



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTENDANCE AND ENGLISH ACHIEVEMENT AT UFUK UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at determining the relationship between attendance and achievement in preparatory English classes, which is a rarely studied topic in the context of foreign language learning, at Ufuk University, Turkey. It was conducted with 244 students with different majors enrolled at the English preparatory program. First, the study established the correlation between student attendance and English achievement. Additionally, the correlation between the two constructs was also investigated after controlling for the effects of gender, age and student majors. A significant positive relationship was observed between attendance and English achievement. Students with higher attendance got higher grades in the language proficiency exam than those with lower attendance rates. Moreover, gender, age and student majors were found to have no significant effect on the relationship between attendance and English exam results.

Key Words: Class Attendance, Success, Gender, Age, Student Majors, Higher Education

UFUK ÜNİVERSİTESİ HAZIRLIK OKULUNDA DERSE DEVAM VE İNGİLİZCE BAŞARISI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

ÖZ

Bu çalışma Ufuk Üniversitesi (Türkiye) İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarında yabancı dil öğrenimi alanında nadir olarak çalışılmış bir konu olan derse devam ile akademik başarı arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi hedeflemiştir. Çalışma İngilizce hazırlık programına kayıtlı 244 öğrenciyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Öncelikli olarak çalışmada öğrencilerin derse devamları ve İngilizce başarıları arasındaki bağıntı saptanmıştır. Buna ilaveten, cinsiyet, yaş ve öğrencilerin akademik ana dallarının derse devam ve başarı ilişkisi üzerinde herhangi bir etkisi olup olmadığı araştırılmıştır. Öğrencilerin derse devamları ve İngilizce başarıları arasında anlamlı pozitif bir ilişki görülmüştür. Derslere daha fazla devam eden öğrenciler İngilizce sınavında derse daha az devam eden öğrencilere kıyasla daha yüksek puanlar almışlardır. Ayrıca cinsiyet, yaş ve öğrencilerin akademik ana dallarının derse devam ve İngilizce sınav sonuçları arasındaki ilişkide anlamlı etkiye sahip olmadıkları sonucu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Derse Devam, Başarı, Cinsiyet, Yaş, Öğrencilerin Anadalları, Yüksek Öğretim

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1. Introduction

Preparatory English courses are common features of the university curriculum in Turkey. Most undergraduate programs require students to enroll in preparatory English classes for at least a year and obtain a passing grade in the end of year English achievement exam. It goes without saying that it is important for educators to understand the determinants of success associated with these classes one of which is classroom attendance. Even though, many studies have concluded that classroom attendance is linked with a student's course grades, most of these studies submitted conclusions drawn from business studies and economics courses whereas research on attendance and achievement in language or more specifically in English language classes is scarce. The study presented here aims add to the literature regards the effect of attendance on student achievement in English language classes in the Turkish tertiary level English language learning setting.

2. Review of Literature

Tertiary level preparatory English language classes in Turkey are environments in which students are provided with opportunities to be exposed to English and use the language to facilitate learning. In order for such a context to yield successful results, one of the most important determinants can be said to be attendance, which enables students to be present in an environment in which they can be provