What are the novice teachers' perceptions of using pronunciation and treating pronunciation errors in the classroom?

(3)    What are the ways to improve teaching pronunciation in the classroom in terms of the emphasis put on its practice and error correction?

## Literature review

### *Pronunciation and error treatment*

Teaching pronunciation has been an area of interest for research for a long time. Exposing learners to the target language is one of the highlighted focus points of several studies (Genesee, 1991; Bradlow et al, 1997; Wang and Munro, 2004; Harada, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Other studies highlight the effect of learners' aptitude, attitude, and motivation on the acquisition of pronunciation (Carroll, 1981; Guiora, 1972; Stevick, 1976; Snow and Shapira, 1985; Schumann, 1986; Skehan, 1989; Bongaerts et al., 1997; Moyer, 1999).

Errors play a fundamental role in learning English since they indicate that learners are dealing with the language. Keeping the importance of errors in mind, the strategies for error treatment need to be specified clearly so as to make use of the correct one at the right time in the classroom context. Ellis (2001), Jessica Williams (2005), Lyster (2004), and Panova and Lyster (2002) present the terms divided into what Panova and Lyster (2002) call feedback types. (L) stands for learner, and (T) stands for teacher utterances.

### *Types of feedback*

***Recast:*** An implicit type of corrective feedback that formulates or expands an ill-formed or incomplete utterance without directly pointing out that the student's utterance was incorrect.

L: I lost my road.

T: Oh, yeah, I see, you lost your *way*. And then what happened?

***Clarification request:*** An elicitation indicating that the message has not been understood or that the student's utterance included some kind of mistake. A repetition or reformulation is necessary by using phrases like 'I'm sorry?', 'Excuse me?' etc.

L: I want practice today, today. (Grammatical error)

T: I'm sorry? (Clarification request)

***Metalinguistic feedback:*** Provides "comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the students' utterance" (Lyster, 2004, p. 405).

L: I am here since January.

T: Well, okay, but remember we talked about the present perfect tense?

***Elicitation:*** A corrective technique that prompts the learner to self-correct. Elicitation and other prompts are more overt in their request for a response.

L: [to another student] what means this word?

T: Uh, Luis, how do we say that in English? What *does* …?

L: Ah, what does this word mean?

***Explicit correction:*** Clearly showing that the utterance was incorrect, the teacher provides the correct form.

L: When I have 12 years old …

T: No, not *have*. You mean, "When I *was* 12 years old …"

***Repetition:*** The teacher repeats the incorrect part of the student's utterance, usually with a change in intonation.

L: When I have 12 years old …

T: When I *have* 12 years old …

The error treatment techniques stated above will be used later in the data collection part.

Although there are six different strategies for error treatment specified in the literature, I located another strategy one of the teachers was using effectively during my class observation: ***Peer-correction***. In this case, the students

making the ill-formed utterance are corrected by their classmates or peers and interaction takes place between the students.

Other strategies to deal with error treatment were **avoidance**, in which the teacher pretends not to notice the student's error and does not correct it and **delayed correction** which means the teacher postpones error correction in order not to discourage the student from communicating. In delayed correction, the teacher may take notes about the errors during the lesson and handle them at the end of the activity or lesson.

Considering the literature, even though there are many studies on teaching pronunciation, there is a dearth of research conducted on error correction/ treatment in teaching pronunciation. Mourad (2010) specifies the reasons for pronunciation as lack of oral practice and priority in terms of pronunciation. Umera-Okeke (2011) identifies pronunciation errors and suggests treatment methods to improve learners' pronunciation in his study. Likewise, Jerotijevic (2013) investigates Serbian teachers' preferences for corrective feedback in pronunciation and indicates that the most frequently employed strategy is '*recast*' in Serbian EFL classes.

## Procedure

The data collection process began with identifying which teachers to observe. In the first phase the criteria for the choice of teachers was convenience since both the teachers and I had busy teaching schedules at university, requiring me to focus on the teachers teaching at the time I was available for observation. I included not only novice but also experienced teachers in the data collection in order to make comparisons and contrasts between them. However, I had to make a change in the sample of the study that it would not be possible to observe all the teachers I had chosen due to lack of time and it might not prove to be effective. Therefore, I specified the novice teachers with an experience of teaching English for 0-3 years to limit the number of teachers and to save time.

*Table 1: The qualities of teachers participating in the study*

| Teacher | Experience (years) | Institution | Pedagogical formation | A course on pronunciation/ teaching pronunciation |
|---------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| T1 | 2 | Hacettepe Uni./English Language and Literature-Ankara | Yes | Teaching pronunciation |
| T2 | 2 | Celal Bayar Uni./ English Language and Literature-Manisa | Yes | No |
| T3 | 2 | METU/English Language Teaching-Ankara | Yes | Phonetics Teaching pronunciation |
| T4 | 1 | Yaşar Uni./English Language and Literature-İzmir | Yes | No |
| T5 | 2 | Ege Uni./American Culture and Literature-İzmir | Yes | No |

Since I wanted to see them teaching in their own classes, at first I did not notify in advance the teachers of my main focus of observation so as not to manipulate their teaching and the amount of time they allocated for pronunciation activities in Main Course lessons. Having observed four teachers in two weeks and acquiring very little data on the use of pronunciation, most of which were on correcting the errors of students, I decided to resolve this matter by informing teachers concerned about my research focus so that they could get prepared before the observation and place emphasis on the error correction strategies of teachers regarding pronunciation. This change in the direction of my research seemed to be critical as it helped me to get richer data.

I developed a checklist for the observations to see which error correction strategies were exploited for teaching pronunciation in the classroom as well as recording the lessons I observed to gain insight into the details for the data analysis phase. I allocated one lesson per teacher to observe their classes.

*Table 2: Checklist for error correction of pronunciation*

| | Strategies / Techniques | Use |
|---|---|---|
| √ | Recast | |
| √ | Clarification request | |
| √ | Metalinguistic feedback | |
| √ | Elicitation | |
| √ | Explicit correction | |
| √ | Repetition/Drills | |
| √ | Peer- correction | |
| √ | Avoidance | |
| √ | Delayed correction | |
| √ | Any others: | |

Another means of collecting data was through conducting individual interviews following class observations. To achieve this, I designed a semi-structured interview to identify the novice teachers' perceptions and views on the use and correction of pronunciation. The questions included in the interview were as follows:

1. *How many years have you been teaching?*
2. *Which department did you graduate from?*
3. *What kind of courses did you take?*
   a. *What areas were emphasized in your training course?*
      → Teaching grammar, reading, listening, speaking, writing, and pronunciation? What did you learn?
4. *Do you think it is important for teachers to focus on pronunciation? If yes, please explain how much.*
5. *Do you think that Turkish (or other) learners have challenges in learning pronunciation? If yes,*
   a. *Please, elaborate on the reasons: what/how.*
   b. *How do you deal with these problems?*
6. *Do you think it is vital to correct pronunciation errors? If yes, when and how should these errors be corrected?*
7. *What can we (as teachers) do to improve our pronunciation and teaching pronunciation?*

As well as taking notes of the important aspects mentioned by the teachers during the interviews, I recorded all the interviews to further analyze afterwards.

**Findings and discussion**

*Classroom observation*

By using the checklist for error correction strategies and recordings, I began to analyze the data for class observations, which turned out to take nearly 10 hours for me to transcribe as I had to focus on every detail so as not to miss anything related to error correction in teaching pronunciation. However long it might have taken, I finally came up with a figure in which I categorized the error treatment strategies used in the observed classes when focusing on pronunciation.
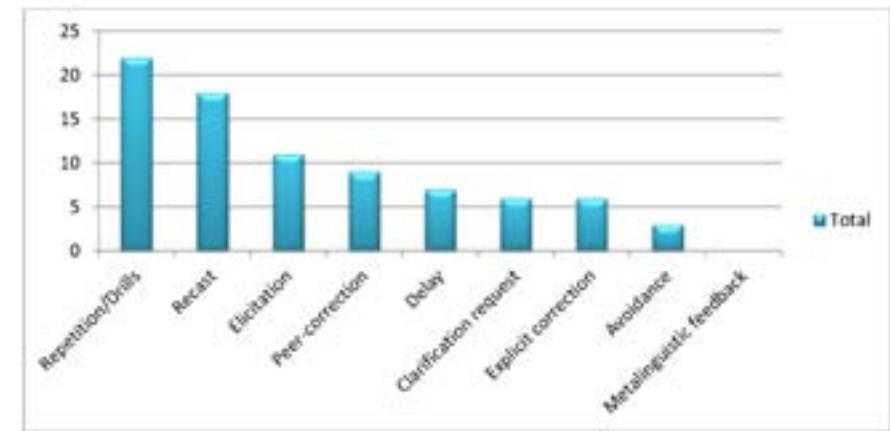


*Figure 1. Error treatment strategies used by teachers in teaching pronunciation*

As *Figure 1* illustrates, 'repetition/drills' and 'recast' were the most commonly exploited strategies by the teachers concerned. Repetitions and drills are strategies that require repeating after what the teacher or the recording utters, while recast refers to correction of the ill-formed pronunciation pattern with the demonstration by the teacher. With all these three strategies handled, it is obvious that most of the pronunciation errors in the observed classes were

treated under the control of the teachers, leading to more teacher-centered classrooms than student-centered ones. This finding overlaps with Behavioristic Theory since learning the correct pronunciation patterns was made up of habit formation through repetitions, drills and taking the teacher as the example for correct pronunciation.

Another prominent finding seen in *Figure 1* is that 'elicitation', 'peer-correction', 'delay', and 'clarification request' were the student-centered error treatment strategies falling behind the teacher-centered ones, suggesting that there was less time devoted to students' self-discovery and self-correction of their own errors or peer-correction of each other's errors. This demonstrates that the observed classes did not include as many cognitive (via elicitation, delay, and clarification request strategies) or communicative (peer-correction) strategies as behavioristic ones (repetitions, drills, and recast) in terms of error treatment in pronunciation.

Also of interest in *Figure 1* is that 'metalinguistic feedback' was not used at all to correct pronunciation errors, meaning that the teachers never made any comments to let students correct themselves through reminding them of prior knowledge on a specific sound (e.g. / ə /) or a rule (e.g. the silent consonant in '*bomb*').

### Interviews

According to the data analysis of the interviews, all the teachers were of the opinion that communication had great importance in teaching pronunciation and that classes should be student-centered in order to achieve high level of accuracy and fluency. Interestingly, though, there was a mismatch between their beliefs and practices of error treatment in pronunciation in the observed classes. Despite favoring the Communicative Approach in practice, they tended towards a Behavioristic Approach with the use of teacher-centered error correction strategies in pronunciation.

Among the teachers observed and interviewed, one shone out as the only teacher adopting the 'peer-correction' strategy for pronunciation errors. She preferred to encourage students to find and correct each other's pronunciation errors many times during the lesson I observed, and expressed her belief in using this strategy as a tool for reinforcing interaction in English by making sure that students build confidence through cooperation and collaboration. Using this strategy consciously to reinforce communication may be related

to her background in studying ELT and taking the Phonetics plus teaching pronunciation courses as part of her education as she was aware of the ways to cope with errors in pronunciation. The other four, who did not take any courses on teaching pronunciation during their studies, did not combine their error correction strategies with communication or interaction.

As another point arising from the interviews was that all teachers believed that Turkish learners face challenges in English pronunciation arising from somewhat similar reasons: the different language structures of Turkish and English, not being native speakers of English, not having an authentic environment where they can produce English in a natural way and lack of importance put on English pronunciation in students' earlier education. The sound /θ/ and the words beginning or ending with the letters 'th' were found to be the most challenging for Turkish students as this sound does not exist in Turkish and it has a different pronunciation. To overcome challenges with pronunciation, most of the teachers informed me that they used repetitions and drills by trying to be a model as well as trying to expose students to authentic environments by watching movies and creating artificial environments.

The recommendations for improving our pronunciation as teachers and teaching pronunciation were made up of the points below:

1. *Putting more emphasis on the phonetic alphabet and repetition,*
2. *Trying to refresh our knowledge by correcting our pronunciation errors,*
3. *Being involved in authentic environments,*
4. *Audio-lingual activities, i.e. watching movies or series, listening to songs in English.*

### Reflection

As regards the research study, I was glad to have invested my time on a topic I have had a professional interest in for a long time and doing this research helped me to develop myself both as an English teacher and a researcher. Therefore, I could handle the whole process in terms of pedagogical learning and methodological learning.

*Pedagogical learning*

Considering my understanding and classroom practices of teaching pronunciation, through the error correction strategies I have focused on so far, I have become more conscious of myself as a teacher treating my students' pronunciation errors in the class. Prior to this research study, I was not much aware of the techniques I could use for error-correction in pronunciation in my teaching and my strategies for correction were mostly getting students to locate their own errors through 'elicitation' and 'clarification request', plus habit formation strategies: 'repetition' and 'drills'. However, I did not allocate enough time to let them work together interactively.

Throughout this research study, I realized that there was a lot more I could do in teaching pronunciation in my classes and that I could give more opportunity to students to interact with each other via peer-correction. Hence, peer-correction is a strategy I will be using in my classes from now on. I am also of the opinion that employing a variety of strategies for error correction in pronunciation might be fruitful in order not to disturb students, which means that even avoidance might help in some communication-based contexts.

*Methodological learning*

I can categorize the stages of my development as a researcher as follows:

a) **Reading relevant studies:** In the beginning, I surely had some background knowledge on teaching pronunciation, but it was a significant step to read relevant studies to broaden my horizon and to foresee what I could do based on pronunciation.

b) **Doing observations:** Upon my decision to observe teachers' lessons, I had to make a choice between the teachers to observe on account of lack of time and ended up with the novice teachers. Gathering insufficient data through observations, I had to change the direction of my research towards error correction in pronunciation. Observing all teachers concerned took me several weeks as I had the chance to observe at most two teachers in one week, which was rather time-consuming.

c) **Running interviews:** Following the observations, interviews with the observed teachers aided me in collecting more effective data as well as comparing teachers' views and practices on error correction in pronun-

ciation.

d) **Analyzing data:** As a researcher, whose prior plans had to change direction, I understood that there is always the likelihood of change; therefore, a researcher should be ready for shifting sands and adapting the process according to new contexts. Making use of two data collection tools for the research proved to be helpful to cross-check the results, so I came to see that one data collection might be misleading in some cases.

The analyzed data demonstrated that there was a mismatch between teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the correction of pronunciation errors. While they believed in the benefits of communication, interaction and student-centered classes, they still used teacher-centered error treatment strategies in pronunciation. This may necessitate a training course to be held for novice teachers at İzmir Katip Çelebi University on how to use error correction strategies in pronunciation in more interactive and student-centered ways. Besides, taking the teachers' background into account, it might be fruitful if the pedagogical training courses at universities included a course on teaching pronunciation as the teacher who took the Phonetics and teaching pronunciation courses during her education was more aware of her strategies of teaching pronunciation than the other three having graduated from the department of English/American literature.

> What contributed me most as a researcher during this process is that I now know that conducting research certainly requires devotion; researchers should be able to move on despite ups and downs.

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## 19 *How can teachers find a happy medium between what students want and their own practices?*

*Esin Yüksel*

### Introduction

There has been a surge of interest in vocabulary teaching in recent years (Thornbury, 2002; Grabe, 2009). This is partly because vocabulary learning can be considered to be a crucial step in learning a second language (L2) since '..without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed' (Wilkins cited in Thornbury 2012, p.13). This implies that a considerable amount of meaning is carried lexically. Therefore it is important for L2 users to build a sufficient repertoire of words in order to express themselves. Achieving this would also get them over the threshold level of L2 since vocabulary learning is essential for developing L2 proficiency (Oxford & Crookall, 1990). Besides, vocabulary growth could facilitate their language learning process as unknown words would be no more an impediment to communicate or understand a text.

Given the importance of vocabulary learning, it is necessary to discuss how vocabulary instruction should take place as it plays a central role in vocabulary learning effectively. It is a central issue because a particular way of instruction determines the type of output or learning by students. However, the type of vocabulary instruction, whether to teach explicitly or implicitly, has been a contentious issue in the history of English Language Teaching (ELT) as there are different approaches to teaching vocabulary. Thornbury (2002) discusses them and shows some techniques a teacher might choose to aid learners to acquire new vocabulary items. This study aims to explore them to teach vocabulary through reading, and tries to find a happy-medium between learners' preferences and teachers' actual practices.

## Context and problem

According to Kachru's (1985) model of World Englishes, Turkey belongs to the expanding circle where English is learnt as a foreign language (EFL). That implies Turkish students do not have immediate communication needs and therefore have little opportunity to practice it outside the classroom. Thus, they need exposure to the language as much as possible in the classroom. Based on my teaching experience, however, these students mostly focus on exams and mechanical exercises and prefer explicit instruction rather than communicative activities. As Turkish students are exam-oriented, they tend to memorize vocabulary and expect reading lessons to be full of explanations of unknown items.

The main problem with vocabulary teaching is that there is a tension between second language (L2) vocabulary learning strategies expected by students and vocabulary instruction adopted by instructors. Most Turkish students expect explicit vocabulary instruction whereas teachers tend to teach implicitly. This tendency of learners may raise the question as to whether vocabulary teaching is just presenting the meaning of a word or using translation. Obviously, it is not; it is more than just introducing new words. Vocabulary teaching can take different forms that will be further discussed in detail.

Having considered issues regarding the vocabulary instruction, I could say that these conflicting ideas have to survive together in the same classroom in order to make both the students and teachers happier with a mixture of explicit and implicit teaching. As Schmitt (2008) suggests, there needs to be a combination of explicit teaching and activities from which incidental learning can occur. Therefore, this study aims at finding a happy medium between what students want and actual teacher practices by applying a proper mix of methods.

## Literature review

### *How important is vocabulary?*

Mastering the L2's vocabulary plays an important role in learning a foreign language. Wilkins summed up the importance of vocabulary when he compared the grammatical knowledge that students might possess. In the following quotation by Wilkins, cited in Thornbury (2002, p.13), this emphasis is made clearly.

> If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost everything with words!

The following quotations, on the other hand, highlight the contributory role of vocabulary in fostering grammatical knowledge.

> Vocabulary knowledge can also help and facilitate grammar acquisition since "knowing the words in a text and conversation permits learners to understand the meaning of the discourse, which in turn allows the grammatical patterning to become more transparent" (Ellis, 1997 cited in Schmitt 2000, p.143). Therefore, in the twentieth century there was the shift of focus "from grammar as the central anchor of language teaching to the lexicon" (Hasbun, 2005, p.2) which I now move to.

It is also worth noting that vocabulary is also closely related to reading as a skill. The mutual relationship between reading and vocabulary is inevitable as lexical knowledge is the driving force behind reading ability. As Schmitt (2000, p.150) points out, "reading is an important part of all but the most elementary part of vocabulary programs". The strong relationship between vocabulary and reading is also shown in a various research studies (Schmitt, 2000; Grabe, 2009). One last word related to the perfect correlation between reading and vocabulary is that just as a bird cannot fly without wings, reading comprehension is not possible without a proper grasp of related vocabulary.

## Incidental and explicit learning of vocabulary

As Schmitt (2000) suggests, explicit and incidental learning are the two approaches to vocabulary acquisition. In the former words are learned through direct instruction, whereas in the latter knowledge of words is acquired incidentally. From my point of view there needs to be a combination of approaches in the classroom since explicit instruction is necessary with beginner level students. It is required to form a basis of knowledge, especially with low level students whose interlanguage system (a transitional system reflecting the learners' second language knowledge) is being constructed. Nation (1995) proposes that "the most frequent 2,000 words are essential for any language use, and so

are worth the effort required to teach and learn them explicitly". This is also supported by Schmitt (2000, p. 144) who notes that "the 2.000 level is only a beginning and teaching words explicitly beyond this level can still supply sufficient benefits that warrant the time expended". However, I do not want to be misunderstood. This does not imply teachers should teach explicitly entirely, as an explicit approach includes traditional ways such as dictionary use, translation and mechanical exercises, and so students may get used to spoon feeding and become lazier. As Thornbury (2002, p. 77) exemplifies, when there is over-reliance on translation, learners do not work very hard to access the meaning. This implies that it is less memorable. It is a case of "no pain, no gain". Therefore teachers should first try to make students discover the meanings of words by eliciting them, teaching them in context or any other discovery work, and encourage learners to work out the meanings themselves. This implicit manner of teaching makes the words more meaningful and serviceable.  In the long-term incidental learning is also important for at least two reasons:

- Meeting a word in different contexts expands what is known about it (improving quality of knowledge).
- The additional exposures help consolidate it in memory. (Schmitt 2000, p.146)

As Schmitt (2000, p.121) points out, "For second language learners at least, both explicit and incidental learning are necessary, and should be seen as complementary". Explicit instruction is necessary to reach a threshold level. However, we cannot underestimate the value of implicit teaching and incidental learning since they make words more memorable. Thus, we need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

## Procedure

### *Data collection*

This study aimed to address the following:
- What do students think about the combination of methods applied in the classroom?

The first step was to identify the vocabulary size of the participants with a pre-test. The test form examined in this study consisted of 10 items from each 1000-word level for a total of 20 items which were developed by Na-

tion (2006). The purpose of the pre-test was to check whether students were ready for the combination of approaches or not. The participant's total score was multiplied by 100 to get their total vocabulary size. Having analyzed it, the instructor taught four units following the textbook and special attention was paid to the reading section. Additional exercises of the types suggested by Thornbury (2002) were designed for every unit. These included inferencing from context, matching exercises and dictionary use. The vocabulary was first presented in the context or taught implicitly, so that students could work out the meaning for themselves, and then it was reinforced by explicit activities. Data for this study was gathered through an open-ended questionnaire after each unit was taught. The questionnaires were administered to 16 participants studying English as a foreign language at A2 level. There were five statements in the questionnaire where students were expected to respond with 'Yes', 'No', or 'Not sure'. Responses were then calculated on the basis of percentage. The data coming from open-ended questions were applied to content analysis and emergent themes were listed (shown in Figure 2). This study adopted both a qualitative and quantitative approach in terms of the method used as interpretations and percentages were employed during data analysis.

## Findings and discussion

Vocabulary size test designed by Nation (2007) was conducted to ensure the readiness of students for a combination of methods applied in the classroom.
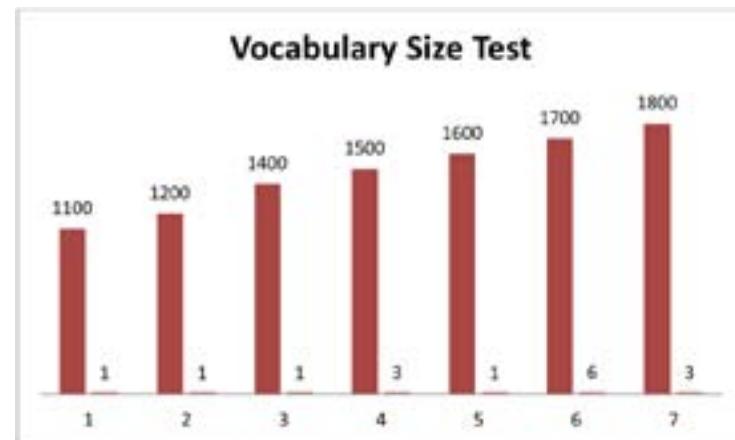


*Figure 1. Vocabulary Size Test*

The collected data shown in *Figure 1* demonstrates the vocabulary level of the participants before conducting the study. The column provides an estimate vocabulary size that each participant has out of 2000 word family level. The data illustrates that the vocabulary level of the participants is beyond 2000. This level is only a beginning, and "teaching words explicitly beyond this level can still supply sufficient benefits that warrant time expended" (Schmitt 2000, p.144). However, Nation (1990) notes that "there comes a point where words occur so infrequently that it is better to use teaching time to help students acquire the strategies necessary to learn the words on their own". Therefore, this study aimed at using both explicit and implicit approaches. Having considered my classroom practices with the participants, I felt that although they were beyond 2,000 word level, they were likely to have the lexical resources necessary to cope with the combination of approaches in reading.

According to Figure 1 the research question examining the students' thoughts about the combination of methods applied in reading represents the learners' positive attitudes towards mixed methods I employed in the classroom.

Figure 2 shows the responses to statements about vocabulary teaching in reading and the number of students corresponding to each category.
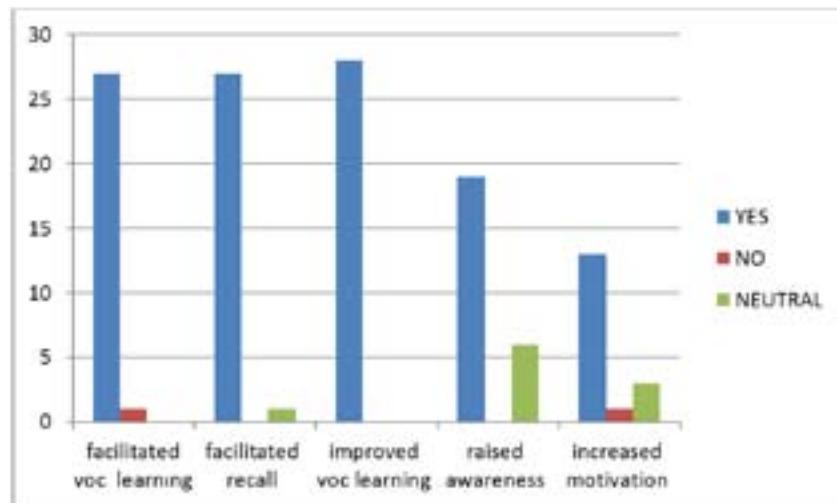


*Figure 2 Responses to statements about vocabulary teaching in reading*

Figure 2 illustrates the frequency of positive answers to the six statements evaluated in four groups: facility with vocabulary learning, facility with recall of the content, improvement in vocabulary learning and increase in motivation. As is clear from the data, there is a general positive trend towards the use of both explicit and implicit approaches in reading whilst teaching vocabulary. Results indicate students are satisfied with the combination of methods - implicit and explicit instruction – one that facilitates their vocabulary learning.

## Reflection

Through this teacher-research, observing learners' attitudes towards different approaches made me gain self-awareness of my practices by reflecting upon them. I realized how important is to tailor the lesson regarding the needs and expectations of my students. I am now more capable of being able to make sense of what is going on in my classroom, which implies understanding students' needs and expectations and being able to respond to them. When the expectations of both students and teachers are met, they are more likely to be motivated.

I have also started thinking critically about my classroom practices which helped me to develop my own learning and teacher framework. The critical approach towards the manner of vocabulary instruction affected my beliefs about teaching vocabulary. Before conducting this study I had always thought implicit instruction was the best style of teaching. However, this study made me realize different ways of teaching vocabulary. I am now aware that it is sometimes not enough to employ a single approach in language teaching, especially with lower level students. I have learnt that teachers should listen to their inner voices regarding the unique atmosphere of their classrooms and decide whether to teach explicitly, implicitly or maybe a combination of both.

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# 20 *Exploring how to integrate English culture into my teaching practice*

### *Duygu Işık*

## Introduction

Having been an English language teacher for five years, I have always felt something missing in my language classes. Although they have had an intensive English language learning programme, students have always had problems about internalizing the language and its components. They have known almost all the grammar rules theoretically or memorized a large amount of vocabulary or some useful expressions, phrasal verbs and so on. However, when it comes to practice they have generally had difficulty. The problem is either incorrect or inappropriate usage of grammar rules or words or not even reflect their knowledge and disuse them. One of the most disturbing things that I have experienced is having upper-intermediate level students who still disuse or overuse the third person singular "-s". Another one is trying to teach students useful expressions they can use in daily life and when the perfect time to use the expressions comes, seeing no students using them. That is why it was really very pleasing and surprising when I see students using the rules or expressions although it was what it normally had to be. The frequency of the reverse situations was high and it made me think about the reason behind the problem.

After examining my classes I deduced that my students' lack of effective language learning was the result of their not being integrated or familiar with the target culture. I often observed students who tried to find a way to escape reading and comprehending a text, avoid using different structures and expressions in their writing or speaking. They also had problems when they listened to a text related to target culture and daily routines. It was clear that when they felt like a stranger to the topics covered they were unable to comprehend it completely and unwilling to use it in further productive activities. This fact led me to find a way to break my students' chains and make them more interested, related and integrated with the target culture. The aim of this study is to find

whether integrating target cultural elements into language teaching makes language learning more effective or not.

There are two research questions in this study;

1. Does integration of target cultural elements into language teaching make language learning more effective or not?
2. What are students' opinions about the effect of target cultural elements in language learning?

## Literature review

Culture in language teaching has always been a controversial topic in ELT. Although it is accepted that culture and language cannot be separated, some people find it unnecessary to teach culture. The conflict is not only about the use of culture but about which culture to use in language teaching. While some group of people are in favour of using home culture, others believe it is important to teach target culture and some others support teaching both.

Before we discuss whether it is important to teach or integrate cultural elements in language teaching we should know what culture means. It is really not possible to put culture in only one definition or under one title because this concept is related to many disciplines and means somehow different things for each discipline. Two American anthropologists, Kroeber & Kluckhon, have identified 164 different definitions of the term culture (Özkalp, 1989; Sabuncu & Emre, 1995; Gao, 2006, cited in Damar, 2013). It shows the complexity of the concept which is not possible to explain in relation to one discipline or one aspect.

Culture is dealt with from different perspectives in language teaching. The first is the concepts as big "C" and small "c". Big "C" means the visible part of a culture such as food, sports, popular culture, art, literature and so on while small "c" refers to the invisible part of a culture such as cultural norms, communication styles, verbal and non-verbal symbols. While teaching a language both are used to enhance language learning and teaching. In this study, also, culture is accepted as both big and small "c".

Another explanation about culture comes from Alptekin (1992) as he says there are two types of knowledge that make people understand a language. The first is systemic knowledge that includes syntactic and semantic or so-called "formal" aspects of language. The second one is schematic knowledge, knowl-edge that is learnt socially. When these two kinds of knowledge progress at the same time, as is the case in native language learning, systemic knowledge is supported by schematic knowledge and as a result, meaningful language learning occurs. When a person tries to learn a language with its systemic but without schematic knowledge, they meet their need of schematic knowledge from their already established one which belongs to their native language. The reason why students cannot internalize a language is the inconsistency of these two types of knowledge. When schematic knowledge does not fit systemic knowledge, the syntactic and semantic rules do not have a complementary environment that helps a learner to visualize it and these rules remain incapable of helping the learner to understand and use the language. As a result effective learning does not occur and learners cannot or do not remember to use the rules they learn although they have enough theoretical knowledge.

When we look at the literature about target culture teaching we can see many studies dealing with culture issue. To start with, Jingxia (2010) was one of the people who supported the importance of incorporating target cultural elements into language teaching. She states that a learner without cultural knowledge would falter in case of a direct interaction with a native speaker of English. To prove her idea and to see the current situation of Chinese universities on culture teaching, she investigates the place of culture teaching in Chinese universities. The points she wants to find out are the state of Chinese students' cultural awareness & competence, culture teaching in EFL classes and the best methods of culture teaching. The results reveal that students find their culture learning and so competence inadequate although they are willing to learn about target culture. When it comes to the teachers, they state that culture teaching is important in language teaching for successful communication. They, however, reveal that they do not often introduce cultural elements in class. All the participant teachers also agree that linguistic knowledge is more important than culture teaching. Finally, they show dissatisfaction with the amount of cultural elements in textbooks.

Another piece of research was conducted by Yılmaz (2006) who examined the opinions of students on the role of culture in EFL. He developed and applied a questionnaire to senior Anatolian high school students from three different cities. Participants stated that they gave importance to learning English for instrumental purposes, practicing features and skills of this language and including international topics. In addition most participants supported the

notion of teaching target language culture integrated with English language teaching although a significant number disagreed or partially agreed.

Önalan (2005) studied EFL teachers' perceptions of the place of culture in ELT. He used a written survey questionnaire and an interview to collect data from Preparatory School teachers. Participants stated that they generally taught the differences between target and native culture in their classes. In addition the responses of the teachers revealed that they had positive attitudes towards using culture in their teaching but some stated that there should not be too much target cultural information so as not to cause boredom or sympathy towards it. Although participants had positive attitudes results showed that teaching the target culture was not among their prior objectives. When it comes to their students' point of view they thought their students had a positive attitude towards target culture learning.

To check teachers' perceptions of culture Bayyurt (2006) also made a semi-structured interview with non-native (Turkish) teachers on issues such as the concept, content and context of culture, and advantages & disadvantages of being non-native English speakers. The results show that culture and language were connected for most of the participants but they preferred using different cultures (international culture) in their classes. Participants also stated that target culture was indispensably involved in their lessons and was important to make students aware of differences between native, target and other cultures. However, there was not agreement among the participants on whether to use cultural content in foreign language education or not. When it comes to their being non-native English speakers, participants agreed that their success in learning English affects students positively.

All these studies were important for me to shape my idea as to how to conduct my research.

## Procedure

In the research the participants were 20 students at preparatory school of İzmir Katip Çelebi University. Their level of English was pre-intermediate.

As a first step, a pre-test was applied to the participants. In the pre-test, there were two questions;

---

1.  Do you know anything about British/American culture?

    YES                                    NO

2.  Does (not) knowing British/American culture affect your language learning? Why and How?

---

The aim of the test was to see students' existing knowledge about target culture and their opinion about the effect of knowing or not knowing it. After adminstering the pre-test I started to teach the students target cultural elements. That is why an extensive search was done before starting the culture teaching process. Some materials were found that could help students to have an idea about target culture.

NEF Practical English Part: In the students' course book "New English File Third Edition" there were parts after each two units named "Practical English". In these students were taught about British/American cultures by means of an American girl and a British boy's love and life stories. These parts were both culturally educatory and engrossing so students learnt about them in a funny way. In practical English parts students learnt not only the cultures but some differences between these two cultures.

Sit-coms: Another method that was used for target culture teaching was sitcoms. As students generally like visually-attracting materials and sitcoms are short and humorous, students learnt about target culture

Online quizzes about target culture: Students were given quizzes that were about target culture. The source for the quizzes was a website called "esolcourses.com". The quiz parts were applied in a competitive way so that students were more enthusiastic to answer the questions and the answers were more permanently learnt compared to classic teaching methods.

Proverb and Idiom Teaching: In these activities, students were given a proverb or idiom and asked about the occurrence of them. Students worked as pairs and groups.

Videos, Listening &Reading texts: Students watched listened or read authentic materials about target culture. These materials were about geography, currency, leisure activities, English language, new words, and manners of peo-

ple and so on. After each material, activities were done to support and reinforce culture teaching.

Students were given a target culture education with the materials above for ten weeks. Despite their busy pacing, each week they did three or four culture activities. The activities usually ended up with a related writing task. After each there was an evaluation part for about 5 to 10 minutes when students evaluated their learning and summarized what they had learnt in an oral way.

At the end of week ten students were given a post-test (See Appendix) in which they were asked about the effect of their culture learning on their language learning.

### Post-practice interview

Have these activities that teach cultural elements of English influenced your English learning?

Students' answers were collected and put into categories as the conclusion illustrates.

### Findings

In the pre-test students were asked two questions as to whether they knew about British/American culture and what their opinion was about the effect of culture knowledge on their language learning. Here are the results:

| Do you know anything about British/American culture? | |
| --- | --- |
| YES | NO |
| 6 | 14 |

70% (14 out of 20) stated that they did not have knowledge on British or American culture while 30% (6) of them claimed to have knowledge about target culture. When they were asked their opinion about the effect of culture knowledge on their language learning, their answers were various. Some supported culture learning as a facilitator of language learning by stating that:

- Culture is important in terms of understanding native speakers' behaviours, attitudes or using and idioms and proverbs appropriately

- We do not forget what we have learnt and it is more permanent because we learn through experience not memorization
- Culture is the most important factor to learn a language
- We cannot understand the jokes and we can misunderstand people because of this we cannot realize whether they have good or ill will
- Apart from idioms and proverbs, we can have extensive vocabulary knowledge by learning target culture
- When we do not about culture, we cannot understand what a mimic, body language or intonation mean
- If you have the full command of the target culture, you will have the full command of the target language, too.
- Culture and language are like hand in glove. You cannot understand one without the other

Not all the answers were positive. There were some that were opposed to the culture learning such as:

- Culture and language are totally different. I saw nobody starting to learn a language by learning its culture
- I do not think that knowing the cuisine or education system of a country would help learn its language
- Culture does not affect spoken language and a foreigner can understand a native or vice versa
- At school we learn grammar not culture and we can speak English, so culture is not important
- Language learning is not about knowing target culture; it is about being willing, motivated and inclined to learn it.

After the pre-test and following culture teaching activities a post-test was applied to see whether culture teaching resulted in any changes in their language learning and opinions about the effects of culture learning. The results are presented in the table below:

*Table 2: Post-test results*

|  | Disagree | Not sure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Familiarising with English culture made **reading comprehension** easier for me | 2 | 4 | 14 |
| 2. Familiarising with English culture helped me **remember the content of authentic texts** | 2 | 3 | 15 |
| 3. Familiarising with English culture helped me improve my **vocabulary** | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| 4. Familiarising with English culture helped me improve my **speaking** | 2 | 3 | 15 |
| 5. Familiarising with English culture helped me improve my **listening** | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| 6. Familiarising with English culture increased my **motivation** to learn English | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| 7. Familiarising with English culture made **writing** easier | 2 | 2 | 16 |

For the first statement, 70% (14 out of 20) agreed that their reading comprehension improved thanks to culture learning while 20 % (4 out of 20) were not sure about it. 10% (2 out of 20), however, disagreed that culture learning had positive effects on their reading skills. In the second statement, the students were asked about the effect of culture learning on their remembering the content of authentic texts. 75% (15 out of 20) agreed, and 15% (3 out of 20) were unsure while 10% (2 out of 20) disagreed the positive effect of culture learning on their authentic knowledge remembering. For the third statement which was about the effect of culture learning on vocabulary improvement, 80 % (16 out of 20) agreed, 10% (2 out of 20) were unsure while the other 10 % (2 out of 20) disagreed. The next statement was about the effect of culture learning on speaking skills. 75% (15 out of 20) agreed that culture learning improved their speaking skills, 15 % (3 out of 20) were not sure about such an effect while only 10 % (2 out of 20) disagreed.

The fifth one which was related to the culture effect on listening skills, 50% (10 out of 20) students agreed while the rest was divided as 25% (5 out of 20) were unsure and the other 25% (5 out of 20) disagreed. The seventh statement asking the culture effect on writing skills got 80% (16 out of 20) agreement, 10% (2 out of 20) indecision and 10% (2 out of 20) disagreement from students.

When it comes to the last statement that asked the culture effect on students' motivation, (16 out of 20) agreed that learning target cultural elements increased their motivation to learn English, 10% (2 out of 20) stated they were unsure and the rest 10% (2 out of 20) stated that learning target cultural elements did not increase their motivation.

After the post-test they were also asked whether the activities that taught cultural elements of English influenced their learning English. The answers were generally on behalf of the effectiveness of target culture learning. The students stated that:

- They were much better at understanding the native speakers of English
- As they knew that there were some cultural differences, they did not judge or stigmatize native speakers of English with their own cultural norms or misunderstand them
- They were better at using idioms or proverbs or making jokes appropriately
- As they learnt them in context, students had a permanent vocabulary knowledge
- They had fun while learning through culture as they did not only learnt grammar rules or a list of words to memorize
- They were more enthusiastic and volunteer to participate in the activities, so they had a higher level of motivation.

In contrast with the majority, there were some students who stated that:

- They did not want to learn about the target culture
- They did not find it useful or effective to learn about the target culture
- Instead of wasting time with the target cultural stuff, they could learn more grammar rules or do some more exercises about them.

## Discussion

It can be seen through the answers that learning target cultural elements helped students learn English better and easier although just a few students did not find it useful. When we check the post-test we can see that 80% students agreed that learning target cultural elements improved their speaking and writing skills and motivation. 75% also stated that they got better at remembering the context of authentic texts and speaking skills. 70% students said to get better at reading comprehension. The only skill that had 50% agreement about the improvement was listening. Only half of the students agreed that target culture learning improved their listening skills.

By looking at the statistics I can claim that learning target cultural elements had a positive impact on speaking, writing, remembering the context, reading skills and motivation. Students showed a marked improvement on this skills when they started to learn about target culture. They were good at using the right expressions and a good range of words in their writing, expressing the right mimics or attitudes in their speaking activities or role plays, and were able to understand even complex texts faster than before. They were also willing to do some tasks about target culture and had fun from these activities. Although only half of the students stated that their listening skills improved thanks to target culture learning, I observed improvement in all of them including the ones who claimed to have no improvement after target culture learning. The reason may be that they became familiar with the target culture and it helped them to have permanent and meaningful learning.

Apart from language skills, learning target cultural elements made them more motivated to learn. Unlike most of the time when students did not want to do anything related to lesson at all, I saw students who really wanted to learn. Instead of having to memorize formulas of grammar structures, they liked learning English with real-like activities.

## What I gained

Although we as language teachers are all in agreement that culture and language are inseparable, we do not give enough importance to it and culture is not integrated enough in our lessons. The result is generally a huge deal of grammar and vocabulary knowledge, full of theoretical knowledge without practical skills and thus confused, bored and unmotivated students, because students are like a cook who has a lot of the ingredients and gets more day by day but knows nothing about cooking. What we should do is not to give more ingredients but the recipe. If not, they either do not cook anything so the ingredients decay or use wrong the ingredient for the wrong meal such as an eggplant for cheesecake. In my opinion, what we lack of in our language teaching is this "the recipe".

In my teaching profession, for five years, I have always supported using cultural elements in our classes and claimed to know the importance of target culture teaching on students' learning. With this research, however, I realized that my ideas on target culture teaching only remained in theory. When I was asked I was totally in favour of teaching it, however, it was not the case in practice. I was like the teachers I criticized; I was one of the teachers who did not teach how to cook, who did not give students the recipe but just gave the ingredients and asked for a good meal. What is more, I was unfair towards my students because I really got angry when they did not understand or use what I taught. All in all, I had a chance to have a deep insight of my teaching and myself, as a teacher. It was important to see my weaknesses and find a solution for them.

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**Appendix**
**POST-TEST**

|  | Disagree | Not sure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.   Familiarising with English culture made reading comprehension  easier for me. |  |  |  |
| 2.   Familiarising with English culture helped me remember the content of authentic texts |  |  |  |
| 3.   Familiarising with English culture helped me improve my vocabulary |  |  |  |
| 4.   Familiarising with English culture helped me improve my speaking |  |  |  |
| 5.   Familiarising with English culture helped me improve my listening |  |  |  |
| 6.   Familiarising with English culture increased my motivation to learn English |  |  |  |
| 7.   Familiarising with English culture made writing  easier |  |  |  |

# 21 Vocabulary teaching through readers: "close your dictionaries and open your minds"

### İlknur Kurtulmuş-Canan Önal

## Introduction

Whenever we ask our students to read a text, they grab their smart phones to check the meaning of the unknown words rather than trying to guess it from the context. With this 'dictionary interruption' reading a text can sometimes be a torture both for students and teachers. We can observe that our students sometimes lose concentration and drift away from the real purpose of reading. The reading lesson becomes a translation class because they feel the need to look up each unknown word in the dictionary. Therefore, we usually feel disappointed to see our students struggling. We might even think that this stems from laziness because students believe it is the easiest way. However, are we able to show our students this is actually a short-term solution rather than an effective way to learn unknown words in reading texts?

As we observed, the general expectation of our students from a reading class is to learn the target vocabulary in an isolated way and then start reading. That is, they always demand the Turkish definitions of target words before reading rather than trying to infer meaning from context. Having this as our starting point, we decided to create awareness amongst our students about being independent readers and help them realize that new vocabulary can be learned more effectively and retained longer if they discover the meaning in context. To achieve our goal we used a variety of different vocabulary teaching techniques by combining implicit and explicit activities in our extensive reading classes. As our students are accustomed to learning vocabulary in an isolated way, it would be too radical to solely use implicit activities in the classroom. Therefore, we took the student needs and preferences for vocabulary learning into consideration and decided to include contextualized implicit and explicit vocabulary activities. We found that contextualized implicit and explicit vocabulary teaching we integrated into the lesson has a positive impact both on vocabulary learning and overall comprehension of extensive reading.

**Literature review**

Language ability is divided into four skill areas of listening, reading, speaking and writing; vocabulary is one of the key elements which connect the four skills in foreign language learning. As Wilkins (1974) states:

> "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed"

Wilkins argues that learners should have a good deal of vocabulary knowledge and learn new words constantly in order to communicate effectively. Therefore, we chose our extensive reading classes to conduct this study because we believe extensive reading is one of the important ways of learning and developing vocabulary knowledge. Extensive reading is seen as a powerful strategy by Bell (2001), who states:

> "Extensive reading is a type of reading instruction program that has been used in ESL or EFL settings, as an effective means of developing reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development."

Learners are also exposed to new words repeatedly while they are doing extensive reading, which enables them learn vocabulary by guessing the meaning in a context rich text. Learning occurs more effectively as a result of frequent encounters with the same word in different contexts throughout the book. Similarly, Gatbonton & Segalowitz, (2005) state:

> "Learners encounter the same words over and over again in context, which result in vocabulary learning"

In the extensive reading class we aim to guide students to do extensive reading rather than assign them to read at home. Students are expected to read certain chapters extensively and discuss the content and engage in vocabulary activities during the lesson. Activities are carefully designed by the teachers as a combination of implicit and explicit vocabulary teaching in order to foster vocabulary learning within the context and to minimize the use of dictionary as a source of vocabulary translation. In Table 1 we present the differences between implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction to elaborate on the principles and prepare ourselves for such classroom practices with reference to several studies.

*Table 1. A comparison of explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction*

| EXPLICIT vs. IMPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION | |
|---|---|
| Explicit | Implicit |
| √ Focuses attention directly on the information to be learned | √ Using language for communicative purposes (Schmitt, 1988) |
| √ Focuses on making the learner notice new vocabulary by doing exercises such as learning vocabulary lists, word building games and using various strategies (Nation, 1990). | √ The meaning of a word is acquired totally unconsciously as a result of abstraction from repeated exposures in a range of activated contexts. (Ellis, 1994, p.219) |
| √ Applying metacognitive strategies to remember new vocabulary, to consolidate a new understanding by repetition…' (Ellis, 1994, p.219). | √ More contextualized, thus enables learners to learn more words and can boost their vocabulary retention (Hunt and Beglar, 2002). |
| √ Can take place both intentionally and incidentally Laufer and Hulstijn (2001, p.11) | √ Can only be incidental, which is defined as "without learners' awareness of an upcoming retention test, or without learners' deliberate decision to commit information to memory Laufer and Hulstijn (2001, p.11) |
| √ A variety of techniques used such as, pre-teaching vocabulary words, repeated exposure to words, keyword method, word maps, root analysis, restructuring reading materials, etc. | √ Incidental learning and context skills are used in the exercises. |

The different aspects of implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction in Table 1 gave us an opportunity to identify the specific characteristics of the activities we were going to design. We paid attention to these differences while preparing materials for each lesson.

**Research Questions**

As we wanted to see the degree of effectiveness of the blended implicit and explicit activities in students' vocabulary learning, we asked the following three questions:

1. What is the students' target vocabulary knowledge before they read the reader?
2. What is the students' target vocabulary knowledge after they read the reader?
3. What are the students' views on contextualized activities before and after the reader lesson?

We aimed to find answers to question 1 and 2 by analyzing the target vocabulary lists for which we asked students to produce a sentence for all words they knew. We found answers for question 3 by analyzing student feedback.

## Procedure

The research was carried out in Gediz University Preparatory School in İzmir, Turkey. Our preparatory school system was based on a modular system and the students were required to complete four levels (A1, A2, B1, and B2) successfully in order to be able to start their faculties. There were four quarters in each level, each consisting of eight weeks. This study was conducted in two separate A2 classes by two instructors. Students were required to read two readers, each of which were completed in four weeks. At the end of four weeks students were tested from the assigned book. Every week they had two hours of reading classes in which they were expected to read the assigned pages extensively. The two hours of instruction each week consisted of a combination of contextualized implicit and explicit vocabulary activities. According to Elley and Mangubhai (1991), successful extensive reading programs should integrate reading with the respective four skills such as speaking, listening, and writing tasks. They should also encourage students to read more over a course of time. Therefore, we aimed to design our classes to include all four skills in order to help students master their target within all aspects as illustrated in the figure below:
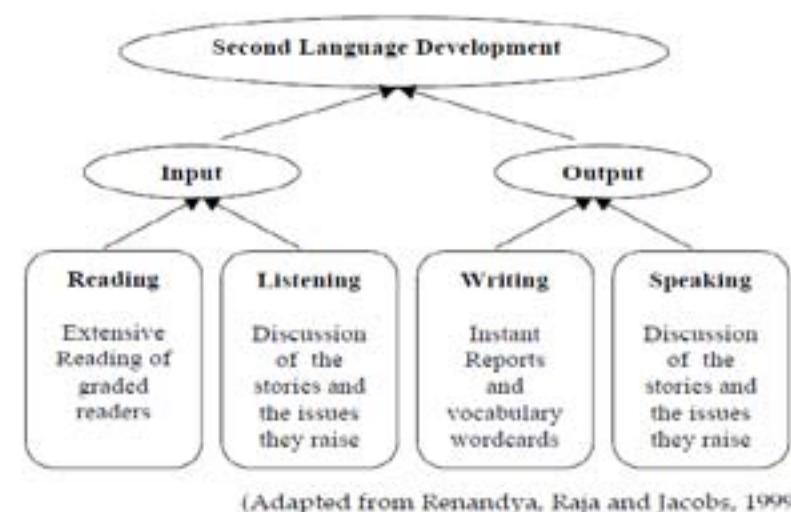


(Adapted from Renandya, Raja and Jacobs, 1999)

*Figure 1.  Integration of extensive reading with speaking, listening, and writing tasks*

Before starting the project, we aimed to create a sense of awareness amongst students about the learning process. We informed students that they were going to be participants of a study and explained to them the general structure of our instruction. We told them that this would not be a vocabulary-centered lesson alone and that they would be involved in many skill-based activities. We also emphasized that they should not look up any definitions or translations of unknown vocabulary during both the reading process and lessons.

In the lesson, as part of reading syllabus, students read Dracula, a graded reader for their level. Before we started the lesson, as a first step, we checked the students' background knowledge of the headwords in the reader. We gave students a list of headwords before they started reading. This list included 38 target words to be taught during the instruction. Students were asked to number each word using the scale in Table 2.1 (*'Vocabulary Knowledge Scale'* (VKS – Paribakht & Wesche, 1993, 1997; Wesche & Paribakht, 1996)

*Table 2. Vocabulary Knowledge Scale*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | I have never seen this word before. |
| 2 | I have seen this word before, but I am not sure of its meaning. |
| 3 | I know the meaning of this word, but I am not sure if my sentence is correct or not. |
| 4 | I know the meaning of this word and I can use it in a sentence. |

Students were asked to produce a sentence for the words they had marked as '3' or '4'.

*Table 3. Pre-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale (Dikilitaş & Bush (2014)*

| Target Word | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Produce a sentence if you mark 3 or 4. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. become | | | | | |
| 2. believe | | | | | |
| 3. carriage | | | | | |

After doing this exercise in the classroom students were assigned to read the first three chapters at home. They were asked to read the assigned part without using a dictionary.

The next stage was to teach the target vocabulary. To do this we prepared various types of vocabulary activities. For the first week we assigned the first two chapters and asked students to scan the text and underline the unknown vocabulary and then start reading. We told them to try to infer meaning of underlined words rather than look up their definitions.

## Week 1

For the first 2 hours in the classroom students were asked to pair up and detect the part of speech of the unknown vocabulary item. Teachers elicited some answers. They showed the paragraph below in which some target words were changed with completely nonsense words:

**Exercise 1 (Contextualized/explicit).** *'The **XONT** was there, in his **PLURT**,*

*but he looked younger and his hair was no longer white. There was **HORDT** on his mouth, which ran down across his neck. My hands were shaking, but I had to touch him, to look for the keys. I felt all over his body, but they weren't there. Suddenly, I wanted to kill Count Dracula. I took a workman's **MLAMB** and began to bring it down hard on to that **TROBLE**, smiling face. But just then the head turned and the **XONT**'s burning eyes looked at me. His **HORDTY** mouth smiled more **TROBLY** than ever. I dropped the **MLAMB** and stood there, shaking. What could I do now?'*

After handing out this paragraph we drew students' attention to certain structures such as *NOUN + TO BE* and *POSSESIVE PRONOUN + NOUN*. We also asked them to look for similar patterns with their partners. In addition, we told them there were some other structures which indicate the part of speech of a word. Students were asked to detect the parts of speech of the given words and replace them with appropriate words (i.e., target words), paying attention to the meaning that they are supposed to convey, such as a positive or a negative adjective, or an adverb. Students exchanged their papers with another group and looked for alternative answers. After eliciting the answers we showed the original paragraph below and asked them to check their answers:
*'The **Count (n)** was there, in his **coffin (n)**, but he looked younger and his hair was no longer white. There was **blood (n)** on his mouth, which ran down across his neck. My hands were shaking, but I had to touch him, to look for the keys. I felt all over his body, but they weren't there. Suddenly, I wanted to kill Count Dracula. I took a workman's **hammer (n)** and began to bring it down hard on to that **horrible (adj)**, smiling face. But just then the head turned and the **Count (n)**'s burning eyes looked at me. His **bloody (n)** mouth smiled more **horribly (adv)** than ever. I dropped the **hammer (n)** and stood there, shaking. What could I do now?'*

We observed that students were mostly able to detect the part of speech of the words, and had ample alternatives, such as:

"I took a workman's hammer, and began to bring it down hard on to that **frightening,** smiling face." (Original word = horrible)

"His **ugly** mouth smiled more **strongly** than ever." (Original words = bloody, horribly)

The teacher elicited synonyms or antonyms and, if there were not any, they were supplied by the teacher.

**Exercise 2 (Contextualized/implicit).** As a follow up exercise we gave students ten comprehension questions for which answers were carefully designed to address the target vocabulary in the chapters. Having encountered the tar-

get vocabulary many times students were able to answer the questions using those words successfully.

## Week 2

**Exercise 1 (Semi-contextualized / explicit).** Students read chapters three and four extensively. In the classroom they were given a worksheet which asked them to choose the most appropriate collocations for the given words. The collocations were extracted directly from the reader and they were asked to collocate the words as they were in the book. Some examples from the worksheet are given below:

|  | *ice* |  | *frightened* |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | *a kiss* |  | *wound* |
| *as cold as* | *hate* | *Lucy looks…….. lovely* |  |
|  | *fear* |  | *horrible* |
|  | *hammer* |  | *pale* |

Students compared their answers with their partners. While checking the answers they were able to realize there might be multiple collocations in some exercises. They stated that they were able to detect alternative collocations by the part of speech that they belong to.
**Exercise 2 (Implicit/contextualized).** As a follow up activity students were given some discussion questions to answer within their group. These were designed to encourage them to use the related vocabulary of the week.

## Week 3

**Exercise 1 (Explicit).** Students were assigned to read the last two chapters extensively. Target vocabulary of the related chapters was shown to the students and they were asked to categorize words under the titles *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*. For unknown words we asked concept-checking questions to elicit meaning, such as;

'Lucy's face was ***pale***.'
T: Is Lucy healthy?
S: No.

T: Is her face red or white?
S: White.
T: Is a 'pale face' red or white?
S: White.
T: Who has a pale face in the class?
S: Eren.

In groups students were asked to write a descriptive paragraph for some of the characters using these words. Groups exchanged their paragraphs to see different character descriptions.
**Exercise 2 (Implicit).** As a follow up activity students were asked to identify some adjectives which describe the main characters. As a group they were asked to write a descriptive paragraph for a character they had chosen.

## Week 4

**Exercise 1 (Implicit).** As students finished reading the book in the last week, group discussion was held in the classroom. Teachers observed how students were able to use the target vocabulary successfully during the discussion.
**Exercise 2 (Explicit/contextualized).** Next, the teachers handed out a worksheet which included original sentences from the book with missing target vocabulary to fill in. The aim was to make them guess the target vocabulary based on the words which they collocate with.

As the last step we handed out the same list which we had given out at the beginning (Post-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation) to observe progress in sentence production. Finally, we got written feedback from students to see if there was a change in their views.

## Results

The first two research questions were as follows:
1. What is the students' target vocabulary knowledge before they read the reader?
2. What is the students' target vocabulary knowledge after they read the reader?

To answer these questions we used the vocabulary lists which were named Pre-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale and Post-Exercise

Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale. In each vocabulary list, there were 38 headwords which students were expected to use in self-produced sentences.

*Table 4. Pre-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale, Dikilitaş & Bush (2014)*

| Pre-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Word | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Produce a sentence if you mark 3 or 4. |
| 1. become | | | | | |
| 2. believe | | | | | |
| 3. carriage | | | | | |
| 4… | | | | | |
| 38…. | | | | | |

Teachers analyzed these sentences using a rubric shown in Table 5 designed by Dikilitaş & Bush (2014) and answered research questions one and two. The researchers marked each of the 38 items on a scale of 0-4 according to the rubric in Table 4.

*Table 5. Productive Vocabulary Evaluation Rubric, Dikilitaş & Bush (2014)*

| Productive Vocabulary Evaluation Rubric | |
|---|---|
| 0 | Student didn't write any sentence or answer, or had the word confused with another word. |
| 1 | Completely incorrect usage; doesn't show understanding of the meaning or semantics. |
| 2 | Shows low understanding of the meaning of the word; may understand grammatical function or part of speech |
| 3 | Shows understanding of the meaning, but uses the word incorrectly. May use incorrect collocations or awkward usage (Ex: "the road became tight." Instead of "The road became narrow." |
| 4 | Shows an understanding of the meaning and usage of the word. Ideally, students are using the word in a complicated way such as changing the part of speech, idiomatic usage, using correct collocations, or adding inflectional or derivational morphemes. |

Figure 2 shows the teacher evaluation results of 836 total items in the Pre-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale.
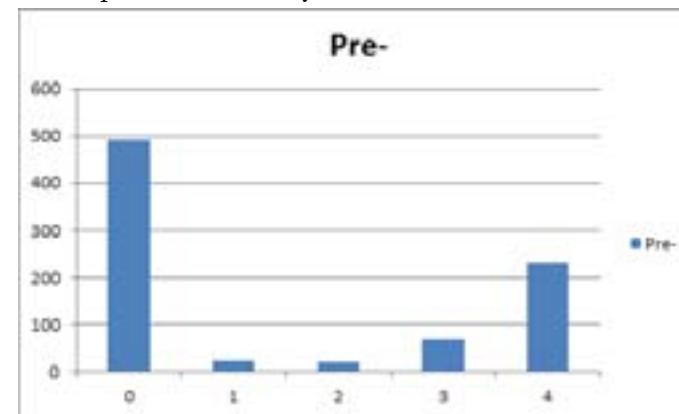


*Figure 2. The teacher evaluation of 836 total items in the Pre-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale*

The table indicates that most of items in the pre-word lists were marked '0' (492 items) by the teachers, which means the student didn't write any sentence or answer, or had the word confused with another word. A score of *1* in the rubric indicates 'completely incorrect usage of a word, which does not show understanding of the meaning or semantics'. The number of the items which were scored as *1* is only 24 in the pre-test. Similarly, the number of items marked as 2 is only 19. A score of *2* means that the item response shows low understanding of the meaning of the word, and the student may understand grammatical function or part of speech. When we look at a score of *3*, the number of the items increases to 68. This score refers to the item responses which show understanding of the meaning of a target word, but the word use is incorrect (there may be incorrect collocations or awkward usage). A marking of *4* in the rubric indicates that the item response shows an understanding of the meaning and use of the word. Teachers marked 233 items as *4*. Results of the pre-test were in line with the expectations of the teachers. The teachers aimed to teach the target vocabulary with a combination of implicit and explicit activities, and expected a decrease in the number of item responses which were scored as *0*. There was a considerable decrease in the number of the post-test items which were scored as *0* when compared to pre-test items.

Figure 3 shows the teacher evaluation of 836 total items in the Post-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale.
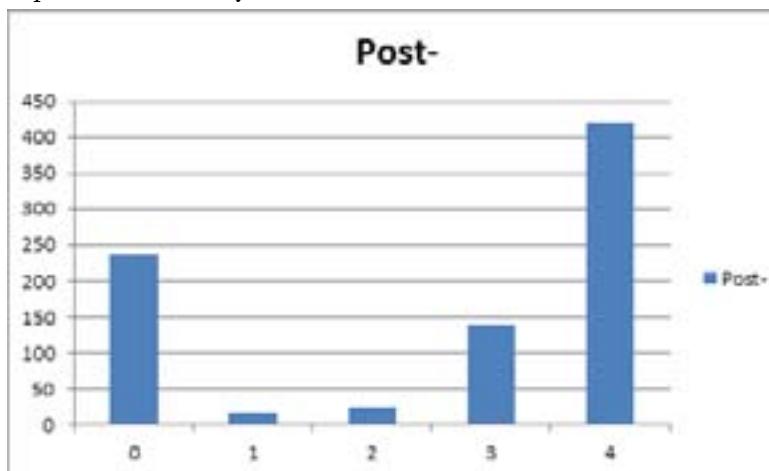


*Figure 3. Post-Exercise Self-Reported Vocabulary Evaluation Scale*

Figure 3 shows 236 items were marked as *0* in the post test. The number of items marked as *1* is 17 and *2* is 23. 140 items were marked as *3* and 420 items were marked as *4*. Figure 4 compares pre-test and post-test results and shows the percentages.
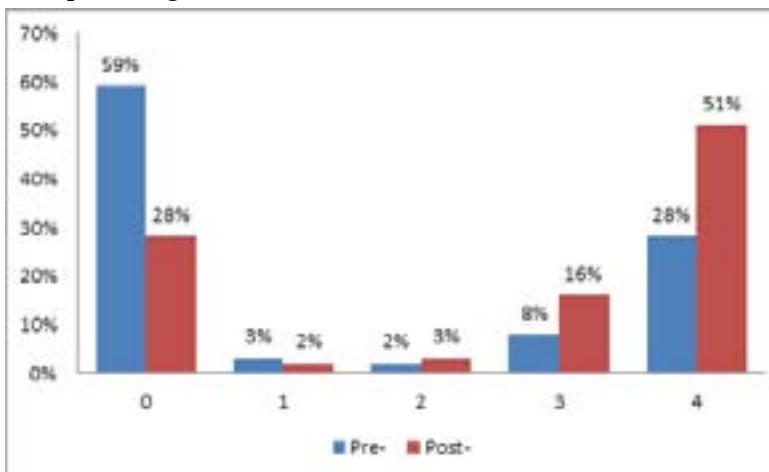


*Figure 4. Comparison of pre-test and post-test results*

Figure 4 clearly shows that there was a dramatic decrease (31%) in the number of item responses receiving a score of *0* and an upward trend in the number of item responses receiving a score of *3* (8%) and *4* (23%). The number of item responses receiving a score of *1* decreased slightly and there was a slight increase in the number of item responses receiving a score of *2*.

The results of pre-test show parallelism with results of post-test. Items marked as '0' and '1' show a decrease in both pre-test and post test results; however, there is an upward trend in items marked as '2', '3' and '4'. The upward trend in '3' and '4' indicates how students were able to understand the target word and used it correctly or almost correctly. The increase in items marked as '3' and '4' shows that the students achieved significant success in producing sentences which show the meaning of related vocabulary. The substantial decrease in the number of the items marked as '0' shows that the students were successful in learning the target vocabulary. The decrease here is dramatic; however, items marked as '1' and '2' hardly changes. This may be because the combination of implicit and explicit activities led students to be accomplished in production. In short, the high percentage of the items marked as '0' in pre-test shifted to '3' or '4' in post-test. To conclude, figures in the tables above show that there is substantial achievement in sentence production of the students thanks to the combination of explicit and implicit vocabulary teaching activities.

## Feedback results

By analyzing student feedback, the teachers tried to answer the third research question:

3.    What are the students' views on contextualized vocabulary teaching activities before and after the instruction?

Table 3 displays 32 students' feedback on the four-week instruction of contextualized vocabulary learning through the reader 'Dracula'.

*Table 6.  Reported changing and unchanging ideas*

| Reported changing and unchanging ideas | N |
|---|---|
| Shifting to contextualized learning | 20 |
| No change in favor of explicit learning | 8 |
| Favoring contextualized learning before and after | 4 |
| Total number | 32 |

According to Table 6, there are great reported changes in the type of instruction that students preferred in vocabulary learning. Table 7, on the other hand, shows how these changes are reported with their own words. The responses of the students were categorized as themes in order to provide clarity.

*Table 7. Student feedback on the 4-week instruction of vocabulary learning practices*

| Contextualized vocabulary learning | N | N | Explicit vocabulary learning |
|---|---|---|---|
| Retention | 18 | 3 | Retention |
| Less time consuming without a dictionary | 12 | 3 | Too much time spent on guessing |
| Feeling discouraged and unmotivated with dictionary | 2 | 3 | Lowers motivation when couldn't be guessed |
| Better focus on comprehension | 3 | 4 | Comprehension problems |
| Provides a holistic view for comprehension | 3 | 3 | Possible to guess incorrectly |
| Lessen the concern of dictionary use | | 2 | Incompetence |
| Improvement in the ability of guessing and making connections | 3 | 2 | Difficult to bother to guess |
| More fun and flawless reading | 4 | | |

## Interpretation

Positive feedback from students who are **in favor of contextualized vocabulary learning through readers** can be grouped under four implications:

1. **Contextualized vocabulary learning through readers has a positive effect on retention:**
   The feedback shows that 20 students who formerly believed they could only learn a new vocabulary item in an isolated way, generally through a dictionary, changed their ideas after this instruction. 18 of these students stated that, when they tried to guess the meaning of a word from the context, it became permanent in their memory. This implied that learning vocabulary in a contextualized manner increases retention.

2. **Having no interruption while reading has many benefits.**
   Four students said that reading was more fun and flawless since there was not any interruption caused because of dictionary usage. This made them concentrate better on the reading material, which in turn fostered comprehension. Two students stated how when they looked up the unknown words while reading they felt discouraged and lost their desire to read. Now that they knew there wouldn't be an interruption they felt more motivated. Another issue concerning dictionary interruption may concern its psychological effect. As one student stated, trying to guess the meaning of a word from the context made him feel relieved about the dictionary use because he generally felt distressed about using a dictionary each time he encountered a new word.

3. **There is an improvement on the overall comprehension of the reading material through contextualized vocabulary learning.**
   As three students stated, reading without dictionary interruption and trying to guess the words from context provided better focus on comprehension. They suggested that there was an improvement in their ability to guess, and in this way they can make better connections. Three students said that having to look at the general context to understand the meaning of a word provided a holistic view, and in this way they were able to have better overall comprehension.

4. **Reading is less time consuming when done without using a dictionary:**
   L2 students stated they used their time more efficiently since they didn't have to look up each new word. Therefore, student feedback showed that trying to guess the meaning of the words from the context while reading was time-saving.

Eight students did not alter their views on contextualized vocabulary learning. Feedback from those students who favored isolated vocabulary learning while reading can be grouped under four similar implications:

1. **Seeing the definition / translation of a word has a better effect on retention:** Three students believed they had to see the exact definition or the translation of an unknown word in order to remember it. Therefore, they didn't favor any implicit or contextualized vocabulary activities during reading.

2. **Contextualized vocabulary learning may lead to comprehension problems:** Four students stated that having too many unknown vocabulary

items created comprehension problems. Three of these students also believed that it might be possible to guess the meaning of a word incorrectly, and this could mislead them about comprehension.

3. **Guessing is time consuming:** Three students stated that they spent too much time on guessing the meanings, so they wanted to learn the words before they started reading, and preferred isolated vocabulary teaching.

4. **Incompetence creates motivational problems:** One student stated that he didn't have enough vocabulary knowledge in order to guess meanings from context, and felt discouraged when he couldn't infer the meaning. As another student said, it was too difficult for her to try to guess a meaning, so she didn't bother to do so. She felt she didn't have enough competence in vocabulary.

Apart from the students who changed their former ideas on vocabulary learning, and those who still favored the isolated way of vocabulary learning, there were four who favored contextualized vocabulary learning both before and after our instruction. It was interesting to see their answers because they suggested that even before this practice, they applied similar techniques and avoided dictionary use. They believed inferring the meaning has a positive effect on comprehension. It was exciting for us to see more autonomous students like them. Another surprising result observed were students questioning their beliefs on their traditional vocabulary learning techniques. These included those who favored the isolated way of vocabulary learning because of their prejudice against contextualized ways of learning. Even if they seemed to support strict dictionary use and isolated teaching, they confessed that the exercises conducted during the instruction helped them use a dictionary less while reading. One stated:

> "I still prefer reading the book using a dictionary. Nevertheless, these activities encouraged me to use the dictionary less than I usually do because they helped me how to have an idea on a word I have never seen"

Even if the student seemed not to have changed her ideas about vocabulary learning, she will probably realize the change in her practice as she gains more confidence on guessing.

## Reflection

As teachers, we have always wanted to integrate extensive reading materials into our classes and encourage our students to read outside of the classroom as well. Observing similar problems during our reading instruction in various classes led us to handle this issue as a research topic, and we observed many students struggling with a reading passage, trying to concentrate on every bit of it, thus forgetting to take pleasure in reading itself. Therefore, we wanted to help them improve their reading skills with the help of this research.

This research was a rewarding experience for us in many ways. The first effect is that we had a chance to deepen our knowledge on vocabulary teaching techniques, learning strategies, and extensive reading. Another effect is that we were able to monitor the change in students' views. It was fulfilling to see that there had been some considerable change in many of the learners' beliefs and practices regarding vocabulary learning and readers. They felt that they became more autonomous in reading and did not need to use dictionaries frequently anymore while reading, which was one of our main objectives before we started the research. Both qualitative and the quantitative data implied that teaching vocabulary through reading is very effective if it is taught with a combination of explicit and implicit activities. We were very contented to see that the results of this research were in line with our expectations. The last effect was on our teaching. Having seen that our students overcame their bias regarding contextualized techniques and tended to use inference-based techniques rather than frequent use of dictionaries, we are planning to use similar strategies in our future reading classes to help our students be less dependent on dictionaries and teachers and more autonomous in vocabulary leaning. We are now more aware of the positive effect of teaching vocabulary in context. Although we carried out this research in a reading class environment, we realized that we can transfer results of this research. Actually, we have already started to use it in grammar and listening classes.

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# 22 *Creating a learner-centred classroom environment*

*Çiler İnan*

## Introduction

The matter of creating a learner-centred classroom environment has long been a critical issue for teachers. In my opinion, the more we get the learners involved in the classroom work, the more they will be successful and responsible for their own learning. How to accomplish this also is the question that has inspired many researchers, such as me, to search for ways to foster learner-centredness. Key questions include; what does being 'learner-centred' actually mean? And how can we create a classroom environment in which learners do the work, and not the teacher?

Teachers should always look for ways to develop their classroom practices and give more importance to the learners rather than the input. I am also one of these teachers who struggle to get students to be more responsible for their own development. This is a research study that arose from a point to develop in an area identified during a post-observation feedback session with a teacher trainer. Following this, I decided to talk less in the classroom, give my students more opportunity to direct their own learning, get them into work and have them create their own learning environment as much as possible. In relation to this I realized that the things I decided to implement were actually some of the principles of a learner-centred approach. The next step was to learn more about this approach and take action accordingly.

As mentioned earlier in this study, the first step is to ask what does 'learner-centred learning' actually mean? What are the differences between learner-centredness and teacher-centredness? The section below introduces, according to the literature 'learner-centred learning' and 'teacher-centred learning' and their differences.

# Literature review

### Characteristics of learner-centred learning

The constructivist approach to learning describes a learning process where students work individually or in groups to explore, search and solve problems and become actively engaged in seeking knowledge and information rather than being passive recipients of information. Constructivism states that students learn more by experiences and active involvement than by observing (Brooks & Brooks,1993). In this learner-centred classroom learners are the constructors of knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking and problem-solving. The learners have to adopt an active role. Instead of merely repeating after the teacher or mindlessly memorizing dialogues, they have to learn to navigate the self, the learning process, and the learning objectives. (B.Kumaravaduvelu,2006).

In learner-centred learning the focus is on the 'learning process' rather than the 'content', and this learning environment encourages learners to develop their ability to use language and communicate knowledge effectively. In this way, learners will become active participants of their own learning process, and will be able to make use of the knowledge presented by the teacher. In learner-centred classrooms there is such a learning environment that students do the work, talk and ask and answer questions either by pair or group work. In this classroom the leading idea is that if a learner is actively taking part, he or she will take in more than if he or she is simply getting messages from a teacher. Harmer (2007) also says 'The ideal situation is for students to take over their own learning'. In learner-centred classrooms, learners are directly involved in the production of their own knowledge. They produce their own work, like writing papers, essays, reports and tests, and this production process is just an element of formative assessment. Because in learner-centred learning learners are not just assessed with exam papers, they are also assessed in progress with their own products. Through collaboration and cooperation with others, learners engage in their learning and at the same time learn from each other's mistakes by peer correction. Asking questions and leading learners to solutions nurtures students' natural curiosity and is recommended over simply giving answers (Brown, 2008).

In summary, we can say that students take the responsibility of their own learning by making decisions on how to learn and what is important to learn but of course in partnership with the teacher, because in learner-centred classrooms the teacher has many different roles. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher: first, as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself; second, as a guide within classroom procedures and activities. In this role the teacher endeavors to make clear to the learners what they need to do in order to achieve some specific activity or task if they indicate that such guidance is necessary. (B.Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.99).

### The traditional mode: teacher-centred learning

In contrast to the learner-centred approach, the traditional mode shows the teacher as the sole authority of learning as in the behaviorist perspective. In this traditional perspective the teacher controls the instructional process and delivers the content to the entire class. Thus, the learning mode is passive and learners play little part in their learning process (Mayer, 1998, p. 353-377).

In teacher-centred classrooms students mostly work alone and do not learn to communicate with other students; there is no peer correction at all. Teacher-centred instruction does not allow students to express themselves or ask questions and direct their own learning; they are just passive recipients of knowledge so they can get bored easily. In this learning environment the focus is on the instructor not on the learners; instructors generally tend to correct students' errors themselves. Students are generally just waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do or what is next. They are also just assessed with exam papers to monitor learning -as an example of summative assessment- at the end of a learning session.

In summary, during teacher-centred instruction teachers just create passive recipients of knowledge. However, with learner-centred instruction, our learners can produce their own knowledge and become active participants of learning. Through learner-centred instruction, learners can achieve independent minds and the capacity to make educational decisions and value judgments (Brown, 2008, p.5).

## Data collection

In this research study I utilized both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Firstly, as a quantitative data collection tool, a questionnaire

including seven questions about student-centred and teacher-centred teaching was administered to a group of 130 students.

Originally, there were five questions in this survey; two of them leading students to learner-centred teaching and three of them to teacher-centred teaching. After the questionnaire was applied to a group of students as a pilot study, it was identified that the last question in the survey did not lead students to a specific choice. Accordingly, some alterations were made and the questionnaire was extended to seven questions. The questionnaire was conducted in the students' native language to make it easier for students to comprehend and answer.

Survey one (below) aimed at revealing students' viewpoints about the leading power of the class. In other words, this questionnaire was used to understand where students place themselves concerning classroom work.

*Table 1: Questions in the first survey*

| | totally agree | partially agree | undecided | partially disagree | totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I prefer working in groups, in pairs or individually to having a teacher-dominated lesson. | | | | | |
| 2. I like it when the teacher asks my opinion about what to do or how to do it. | | | | | |
| 3. A good teacher should be the authority in the class. | | | | | |
| 4. I don't want to be active and productive in the class; reading, writing, speaking and doing a task all the time. | | | | | |
| 5. I like getting all answers from teacher. | | | | | |
| 6. The teacher is responsible for giving necessary information for me. | | | | | |
| 7. I want my teacher to correct my errors immediately. | | | | | |

*Table 2: Questions in the second survey*

| | I agree because | I disagree because |
|---|---|---|
| 65 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they prefer working in groups, in pairs or individually to having a teacher-dominated lesson. | | |
| 87 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they like it when the teacher asks their opinion about what to do or how to do it. | | |
| 60 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they like getting all answers from teacher directly. | | |
| 79 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they believe the teacher is responsible for giving necessary information for them. | | |
| 65 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they want their teacher to correct their errors immediately. | | |

After getting the results from the first survey a follow-up survey (Table 2) including open-ended questions was designed. This follow-up survey aimed at getting more qualitative information about learners' ideas. It consisted of five statements which provided me with more relevant information for the research study.

### Some problems of data collection

In the data collection process it was sometimes difficult to get students together to do the questionnaire beyond lesson time. However, I didn't experience any problems with getting students' permission to conduct the questionnaire as they were really eager to respond to my questions. In some classes I conducted it in the last few minutes of the lesson if we had time to do so, but in others I conducted it during the break time.

## Data analysis

### *Survey One*
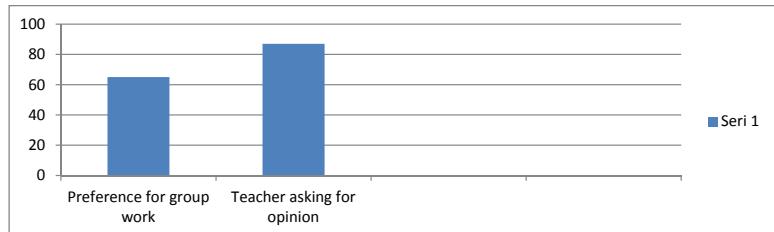


*Figure 1. Results of the first two questions of the first survey*

The two questions above were prepared to see to what extent students have a tendency towards a learning-centred classroom environment. According to the percentages we can clearly see that 65 % of the students like pair and group work activities and they mostly prefer working in pairs or groups. In addition, a great majority of students (87 %) like being asked what to do in the lessons and how to do it by their teachers. As McCombs & Miller state 'The students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning, share their insights with their peers, and apply new learning to real-life, authentic experiences.' (McCombs & Miller, 2007).

When learners are the focus, they become fully engaged in the process. Learner-centred learning is much more efficient for students' language learning in contrast to traditional learning. Apart from being more efficient, most of the learners – according to the survey results – prefer it, too. Here are the other results:
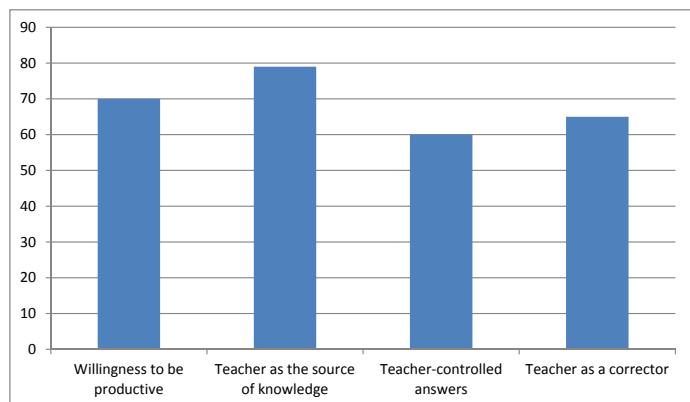


The other four questions above were prepared to see to what extent students have a tendency towards a teacher-centred learning environment. According to the results, 70 % of the students actually want to be active and productive in the class with reading, writing, speaking and other types of activities. On the other hand, 60 % like getting all answers from their teachers and 65 % want their teachers to correct their mistakes immediately which shows us that they feel dependent on the teacher to some extent. Additionally, a large majority of the students (79 %) think that the teacher is responsible for giving necessary information to them. They believe that it is the teachers' duty to provide them with necessary information. This again shows us that they have a misconception about language learning and also they do not really know the importance of learner autonomy, learning outside the class by themselves.

The second survey was applied to a specific group including seventeen students. It provides us with more detailed information about students' views, so each question was analyzed in a more detailed way with key words and schemas.

### *Survey two: question 1*

65 % of the students who participated in the first survey stated that they prefer working in groups, in pairs or individually to having a teacher-dominated lesson. This was confirmed in the second survey. Ten students out of seventeen were positive about pair work or group work activities. Below in an illustration we can see the subcategories presenting reasons why they are positive about pair/group work activities.
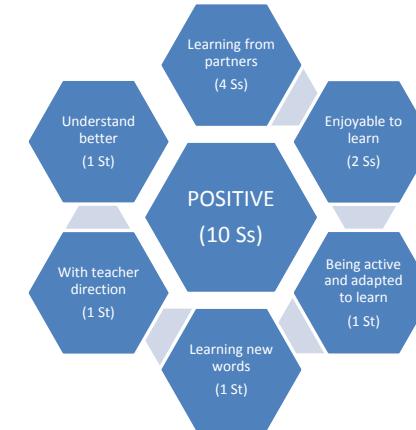


*Figure 1: Reasons why students are positive about pair/group work*

In this first question four students state that with the help of pair and group work activities they can learn from their partners. They state that they can ask partners questions they cannot ask their teachers easily. Two students state that it is enjoyable to learn with pair work and group work activities. One of them states that they can understand better if they work in pairs/groups. One of the students states that they have more chance to be active with pair/group work activities and they can easily be adapted to learn. Another student comments that with every pair/group work activity they can learn new words from their partners. On the other hand, one states that they should work in pairs/ groups but with proper teacher management. The most prominent result derived from the survey is that students have a belief that they learn from their partners while they are working in groups or pairs. As Jensen (1998) says, 'New meaning comes through social interaction, so the connection between students is important. Cooperative learning and collaboration should be encouraged. The learner-centered teacher recognizes this principle of learning and actively infuses collaborative opportunities into each lesson. Collaboration provides students with opportunities to learn from their peers and to gain skills that will be beneficial throughout their lives (Jensen, 1998). Students feel free to ask their partners questions they are afraid to ask their teachers. They also find their lesson more enjoyable if they do pair/group work activities, and they learn better. In addition, it is seen that students feel more active and motivated to learn with these activities. Although we can clearly see that students prefer these kind of activities, they still want to feel secure and guided at the same time. That is why they need sufficient guidance and support from their teachers.

On the other hand, seven students out of seventeen are negative about pair/ group work activities. Below we can see subcategories showing reasons why they feel this way.
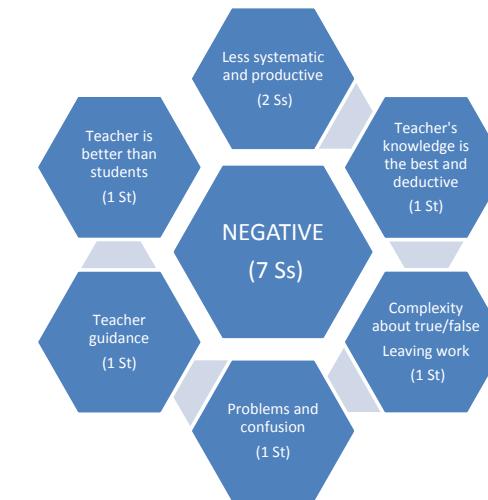


*Figure 2: Reasons why students are negative about pair/group work*

In the first question, two students feel that the lesson would be more systematic and productive if there were no pair work activities. They strongly believe that they can get the most accurate knowledge from the teacher and do not think that they can learn from their partners. One of the students even has a misconception that there can be problems and confusion in the class if there are pair/group work activities. Another claims that she does not understand what is right or wrong and, as a result, abandons the work during pair/ group work activities. These answers show us that some of the students have a very deep dependence on the teacher. From their answers we can clearly see that they have a misconception about a productive and systematic class. They wrongly believe that if the teacher is the authority and controller of the class, it can be systematic and productive, otherwise there will be problems and confusion in the class and a lot of n noise will result. However, they do not know that to learn a language efficiently students must have 'learner autonomy'. As Nunan (1988, p.3)  suggests, not everything can be taught in class, but even if it could, a teacher will not always be around if and when students wish to use the language in real life (Cotterall 1995, p. 220).

**Survey two: question 2**

87 % of the students who participated in the first survey stated that they like it when the teacher asks their opinion about what to do or how to do it. In response to this, in the second survey 3 out of 17 students appeared to misunderstand the question or gave incomprehensible answers, but the remaining 14 students agreed, with different reasons as follows:
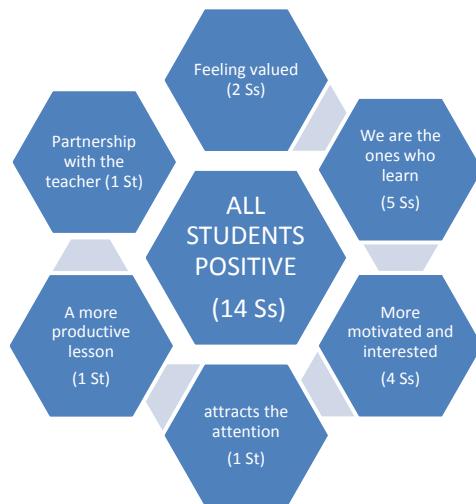


*Figure 3: Reasons why students like being asked by the teacher*

In the second question five students say, 'I think we are the ones who learn, so we should decide what to do' and 'everyone has different learning styles, so we should give our opinions.' Four students think that the lessons would be more motivating and interesting if the students decided  what to do and how to do it in the class. One of the students states that asking their opinion would attract their attention. Another one states that they would have a partnership with the teacher during the lesson in this way. One important result is that two students state they feel valued if their opinion is asked by the teacher. Also, one believes that it can be a more productive lesson if the teacher asks their opinion about the lesson.

These answers show us that even if they have different reasons, students all like being asked what to do in lessons. From one commonly given answer I can understand that they are aware of their place in the learning environment.

They think that they are the ones who learn, so they should decide what to do and how to do it. In this way, they can control their own learning. Here we can infer that they actually want to have 'the responsibility of their own learning' -one of the important features of learner- centredness- if they are given the chance to do it. It is also true that students will feel valued and they will be more productive if they are asked by the teacher, as two of them state. In fact, students want to feel important in the class and want to see that they have the right to criticize things or give opinions about the procedure of the lesson. If the students have all these values then they will take control of their own learning environment.

**Survey two: question 3**

60 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they like getting all answers from the teacher directly. In the second survey, nine students out of sixteen concurred. Here are the subcategories showing the reasons.
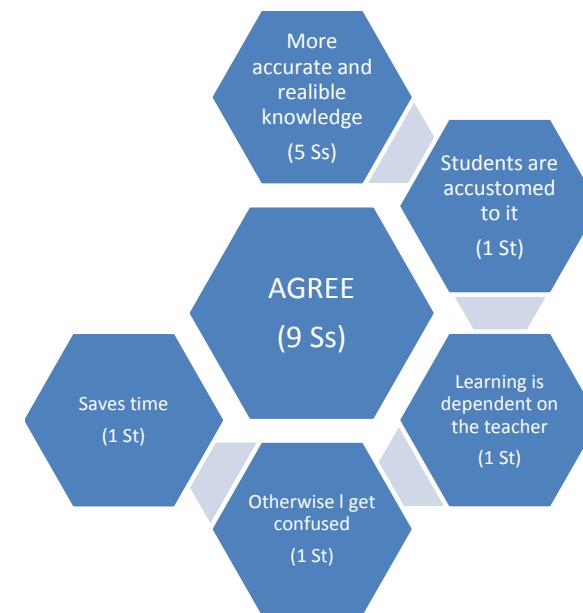


*Figure 4: Reasons why students like getting all the answers from the teacher*

As a response to the third question five students state that they can get more accurate and reliable knowledge from the teacher. One of the students states that if everyone says something at the same time there will be confusion, so getting the knowledge from the teacher saves time. One states that they prefer this way because this is the way they are accustomed to because of their previous teaching contexts. One of the students believes that learning a new language totally depends on the teacher. Another one says if he/she hears something wrong from others, he/she will get confused.

These answers indicate how some students have a dependence on their teacher. One of the students even says that language learning occurs with the efforts of the teacher. They mostly believe that only the teacher can provide them with accurate knowledge. Also, it is seen that they wrongly believe they waste time if they search for the answers, and are afraid of getting confused.

However, the remaining seven (one more student gave an unclear answer) state that they do not prefer getting all the answers from the teacher, and the reasons vary:
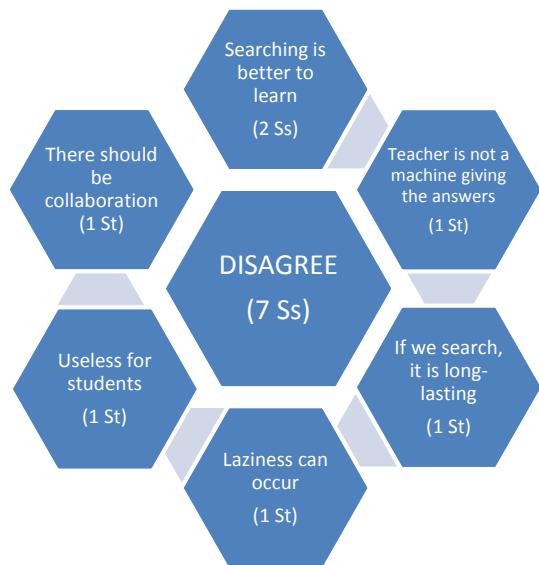


*Figure 5: Reasons why students do not like getting all the answers from the teacher*

Two students prefer searching for knowledge, and believe that searching is a better way to learn. One student states, 'If we just sit waiting for the answers,

there will be no collaboration in the class.' Another says, 'The teacher is not a machine giving the answers all the time and he/she should not be, either.' Another one thinks that it is useless for students to just sit and wait for the answers instead of searching for them. One states that sitting and waiting for the answers can cause laziness among students and another believes that the information will be more long-lasting if we search for it and then find it.

By looking at these answers we can clearly see that some of the students are aware of the importance of collaboration during classwork. It is nice to see that some know that the information will be longer-lasting if they search for it. In addition, one of them is afraid of laziness because of teacher-centredness, so we can say that in contrast to our common belief about students' laziness, some may actually want to be active. Therefore, I think we should not make generalizations about our students and firstly we should check their existing beliefs about their own learning.

### Survey two: question 4

79 % of the students who participated in the first survey stated that they believe the teacher is responsible for giving necessary information to them. Eight students out of twelve answering the second survey (five either misunderstood the question or gave incorrect answers) agree that it is the teacher who should provide them with necessary information. Here are the subcategories showing the reasons why they agree:
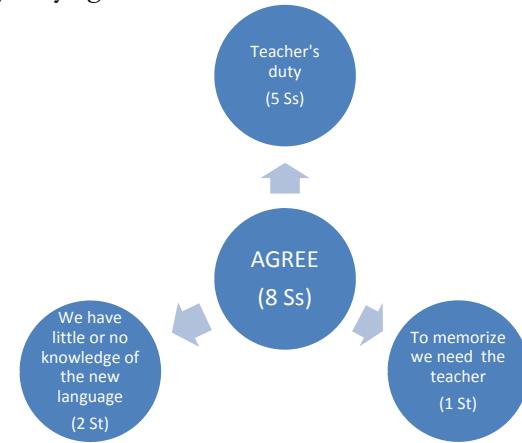


*Figure 6: Reasons why students think that teacher is responsible for giving necessary information*

Five students state that it is the teacher's duty to give them necessary information. They strongly believe that they cannot learn in any other ways. Two students say 'we have little knowledge of new language, so we need someone to learn this new language.' One of the students states that to learn a new language they should memorize the language and to memorize it they need a teacher.
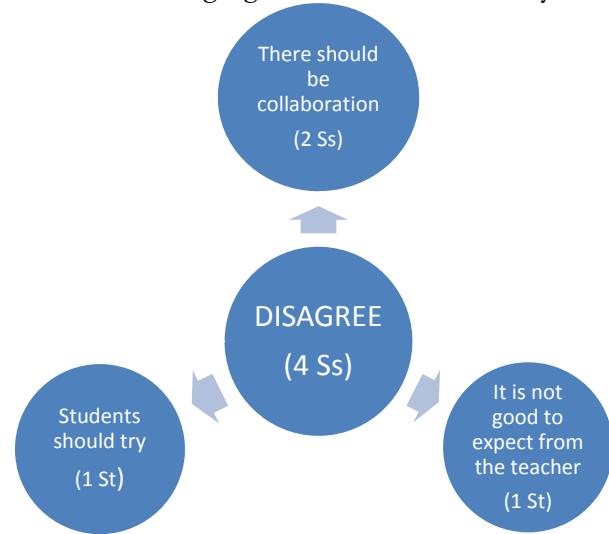


*Figure 7: Reasons why students think the teacher is not responsible giving necessary information*

From the answers to this question we can say again that students have a great misconception about who a teacher actually is. Is s/he someone who should have all accurate knowledge about the language and transfer it to students, or someone who should guide students to succeed in their learning practice, to get the idea of how to acquire the language efficiently?  In addition, they wrongly believe that to learn a language they have to memorize it in all aspects. Here we can understand that from the beginning of our teaching practice we should make our students aware of the teacher's place in the class. We should train them to take the responsibility for their own learning. They should know that a teacher is someone who assists them and guides them with their learning practice but the actual responsibility of getting the knowledge is their own duty. In addition, from the beginning they need to realize that they cannot learn a language by memorizing it; actually they can learn it by internal-

izing, making it real for themselves. To make them realize this, we, as teachers, firstly should believe it and integrate this belief in our own teaching practice, and try to make the language use real for our students in every situation.

However, the other four students state that the teacher is not always responsible for giving necessary information to them. They should arrive at the answers themselves when it is possible.

Two of these students hold the viewpoint that teacher and students should collaborate. The two others say that students should try to learn, should search for knowledge, and that it is not good for them to expect everything of the teacher all the time. By looking at these answers we can say that some students are aware of the importance of taking part in learning. They attach importance to searching for knowledge. Furthermore, they know how important collaboration is in the learning environment and they value collaboration. However, only a few of them are aware of this.

### Survey two: question 5

65 % of the students who participated in the survey stated that they want their teacher to correct their errors immediately. In answers to the second survey, fourteen out of seventeen students agree with this  Here are their reasons:
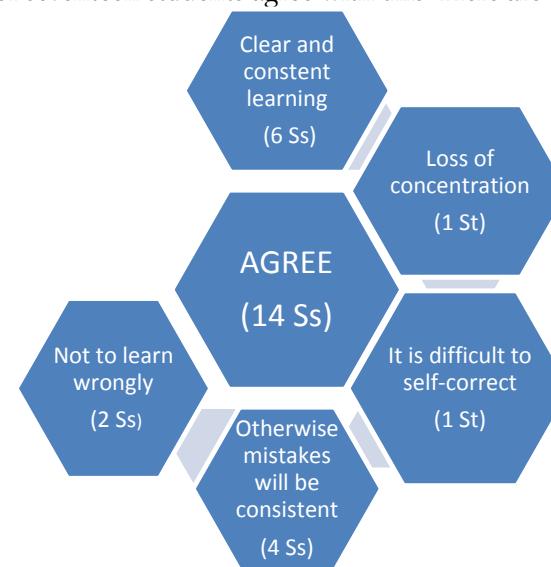


*Figure 8: Reasons why students want their teachers to correct their errors*

Six students state that learning will be clear and consistent by this means. Four are afraid that if the mistakes are not corrected, they will persist and later it will be harder to correct them. Two students say 'If the mistakes are not corrected, we will have the wrong information.' One of them emphasizes the importance of concentration and he claims that he will lose his concentration if the mistake is not corrected immediately. Another one says 'It is difficult for us to self-correct, so the teacher should correct our mistakes.'

Here we can clearly see that most of the students are really afraid of learning something wrong. However, their misconception is that they always expect the teacher to correct their mistakes, but they do not try to self-correct. They are not aware of the importance of self-correction or peer-correction.

I believe that the first thing we should do is get students to realize the importance of self-correction and peer-correction. Then we should allocate more time to these. With the help of pair or group work activities we can easily achieve this.

In answer to the same question, only two students stated that they can self-correct (one further student gave an unclear answer). Here are their reasons:
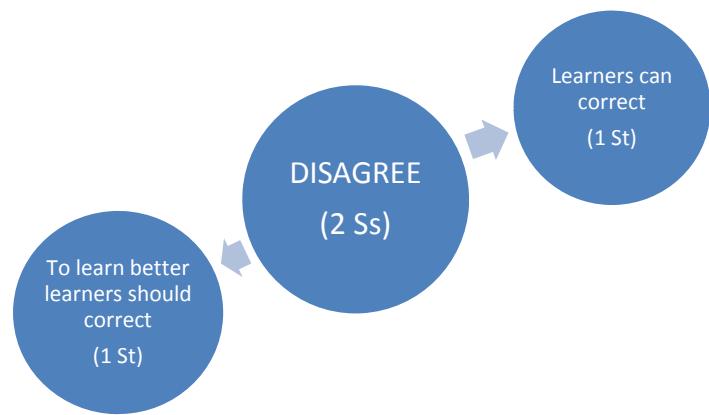


*Figure 9: Reasons why students do not want their teachers to correct their mistakes*

Here we can see that only two of the students think they should correct their mistakes themselves, but they have different viewpoints. One of them says 'to learn better we should correct our mistakes', whereas the other one says 'we can correct our own mistakes, it is not really important who corrects.'

Here I can see that only a minority of the students believe they should correct their mistakes themselves. Only one student is aware of the importance of self-correction. This means that our students mostly depend on the teacher in the class, which is not the right attitude to learn a language. As we already know, language learning should be consistent in and out of class, so our students at first need to learn how to correct their mistakes themselves and how to learn from their mistakes by self-correction and peer-correction.

## Reflections in general

In this research study I researched students' existing perceptions of learner-centred instruction in a detailed way and came up with really interesting results. The most unexpected one for me was students' preference for pair and group work activities because, in contrast to the common belief, they defined their preference for pair and group work activities with really logical reasons. This made me realize that the first thing we should do in our classes is to try to be aware of our students' preferences without prejudgments. Another interesting result was seeing student's desires (87 %) for their opinions to be valued in class. I learnt that being asked by the teacher is more important for students than we think. If we do this, they will feel valued and will probably be more active during lessons.

In addition, however, I see that most of our students are not really aware of 'learner autonomy'. They do almost nothing on their own apart from the things they do in the class.

Another thing I learnt, then, is that I should encourage my students to keep learning outside the class as much as possible. I should also teach them to navigate for themselves but not to wait for the teacher to give the necessary information all the time. I also realized that most students do not know the importance of self or peer-correction. I should create contexts for them in which they have the chance to correct each other. Last but not least, our students, due to their learning backgrounds, are really dependent on us. They, in fact, want to exceed their limits, but are still afraid to make mistakes and need our guidance.

I should, therefore, always try to be a guide or an assistant for them, but not the leader in the class. I should try to create their learning environment not my own teaching environment.

**Reflections on my own teaching practice**

Thanks to this research study I gained a critical look at my own lessons, and started to question my own teaching practice. Additionally, I learnt to look at the class environment from students' perspectives, and I realized that there is always something else to do to improve my teaching practice, and I also got an immediate impact on one of my current practices. In one of my lessons, with regard to the results of my survey, I tried to ask my students their opinion about how to practice the topic of the day. They really appreciated being asked and immediately found ways to practise the topic. I realized that in this lesson students participated more than the other lessons where I chose how to practise the topic. This experience gave me the chance to see the validity of the results of my research study.

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# 23 *Developing language learning strategies and learner autonomy through video games*

*Alexandros Palaiogiannis*

## Introduction

Nowadays, most teachers are increasingly finding themselves in situations where the majority of their students are video game players, either novice or experienced ones, within a primary or secondary school context alike. We are going through an "age of digital culture" (Buckingham, 2007), with the youngsters being the "Digital Natives" (Prensky, 2001a; 2001b), since they are "all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (Prensky, 2001a, p. 1).

## Context and research questions

Along these lines, the fact that my students, in a Senior High School, have repeatedly expressed a keen interest in knowing the meaning of English words they have come across in the virtual worlds of their favourite video games, coupled with my own wish to explore whether this popular entertaining means could be turned into a powerful learning tool as well, has become the incentive for the present research.

To this end, this study mainly explored the various language learning strategies that students employ when playing video games at home and not in a formal schooling context, at their own pace, alone or with peers. These learning strategies were examined in connection to coping with new vocabulary encountered in a video game and the development of students' writing skills in a "situated learning" (Gee, 2004) mode. The study also focused on issues closely linked to learning strategies such as learner autonomy and life-long learning skills development. In particular, it investigated the following research questions:

- Does students' engagement in video game play facilitate their understanding of new vocabulary?

- Do video games provide students with a context that will help them develop their writing skills in a meaningful, motivating way?
- Do video games urge students to develop learning strategies en route to reaching specific goals set during video game play?
- Do video games facilitate learner autonomy and independence, thus promoting life-long learning?

But first, let us have a look at some significant theoretical considerations underlying the present research.

## Literature review

The theory of learning which informs the design and use of video games for educational purposes is constructivism, whose main tenet is that learners construct meaning and knowledge by actively interacting with their environment and reorganizing their mental structures (Phillips, 1995), building upon previous knowledge and experience, which they match against newly-acquired information (Thanasoulas, 2001).

Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory (1990) is also considered central to video games (Squire, 2011), since it describes the state of completely focused motivation, absorption and immersion in the task at hand, which "becomes intrinsically rewarding, done for its own sake" (Stevison and Kaplan, 2010, p. 155), a state that video games are believed to foster and favour. Game designers manage to keep players in such "flow" states, in which educators would like to see learners in formal instruction settings, as well, but, in fact, "few current curricular practices are designed to foster" (ibid.).

Along these lines, various arguments in favour of the integration of video games in educational contexts have been put forward, although research into this newly emerging field is quite recent and still in progress. With regard to the present study, through video games students "experience a *sense of autonomy*" (Stevison and Kaplan, 2010, p. 152), since players are continuously asked to "make active choices in simulated settings", simultaneously developing their *critical thinking* skills on "a multilayered platform of insights and discoveries" (ibid.).

Following Oxford (1990, p. 1), learning strategies can be defined as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning", and their being "tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communi-

cative competence", render them particularly important for language learning purposes. Such strategies can ultimately lead to learner autonomy, "learning how to learn", and life-long learning skills development, which are the ultimate goals of any educational system designed for the 21st century global citizen.

Although there are numerous strategy classifications and distinctions in the relevant literature, the present study draws mainly from Oxford and her well-known classification system (1990), since it is considered the most influential to date. Oxford's taxonomy consists of two broad categories, namely direct and indirect strategies, which are further subdivided into a total of six groups – memory, cognitive and compensation under the direct category, and metacognitive, affective and social under the indirect category.

Closely linked to learning strategies is the concept of learner autonomy, which can be broadly defined as "the capacity to take control over one's own learning" (Benson, 2011, p. 2), while, with regard to strategies, autonomy could also be described as "the capacity to make use of strategies that are clearly associated with the idea of control of learning" (ibid., p. 97).

According to Benson (2011, p. 2), one necessary condition for the development of autonomy is providing learners with opportunities to exercise control over their learning. In the present research, learners were given the opportunity to "take responsibility for their own learning and to apply active, personally relevant strategies" (Littlewood, 1997, p. 81). To this end, they were asked to play a video game out of the formal schooling context, at home, either alone or in pairs/groups, without the physical presence of the teacher.

## Research design and procedures followed

The research was conducted with a group of twenty 16-year-old students, attending the first grade of a Senior High School in Thiva, a Greek provincial town. The sample consisted of twelve female and eight male students comprising a mixed-ability class, as is usually the case with Greek state schools, whose English language proficiency level mainly ranged from waystage (A2) to vantage (B2), according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

Within this context, I had to select a video game that would potentially engage the majority of the participants and serve the purposes of the study

well. My final choice was *Agatha Christie: Murder on the Orient Express* (The Adventure Company, 2006), a commercial game, designed and created for entertainment rather than educational purposes, for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, mysteries, detective stories and thrillers appeal especially to teenagers, who find them interesting and engaging, as my students confirmed as well. Second, the whole game is based on dialogue, written notes and letters, and whether players proceed in the game or not depends on their understanding of the target language. This served the purposes of the research since players are forced to employ strategies in order to deal with vocabulary difficulties and move on.

Another important criterion is that the train passengers in the game come from different countries and players are, thus, exposed to various accents of English, coming from both inner-circle countries, such as Great Britain and the USA, as well as expanding-circle ones, such as Italy, France and Turkey, in line with Kachru's well-established scheme (1985), describing the main contexts of English language use around the world. At the same time, they have the opportunity to become acquainted with slangy terms or expressions some characters in the game often utter, and the fact that learners are not usually exposed to such terms within formal education settings makes it even more imperative that they resort to strategies in order to cope.

Last but not least, the game is based on a famous novel by the same title, written by Agatha Christie, and some students might have heard about the story or seen a movie based on the book, too. This information could activate their background schemata and help them overcome or anticipate certain difficulties as far as the storyline is concerned. In particular, players have to 'don' the main character of the game, wander in a virtual world, seek clues that might reveal the identity of a murderer, solve a number of simple and more complex puzzles as they proceed in the game, collect fingerprints and footprints, and interrogate suspects until the true identity of the killer is revealed in the end; in other words, they have to act the same way the police would in real life.

The so-called "mixed methods research" (Creswell et al., 2003) was selected as the most appropriate and effective means to collect data within the specific context. This means that both qualitative (QUAL) and quantitative (QUAN) research were employed in an attempt to combine the case-specificity and subjectivity of the former with the objectivity and generalizability of the latter.

Nevertheless, despite drawing from both QUAL and QUAN research, mixed methods designs usually "display a dominant method" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 63). Within this mixed methods research paradigm, the main method employed was the case study, which lies within the QUAL research paradigm, enhanced by QUAN research practices. The sample described above constitutes the 'case' the present research focused on.

Coming to the research instruments, a number of diaries, in which students had to make entries at various points during the research, following certain prompts, and a final questionnaire, administered at the end, were used, the former coming from the QUAL and the latter from the QUAN field. The use of more than one instruments served the purpose of triangulation, which allows the researcher to "confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another" (Laws et al., 2003, p. 281), thus contributing to the improvement of research validity and maximizing reliability at the same time.

The main research instrument constructed was diaries while the questionnaire aimed at complementing and enhancing the data collected through the diaries. To this end, a great number of items focused on behavioural issues, namely the particular actions student gamers took to deal with vocabulary and writing difficulties as well as problems encountered regarding gameplay per se. Other items addressed the respondents' beliefs about and attitudes towards the whole video gaming experience and the effects the latter had on them as foreign language learners, in terms of vocabulary learning, writing skill development and learner autonomy (for the research instruments see Palaiogiannis, 2012).

The research lasted from November 2011 to March 2012. According to student preference, one group of three and three pairs were formed while the remaining eleven students played alone.

The video game consists of three distinct parts, but the research focused on the first two parts, during which students had to carry out specific vocabulary and writing game-related tasks (see Palaiogiannis, 2012). The tasks aimed at making gameplay meaningful and purposeful for their learning and not just a purely entertaining activity, and keeping them focused on certain aspects of the game. Several briefing and debriefing sessions, "critical" conditions for the integration of video games into educational settings (Betrus and Botturi, 2010, p. 49), preceded and followed video game playing respectively, taking place in the regular EFL classroom. During these sessions, language as well as game-

play problems were brought to the fore, solutions were suggested, and opinions were exchanged and commented upon both by the teacher and students alike.

Since the greatest part of the research was conducted outside the school context, a group was set up on the Facebook called *The Murder On The Orient Express Game Group*, which all research participants could join, establishing an online learning community. Within this community, information flow could take place and members could provide feedback to each other and seek solutions to problems encountered in the virtual world of the video game.

At the end of each part, students had to carry out a writing task in the school's computer lab. To this end, the process writing approach (White and Arndt, 1991) was adopted as the most compatible with the application of writing strategies. The participants had to write letters as the main character to their employer, informing him about the progress of the murder investigation, any potential suspects and so on. In this way, situated learning took place through role-play, game-based activities that facilitated students' active participation in a powerful context for learning.

The final questionnaire was firstly piloted on a sample similar, in terms of sex, age and interests, to the target sample with the view to ensuring that respondents in the actual study would experience no difficulties in completing the instrument, regarding the "clarity of wording" (Cohen et al., 2007) either in the items per se or the instructions, the time taken to complete it, or its difficulty level.

As regards the diaries, qualitative content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007) was employed, in that specific patterns and themes were identified in the data (ibid.), on the basis of which relevant categories were established. To protect the participants' anonymity, during the diary entries as well as the questionnaire data analysis, identification numbers were assigned to them ranging from S1 to S20 (where S=Student). Besides, some aspects of the data were 'quantitised', in other words converted into numerical codes (Dörnyei, 2007), in an effort to integrate it with its quantitative counterpart used in this research, in line with a most common practice within the mixed methods data analysis field, namely 'data transformation' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Both the 'quantitised' qualitative data coming from the diaries and the quantitative data that the questionnaire yielded were subjected to statistical analysis through the use of a statistical package widely employed in applied linguistic research, SPSS.

## Findings and discussion

Following Oxford (1990), the questions on vocabulary and writing strategies were placed into specific categories. In particular, in the vocabulary section of the questionnaire, the questions were categorized as cognitive, compensation, social or metacognitive strategies. In the same vein, in the writing section, they were categorized as metacognitive, cognitive, social or compensation strategies. With regard to vocabulary, 90% employed compensation strategies, 80% employed cognitive and social strategies while 65% resorted to metacognitive strategies (Chart 1). As regards writing, all (100%) used both metacognitive and cognitive strategies, 85% resorted to social strategies while 80% employed compensation strategies (Chart 2).
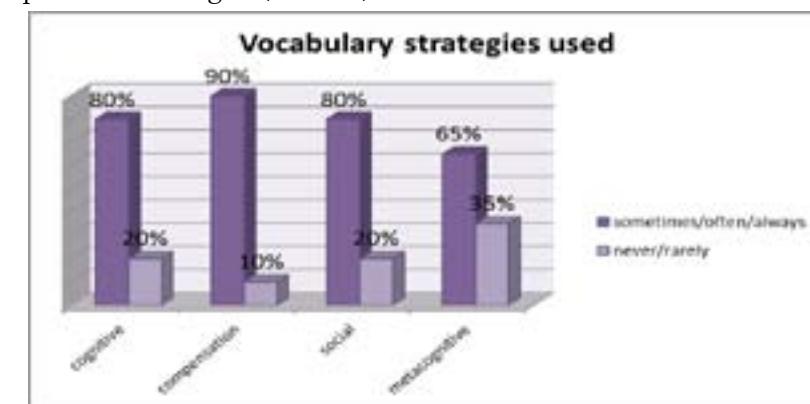


*Chart 1*
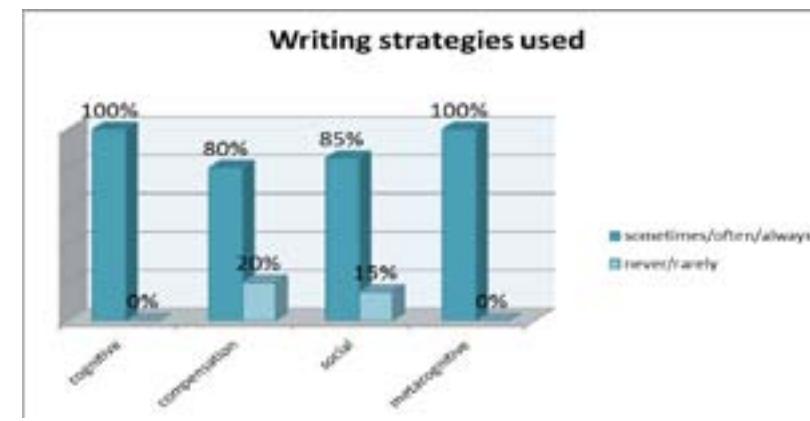


*Chart 2*

With regard to participant beliefs and attitudes about the whole video gaming experience, 90% agree that playing the video game helped them understand new vocabulary, 90% agree that understanding the meaning of new words helped them solve problems and move on in the game, 75% believe that writing letters as the main character of the game gave them a real life purpose for writing, while 50% believe that writing letters as the main character of the game made video gaming an interesting experience to them. Finally, 60% agree that writing in collaboration with their classmates made them feel more confident and 55% believe that playing the video game at home, making their own decisions about their own learning, made them feel more independent and autonomous as learners (Chart 3).
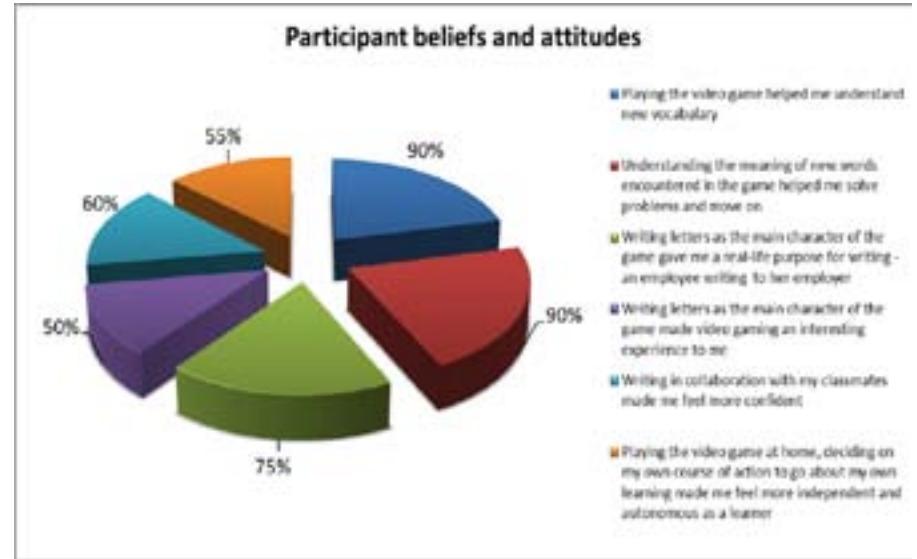


*Chart 3*

The data was statistically analysed through the performance of certain tests, namely Chi-Square tests and especially Fisher's Exact Test, to check whether a statistically significant correlation between variables existed (for more on the statistical analysis and the relevant findings see Palaiogiannis, 2012).

The findings can now be discussed in regard to the research questions that have informed the present study. To start with, the first question refers to whether video gaming can facilitate students' understanding of new vocabu-

lary. The vast majority (90%) of the specific sample believe that understanding new vocabulary and video gaming are linked to each other (Chart 3), since the former enhances the latter and vice versa. In this vein, video gaming promotes purposeful, meaningful vocabulary learning in a way that formal education cannot, since only by understanding new words encountered in the digital worlds of video gaming can gamers come up with solutions to problems and move on in the game. The evidence provided by the statistical analysis indicates that almost all participants felt that gameplay and vocabulary learning were positively interrelated at some point during the game (Palaiogiannis, 2012).

The second research question refers to situated learning and specifically whether video games provide students with a context that will help them develop their writing skills in a meaningful, motivating way. 75% of the participants expressed their enthusiasm for this situated writing in their diary entries since "it was just like [they] had lived this event in real life and [they were] a real detective [themselves]" (S20, diary 1). In terms of gender, 30% were male and 45% were female, comprising 75% of both the total male (6 out of 8) and female (9 out of 12) sample population. This means that the vast majority of the male and female participants were in favour of having their writing skills developed, while acting as the main character of a video game.

Coming to the third research question, this study also explored whether video games foster the development of learning strategies while gamers try to reach specific goals during gameplay. All learners employed strategies in order to deal with vocabulary and writing difficulties, otherwise they wouldn't be able to solve problems and advance the storyline. In particular, regarding the former, most recruited compensation strategies (90%, Chart 1), which is understandable due to the great word load they admittedly encountered during gameplay, while with regard to writing, all learners (100%) used metacognitive and cognitive strategies, followed by social (85%) and then compensation strategies (80%, Chart 2). The evidence also indicates that video gaming and the various technical or storyline difficulties, encountered during gameplay, favour especially collaboration and the use of social strategies among gamers (Palaiogiannis, 2012). The evidence provided by statistics indicates that all female participants showed a preference for social strategies to deal with vocabulary, which might be suggesting that girls are more in need for support and encouragement when it comes to a genre stereotypically associated with boys, while social strategies were also evidenced to be associated with those

who felt more autonomous during gameplay since all of them (100%) employed such strategies.

With regard to the last research question, the present study attempted to investigate whether video games facilitate learner autonomy and independence. The majority of the participants believe that the video gaming experience made them feel more autonomous and independent and collaborative writing boosted their confidence (55% and 60% respectively), a feeling often associated with autonomy (Chart 3). Collaborative writing and autonomy are associated with social strategies and the majority of the sample population (100% female, 50% male) used such strategies. Besides, the statistical tests indicated that those who found the vocabulary tasks in the pre-gaming stages helpful were the ones who expressed feelings of autonomy, meaning that they considered teacher support conducive to the development of their autonomy and independence.

## Teaching implications

Although the generalizability and transferability of the results to similar situations cannot be ensured, due to the contextualized nature of the study and the limited number of the participants, fruitful conclusions can be drawn for reflection.

First of all, games are one of the best methods to motivate learners intrinsically since they can be fun and highly engaging, thus turning the learning process into a meaningful and memorable experience. Besides, video games foster skills "immediately generalizable" to real-life situations (Prensky, 2006, p. 8), such as reasoning, problem-solving and decision-making. The fact that a great number of different learning strategies were evidenced to be at play during gaming renders the virtual environments of video games suitable contexts for learners to develop strategies in a natural, meaningful way if they are to reach their goals and finish the game successfully.

Through video games collaborative learning is promoted and students develop cooperative learning skills as they work in partnerships or small groups having synchronized goals and objectives (Stevison and Kaplan, 2010, p. 152). This is a very important point since collaborative learning and social strategies employed during gameplay were evidenced to be closely associated with participant feelings of autonomy and independence in the present study. In this vein, by engaging students in video gaming tasks that involve and presuppose collaboration, the teacher can facilitate the development of autonomy and life-long learning skills among learners. The engagement in such projects also seems to contribute, as the present research showed, to the establishment of a friendly rapport between the teacher and the learners in a non-threatening, supportive environment for everyone involved.

## Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this study is to provide teachers with insights into the countless possibilities they have at their disposal, especially due to the advent of new technologies and the students being enchanted by them. Although some teachers might be negatively predisposed towards video gaming or feel a bit intimidated at first, due to their lack of familiarity and knowledge regarding the specific genre, it might be worthwhile to give it a try, especially if they consider the potential gains that the whole experience might have to offer, and – who knows – they could even become ardent gamers themselves in the long run, even more so than their own students.

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# 24 *Is using the mother tongue in ELT classrooms a sin? A study of learners' perceptions*

*Sevil Gülbahar*

## Context and problem

Using the students' first language in a foreign language classroom has long been a concern among language teachers all around the world. Some believe that the L2 should be the only medium of instruction in the classroom, while others support the idea that there should be some L1 use in a foreign language classroom in order to foster the learning process of students. However, it is agreed on by the latter group that the use of the L1 should be limited, and so this raises the question "when and how much L1 should be used?"

I had been teaching English to Turkish university students for 16 years and always believed that there should be some L1 in the classroom, especially in a classroom full of students with a low-level of proficiency in English. In my opinion, for example, while making a contrast between the grammatical structure of Turkish and English, or to provide the meaning of a word that is not a key to understand a text, a teacher can use the students' first language. This might both save time and facilitate students' learning. However, at my present university (IKCU, SFL), there are some teachers who do not prefer using L1 in their classrooms. According to them, English is the only language that can be used in the classroom whatever the situation or the students' level is. They support their idea by saying it is the only chance for students to be exposed to and to produce English. That is why I wanted to conduct this study. I was teaching A1 level students and wanted to discover if what I was doing in the classroom was supported by my students' perceptions of L1 use or not.

## Literature review

There is perhaps no common ground between foreign language teachers about the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. Some believe that there should

be zero L1 in the classroom and see it as a harmful sin that teachers must avoid. Others support the use of L1 and consider that banning it is not a good idea and that using the L1 has its own advantages. In *Using the Mother Tongue* (2003:10), Deller and Rinvolucri explain one of the benefits as making students 'feel safe and grounded' in the classroom.

While teachers of English seem indecisive about the use of the mother tongue in a foreign language classroom, students seem more decisive about it. Several studies have been conducted among students to find out their attitudes towards the use of L1 in their foreign language classrooms. Interestingly, they are generally against its use. Findings of a study carried out among Iranian university students to discover their attitudes towards L1 use show that "they are reluctant to use their mother tongue in English language situations and reject it strongly for the sake of better exposure to L2." (Nazary, 2008:147) In another study, the researcher concluded that "students revealed negative attitudes toward L1 use and disapproved its use by their teachers." (Qadri, 2006)

In contrast to the above, there is research that proves L1 use to be beneficial according to students. Schweers (1999:6) indicates that her research results show "a high percentage (88.7%) of the student participants felt that Spanish" -in this case the mother tongue of the students- "should be used in their English classes". In another study, the researchers concluded that "the idea that L1 can help the student psychologically is approved by the fact that learners actually learn more when they feel more secure, and when they are more comfortable in a learning environment." (Raeiszadeh, et al., 2012:437)

## Procedure

### Participants

This study was conducted at Izmir Katip Celebi University, School of Foreign Languages. The participants were A1 level prep. students. Twenty-one participants who attended the study were from the same classroom -my own class- with different English learning backgrounds. Before conducting the interviews participants filled in a permission form which let me use the data collected from the interviews.

### Data collection tools

The data for the study was collected thorough interviews since the data would be more detailed in that way in comparison to a questionnaire in which students generally prefer writing very little. The interviews took place over four days since there were four groups and each interview lasted for about ten minutes. The participants were interviewed in groups of four, five or six because some of them didn't appear on their interview day, so they were interviewed with other groups. The groups were formed by me taking into consideration the characters of the participants: talkative students were grouped together in order not to give them the opportunity to dominate an interview with silent ones. All interviews were recorded using both a mobile phone and a digital recorder as a precaution against the risk of losing the data. In the interview participants were asked three questions about the L1 use in their classroom. The questions were, in the order they were asked:

Question 1: How do you feel when I use your L1 in the lesson? Why?

Question 2: How do you feel when I use only English in the lesson? Why?

Question 3: In which part of the lesson would you prefer me to use your L1? Why?

To decrease the level of anxiety before the interview and to gather richer data, participants were given the questions two days before the interviews, and were told about being recorded. After collecting all the data the interviews were transcribed.

### Data analysis

To analyse interviews I used tables and categorization. The overall view of the students was important for the research; therefore, the data in the transcriptions were grouped under categories according to the major common points of answers given by the students to each question and analysed in that way.

## Findings and discussion

The answers of the participants were analyzed and grouped for each question. The responses to the first question given by all groups are presented in Table 1.

***Research question 1: How do you feel when I use your L1 in the lesson? Why?***

This research question concerns students' reasons for and responses about L1 use in the classroom.

*Table 1. Students' reasons for L1 use*

| Feeling | N | Reasons | Representative responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 16 | Better comprehension | "If we don't understand, speaking in Turkish is better." |
| | | Good for clarifying | "When our mother tongue is used, it's better in terms of understanding." |
| | | Provides support | "When we're stuck, I think support in Turkish is better." |
| Negative | 4 | Loss of concentration | "After some time, when the language we know is used, we get bored easily." |
| | | Slows down the pace | "When Turkish is used, the pace of the lesson may slow down." |

Note. *n*= number of students

According to the data, most of my students have positive feelings towards the use of their L1 by the teacher. The main reason presented by the students is to have better comprehension of the lesson. It is necessary to point out that the students require the L1 only when they don't understand the topic being taught in the lesson. Only a few of the students expressed negative feelings about the use of L1 due to the fact that it causes a loss of concentration. Here I believe it is essential to point out that none of the participants said that the teacher should use only the L1 in the classroom.

The second question in the research asked the students about their feelings towards the use of only the L2 in the classroom. The answers are presented in Table 2.

***Research question 2: How do you feel when I use only the L2 in the lesson? Why?***

*Table 2. Students' feelings for L1 use in the classroom*

| Feeling | n | Reasons | Representative responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 13 | - Subconscious learning | "It helps me be more adapted to the lesson." |
| | | - Better adaptation / | |
| | | - motivation | "We try harder to understand and learn English." |
| | | - Good to hear | |
| | | - Makes one study harder | |
| Negative | 7 | - Problems in comprehension | "Hearing English all the time was problematic for me; it caused me to get lost in the lesson." |
| | | | "When you talk in English, I don't understand you." |
| | | - Loss of motivation / demotivating | "Always hearing English and not understanding makes me feel bored after some time." |

Note. *n*= number of students

According to the data presented in Table 2, most of the participants have positive feelings towards the teacher's use of the L2 in the lesson. The most common reason given by the students was that it causes subconscious learning of English in time. They stated that they did not understand most of the things I said at the beginning of the first term, but later they understood me better. However, there were also some students who had negative feelings towards the L2 use all the time, and their biggest concern was the lack of comprehension it caused. There were also two students who mentioned that the proficiency level of students was an important factor. They added that with lower level students the teacher's use of the L2 all the time might hinder comprehension.

The last question in the study focused on areas of the lesson in which students preferred their teacher to use the L1. The data for the question is presented in Table 3.

***Research question 3: In which part of the lesson would you prefer me to use your L1? Why?***

*Table 3: Students preference for L1 use according to the lessons*

| Areas of the lesson | *n* | Reasons | Representative responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar | 13 | - Better understanding<br>- Requires a high level of language proficiency<br>- Inability to ask questions when stuck | "Especially in grammar, using Turkish is better for us to understand it."<br>"In grammar because it's difficult for us to understand." |
| Vocabulary | 3 | - Provides better understanding | "Turkish explanation of the word makes it clear in mind." |
| Revision | 1 | - Better comprehension | "The teacher may revise the points students didn't understand at the end of the lesson." |
| No specific part | 1 | - Clarifying | "When we don't understand something, I want you to use my mother tongue." |
| No use of the L1 | 2 | - Causes misunderstandings<br>- Students get used to it<br>- A barrier to think in the L2 | "…they are different languages with different rules…"<br>"We think in Turkish all the time." |

Note. *n*= number of students

The data in Table 3 shows that the majority of students stated that they wanted the teacher to use the L1 while explaining the grammar points. The most common reason they gave was that when grammar is in the L1 they understand the rule better. In my opinion, the reason for grammar being at the top of the list might be because the students have to take a proficiency test at the end of the year and they have to pass it to study at their faculties

the following year. Thus, it is possible for them to believe that grammar is the most important thing to learn, and that's why they may want it to be taught in Turkish. Again, two students mentioned that they did not want any Turkish in the classroom because of the problems it may cause such as misunderstanding of a topic.

## Reflections

By conducting the above study I had the chance to confirm that using the L1 in a foreign language classroom is not a sin at all and, in fact, it is required to an extent by students. I had always believed that students had positive attitudes towards their teachers' using the L1, especially in grammar teaching, and through this research it proved to be true. Apart from its reflections as a teacher the study helped me to improve as a researcher. To exemplify, I discovered while carrying out research that my study is actually not action research, in which the primary aim is an action for change, but exploratory practice, in which the researcher aims to understand what is going on in the classroom and why. To conclude, this research helped me understand that, in order to comprehend the rules of English use better, my learners need some Turkish in the classroom, especially while I am teaching grammar.

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# PART III

# 25 Attribution retraining in L2 classes: prospects for exploratory classroom practice

## İsmail Hakkı Erten

"I am just hopeless. I just can't learn English."
*Merve (a prep year student at a state university)*

"I scored very low because
I do not like the way my teacher teaches."
*Arda (a prep year student at a state university)*

## Introduction

The above quotes from two prep year university students who had been studying English for about two months and seemed to have fallen behind their classmates appear to echo voices of a considerable proportion of students in language classes. Such students appear to believe that their poor language learning achievement is simply due to their language learning ability and they can do little about it (cf. Merve). There are also others who consider their teachers as the main source of their poor performance in the exams (cf. Arda). Still ]others claim that either questions were difficult in the exam or they were not lucky. In brief, students do seem to have personal explanations for their exam performance in English classes.

Students' subjective explanations are often argued to be linked to several psychological constructs in the process of language learning and thus constitute a set of significant factors. In the first section of this chapter, I will attempt to summarize significant research into language learners' attributions for their achievement in language learning. In the second section of the chapter, I will review the concept of attribution retraining and endeavour to show how classroom teachers can go about understanding and changing their students' attributions.

## Attribution theory and research in second language learning

Personal explanations given by language learners for their achievement in a particular task or a test are called attributions (Weiner, 2010). Attributions reveal one's self-evaluation and thus can be informative in terms of human motivation and/or motivated behaviour. Weiner (2010: 29) explains this very neatly when he states *"…the interpretation of the past, that is, the perceived causes of prior events, determines what will be done in the future."* This is to maintain that reflecting on the relationship between outcome, task nature, and attributions, learners will develop possible future behaviours and make decisions regarding what to do next. Attributions as evaluations of the past but also as forecasts of the future are profoundly consistent with process-based theories of motivation wherein motivation is pictured as a process consisting of several phases (Williams & Burden, 1997). Dörnyei (2003), for example, describes motivation as involving three stages (a) choice motivation where goals are set, intentions are formed and action is launched, (b) executive motivation whereby efforts on the task are maintained by persistence with it, and (c) motivational retrospection whereby an evaluation of what happened is made. In Weiner`s (1992) attribution-related motivation theory, the relationship between the sense that a person makes of their past learning experience and how they relate it to their current performance is evaluated and the conclusions they draw obviously play a pivotal role in whether they decide to act or to abstain from doing so. If, for example, a student keeps failing in an easy task and attributes this outcome to a lack of ability, she may find it difficult to motivate herself and may simply withdraw from taking any further part or may stop making any effort, thus negatively adjusting her motivation with a possible feeling of learned helplessness. Alternatively, another student who fails in a task and explains the failure by not having made enough effort may have a totally different motivational orientation for the next trial with relatively increased efforts.

Attributions can be of different dimensions. These are *locus of causality*, *stability*, and *control*. The *locus of causality* explains whether people explain their performance by referring to internal or external causes. Examples of *internal causes* include whether someone sees herself as having the required ability and/or endeavouring to achieve the task. *External causes*, on the other hand, signifies the role attributed in good or poor performance in language learning to external forces such as how difficult the task is thought to be and/or how lucky one perceives herself.

Personal explanations generated by individuals for language learning performance can be either alterable or unchangeable. Such a feature is highlighted by the *stability* dimension which informs us of whether one's attribution is likely to change over time or remain unchanged. In that sense, effort can be seen as an unstable internal factor as its amount and nature can be altered in time. Ability, on the other hand, is internal but is usually considered to be stable.

The third dimension is *controllability* which reveals how much control one feels one has over what happens in the process of language learning. Individuals, for example, may see themselves as having more control over the amount of effort they are prepared to invest than over difficulty of learning a foreign language or their luck in exams and tasks. Figure 1 illustrates different dimensions of attributions.

| | Internal | | External | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Controllable | Uncontrollable | (UN)Controllable[1] | Uncontrollable |
| Stable | Long-term effort | Ability | Teacher input/bias | Task difficulty |
| Unstable | Situational effort/strategy use | Health, Mood & Interest | Parental support & Classroom environment | Luck /Fate |

Based on Weiner (2010)

*Figure 1: Dimensions of attributions*

Although interest into personal attributions to one's performance is not new, the topic has only recently started to attract some attention in the field of second language learning and teaching (e.g. Williams & Burden, 1999: Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna, 2001; Ushioda, 2001; Williams, Burden, Poulet, & Maun, 2004; Gobel & Mori, 2007; Hsieh &  Schallert, 2008; Peacock, 2009; Gobel & Mori, Thang, Kan, & Lee, 2011; Erler & Macaro, 2011, Erten & Burden, 2014).

Conventionally, a set of four main attributions (i.e. ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck) have been documented as being used by language learners to explain the main causes for their performance in language learning. However, other possible attributions such as interest, health, mood, materials, means,

strategies used by learners, and significant others (teacher, parents, peers, etc.) are also possible (see Williams & Burden, 1999; Peacock, 2009).

Attributions generated by language learners both for success and failure appear to vary. Descriptive studies report that learners generally tend to attribute internal attributions for success and external attributions for failure. Internal attributions for success often include effort while failure is attributed to lack of effort, distraction from others, or difficulty of the language (Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams et al., 2001; Erler & Macaro, 2011). However, such a tendency does not seem to be universal. In some cases the opposite order holds true. For example, participants in studies from eastern countries appear to credit their teacher as an external attribution for their success and blame themselves for their failure. This was the case among Chinese students (Peacock, 2009), Japanese and Thai students (Gobel & Mori, 2007; Mori, Gobel, Thepsiri & Pojanapunya, 2010) and Malaysian students (Thang, Gobel, Norl & Suppiah, 2011).

Teachers and language learners may have different opinions on what causes success and failure. Such a difference was highlighted by Peacock's (2009) study into teacher attributions vs. learner attributions. He reports that students and teachers gave contrasting views on a considerable number of attribution items. Commenting on such differences, he asserts that contrasting teacher-student attributions for failure or success may result in problematic situations. If, for example, a teacher attributes students' failure to the lack of effort while her students attribute their failure mainly to task difficulty, the teacher is likely to fail to notice the extra future help students may need to succeed in a particular task.

More recently, studies adopting inferential research methodologies appear to have established a link between attributions and language learning achievement (Cochran, McCallum, Bell, 2010; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011; Hashemi & Zabihi, 2011; Erten and Burden, 2014) as well as learners' willingness to continue learning a foreign language (Erler and Macaro, 2011). In such studies, the controllability dimension often appears to be closely linked to achievement as those factors that seemed to predict achievement were more than often uncontrollable attributes such as *ability* (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Erten & Burden, 2014), *luck*, *mood*, and *task difficulty* (Hashemi & Zabihi, 2011; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011; Erten & Burden, 2014), although *effort* as a controllable attribution was also reported to be a predictor of success

(Hashemi & Zabihi, 2011; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011). With reference to continuing with foreign language study, Erler and Macaro (2011) found that if students think learning a foreign language is difficult (*task difficulty*), they are likelier to discontinue their studies, highlighting the link between attributions and one`s motivation to carry out a specific task.

Attribution can also be seen as a reflection of one's mindset regarding the process of language learning. Mercer (2012) makes a distinction between growth and fixed mindsets to describe two competing implicit theories of individuals about how alterable their language learning ability can be. To Mercer, language learning mindset *"reflects the extent to which a person believes that language learning ability is dependent on some immutable, innate talent or is the result of controllable factors such as effort and conscious hard work"* (2012: 22). Uncontrollable ability attribution reported as predictor of achievement can be a sign of fixed mind set while effort attribution can reflect a growth mind set (Erten & Burden, 2014). This suggests that much can be learned from investigating students' opinions on sources of success and failure in language learning.

## Attribution retraining

Remember Merve that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. She believes she is hopeless and she cannot learn English. Her attitude reflects an ability attribution, whereby she seems to believe she has little ability. Weiner (2010) asserts that such students may develop a sense of learned helplessness and give up trying. Also remember Arda who complained about his teacher's method of teaching and attributed his failure to his teacher. Weiner (ibid) goes on to argue that the least desirable (maladaptive) attributions are external, uncontrollable, and stable attributions (e.g. luck, materials, teachers etc.) while the most desirable (adaptive) ones are internal, controllable, and unstable attributions (e.g. effort, using strategies etc.). Weiner recommends that it would be best if students could convert their attributions to their performance from maladaptive ones to more adaptive ones, as these will have more positive effects on learners' future learning behaviours.

The question arises then "what can teachers do to help their students?" Answers to this question lie within studies where apparently achievement attributions were found to be malleable (see Weiner, 2010). Weiner refers to some

attribution retraining studies where steps were successfully taken to alter students' external, stable, uncontrollable attributions into more internal, controllable and unstable attributions, helping them to take a more confident attitude to their studies. Such work can be classified as attribution retraining studies.

Attribution retraining involves convincing students that their so-called explanations of their poor performance may not always reflect the actual truth behind the scene and that they can do better if they believe they can. Such work often tries to promote the locus of control and show students that what happens to them is often within their control (Perry, Stupnisky, Hall, Chipperfield, & Weiner, 2010; Ruthig, Perry, Hall, & Hladkyj, 2004). This is in line with current findings from SLA research that the controllability dimension in learner attributions appeared to predict language learning achievement (Erten & Burden, 2014). Therefore, helping learners to realize the control they might have over the learning process may improve their attitudes towards their studies as well as their autonomy and achievement in the learning process.

Attribution retraining (AR) may involve a multicomponent approach. Haynes, Perry, Stupnisky, and Daniels (2009), for example, discuss a five-step attribution retraining protocol employed in a number of different attribution retraining studies with first year college students. These are given and described below:

1. Pre-AR Diagnostic Assessment
2. Causal Search Activation
3. AR Induction
4. AR Consolidation
5. Post-AR Assessment

*Pre-AR Diagnostic Assessment:* The first step to alter students' attributions for their performance in language learning requires an initial assessment of their attributions. Haynes et al. (2009) propose that this needs to be done within the first month after the term begins. This may be of vital importance for some students as the assistance they may need is likely to be more urgent than is often thought. For a language programme, then, it may well be suitable to wait until learners are first assessed through either formative or summative assessment tools.

To do this, once students receive results from their first assessment, an attributions questionnaire can be administered. An assessment of students' responses can inform us about vulnerable students. Attribution retraining studies (e.g. Perry et al., 2010) propose that the most vulnerable group of students are usually those with low locus of control. In other words, those students who attribute their failure to ability, luck, task difficulty, teacher bias, etc rather than effort and lack of effective strategies are likelier to benefit more from any attribution retraining attempts.. Therefore it will be sensible to hypothetically expect that any attribution retraining intervention can yield better results with such students.

*Causal Search Activation:* Once the vulnerable students are identified, these students can be offered a session in which they are invited to think seriously about possible causes of their performance in a language test. This can be done through a brainstorming activity in a focus interview group or through an interactive pair-work activity where students may be asked to write down possible causes for their performance.

*Attribution Retraining (AR) Induction:* Haynes et al. (2009) suggest that a session that lasts 30-90 minutes may need to be allocated for such an induction. They describe two methods that can be used. The first is based on a video session while the second one employs a handout. They can be used together or separately.

The video session involves videotaping two senior students talking about their experience in the first year. They emphasize how they believed they did not have the ability but things started changing when they made more efforts or changed their study strategies. Following their conversation a lecturer comments on their talk to promote locus of control over the process of learning. This can be easily adopted for a language learning context in which a group of students can talk about (or perform a scripted conversation about) their initial language learning experience and emphasize the fact that things can change when they started taking more control over the process of language learning. This can be coupled with a commentary from a language instructor who highlights the significance of attributing performance to more internal/unstable/controllable causes.

The second method is about employing a handout. A handout can be prepared with a nice layout to present maladaptive attributions on one side and adaptive alternatives on the other side, again promoting locus of control over the process of learning. Students can be asked to read a printed or online version of the handout and participate in a discussion session.

*AR Consolidation:* An attribution retraining session is typically followed by a consolidation session. Haynes et al. (2009) describe four different methods of consolidating students' adaptive attributions: group discussion, a difficult aptitude/language test, a writing assignment, and a handout.

Group discussion: Target students can be organized into small groups and discuss their attributions regarding their poor academic experiences. They are asked to give three most important causes of their performance then report their reasons to the discussion coordinator. The whole group then discusses whether reasons produced by different groups are controllable or uncontrollable. Later the group suggests more controllable alternative attributions for their unsatisfactory performances.

An aptitude/language test: a second AR consolidation procedure that Haynes et al. describe is administering a difficult aptitude test where students are most likely to fail. According to Haynes and his colleagues such a failure following an attribution retraining session can help students practice endorsing more controllable attributions. Iin a language classroom, however, it may not be practical to administer a general aptitude test. Instead, such an experience can be provided through a difficult language test that is above students' proficiency level. Students can then experience generating genuinely more adaptive attributions for their low performance.

A writing assignment: In this assignment, students are asked to remember a test that they failed or performed considerably lower than that they usually do, then describe their emotions and what they learned from this experience. Students are advised that their responses will be kept confidential.

Handout: The handout prepared for the attribution retraining session provides a salient resource for students to study. Further, a printed handout can be complementary to a video session and function as a reminder of the session.

*Post-AR Assessment:* Once the attribution retraining and consolidation steps are complete, students' attributions can be reassessed some time later. Haynes et al. recommend several months after the completion of previous components of the retraining. To do this, the same attribution instrument can be administered again, coupled with a close observation of students' improvement in due course of time. Such reassessment will make it possible to compare students' attributions and performance before and after attribution retraining.

## Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to show the links between the factors to which students refer to explain and attribute their achievement and/or failure in learning a foreign language. I have several times emphasized the need for language learners to adopt more adaptive attributions for what happens to them in the process of language learning. Controllability was also emphasized as it has been shown to be closely linked to achievement. Finally, I tried to exhibit how a typical attribution retraining programme can be applied in language classes.

I feel the need to note that attribution retraining studies are scarce in the field of SLA and any attempts to understand, let alone change, how students explain their performance is truly congruent with the spirit of exploratory classroom practice. At the same time, if we can help our students adopt more adaptive attributions to their performance, be it poor or good, this is likely to lead to genuine improvement in our classroom environments.

## Acknowledgement

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(Footnotes)

[1]    The addition of the prefix UN- indicates that these factors can be controllable but often only by others (e.g. school administration) rather than the learner themselves, making these factors uncontrollable for language learners

# 26 *Integrated teacher-research*

*Jerome C. Bush*

## Context and problem

In this chapter I would like to describe the professional development practices we used at Ahmet Şimşek Koleji during the 2013-2014 academic year. The school is a private K-12 school in Istanbul with about 1500 students and I am the foreign language coordinator. I manage 32 teachers, (25 English teachers and 7 German teachers) who teach foreign languages to children from 3 to 18 years old. The school is well-established, having been founded in 1986. It is located in the Kartal district of Istanbul, which is on the Asian side.

The reason I want to describe our project is that I think what we did is different from, and perhaps an improvement on, other professional development programs. It is my hope that other schools and institutions will adopt this model, which is based on teacher-research. I am now calling the program "Integrated Teacher-research" or ITR for short. The basic idea is that all the teacher-research projects are simplified and have a common theme. The use of a common theme is why the term "integrated" is being used. In this case, all the teacher-research projects were related to motivation in some way. I believe that this program is an interesting innovation and that other institutions can benefit from understanding and using this process.

Before I describe the program in detail, I would like to give you some background on our school and our professional development efforts. Since the school was established in 1986, it has always been focused on the teaching of English. I was recruited in 2010 and came to Turkey in August of that year. I spent the first year getting adjusted to the new system and started training the teachers in the 2011-2012 year. I was doing mostly workshops and seminars. These seminars were on general topics of teaching and learning such as reading comprehension, teacher knowledge, professionalism, the cognitive aspects of writing, and motivation. However, the seminars were not effective in that they seemed to have little impact on classroom behavior.

Although I continued seminars during the 2012-2013 academic year, it was becoming apparent that it was a fruitless endeavor. This was upsetting to me because I put a lot of time and energy into developing the workshops and creating my PowerPoints. The teachers responded positively and said they enjoyed the seminars. However, they said that they couldn't put the theories and concepts from the seminars into action due to curriculum constraints and poor student behavior. I wanted to provide a valuable training experience for the teachers, but the training sessions were only mildly interesting to the teachers. The puzzle I needed to solve was finding a way to make professional development meaningful without overburdening the teachers.

At the end of the year, I was still thinking about how I could improve my seminars. I gave the teachers a survey and had them tick off seminar topics in which they might be interested. The overwhelming top response was "motivation". It seemed that the teachers were assuming an inverse relationship between motivation and classroom behavior. That is to say, that if we could increase the motivation, the instances of classroom disruption would decrease. Of course, motivation has other positive benefits and it seemed like a good topic to consider.

Over the summer something very interesting happened. I was invited to a lovely conference in the city of Izmir, Turkey. The conference was titled "Teacher-researchers in Action" and it was organized by Dr. Kenan Dikilitaş at Gediz University. Dr. Simon Borg was the main speaker at this conference. He gave compelling reasons to try teacher-research as a professional development activity. Additionally, the teachers at Gediz University who had conducted studies presented their research, and that was very interesting. The teacher-researchers spoke about the process and what they gained from the process of conducting research.

I felt very positive about teacher-research and thought I would like to try this method at Ahmet Şimşek Koleji. However, the teachers at Ahmet Şimşek Koleji did not have the skills or support of the teachers at Gediz University. A high school simply does not have the same culture of research as a university. Also, high school teachers have an incredible complicated job that includes communication with parents and adherence with a host of regulations from the M.E.B. (Turkish ministry of education). Teacher-research as it was presented at Gediz University would not be appropriate in this context. I decided to modify teacher-research for our context. The end result is ITR.

Integrated Teacher-research is the result of adapting teacher-research to the primary and secondary environment. The research process was simplified to make it feasible for teachers to complete. All of the studies were to be conducted on the theme of motivation. The goal became not the production of an individual study to develop an individual teacher, but a series of studies along a single theme that could be compared and contrasted. In ITR, the aggregate of the studies are as important as the individual studies. There is as much value in the conversations about the studies and all the teachers being focused on the resolution of a common problem as there is in the individual studies themselves.

I did not so much design ITR as it just sort of grew. In other words, I did not set out to develop a new professional development technique. I was just trying to do something that would be effective in-service training. While we were conducting the project we referred to it as "the motivation project" and not ITR. However, when I look back on it, I am pleased with the results and feel that it was appropriate in this context. I would like to do a similar project next year another around theme. Before describing the concept of ITR further, perhaps it is best to take a look at some of the pertinent literature and related studies to see how ITR differs from other forms of research.

## Literature review

ITR is not the process of integrating teaching and research, which has a developed body of literature (e.g. Colbeck, 1998). ITR is also distinct from Collaborative Teacher-research, which is where a group of teachers do a single study by working together. It should also not be confused with educational research, which is a general term for research about teaching and education, but not necessarily conducted, by teachers.

ITR has some features in common with Exploratory Practice (see Allwright, 2003). One common feature is that the focus is on understanding a phenomenon. The research activities in in an ITR project, when considered together, should give some perspective on a larger issue. Additionally, similar to exploratory practice, ITR does not adhere to the strict principles of academic research. However, ITR differs from exploratory practice in that it uses an intervention. Exploratory practice examines normal classroom procedures to develop understanding. In the words of Allwright (2001), "…one of the chief

distinguishing features of Exploratory Practice, [is] the deliberate exploitation of standard classroom language learning and teaching activities as the means for collecting data on what happens in the classroom …" (p.4). ITR, in contrast, is modeled on intervention studies, but it is the compilation and comparison of the individual studies that leads to greater understanding of a phenomenon. The individual studies in an ITR project may seem completely unprofessional to academicians. However, the aggregate of the studies can shed light on a phenomenon. Also in contrast to exploratory practice, ITR does not just seek to understand a phenomenon, but it may address a problem or seek to make a specific improvement in a school.

The practice of teaching can be improved by looking at solid evidence of what successfully develops students (Hammersley, 2007). This is known as evidence-based practice. The purpose of educational research, then, is to compile evidence which can be used in educational decision making. It is important that teacher base their decisions on evidence of what works. However, much of this research is done in universities and is conducted by professors or professional researchers. Substantial contributions to the field of Second Language Acquisition have been made in this way. Much of the teaching practices of today have come from these empirical studies. However, sometimes these research studies, which are somewhat clinical in nature, miss the realities of the classroom. Teachers have a unique insight into what works for classroom practice. Sometimes teachers are more aware of what works in a classroom than an academician. Thus, teachers have the potential to make substantial contributions to the field of education.

This is the position that Dr. Borg was supporting at the conference in Izmir during June of 2013. In fact, much of the information regarding teacher-research reported here comes from the book "*Teacher-research in Language Teaching*" by Simon Borg (Borg, 2013). In the book, Borg asserts, "…teacher-research has the potential to be a powerful transformative force in the professional development of language teaching" (pg.6). Therefore, exploring the relationship between teachers and research is vitally important. The potential benefits of teacher-research are many, and have been widely reported on in the literature as summarized in Borg (2013). They are:

- Improved teacher decisions and judgments
- Reduced feelings of frustration and isolation for teachers
- Allows teachers to be innovators

- Teachers become more critical, reflective, and analytical
- Teacher rely less on external sources to supply answers to problems
- Fosters connections between teachers and researchers
- Improves teachers' sense of self-worth and status
- Reduces the gap between research findings and classroom practice
- Develops a problem-solving mindset for teachers
- Increases the professional status of teachers
- Empowers the teacher to influence the teaching profession
- Has the potential for improving the entire educational process

It seems that teacher-research is effective in developing teachers' confidence as well as abilities. It also has been shown to have a positive impact on student behavior and learning. Additionally, teacher-research can drive school improvements. Teacher-research not only identifies problems, it suggests solutions and tests them. This creates evidence of effective procedures that can then be adopted by the whole school.

According to Stenhouse (1975), an important characteristic of research is that it must be made public. Teacher-research is certainly reflective, but if it stops at the development of a personal understanding, it would not be considered research according many academicians. These academicians assert that research must be communicated and that such communication is integral to the definition of research. It is only after the research has been disseminated that it can become part of the public debates which shape educational policy. Freeman (1996) stated that teacher-research which is not made public runs the risk of being lost. Although private inquiry can be beneficial, a wider distribution increases the chance that teacher-researchers will have an impact both on the field of education and on educational policy. That is why we compiled and printed our studies.

Some academicians argue that the responsibility to publish research in a way that approximates academic research is too heavy a burden for teachers. Indeed, that is the perspective that I took for the project. I designed it to be feasible for busy teachers to complete. It did not have a strong academic requirement. Imposing strict requirements for academic-like research would be too much for teachers in this context. Unfortunately, our teachers are also not highly paid. Economic instability, generally speaking, does not facilitate

embarking on a path of systematic inquiry. Teachers also have personal reasons for not conducting research such as lack of skills, knowledge, belief, or motivation (Borg, 2013).

In addition to the problems teachers face in conducting research, several researchers question the validity of teacher-research. Much of the teacher-research produced is done so as a teacher development scheme (this project included). This means that teachers are rarely voluntarily involved in research projects. Therefore, much of the research is of low quality and the findings are not reliable. This critique is made according to a traditional view of scientific research and disregards the value of the process of conducting research to the teacher.

Integrated Teacher-research addresses these issues by reducing the academic requirements of the individual studies and focusing on the process and the aggregate results. The individual studies may not be reliable, but the process of doing the research and comparing it with similar research done by peers has many benefits. I really think it is a new idea. Although a wealth of research exists on teacher-research, I couldn't find a situation where the research was integrated around a single theme. I make the claim of developing a new system with no small degree of trepidation. Such a wealth of research exists that it is possible this concept has been tried before and I wasn't able to find the study. Even if this project turns out to be unoriginal, it still adds to the growing body of practitioner research. Perhaps it is significant in that it focuses on the primary and secondary EFL teaching environment, which tends to be underrepresented in the literature.

## Procedure

The rationale for the program was set out in the department strategic plan which was given to teachers on Monday, August 19, 2013. The strategic plan clearly stated a position that teacher behavior stems from teacher beliefs. It also reported that seminars may be pleasant experiences, but not effective. Therefore, to impact teacher behavior, teachers should actively work on a project themselves. This project will have the teacher trying some new behavior, observing the effect and recording the result.

I gave a presentation to the teachers on Wednesday August 21st, 2013. The presentation was about 45 minutes long. I prepared a handout and PowerPoint slides. The reduced research process was described in detail for the teachers and effort was taken to see that the overall project was explained clearly. The process for the teachers consisted of four steps. The teachers were to find and read one article related to motivation. Then the teachers were to develop a research question. The third step was to do something to test the question, such as a classroom activity. After that the teachers had to observe the results and write a report. Although the research process was simplified for the teachers, it was not an activity they were used to and they had a lot of questions. At an early stage it became clear that this was not a research culture and there would be some problems.

In spite of the confusion, the teachers all found articles related to motivation by the required due date. Presumably, all of the teachers read these articles. Many of these articles were from academic journals, but some of them were just simple one-page articles from the internet. Regardless of the quality of the article, it is almost certainly true that this project prompted the teachers to read. In addition to understanding the contents of the articles, the process of searching for such publications can be beneficial. One can see the scope of current research and discover what types of studies are popular. It is possible that just by searching for and reading an article the teachers had internalized more information about teaching than they had the year before when they were passively sitting through seminars.

In addition to the reading, all teachers developed a research question that I approved. The project was to be a systematic way of answering this question. Then more problems started to develop. Some teachers became confused as to what to do to proceed, but didn't want to ask for guidance. Other teachers were afraid that their classroom activity, which was often referred to as an intervention, would not be effective. Time constraints, particularly the testing schedule, were reported to be a problem. Many of the teachers said that they were not used to this kind of project and were unclear on how to proceed. To make the project less confusing I made another handout that listed the expected outcomes along with section headings for the reports.

In addition to this, I made myself available to assist with the various projects. I also checked in with teachers at our weekly meetings. Teachers were hesitant to ask me for help, but they were discussing their projects with each other. I was very happy to see these discussions going on. However, it should be noted that some teachers strongly resisted the project. In fact one teacher

just handed in some material copied from the Internet with a letter of apology. Although this was a great disappointment at first, I eventually came to realize that this was also a type of data. These kinds of projects will not work for every teacher and having inflated expectations could be dangerous. I decided that it would be best to take the long view and consider the research in the aggregate and the effects it was having on the teachers and the school.

Eventually, I had all the reports. I realized that it would make a nice book. As part of the process I had always meant to publish the compilation of reports. However, I hadn't really planned on creating a book. I thought it would be more like a magazine. I ended up with almost a hundred pages of material. To determine the effectiveness of the project I had the teachers complete a survey with eight open-ended questions. I analyzed the responses, wrote a few sections describing the process and results, added a few pictures and ended up with 135 pages of material. I designed a cover and had it printed as a book.

As of the writing of this article the book is being printed. After the book arrives, I will have the teachers read the book and respond to at least three of the authors. This will further create discussion, analysis and comparisons. At our school we have a primary school group and a high school group. These two groups of teachers don't often interact. However, they will interact through this book. The process took place over an entire school year. It was not really easy, but it also wasn't so difficult it couldn't be done. It was appropriate for a context where research is generally not valued, and the teachers are over-worked and under-paid.

**Findings and discussion**

I will give a summary of the responses of the eight-question survey in this section. The survey was completed by 21 teachers. Three teachers did not respond to the survey. The responses of the teachers will be reported anonymously. Each teacher has been assigned a number, from "T1" to "T21", and these numbers will be used instead of names.

The first question of the survey had to do with whether or not the article that was read related to the research project. Twenty of the teachers (95%) indicated that the article related to their study in some way. Only one teacher said that her project was not connected to the article that she read. In this case, she was inspired by another project that was going on in the school and did her study on that topic. Some of the articles were directly related to the project, others were related in an indirect way. These indirectly related articles were general in nature. Although they provided useful background information and theoretical perspective, they did not relate directly to the study done by the teacher.

> "In fact the article was about studies and developments on motivation in education up to date. So in that point of view my project seems as if unrelated. But when all details are read in the article the main point of the project suits well I think." –T1

Several teachers mentioned that the articles were partially useful. Some of the teachers adapted the articles to their particular circumstances and used some, but not all of the information in the articles.

> "Yes, most of the parts are related to what I did in the classroom." –T16

> "…I was aware of the fact that I would not be able to use every single idea recommended in the article, but I chose some parts of the article and tried to adopt them in my classroom studies." –T11

Most of the teachers based their studies on the articles that they chose. This turns out to be the reason they chose the articles. In these cases the article was directly related to the study. In some cases the teacher-research study was essentially a replication of a previous study. The teachers are using procedures described in the articles and verifying if the results will be similar in the Turkish EFL environment.

> "I chose an article which was useful and could be done easily in my classroom. So it worked well in the classroom I chose. When I saw the positive impact on the students, I also did some of the same activities in my other classes." –T10

The responses to this question seem to indicate that initial reading is an important ingredient in ITR. In most cases, the article provided structure for the research study which was conducted by the teacher. Of course more reading would have been better. However, requiring the teachers to search out and read five or ten studies would be a heavy burden for already overworked teachers.

It should be noted that the article selection done by the teachers was not random. For the most part, the teachers had an idea of a topic they wanted to research before they went looking for an article. The articles provided theoretical frameworks and methodologies for the studies of the teachers. It is hard to imagine that the teachers would have produced much of anything at all if they had skipped the article reading step.

The next question asked the teachers what part of the project was the most stressful. Several teachers mentioned during staff meetings that they were stressed by the project and that they did not have adequate preparation to conduct a study. The teachers' responses to the written survey indicated a variety of factors contributed to the stress of the project. The stress factors and the frequencies are reported in the table below.

*Table 1 – Frequencies of stress factors (N=21)*

| Freq. | % | Stress Factor | Freq. | % | Stress Factor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | 48% | students | 2 | 10% | nothing |
| 5 | 24% | time | 2 | 10% | materials |
| 4 | 19% | failure apprehension | 2 | 10% | evaluating the results |
| 4 | 19% | noise | 1 | 5% | technology |
| 3 | 14% | finding the article and writing the report | 1 | 5% | finding a place |

In this current project, the item that was most mentioned as stressful was the students. The adverse behaviors of students that were most mentioned were lack of participation, noise and failure to study.

> "It was the students' part which made me stressful. Despite having planned the activities beforehand, I felt stressful and a bit frustrated when there was not enough student participation." – T11

Another major stressor was time. Some teachers reported that the project took class time away from other planned activities. Others reported that working under deadline caused them stress. One teacher reported that the searching a reporting phase of the project took up a lot of time in the evening.

> "We have to teach them grammar, vocabulary etc. Our programme is so much filled with these kinds of grammar and vocabulary exercises. We do not have extra time for doing any other activities. It was stressful for me." – T10

The fear of failure was mentioned by four people. This fear was mostly about whether or not the intervention would be successful, rather than a fear of reprisal or public humiliation.

> "…so all these could be wasting lots of time on something that wouldn't work probably." – T1
> "It's very easy to get excited about a project or a new way of teaching but actually putting it into practice is quite difficult…" –T18

Only one teacher mentioned a fear of something like a reprimand.

> "…I felt extremely discouraged and was worried that I wouldn't prepare a satisfactory report." –T19

The other stress factors mentioned are more or less self-explanatory. In the category of noise, three of the teachers were stressed by the noise the students made and one was stressed by noise that came from outside. What is made clear by the responses to this question is that the project was indeed stressful for the teachers. This is the first time the teachers had been asked to do such a project. Additionally, the all wanted to do a good project. At the beginning it was told that the reports would all be shared with the group. Although this was not indicated as a stress factor, it may have had an effect on the quality of work that the teachers desired to produce. Teachers, like other professionals, want to be seen as competent by their peers.

The next question asked if the project changed the way the teacher will teach in the future. Thirteen of the teachers (62%) responded positively or directly said "yes", six teachers (29%) responded negatively or said "no", and two teachers (9%) made replies that did not give a clear indication.

> "Yes, absolutely changed the way I teach. It happened as soon as I finished the project, It didn't take a long time. By the help of this report, I improved my methods in reading." –T21

"Actually this Project taught me new techniques that I never used. I realised the importance of authentic materials on students because they helped them to increase their motivation." – T14

The teachers who responded negatively or said "no" directly indicated that they were already using the techniques they were investigating. In these cases, the teachers were expanding on what they were doing or verifying the effectiveness of their methods.

"I feel this project won't change the way I teach because I always use this kind of things in my classroom activity. But I learnt some new activities from this article." –T3

Comments that were unclear indicated a need to define what one means by teaching.

"I still teach in the same way but I have learned new methods; so I have added new techniques. I believe every teacher has a teaching style and it does not change; but they can add more fresh techniques in their way of teaching styles." –T10

The teachers were very astute in pointing out that learning a few new techniques may not entail a substantial change in the way a teacher teaches. While they may not represent a fundamental shift in teaching, new techniques enhance the quality of classroom practice. Therefore, it seems that even those who did not claim to have a change in their teaching were able to improve as a result of the ITR program.

All of the teachers commented that students received benefits from the program. ITR, as well as other teacher-research programs, have an advantage over other forms of professional development in that working with students is integral to the process. This can provide a direct positive result for students.

"The projects impact on students was astonishing. They were all like racers waking up to the big day." - T1

"I saw that students like this kind of things. They eagerly participate in the lesson. And also their success becomes more than an average." –T3

Not all the comments were as positive as the examples above, but overall the projects seemed to give a benefit to students. Even the comments that were less glowing indicated that the majority of students benefitted from the project.

The fifth question asked if the teachers felt supported. The teachers were told about teacher-research and were given documents outlining the project. They were also told where they could get additional information on teacher-research. The foreign language coordinator also offered to help the teachers. A few teachers accepted this offer, but most of the teachers did not. Although many of the teachers did not ask for help it seems they were able to draw on a number of sources that assisted them in their projects.

"We searched and we asked each other how we could success this project as teachers." –T9

"I was supported in doing this project. At the beginning of this term in seminars, I learned lots of things methods and techniques. I looked into methods books and I asked some English teachers." – T8

A teacher-research project, as we have seen, is a stressful activity. Although support was often offered, it seems the teachers felt more comfortable getting help from each other. In this way, an ITR project can help to develop a community of teachers. It also creates a culture of inquiry within this community. However, some people, especially those outside the community of teachers, are not so understanding and supportive.

"Nobody supported me while I was doing my Project. And also when I got permission from principle, he said you should be careful, if our students see you maybe they want to go out and if it happens, you will be responsible for it. This speech made me stress." –T12

The previous comment, regarding the way the principal threatened the teacher, should receive special attention. Not all of the management at every school will be supportive of ITR projects. In fact, many managers do not want to step outside of traditional boundaries and try something different in teaching. Some of the teachers mentioned a fear of failure, and that possibility always exists. A failure on the part of a teacher can be seen as a failure of the

principal. School principals have often worked very hard for a long time to become principals and do not want to do things that would jeopardize their careers. However, as indicated here and in other research, the real and potential benefits are substantial. It is not clear how traditional-minded educational leaders can be convinced to allow ITR and other teacher-research projects.

The sixth question was a general question about the value of the project. Nineteen of the teachers (90%) responded positively. The two (10%) comments that were less than positive were not strongly negative. In these cases, the teachers made suggestions for other activities that could be more valuable.

> "To me, next year or any appropriate period we will have to come together and set up brain storms on how to improve the standard of the school and professional activities. And we may also use other schools' activities after considering and adapting the differences to our conditions." –T19

Those who responded positively cited a number of benefits. Most of the benefits were related to the process of doing research. Some of the teachers became excited by research.

> "It was a professional activity which made me think beyond the teaching routine. Searching for the article, deciding about the activity plan and learnıng new things were "valuable". –T11
>
> "The article and the data were the valuable materials for me. First of all, by reading the article I learned to use new techniques. Secondly, I learnt the results with the data. While I was doing the questionnaire I wondered the results of it and I got excited." –T14
>
> "Motivation is very important for all skills and has an important role in learning a new language. So, this project is valuable for me in learning how to motivate and also I have done like this kind of project for the first time." –T16

The next question was about whether or not a similar project should be conducted next year. The word "similar" was deliberately used to allow teachers to consider ways in which the program might be adapted or changed to be more effective. In the school the project was referred to as "the motivation project" and not the "ITR project" or "the research project". Therefore, some

confusion was experienced regarding whether "similar" meant a different project about motivation or an ITR project on another topic.

> "No, I really don't like to do motivation project. However, if the subject will be different, yes I would like to do any Project next year." –T15

Most of the teachers said they would like to do a similar project next year (n=16, 76%). There were a number of positive comments on the project. This is interesting in light of the fact that the teachers generally reported stress doing the project. It seems as if the benefits of the project outweigh the difficulties of doing the project.

> "Yes, we should. Because it helps to improve ourselves and it enables us to learn the importance of methods that we are using while teaching English. For example, I learned that reading is more important in learning foreign language than I thought. Now I'm giving more importance to my reading lessons." –T21

Some of the teachers were much more moderate in their support and suggested changes, sometimes substantial changes. Although the project was designed to be easy and simple, several of the teachers voiced opinions that it was too difficult. From another perspective, the project itself may not have been so difficult, but teachers have a great deal of responsibility and a wide range of duties already. It seems the objection is to putting another duty on top of an already heavy load.

> "Yes, but we should do it orally. Because we wrote this project and it took much time, and there was too much stuff to do…" –T3
>
> "Perhaps a group of teachers or a pairwork project might be easier and spread the load a bit." – T7

The teachers who said they did not want to do a similar project next year (n=3, 14%) also reported on the difficulties of doing to projects in addition to other duties. It is absolutely true that teachers received no additional pay or even release time to conduct their research. Even though the requirements of the research were low, it is an extra duty.

"If I have to be an honest, I don't want to do. Because this is my first year in teaching English, I am trying to learn many things about the job. Also, the stressful things in question 2 made me tired, both physically and mentally." –T17

For some of the negative responses, it was not clear if the teacher didn't want to do teacher-research or work on the topic of motivation.

"For my professional development, it was an extraordinary experience. I prefer to do something different for the next time." –T11

The final question was an open question asking about additional feelings or thoughts about the project. Some of the feelings that were expressed were happiness and pride. Teachers were proud of themselves and their students. Teachers again mentioned that the project was useful. Some of the teachers expressed feelings of anxiety. Many of the teachers reported that they gained insights into their students through the project.

"What I felt about the project was also a great excitement and of course I was proud of my students. I was anxious at the beginning but when I saw how hard they tried, I did not mind about any other thing. The mission was accomplished for me since they learned and remembered the vocabulary for a long time (still indeed). On the other hand I've been teaching almost about 14 years and that happened to be the best time that I understood the importance of high motivation." –T1

"Personally, the project was beneficial because, both we research something, we developed ourselves and encouraged students. … we learned new techniques thanks to this project." –T17

"In fact, this kind of project was useful for us to set up a new mentality but we need time and experience to go further." –T19

## Reflections

In my opinion, the project was a success on many levels. The students received a benefit from the teachers trying new techniques. These techniques are now in the repertoire of the teachers, which means that the teachers developed.

It also means that subsequent classes taught by these teachers may benefit. The school also profited because the problem of students motivation was addressed. Another positive outcome was that the teachers formed a community of reflective practice. In my opinion, this is the best outcome and it was unforeseen at the outset. The project started as a way to help individual teachers develop and as an alternative to professional development seminars that were not effective. The development of a community of inquiry was not planned. It was not designed to be a collaborative teacher-research project, where teachers work together on the same study. However, teachers reported that they often got support from other teachers. This mutual support fundamentally shifts the quality of the conversations in the teachers' room. The last comment in section 10, which comments on the setting up of a new mentality (T19), reflects this community of inquiry. Perhaps having the projects all related to a single theme increased this feeling of camaraderie. Integrating the projects made it more of a school project and less of a collection of individual projects. This seems to have had an impact on the teachers as a group.

Regardless of the theme or purpose of the studies, ITR helps to develop an inquisitive mindset among the teachers at a school. It can bring a department together and discussions of classroom practices are more likely to occur. The project involves all the English teachers at a school and ideally, those teachers should suggest the theme of the project. Generally, teachers are interested in better and more effective ways to teach. They are practitioners, not theoreticians. This often leads to a problem-solving approach to developing a theme. Therefore, ITR can be a tool to solve the problem that is the theme of the project, in this case unmotivated students, while developing the individual teachers and the school.

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# 27 *A collaborative action research teacher development programme*

*Yasemin Kırkgöz*

## Introduction

This study describes a collaborative action research (CAR) teacher development programme established between six primary school teachers of English and a university teacher educator, the author of this paper. Six newly-qualified English language teachers critically examined their instructional practices in teaching and learning English to young learners (TEYLs). From this reflective process, they proceeded to implement a problem that they identified in their own classroom settings and reflect upon their new practices. The first part of this paper describes a review of the relevant literature. The second part documents the procedures outlining the methodology of conducting a CAR. A qualitative case study approach was adopted to describe the development of the teachers. This section also provides an analysis of the major points emerging from the qualitative data. The analysis of the interviews, collaborative meetings, lesson observation data, and the researcher's field notes suggests that teachers have developed professionally besides experiencing challenges. In order to provide a picture of how one of the teachers carried out action research in his classroom, lesson extracts is presented. The article concludes with the author's reflections of the outcomes of utilizing CAR to promote teacher development.

## Context and problem

In Turkey, the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) offers in-service training for practicing teachers at primary and secondary education. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of participants in such programs, the kind of one-off training remains insufficient for on-going teacher developmental processes (Bayrakçı, 2009). Thus, innovative in-service

teacher development programs are needed to address the actual needs of particularly novice teachers in their early years of teaching.

This study describes my engagement, as the university teacher educator, with six novice teachers of English on a school-university collaborative action research teacher development programme in order to address the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of a collaborative action research process on the teachers' professional development?
2. What challenges, if any, do teachers face during their participation in this process?

## Literature review

Collaborative Action Research (CAR) employs a recursive spiral cycles focusing on planning, acting, observing, reflecting, re-planning, and re-enacting (Kemmis, 1998). Mitchell Reilly and Logue (2009) state that CAR is relevant particularly for novice teachers in their first five years of practice as they may need support for engaging in the real teaching problems they may encounter. They also note that via CAR, a zone of proximal development is established, during which the novice teacher solidifies her/his own teaching style, the university partner scaffolding the process of using theory to guide decision-making, and by doing so, buffers the novice teacher as she/he tackles with the realities of teaching with tools to solve other problems. Within the supportive framework of CAR, teaching concerns can be addressed by the development of meaningful solutions "at a quicker pace than toiling in social and intellectual isolation" (Mitchell et al., 2009, p.346).

Studies reporting the use of CAR have documented several benefits. Capobianco and Joyal, (2008) found that teachers involving in CAR demonstrated observable professional development. Johnson and Johnson (2002) and Burns (1999) indicated that when novice teachers work with experienced mentors, CAR helped participants gain better understanding and develop collaborative relationship. Studies also highlight some challenges faced by teacher-researchers. Cole and Knowles (1993) categorize some of these challenges as technical/logistical issues (e.g. time and place to do the research), personnel issues related to the group dynamics of working collaboratively, and procedural issues in conducting robust research. Zeichner (2002) identifies "narrowing

down an area of interest into a research question and finding time to write in their action research journals" (p. 309) as causing difficulties for teachers.

In this study, I worked with six practicing primary school teachers in one of the provinces in Turkey. A framework, proposed by Mitchell et al. (2009) guided the theoretical orientations to action research that is practical, or emancipatory, it focuses upon professional development and it supports teachers in planning and implementing their action research projects based upon their individual needs and problems emerging from their classroom context through self-reflective spirals of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Thus, the uniqueness of the participants and the fact that each teacher was engaged in different 'ecologies of practice' (Kemmis, Wilkinson, and Edwards-Groves, 2009) contributes to the significance of the study.

## Procedure and methods

I used a case study method to examine the nature of each teacher's professional development (Yin, 2003). Data were collected from interviews, collaborative meetings, lesson observations and my field notes from the teachers who voluntarily participated in the study. Participants were six Turkish native speaker teachers of English with an average age of 25.6 years and an average 3.5 years of teaching experience, teaching English in primary classes to young learners (TEYLs). Three teachers had previously attended short one-shot seminars. The research took place over a four-month period during the spring semester of the school year.

Prior to initiating CAR, I held a meeting with the teachers for planning the *CAR partnership*. I made it clear that my role was to act as a supporter, organizer, a facilitator and a co-researcher with the teacher participants. We agreed on the aims of the programme, and planned a sequence of weekly meetings.

As the next stage, I held a semi-structured interview with each teacher (*pre-professional development interviews*) to gain information on background teaching and the issues for investigation in their own classroom settings. At the end of CAR, final interviews (*post-professional development interviews*) were held with the teachers that aimed to provide data concerning any changes in teachers' views of their participation in this CAR project.

A schedule of fourteen meetings equivalent to 42 hours were set up that took place regularly on a weekly basis during the teachers' release time from

teaching. Meetings were used to help how to design and implement action research project; to inform on data collection tools and date analysis techniques. Such meetings also created an opportunity to share ideas, offer feedback, and for the teachers to reflect upon their experiences. All discussions from the meetings were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analyses.

Each teacher identified a problem or a research focus that they wished to examine. Teachers examined their problems from various aspects, setting up an inquiry in light of the literature; collecting data via interviews and questionnaires, and analyzing. They finally documented action research projects, followed by reflection on their action. I facilitated the action research process by providing

- support and resources as teachers conceptualized and implemented their action research plans,
- research guidance on conducting literature reviews and on how to analyze qualitative and quantitative data.

I also visited each teacher's classroom to evaluate their action and document specific examples of action research pedagogy as evidenced from observation that may be attributable to their participation in CAR. Six rounds of lesson observations were allocated to each teacher, thus totaling 12 audiotaped observations per teacher in teachers' own primary grade 4-5 classes.

## Data analysis

Data from the interview, weekly meetings and lesson observation were transcribed. Transcriptions and the researcher field notes were read and coded by the author. Data were unitized into textual units and coded using *descriptor phrases* (Patton, 2002). Another researcher familiar with qualitative data analysis coded data independently. Collaboratively, the author and the researcher then constructed general coding categories to correspond to the research questions. Observation notes were read several times to have a holistic nature of the data. Based on the qualitative analysis of the completed lesson observation form, data reduction was achieved through an interpretive summary of classroom observation for each teacher. Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data sources to enhance the validity of data analysis. The length of the study and the involvement of member checks ensured data trustworthiness.

## Findings and discussion

In this section, I present the data to answer my research questions, and discuss it in light of the research findings. Additionally, I present lesson observation data of one teacher to illustrate the impact of a facilitated CAR on the development of participants' professional learning.

### *The impact of car on the teachers' professional development*

The analysis of qualitative data revealed two main categories of teachers' professional development: *knowledge* and *practice*.

*Knowledge development* involved teachers' learning about new ideas generated from collaborative meetings and readings of the literature. All teachers had a deeper understanding of TEYLs, and implementing this newly-acquired knowledge within their school context. They also expressed enhanced confidence, feeling more capable to deal with emerging problems/puzzles.

The preliminary interview with teachers revealed answers that were inconsistent with contemporary views of TEYLs. Post-programme interview data suggest that the teachers' knowledge changed as they engaged in understanding details of TEYLs while concurrently attempting to integrate it into their practices. For instance, *Cem* described himself as possessing a better conceptual understanding of TEYLs:

> I definitely have a better understanding of how to tackle learners' short concentration by setting up engaging and experiential learning activities based on my readings of the literature and my action research project.

The opportunity to learn about multiple intelligences helped *Hamdi* to employ it effectively in addressing the varied learning styles of his students:

> As part of this process, I learned about the principles of multiple intelligence theory. I'm now able to apply different kinds of activities for different intelligence types: games, songs, drawing, colouring, and information gap activities, which students enjoy.

> CAR also had the benefit of introducing teachers to research, as explained by *Seval*:

Doing action research helped me to identify specific problems and improve my teaching English to this age group. I can now see the value of using pair and group work in managing my lessons.

In terms of **practice development,** each teacher was able to make connections between theory and practice as evidenced from lesson observation data and my field notes. The following observation notes from different teachers illustrate this clearly.

*Cem* identified lack of motivation as a major problem in his classroom. As a way to solving this problem, he introduced *surprise activities*, e.g. ice breakers during the lesson (colouring, matching, games) to help the teacher manage the class more effectively. He also took account of the differences in pupils' learning style by varying the activities, and often set up information gap activities in which learners were encouraged to be both actively involved and mentally engaged in the learning process.

Documentation compiled in the form of interviews, lesson observation, the researcher's field notes, and the participants' insightful reflection and evaluation of their experiences, four months after initiation of CAR, brought to the forefront several issues promoted in the present project: CAR provided a viable method of professional development for all these teachers in idiosyncratic ways. The high degree of commitment for the investigation, different strengths and talents from individual teachers, and the fact that teachers had common needs contributed to the ultimate effectiveness of CAR.

In order to provide a picture of how one of the teachers carried out action research in his classroom, the following lesson transcripts (Table 1-2) offer excerpts on 'Vehicles and Transportation'. The lesson extracts show that around the main theme 'transportation', through many activities the teacher tried to maximizes the use of L2, addressing different learning styles and (*pseudonym).* The problem *Cem* (*pseudonym*). identifies in his action research project with primary grade four class is to promote students' communicative proficiency, lack of which he identified as a problem.

Line No.

1    T: Do you like CARS? *(showing flashcards of cars)*
L1: Yes, I like cars very much.
T: What about HORSES? *(pointing to flashcards of horses)*
L2: Yes, I like horses. Hocam bizim atımız var zaten. (*with code-switching,*
5    *We already have horses)*
T: Okay. Very good. Then, Kaan, please tell me…. What do you use your horse for?
L2: uuuuh. Teacher teacher…
T: Ne için kullanıyorsunuz atı? *(He explains the question in Turkish)*
10    L: teacher…..biniyoruz. (*..we ride on it).*
T: Ohhhhh. You are riding on it? good (*He responds to students in English).*
T: What about cars?
L: Hocam bir yere gitmek için kullanırız. (*we use it to go somewhere) Pupils comprehend the question and answer it with code-switching between English*
15    *and Turkish.*
T: Ne diyoruz buna? (*what do we call this?)*
L: Ulaşım mı hocam? (*is it transportation?)*
T: Yes, very good. TRANSPORTATION. Repeat after me. TRANSPORTATION (*He invites the whole class to repeat the new word*
20    *many times)*
LLL: Transportation. Transportation (*in chorus)…*
T: Now, please tell me. What other things can we use for TRANSPORTATION? (*To support the meaning, he uses gestures).*
T: Yani, başka neleri ulaşım için kullanırız? I mean… what else do we use
25    for transportation?. (*The target content is not being told by the teacher directly, learners are being directed by the teacher)*
L: Otobüs, kamyon   (*Bus, truck)*
T: Yes, very good…. Bus… and truck….(*pointing to the pictures)*
*Then, he puts some objects on the table and introduces them to the learners one by one. These are toys of rocks, plane, school bus, sailor, pilot.  He asks them what the means of transportation, carrying these objects are).*
T- Okay. You were very good. Thank you… you know the vehicles we use for transportation. Okay. You got it?  Now, please tell me….What is this? *(showing a rock)* It is a ROCK… What CARRIES it?
L: Truck…. Yes  truck
T-TRUCK…good…. Please repeat after me…TRUCK…TRUCK *(showing a toy truck)*

LLL: truck... truck… (*He continues till he has introduced all types of vehicles used for transportation. The use of objects in the classroom helps them create links between the words and the images of them*).
*Further practice: Listen and number. After repetition, the teacher shows them some pictures of the vehicles used for transportation. He wants pupils to listen and then match the number with the correct vehicle*).
T: These are the pictures of the vehicles.... Okay... We use them for transportation. This is a picture.... Picture of a vehicle. I will say the names of these vehicles with numbers. You will put the correct number next to the picture. Okay. (*He then gives the same instruction in Turkish to make sure pupils have understood*).
T: Number 1 is the truck…. Number 2 is the car…. Number 3 is a school bus. Number 4 is a plane (*He moves around to check students' answers*).
Below is another excerpt recorded from the next lesson observed.

Activity 2: Production (Speaking)
(*He gives pupils toys or pictures of vehicles with different colors. He gets them to talk about the vehicles according to their types and color. To do that, he directs some questions just for the first time, and then wants the learners to ask and answer these questions*).
T: I have very good toys and pictures for you. Look. Helin! Which one do you want? A car? A truck? A plane? Please take one... They are all beautiful.
L: Teacher…. please give me this picture…
T: Özge! Stand up please. (*uses gestures*) I have got a car. It is grey. What have you got?
S: I have got a truck.
T: What colour is it?
L: It is green.
T: Good Helin . please ask Özge what she has got..
 Now, take your toys and pictures.. please everyone.. and you can walk around and look at your friends. Ask and answer these questions 'What have you got?' and then you can answer okay..and then …'What coulor is it?'.
T: Okay good..come here Fikret. Come here..
(*After the initial prompting and encouragement by the teacher to ask and answer questions, students get out of their seats, move around and find a pair toask and answer the questions. In this way, they have the chance to interact with each other*).

Transcription conventions: T= teacher; L1, L2= identified learner; LLL=whole class choral; (in italics) = commentary; …= pause; CAPITALISATION= emphasis.

As illustrated above, *Cem's* persistent attitude to use L2 is reflected in his teaching. Many of the key features associated with the communicative use of language are manifested in the instructional practices of *Cem*. Pupils are being exposed to comprehensible input through the use of techniques such as repetition (Line 10), short simple sentences, and visual support (the use of flashcards, pictures, toys, real objects) to facilitate their understanding, feeling that utilizing a variety of techniques can help increase student motivation.

*Cem* gives priority to meaning over the form on the belief that young learners need to be taught indirectly through games, songs and activities as the most favourable way to promote their acquisition of English. In other words, he has a clear rationale for exposing the pupils to L2. In this lesson, with the help of the teacher's use of intonation and stress, pupils know that they are learning about transportation. Besides, they are directed by the teacher's questions (Lines 1, 3, 21) to consider the subject from different perspectives. The pupils are actively involved in using L2 by carrying out various activities.

There are many key features associated with the TEYLs which are manifested in the instructional practices of *Cem*. He introduces new language items using enjoyable activities to make the learning of English a pleasant and an enjoyable experience for the pupils. The way in which he presents vocabulary and the structure help pupils acquire language unconsciously, and practice the language more effectively. *Cem* introduces useful phrases and words in the context of games and activities within familiar topics to facilitate pupils' understanding of the new structure rather than teaching or explaining it directly.

Despite pupils' tendency to use L1 in some communication, and is able to maintain fluent use of English with very little mixed-code when he wants to ensure that the pupils have understood instructions. He tried to speak in L2 while giving instructions or communicating with the students, and responded to students in L2, which he justifies as follows:

There is a good balance between the use of mother tongue and the target language. Yet, we can also see that the learners get the basic knowledge. They are accustomed to the teacher's speaking in L2. However, there is a problem here which is that the teacher speaks more. The learners should be directed to speak more frequently. I am trying to manage this.

As suggested by Slattery & Willis (2001), young children will only acquire the language when they hear around them, need to hear a lot of English since teacher is the main source of input. He encouraged pupils to use the L2 during interactions.

Interview data indicated that *Cem* has become aware of the teaching style to young learners, as indicated by the following interview extract:

> I believe that the structures should be presented in an inductive way rather than    deductive way. Learners should be helped to guess what the structure and the target content are. In this transcribed lesson, with the help of the riddles, and the teacher's use of intonation and stress, the learners know that they are going to learn about transportation. In addition, they are directed by the teacher's questions.

Throughout his lessons, *Cem* used gestures and body language and his voice appropriate to support what the students' were learning. *Cem* displayed many of the features that accorded good instructional practices expected in TEYLs. There was a higher incidence of contextualized activities like games, songs, in his lessons, as specified by the COC.

### Challenges teachers face during their participation in this process

While the present CAR was viewed by participants as successful, it resulted in a number of challenges, corresponding to three factors in the categorization of Cole and Knowles (1993).

### Technical/logistical issues

The action research projects focused on improvement of classroom practice and teacher actions were therefore very similar to the processes that teachers engaged daily in their classrooms. However, participants perceived that the amount of work required in designing questionnaire, holding interviews caused them workload beside their teaching workloads, as expressed by *Cem* below:

> It was initially hard for me to investigate students' learning styles. I struggled with issues related to how I should best deliver this to the students.

### Personnel issues

Being in different ecologies meant that any additional meetings had to be scheduled outside of school time.        Besides the regular weekly collaborative meetings, four teachers were able to create opportunities to meet face to face on a regular basis. However, two teachers experienced personnel issues related to the additional meeting times as they perceived it as an additional workload. This was because the schools were geographically isolated, which prevented them to create opportunities to participate in such meetings for collaboration and discussion of action research projects.

### Procedural issues

Teachers in their first action research project experienced research-related problems in narrowing down an area of interest into a research question. As the teachers were unfamiliar with conducting a research they found it a challenge to transform the interview and questionnaire data collected into an understandable form. This is in line with some other action research studies (see Zeichner, 2002).

## Reflections

Through this research I have learned that professional development can be improved, and many of the day-to-day problems experienced by novice teachers can be addressed by creating opportunities that support teachers to become self-reflective through adopting a school-university collaborative action research model, conducted in the company of an experienced teacher, a researcher and/or a teacher educator.

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# 28

## What happens when pre-service English language teachers are in action and researchers are recording?

**H. Sezgi Saraç, M. Galip Zorba and Arda Arikan**

### Introduction

Research that teachers do in their classrooms has been variously named such as teacher-research or practitioner research (Anderson & Herr & Nihlen, 1994; Hopkins, 1985). Similarly, action research is a broad term for all kinds of school-based or practitioner-based research all of which are based on common principles such as systematic inquiry and scientific data gathering process (Dörnyei, 2007). Action research has been defined in various ways according to Gay and Airasian (2000) it is a process in which individual or several teachers collect evidence and make decision about their own knowledge, performance, beliefs and effects in order to understand and improve them (p. 597). Hopkins (1985) states that action research is "a form of disciplined inquiry" involving "personal attempt to understand, improve and thus reform practice" (p.32). Ebbutt (1985) accepts the term as "a systematic study that combines action and reflection to enhance practice" (p.156) and Corey (1953) regards it as "a process of studying problems scientifically" so as to "evaluate, improve and steer decision-making and practice" (p. 6). Although action research is seen as a form of inquiry focusing on teachers' everyday lives, Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) articulates that action research requires careful planning, acting, observing and reflecting in a more systematic and more thorough manner than one usually does in his or her everyday life.

The common point of the definition given above is that action research aims to improve practice through detecting instructional problems and fixing them, and it emerges from the learning itself and is designed and carried by practitioners who are in search of a solution. The aim of all this type of practitioner-based research is to improve practitioners' practice and transforming teachers to researchers or explorers about their own teaching (Burns, 1999; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009).

Van Lier (1994) claims that although action research is a small scale study, its intervention in the real world is symbolically important. With the help of an action research study, practitioners produce information on all aspects of their teaching. However, often times, teachers who participate in action research studies are given certain tasks that are beyond their interests. Action research, as Johnson (2012) argues, is an effective tool for professional development and growth, and helps teachers improve their vocational competence as well as filling the gap between theory and practice. Action research in the related literature is seen both as a tool and a research method that empowers teachers with knowledge, skills and feeling of autonomy (Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2008). Among its many benefits, Hensen (1996) argues that action research has many benefits for teachers because

1. it improves critical teaching and thinking,
2. it improves teachers' pedagogical repertoire,
3. it promotes learning new things and continuous professional development,
4. and it helps teachers get first-hand information about their classrooms.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005) offer an eight-step model of the action research process;

1. review your current practice,
2. identify an aspect that you wish to improve,
3. imagine a way forward in this,
4. try it out,
5. monitor and reflect on what happens,
6. modify the plan in the light of what has been found, what has happened, and continue,
7. evaluate the modified action, and
8. continue until you are satisfied with that aspect of your work (p. 71).

Similarly, Burns (2010) also offers an eight-step model of action research;
1. Identify a puzzle area
2. Refine your thinking about that puzzle area
3. Select a particular topic to focus upon
4. Find appropriate classroom procedures to explore it
5. Adapt them to the particular puzzle you want to explore

6. Use them in class
7. Interpret the outcomes
8. Decide on their implications and plan accordingly (p. 17-18).

Fox, Martin and Green (2007) argue that researchers need to answer the following pre-research stage questions in order to become more reflexive in their own inquiries. Hence, we find these preliminary questions of utmost importance since, to our knowledge, answers to these questions put the theoretical framework of our research study. Below are the questions we answered in the pre-research stage. Nunan (1992) suggests that an action research cycle that starts with a problem or a puzzle identification in which a teacher identifies a problem and follows the systematic procedures given below:

1. Preliminary investigation: collecting baseline data through observation and recording
2. Hypothesis: forming the hypothesis based on the first two steps
3. Intervention: teacher's action to solve the problem
4. Evaluation: evaluating the teaching process whether there is involvement
5. Dissemination: sharing the findings and action with other colleagues
6. Follow-up: investigating alternative ways to solve the same problem (p. 19).

Teaching pre-service teachers how to plan, do and present action research along with data gathering process plays important role in teacher education. Odhiambo (2010) indicates that teacher training departments should involve pre-service teachers in some form of action research so that they gain experience and autonomy. Faikhamt and Clarke (2013) state that one of the most important factors that improve pre-service teachers' action research studies is the support and guidance that is provided by university supervisors whereas lack of confidence and practice in carrying out an action research are the main challenges that pre-service teachers undertake during the initial stages.

When the related literature about action research in Turkey is reviewed, it is seen that there are considerable number action research studies. However, action research studies in Turkish context mainly focus either on fixing specific instructional problems or encouraging in-service teachers to do action research and improving their research skills rather than focusing on effects of ac-

tion research in teacher education programs. Devecioğlu and Akdeniz (2007) taught action research both theoretically and practically in order to improve pre-service teachers practitioner-based research skills so that they could detect instructional problems and find solutions to these problems while practicing. Çepni, Küçük, and Gökdere (2002) compared teaching practice courses taught at Karadeniz Technical University with the ones taught at California State University in terms of action research. They revealed that there were significant differences in terms of encouraging pre-service teachers to carry out action research or to take part in research activities effectively and suggested that integration of action research studies in these courses would improve effectiveness of pre-service teachers during practice. Aladağ and Gürpınar (2007) investigated students' competence in power point presentations at Computer Education and Instructional Technologies of Çukurova University. Through an action research study they revealed that pre-service teachers prepared more effective presentations when they watched and self assessed their presentations. Besides, pre-service teachers also found problematic parts and re-arranged their presentation as well as defining negative factors that influenced their presentations such as anxiety, time limitation, lack of resources, lack of experience and technical problems.

Kılıç (2006) states that pre-service teachers do not gain sufficient competence in practice and observation in classroom. Similar research also revealed that pre-service teachers have problems in applying content knowledge and vocational knowledge that they gain during their undergraduate education (Yeşilyurt & Karakuş, 2011; Yeşil, 2009; Baskan, 2001). Ataünal (2003) indicates that lifelong learning is an indispensable part of teaching, and thus teachers should always be in the pursuit of improving their knowledge along with their practice. Traditional in service training is considered as ineffective since it does not always provide sufficient time and opportunities for practice (Johnson, 2012). There is a considerable need in research that focus on pre-service teachers' experience and opinions about practice of theoretical knowledge (Avcı & Bayrak, 2013).

We strongly believe in the necessity for making preservice teachers autonomous and life-long reflective inquirers who continuously look at their practice, find problems, and solve them by means of scientific inquiry. In that sense, by applying this research with them, we believe that we can help them realize that such a process is doable. In this study, there exist four assumptions involved. It is hypothesized that the participating preservice teachers will:

1. face difficulties while finding a problem in their microteaching session mainly because they have not been used to such research design or task,
2. not easily find a solution to the problem they previously spotted mainly because they have not been equipped with such self-correction/self-improvement schemes,
3. identify their teaching skills and strategies that need to be strengthen as well as their strong points in teaching,
4. find this overall research experience useful, beneficial and applicable.

It is also aimed to find out that the preservice teachers who participate in this study will internalize this research scheme and re-apply them continuously in the future. Since this action research scheme and its related task cycle will not be familiar to the participants, they might feel difficulties in the initial stages of the application phase. Nevertheless, it is expected that in the meantime of experiencing the research procedure, the target group of preservice teachers will benefit from the application and prefer to sustain it as part of their teaching and professional development. In order to achieve such a target, the research design and its related questions are as follows:

1. Which areas are identified as problematic by preservice teachers in terms of their own in-class teaching applications?
2. What are the positive and negative aspects of carrying out such an action research from the perspectives of preservice teachers?

Therefore, within this study it is aimed to instruct preservice teachers to apply an action research procedure in their practicum and evaluate the whole experience of teaching and research cycle at the end of the academic term.

## Method

Harmer (2007: p. 415), while describing the data gathering techniques commonly used in action research, articulates that we "might record ourselves (or have ourselves filmed) doing particular tasks so that we can assess their effectiveness." In this action research study, we asked twenty-four preservice English language teachers to take one of their microteaching sessions previously recorded and re-view it so as to find one single problem that they find bothering in their teaching. Following that, they would "correct" the problem they identified the proof of which would be a new recording of their previ-

ous microteaching session. The data was collected through a comparison of the microteaching sessions and interviews with the prospective teachers who carried out their own action research. Therefore, the aim of this study was to carry out a research in which preservice teachers carry out an action research of reflective teaching procedure to identify their own problems in teaching and explore possible solutions to apply and get over them all. The data sources which were used to investigate research that aimed to evaluate the whole process of this action research included:

1. written action research reports,
2. four video recordings for each preservice teacher, and
3. an open-ended survey administered to all the participants (n=24) via one-to-one interviews held at the end of the one-term course.

## Context

The Practicum, which serves as the context of the current study, is a six credit compulsory course offered in the English language teacher education curriculum in Turkey. It is also named as the teaching practice course and given in the spring semester of senior year in the preservice English teachers' education towards the bachelor's degree. The prospective teachers taking the course are assigned in different primary or secondary state schools and required to teach at least four class hours per week under the supervision of the course instructors at the faculty and with the help of mentoring teachers working as English teachers in those schools. It is required for the preservice teachers that they participate in a fourteen week of teaching schedule that enable them to experience actual teaching setting, material application and teacher-student interaction in English lessons.

## Participants

The participant selection included all twenty four preservice English teachers taking the practicum course in four different sections. Among the participants, eight were male and sixteen were female. The participants were ranged in age from 20 to 26 years old with a mean age of 22. The whole group was placed in two different schools in groups of at least three. Each group of three prospective teachers was guided by one mentor teacher at different grade levels from

the fourth to eighth year. The whole group was facilitated and guided during the action research procedure by two supervising course instructors at the faculty. In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were employed all through the data presentation section in the present study.

## Procedure

The participants were informed about the research cycle and the related task procedure at the beginning of the term, and constant guidance and support were offered by the instructors via meetings held every fortnight. The participants were asked to record their classes in the first place. Later on, they reviewed their recordings and identified their in-class applications that need to be strengthen or replaced with other applications. They also focused on the strong teaching points but the focal aspect was their weak application in that particular recorded teaching experience. After the identification phase, the participants were instructed on how to do multiple source research to find out possible solutions to the singled-out issue in their teaching. Having completed the data collection procedure on possible solutions, they altered their problematic strategy with an alternative one and video recorded the teaching practice again. They were asked to reflect on their altered strategy applied by writing a report of evaluation. At the end of the term, the preservice teachers were invited to one-to-one meetings with the course instructors to evaluate the whole procedure of reflective teaching via carrying out action research.

## Data analysis

Through multiple reading of the written data taken from the action research reports, the recurring themes and categories were coded. Having coded the data, meaningful categories were developed out of the repeated items (Creswell, 2004; Gall et.al, 2005). In order to triangulate the findings, the recordings of practice teaching were reviewed as well, and three different experts worked on the same procedure independently for verification. The same methodological pathway was followed for the analysis of data derived from interviews held via a survey of open-ended questions on the positive and negative aspects of carrying out action research to identify problematic teaching issues.

## Findings

The coding and theme analysis of the data gathered from the participants resulted in three interconnected headings of findings. First, there were issues related with their teaching skills in their classrooms. Secondly, coursebook dependent teaching posed a serious problem for them. Thirdly, they experienced problems while teaching in the classroom which should be categorized as problems in their classroom management skills (see Fig. 1).

*Fig. 1. Prospective teachers' problematic areas*

To be more specific, the data we analyzed helped us find answers to our first research question which was the areas that would be identified as problematic by the preservice teachers in terms of their own in-class teaching applications. Their problems are given under appropriate headings below.

### Teaching skills as a problem area

The participants registered a considerable emphasis on evaluating their actual teaching skills. They noted that even though they were informed and knowledgeable about stages and features of teaching skills, in the actual teaching environment they found themselves diverged from the theoretical ground to a 'less capable' attitude. They critically engaged with particularly their methods of teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary, and teaching reading.

### Teaching of grammar

After reviewing the video recordings, the preservice teachers had identifications on their teaching style in their reports and emphasized that changes in their grammar teaching styles were required. While describing their grammar teaching, they had some identification; such as, teaching in a grammar-based, deductive and traditional manner:

> *It was so weird to see myself in the video while teaching just as the teachers I had been criticizing. I realized that whenever I wanted to clarify a grammar point I tended to give deductive explanations and turned out to be a traditional teacher whose favorite method was the grammar translation method. I realized that I had to trust my students that they could handle discovery learning and inductive method.* (Sarah)

> *I saw myself spending excessive teacher talking time on giving deductive explanations of grammar and feeling satisfied as a teacher while doing that. I realized that I had to talk less and let the learners talk and produce. It was not me who had to be the center of attention but the students. I have to admit that I find it so impressing to explain rules and regulations to the students just as a mathematics teacher but this is such a traditional method since I teach English and I have to know where to withdraw and let the students be active.* (Jenny)

Within the cycle of action research procedure, the participants found out some possible solutions to the identified weak points and spent time to apply these in the classroom. The preservice teachers noted that using drama, inductive teaching strategies, productive tasks of speaking and writing were useful to them in refraining from traditional methods of grammar teaching.

### Teaching of vocabulary

The issue of ineffective vocabulary teaching proved to generate much concern among the preservice teachers. There was broad agreement that using of the first language was not theoretically preferred but applied within the classroom setting; therefore, the discrepancy between the theoretical preferences and deeds in practice were highlighted. The preservice teachers were also highly

critical towards their pronunciation mistakes while teaching vocabulary. These two main issues of using the mother tongue and pronunciation mistakes were the points that had been identified in data collection procedure of the action research procedure:

> *I think that using the first language was just like a life-saver to me, but the problem was that I felt the need of using the mother tongue more than necessary. I was prepared in terms of visual materials and explanations for the set of vocabulary identified for teaching before the class, but whenever the students asked me to explain a new word I tended to come up with the first language equivalence of it. This let the students carry on the conversation in the first language with me from that moment on.* (Alan)

> *I studied the pronunciation of each and every word I decided to teach in the class. But, it was so embarrassing to hear that I was mispronouncing the word I was teaching for a couple of times. I need to brush up my knowledge on reading the phonetic transcriptions of words in English and take notes to refer during the classes. Sometimes the only thing that remains in a student's mind might be the thing you teach incorrectly. I would not be beneficial to hear someone to tell me that I have to pay special attention to pronunciation, but as I saw that I was mispronouncing in the video, honestly speaking, I felt terribly sorry and promised not to do it again by studying on it much more.* (Meg)

> *Code-switching is a favorite strategy of mine while teaching vocabulary. Nevertheless, watching my video, I came to the conclusion that only if I use it scarcely, it might be an effective strategy. Otherwise, learners will tend to use the first language excessively in the class, which is not something I want to experience in my English lessons.* (Sarah)

### Teaching of reading

The participants observed that during the while-reading stage, they tended to make the students read the text with no purpose at all. Traditionally, the students read the texts aloud for a couple of times but this found to be 'pointless' by the preservice teachers:

> *It was in my reading classes that the students read the text just for the sake of reading. The point was not teaching pronunciation or answering questions. I realized that both while teaching reading and listening, I had to give the students a purpose to follow the text attentively. Otherwise, it is so pointless for the students. Since they do not have a purpose in mind while reading, they can never know where to focus or what to look for within the text.* (Dan)

In order to cope with such an issue, the participants suggested various applications; such as dividing the text into segments of incorrect order and asking the students to reorder the text, asking students to suggest a heading for the text they read, filling out a simple table of outline to take notes while reading, creating info-gap by dividing the text into two parts and asking pairs of students ask and answer questions on this jig-saw reading text to have an idea on the whole text.

### Coursebook dependency

A significant problematic issue emphasized is 'coursebook dependent teaching'. The participants wanted to work on this issue as it was found to be 'problematic' in their eyes. While hypothesizing on the possible reasons, the participants noted that they wanted to be on the safe side by following the sequencing and related applications suggested in the coursebook. Nevertheless, the attitude of coursebook dependent teaching was defined as an 'inexperienced' manner and 'boring classes' which bear no surprise or excitement for the students:

> *In my first class, I felt so insecure, and that was why the coursebook was the main actor and decision maker, not me. I was trying to be flawless but looking inexperienced and replaced by the coursebook. There was nothing exciting or provoking enthusiasm on the side of the students as everything was so regularly driven by the coursebook itself. I was parroting the coursebook, which I hated the most. Watching the video, I decided to be a coursebook manipulator while teaching English to tailor my classes in accordance with my students. I think as I gain more experience in teaching, I will manage to be the master of the coursebook and not let it take over my classes in teaching.* (Doug)

The participant preservice teachers reported to have adapted the course-book in terms of re-sequencing the activities given, feeding the suggested activities with more supplementary materials taken from other sources and replacing some of the activities with alternatives. Upon applying new strategies in the following classes, the prospective teachers indicated that varying materials and activities help them conduct more enjoyable classes and diverge from the 'cliché applications' offered in the coursebooks.

### Classroom management

The participants also focused on the issues related with classroom management and identified the problematic points that they needed to be more skillful in time management, grouping learners and giving the instructions. The managerial skills they operated in the classroom were found to be 'insufficient'; therefore, they spent time on developing such skills through action research procedure.

> *I thought that taking the attendance would take at least five minutes and that was why I allocated that much time in my lesson plan. When I watched my practice teaching to find out why I my class ended earlier than planned, I found out that I was too generous while allocating time for trivial things like taking attendance. Even though five minutes sounded such a short span of time for me before the class, it was obvious that it took only about a minute to ask who was missing in the class. Besides, after facing such a problem of ending the class fifteen minutes earlier than planned, I decided not to rush during classes, expand my activities according to students' pacing and add one or two contingency plans in case I need them.* (Ian)

> *Before starting a group activity, I asked the students to form groups of three. It took only a minute to see that the whole class was in chaos. All the students were discussing how to form such groups and I had hard times in silencing the students and calming them down. While watching the video I realized that I was so busy with preparing the materials of the activity and fell short in grouping students. In my second application I will solve this problem by assigning the members of groups by myself before starting an activity. I will give the instruc-*

> *tion, group the students by pointing at the members via body language and eye contact, and ensure that all of the students know in which group they are going to be working.* (Sam)

> *While watching my practice teaching, I hated myself saying: 'do you understand?' My intention was checking clarification but I sounded as if I were humiliating students by constantly repeating that question. I realized that I had to use a better language to check understanding and I have decided to replace my question with 'am I clear?' Besides, I will ask students to tell me what they will be doing through question and answer exchanges before starting the activity.* (Kaya)

### Preservice teachers' evaluations on the action research procedure

Our second research question interrogated the positive and negative aspects of carrying out such an action research for the preservice teachers. Our analyses indicated that as the academic term and related studies of action research progressed, the students developed a highly reflective perspective on both their performance and the research procedure. It was the interviewers' perception that the participants suggested their evaluations with great awareness and precision. On the positive aspects of the action research procedure, the preservice teachers indicated that such an application increased their:

- teaching efficacy,
- self-awareness,
- self-evaluation skills.

> *It would not be this much effective to hear my mistakes from an outsider. Most probably I would defend myself and act against such an observation. But, as I observed the mistakes on my own, I could pinpoint my defects and evaluate myself in a much efficient manner. This research procedure enabled me to develop self-awareness on my teaching skills and provided me with chance to have an overall idea on my teaching effectiveness. And now, I can say that in my actual teaching career I will be observing myself just as the way I do in this research cycle and keep a tract of my actions in the classroom.* (Beth)

It was hypothesized at the initial stage of this research study that the participants would 'face difficulties while finding a problem in their microteaching session mainly because they had not been used to such research design or task'. Nevertheless, depending upon the participants' identifications, the procedure was:

- not demanding to carry on,
- much more beneficial than being observed by others.

*The instruction was so simple to perform; prepare a class, record it and evaluate yourself to improve your teaching. I was not supposed to be error-free in my teaching, and for that reason I was not scared of having mistakes for the first time. I could see how I improved as well as my friends. Instead of being judged by another person, I was responsible with the application and evaluation, which game me enough strength to improve myself.* (Jenny)

Another hypothesis was that the preservice teachers would 'not easily find a solution to the problem they previously spotted mainly because they had not been equipped with such self-correction/self-improvement schemes'. However, it can be stated that the participants disproved this hypothesis with the indication that:

*While finding out a solution there are various sources of data you can refer to; such as, your classmates, the forums, blogs on the Internet, your teachers, sourcebooks, your mentor, and especially you! After identifying the problem point you have countless ways of solving the issue. You can try one of them this time and the other solution another time. It all depends on you.* (Ian)

The last two hypothesis of this study were that the students would 'identify their teaching skills and strategies that need to be strengthen as well as their strong points in teaching' and 'find this overall research experience useful, beneficial and applicable'. Depending upon the participants' reflections and evaluations on the research procedure, it can be stated that the participants were highly critical and effective in their self-evaluations, and regarded the whole process as constructive and of use in practical sense.

*The research we carried out and the teaching experience were just the things we lacked and in immediate need before graduation. I was indecisive on working as an English teacher before taking this course and now I can tell for sure that I like teaching and I feel the courage to perform this profession. While doing research I named my weak points and now I have some plans on how to cope with them all. The best of all is that whenever I spot a mistake in my teaching I will have the strategy to sort it out and leave it behind. I find the whole experience beneficial and encouraging.* (Sam)

On the negative aspects of the action research procedure, the participants emphasized one major problem which was that being videotaped affected both their and the students' performance especially at the very first class recorded. The preservice teachers reported that they felt under scrutiny when their performance was recorded by a camera. Besides, they also noted that especially in the very first class, the students' center of attention was the camera most of the time. Nevertheless, it was also noted that in the second class that was recorded, there happened to be relaxation on both the teacher's and the students' sides.

*You can see students waving hands right to the camera in my first class. It was such a fun for the kids in class to be recorded but at the same time it was a real intruder for me actually. But it is surprising to see that children can get adapted to any circumstance so fast. In the second class of recording, it was something usual for them all and they did not bother to pay much attention to it. I observed that they totally forgot about it when they saw a colorful ball that I brought into the class to play a language game that day.* (Ken)

Therefore, it can be stated that even though video recording the class was a hindrance at the initial stages, as time passes the class participants and the preservice teachers become more tolerant towards it.

## Conclusion

El-Dib's (2007) action research study with undergraduate-level Egyptian prospective teachers of English found that half of his students were capable of low-level reflection and reflective thinking did not develop naturally but re-

quired constant scaffolding. Although we believe in the importance and power of action research in transforming prospective teachers into reflective inquirers, we aimed to focus on changing our participants' daily pedagogical practices rather than working on how they come to realize or reflect upon their practices. Seeing that our participants' recordings and voices show the fact that each of them has tried to change at least one practical aspect of their teaching through this research study, we believe that our study has beneficial outcomes especially from a practical perspective.

The overall findings suggest that the process of carrying out action research enabled the preservice teachers to be reflective upon their own in-class applications and highlight the areas of teaching which require strengthening. It is observed in the data that the participants found out alternative teaching strategies and felt more satisfied with the related changes applied in their classes. By leaving the control of the study to the preservice teacher, we assumed that the "action" we sought was to happen naturally especially long after our preservice graduate and become in-service teachers.

Echeverría's (2010) review of literature has shown that several studies in Latin American countries pointed at "the problems such as the disconnected entity of the theory and the practice, fragmentation of the teacher education curriculum, lack of coordination between teacher education institutions and schools and the separation of the materials and pedagogy" (p.151). Similarly, our results can be interpreted in light of these findings in that prospective teachers' fourth year courses should serve as a bridge connecting the two ends specified above. In such an endeavor, action research studies such as ours can help to minimize the negative effects of such structural problems associated with teacher education institutions, curricula, and pedagogy. Hence, a specific course on action research may be added to the ELT teacher education curricula.

The findings of the present study highlight that action research procedure enables practitioners to take over the responsibility of the whole teaching and learning process taking place in the classroom environment. As is stated by Freese (2006), prospective teachers are to be conscientious of their in-class applications and performance so as not to put the blame on the students or other parties for the problems concerned. Therefore, it can be stated that the preservice and also in-service development require application and reflection through the research pattern suggested by the constantly looping cycle of action research procedure (Harmer, 2002).

A growing amount of research studies on prospective teachers in Turkey report that classroom management is the leading problem with which prospective teachers deal in their practica (Alpan, Özer, Erdamar & Subaşı, 2014; Boz, 2008; Saban, Korkmaz & Akbaşlı, 2004; Çakmak, 2008). Findings of this study support the claim that classroom management is an important problem for prospective teachers who participated in this study. As such, immediate action should be taken into account to solve the problems associated with prospective teachers' perception and handling of classroom management. It should be noted that action research, according to Gall, Gall and Borg (2005: p. 487) has "the purpose of improving local practice rather than producing theory or scientific generalizations." Similarly, while the findings of our study are important, we value the research technique we used through which practicum teachers seem to have developed themselves more than what practicum teachers (and we as researchers) have so far understood.

Despite its benefits, action research has serious shortcomings such as the fact that it is not really possible to generalize the results to each educational environment (Gay & Airasian, 2000) since they are generally, as Van Lier notes (1994), small scale studies. However, considering the findings that the participants found the action research beneficial, it can be stated that a principal area for prospective research emerges from this study. The problems identified and the possible solutions suggested by the participants can lead us to carry out 'cooperative action research' approaches (Atkinson, 2003). In order to empower the personal development facilitated in the research procedure, the preservice teachers might also be engaged in collaborative action research study groups (Tasker, Johnson, & Davis, 2010). Therefore, they get the opportunity to share and expand their knowledge base gathered from the research experience through collaborative work.

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# 29 Researching the researchers: A case study of perceptions and reflections of teacher-researchers in a higher education context in Turkey

*Wayne Trotman*

## Introduction

Borg (2013: 1) comments that for most teachers research is 'a foreign concept, or at least an unfeasible one.' More optimistically, he adds that although teacher-research remains a minority activity in the field of language teaching, '...it has the potential to be a powerful transformative force in the professional development of language teachers', (Borg, 2013: 6). Bearing this in mind, this study employs empirical data in order to outline research on language teacher-researchers in Turkey. Along with reasons for choice of projects carried out by Turkish university level teachers of English there, it looks also at issues faced throughout the research period and how they were dealt with. The final question concerns the perceived benefits of their research.

This was in a sense, therefore, a partial replication study of Borg (2013, chapter five), in which I sought to compare where possible my own findings with his concerning teacher engagement in research. Borg's much larger study – one I would recommend all research supervisors read - presents findings from an empirical investigation involving 1,700 practitioners worldwide. Critics of a qualitative research study such as my own into a relatively small corpus of researchers might query the sample size and degree of generalizability of conclusions drawn; Yates (2003: 224), for example, comments on the 'potential over-reading' of individual stories. In contrast, Dörnyei (2007: 39) explains that the detailed exploration of a few cases may be particularly appropriate when working in areas where few empirical accounts exist. Whatever the case, it is hoped that the findings in this study when compared with those of Borg (2013) will have resonance with teacher-researchers and their supervisors.

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## Background

During the summer of 2013 I invited nine experienced colleagues in Izmir Katip Çelebi University (IKCU) a state university in Turkey to a meeting to discuss the degrees of interest in and possibilities of setting up and carrying out teacher-research projects, i.e investigating aspects of their own classrooms. This was with a view to hosting an ELT research conference and writing up their studies for publication. I outlined how support would be available from myself and a colleague at a nearby university who was also experienced in supervising research studies. At a follow-up meeting the nine teachers were informed that there was a possibility of them both presenting at an international IATEFL Research SIG supported conference in 2014 and having their subsequent papers published. Meetings over the summer of 2013 continued at which proposals were discussed and refined.

## Participants and context

At the start of the 2013-2014 academic year five of the original nine participants began their projects, while three newly appointed teachers also joined the group and began theirs. In a sense the eight participants (from a then possible total of 34 teachers in the School of Foreign Languages) formed a convenience sample; dealing with a larger figure was not felt to be possible. Several other teachers were currently engaged in Master's studies, albeit in areas other than ELT such as English literature and teaching Turkish as a second language. All studies referred to in this chapter took place with colleagues, students and classes in preparatory year language courses. All were carried out on a voluntary basis and with the permission of the university authorities who were keen to host an initial teacher-research conference. Following their presentations at the Gediz / IATEFL ReSIG conference in Izmir in the summer of 2014, participants also presented their work to colleagues at the start of the 2014-2015 academic year.

## Methodology

### Research questions

The aim of the the study was to analyse interviewee responses to the following:

> What were researchers' definitions of teacher-research and why did they decide to engage in this?
> How did they feel about being a researcher?
> What topics did researchers investigate and why?
> What issues did they face in their research; how did they deal with them?
> What were the benefits of their research and for whom?

### Data collection and analysis

Apart from the first question for which a short questionnaire was used to gain data, all others were investigated by individual semi-structured interviews that were transcribed and analyzed. A few minutes before the interviews participants were provided with the questions in order to prepare their responses. Also used for data gathering was my on-going log to track researcher progress and locate difficulties teachers faced. After arranging a schedule for weekly tutorials, some were recorded and transcribed. Prior to my analysis, participants were asked to carry out 'member checks' in order to verify the accuracy of extracts taken from the eventual transcript.

### Research definitions

I asked teachers to provide their own definition of 'teacher-research', all of which appear in Box One. I then asked them to compare their own definition firstly with each other's and then with that of Borg (2010) which I feel encapsulates the essence of what teacher-research consists of. Apart from generating data for my own study, in a follow-up group discussion this also acted as an awareness-raising task that enabled teachers to clarify parameters and directions to be taken in their own research.

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Box One: Researcher definitions of 'Research'

> **1** *'Teacher-research is systematic research used by teacher-researchers in a teaching environment to gain a deep understanding of their own teaching and their students' learning. In this research, teachers search for useful ways to improve their teaching practice by gaining new perspectives and ideas from different sources.'*
>
> **2.** *'Teacher-research is is systematic research used by teacher-researchers in a teaching environment to gain a deep understanding of their own teachin and their students' learning. In this research, teachers search for useful ways to improve their teaching practice by gaining new perspectives and idea from different sources.'*
>
> **3.** *'As an indispensable element of teacher and curriculum development, teacher-research plays a crucial role in teaching. It supports researchers in raising awareness of the efficiency of the teaching process, as well as aiding teachers in discovering their strengths and weaknesses with the help of solid data on a specific part of teaching; it keeps teaching alive.'*
>
> **4.** *'Teacher-research is a term that is used to describe the systematic affairs of language teachers who seek new ways or methods to improve students' language learning, as well as their own professional development.*
>
> **5.** *'Teacher-research is usually small scale studies conducted by teachers upon a challenge they face or out of curiosity, with the purposes of answering questions on how to enable learning more effectively, finding ways to overcome challenges related to the teaching / learning context, and providing insight on the teaching profession.'*
>
> **6.** *'Teacher-research is a process in which a teacher tries to shed light on some problems she experiences or faces in her classes. To start the process the teacher has to feel the need for a change or improvement in her class practices. The process goes on with systematic thinking over the problem.*
>
> **7.** *'Teacher-research is an important aspect of development, not only for educators and teacher-researchers themselves but also for their colleagues, in that it provides valuable information about the teachers, their teaching styles and their students' attitudes and learning styles. Besides this, it provides a means for teachers to figure out why certain things are or are not happening.'*
>
> **8.** *'Teacher-research is small scale research which a teacher does to find answers to his questions about his teaching / lesson, or to find solutions to his problems in class. It may improve a teacher's teaching method.*

Borg (2010: 395) defines teacher-research as *'..systematic inquiry, qualitative and / or quantative, conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts, individually or collaboratively (with other teachers and / or external collaborators, and which aims to enhance teachers' understandings of some aspect of their work, is made public, has the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms and which may also inform institutional improvement and educational policy more broadly.'*

Comparison of definitions with that of Borg (ibid), which contains eight features, reveals how although three (numbers 1, 3 and 4) indicate that it should be systematic, none make any reference to it being qualitative and / or quantitative. Two (5 and 6) indicate that it should take place in their own professional contexts, while number 1 refers to 'a teaching environment' and number 2 refers to 'their teaching experience'. Although no direct mention is made concerning research being an individual or collaborative affair, numbers 6 and 8 refer only to 'a teacher', which leads me to conclude that in perhaps all eight cases teachers view research as solely individual projects. All eight definitions include a reference, directly or indirectly, to research being both about enhancing a teacher's understanding of their work and having the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning, with some referring to either problem-solving or answering questions. None, however, appear to feel that teacher-research should be made public or may be able to inform broader educational policy. It is also of interest that numbers 5 and 8 feel teacher-research is something done on a small scale.

## Researcher vignettes

### *Departures*

Perhaps in the case of many (if not most) research groups, for varying reasons participant fall-out tends to occur. Soon after providing their definitions of research two participants asked to withdraw. The first was S, whose research focus had been 'How to Use Translation in ELT Writing Classes. S felt he should prioritise and complete his doctoral studies concerning translation. The second withdrawal was D, whose focus was 'Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills', an extension of her second MA, who also chose to prioritise thesis completion. D continued with work on the initial focus, although this became curriculum design rather than teacher-research. She later gave an in-

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house presentation of her on-going study. Towards the end of her study, N, who was researching the impact of poetry on English language learning, asked to withdraw on the grounds that it clashed with MA studies which were also drawing to a completion. It is interesting to note that all three withdrawals were due to realisations, two early on, and one much later, that Master's and Doctoral studies already begun did not easily transfer to teacher-research. Researcher vignettes of the five remaining participants appear below, followed by extracts from transcripts of interviews with each which illustrate responses  - in no particular order - to the same questions.

Of those completing their research, **Vildan** completed her BA in ELT at METU. She was in her first year at IKCU, following ten years' full-time teaching at state universities in Turkey: seven at Uludağ University and before that three at Trakya University. She was assistant director of the Testing Department at IKÇU and mother of a four year-old son. Throughout the study she taught eighteen lessons per week. **Çiler** graduated from Uludağ University ELT department in 2010 and was in her third year of teaching, her first year at IKCU. Throughout the study she taught twenty lessons per week. **Sevil** was in her eighteenth year of ELT and was Director of Testing at IKCU. Currently in her second year there, she had previously worked in Uludağ university where she had completed her Master's which involved research into Teacher Peer Observation. She was married with a five-year old son. Throughout the study she taught twenty lessons per week. **Kevser** was in her eighth year of language teaching. Having spent the first eight in two private high schools, she was at the time of the study in her second full year at IKCU. Kevser had sixteen lessons a week plus responsibility for Faculty English Testing. She had previously completed the CELTA. **Ezgi** completed her BA in ELT at Marmara University and MA in Educational Administration in 2013. She was in her sixth year of teaching and this was her first year at IKCU. She had previously worked at Doğuş University and Celal Bayar University. Throughout the study she had duties in the Testing Department and taught twenty lessons per week.

### *"Why did you decide to engage in teacher-research?"*

*'I've always wanted to do something like this but never had the chance or time to do it..and also I don't know how to do it..I always had lots of things to do and the administration never encouraged us to research..so I didn't try..I never had a colleague who was doing research..*

*'I like doing research..but I didn't have a chance so I thought this was a good chance'*

*'....I thought I needed to improve something about myself and my teaching.. and I've always wanted to be a better teacher..I want my lessons to be more beneficail to my students'*

*I had just completed my MA and I was familiar with the process of conducting research. Since teacher-research involves evaluating the ongoing process of teaching as well as engaging in research, which meant practice plus theory, the idea of being involved in teacher-research really aroused my interest.*

### *"How do you feel about being a teacher-researcher?"*

*'I'm a bit afraid..because I don't know anything about it..but if I can get time..and coaching..I think I can do it.. I am sure it will help in my classes'*

*'I'm excited to be involved in research..as I am in my early years of teaching I have so many things to learn'*

*'In fact it feels academic.. I mean professional..we are academicians and we need to do research...so it's a good thing..you improve yourself..it's what we should do.. instead of preparing tests (laughter)'*

*'Being a teacher-researcher required me to put a lot of effort in allocating time for my research by giving up some of my leisure activities. However, doing something for my personal and professional development gave me such a pleasure that it was really worth it'*

Combining analyses of responses to the above two questions it is clear that although they expressed a wish to do so, unsurprisingly, working in earlier contexts in which there was no encouragement or possibility of carrying out research had previously prevented most of the group from such studies. Comments reflect Borg (2013: 18) who notes how non-collaborative school cultures tend to act as a barrier to teacher-research. Two participants reflect Borg's finding that the top two reasons for doing research are to find better ways of teaching and because it is good for their professional development. Borg (2013: 107). It is also interesting to note that apart from fear, the largely positive feelings of optimism, excitement, felt professional needs, pride, pleasure and self-worth are all  features in researchers' responses.

**"What research topic are you investigating and why?"**

*'My topic is how to engage my students in more communicative pairwork activities.. because I'm having problems with this in my classes..my students are not interested in pairwork and they don't want to talk during pairwork activities..that's why I decided to work on this topic'*

*'Developing a Student-Centred approach in my classroom. I'm curious as to how teachers could overcome the problem of planning a student-centred lesson and actually carrying it out. I recently watched an experienced teacher having difficulty in doing this'*

*'L1..I prefer using the L1..Turkish in my classrooms in fact..and I really wonder if I'm doing the right thing or not and how my students feel about it...do they want it or..if they want it..when and how much'*

*'I'm trying to find ways to make my classroom more learner centred..to make them more actively involved in the learning process..teachers in Turkey are making a big mistake...the foreign students can all speak better than Turkish students.. we do not create an environment for our students to produce the language they've learned...I'm going to do that'*

*'I focused on error-correction in pronunciation that broadened my horizon as I got to learn the error-correction techniques to be used in this'*

In terms of a research orientation, three are a combination of evaluating and surveying. These concern pedagogically enquiry into the effectiveness of or reactions to new approaches and examining views and attitudes then using the finding as the basis for practical action (Borg, 2013: 109). All five reflect Borg's key finding which describes teacher-research carried out on the whole as '..predominantly private, reflective, pedagogical, evaluative, informal and internal', which contrasts with formal scientific research carried out by researchers seeking to improve their academic status, Borg (2010: 123-4).

**"What issues, e.g problems or obstacles are you facing? How are you solving them / planning to solve them?"**

*'I can't find time..here I have too many classes.. I have to do work related to the Testing office.also this is my first year and I'm trying to get used to the system..and I have a four year-old son who has just started kindergarten. In the mid-year break I'll have time for research reading..and will write the introduction'*

*'As this is my first venture into research I'm having problems finding reading material, and always wondering about the next step. As I'm teaching several classes, getting data is not an issue as long as I do it outside teaching time..asking students to complete a short survey'*

*'Time..and in fact I couldn't start it..if I can start during the five week break..it's not a very difficult subject.. I think I can find enough literature about it...I hope I'll have time to analyse..in fact I can't do anything'*

*'To be honest I should spare more time to think about what I should do..lack of activities..I'm having difficulty in implementing my ideas in my lessons.. I need more experience.a lot of reading..attending seminars'*

*'The main problem I face is the collection of data because I prefer to work with teachers by observing their classes and their use of pronunciation..I had to record the lessons besides taking personal notes and then transcribe all the data'*

Issues researchers faced in the middle of their studies are clear from the above responses. They are illustrated in comments concerning finding the time and energy to combine research with a heavy teaching load, carrying out research while still getting used to working in a new institution, locating relevant research literature, assessing an appropriate means of data collection and finding the initial impetus to begin writing up the study. Scheduled weekly individual tutorials went a long way towards relieving some of the strain felt by members of our research group; such meetings I am sure prevented further participant fall-out.

**"What do you think will be the benefits of your study?"**

*I'll try to find solutions..and practise the new things I've learnt in my class.. students benefit from seeing a teacher doing research...it's very helpful for colleagues..maybe they also experience the same problems..even if not.when you share your findings they begin to think about it...without being aware of it you start to do it better..you can share it with other universities.they start to respect you.. and see that you try to update yourself'*

*'I've benefited early on in my own teaching by trying to talk less, getting students to communicate more, and stopping and observing the lesson from my students' perspective..my colleagues could also benefit from my feedback, I think'*

*'I'll answer my questions..if I should use L1 or not..next year's students may benefit if I change my teaching style..in our school it's a problem for colleagues..how much L1 should they use'*

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*..it's something I'll learn from..firstly colleagues..then students..I've learnt a lot.. first of all students wanted to do more listening..this surprised me..also all of the students wrote that they don't want me to use Turkish'*

*Looking at my research, I've became more conscious of myself as a teacher and discovered different techniques I could make use of in my own classes. ...teacher-research helps the teachers develop themselves not only as researchers on a specific topic, but also as teachers to become more effective in their teaching processes.*

For the interested reader, Borg (2013: 15) provides an extensive list of potential benefits of teacher-research, several of which are illustrated in the above extracts. Examples therein include allowing teachers to become 'more reflective, critical, and analytical about their teaching behaviours in the classroom', (Atay, 2006), and 'boosting a teacher's sense of status', (Davies, Hamilton & James, 2007). In relation to Borg (2013) extracts above also reflect his finding that the four main ways that research had an impact were in terms of learning new teaching techniques, sharing ideas with colleagues, improved teaching, and greater awareness of teaching and students.

## Implications

An institutional climate that encourages teacher-research is vital if such studies are to be carried out; permission and support should be sought by the supervisor and researchers involved. Organised support in the form of weekly tutorials is also a clear requirement in order to locate and deal with ongoing issues and any difficulties arising, plus, where possible, outside help from a fellow research supervisor. An ultimately achievable goal, in the form of a conference to present at or the possibility of publication would certainly motivate would-be teacher researhers.

## Endings

As a final comment, vignettes reveal how teachers ranging from three to eighteen years of experience carried out research into their own classrooms. It should not be interpreted as patronising for me to point out that all five were female; anyone who perceives research as a male oriented / male dominated field might like to  remember this. Also noticeable is that apart from heavy teaching loads, four teachers also held busy positions of responsibility con-

cerning Testing, while two were also married with a young child. Supervisors of research confronted with teachers who claim they cannot find time to carry out studies might like to point them to the relevant chapters in this book. It is also interesting to note that while two participants had previously completed their Master's, the other three – perhaps as a result of confidence and self-esteem boosted by their success in research outlined here – are about to begin their own. I wish all five well, and look forward to working with them again on their research one day soon.

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# Teacher-researchers in Action
Edited by Kenan Dikilitaş, Richard Smith and Wayne Trotman



Teacher-research Workshop with teachers from Gediz University



Tutorial sharing meeting with teachers from both Gediz University (on the left) and İzmir Katip Çelebi University (on the right)

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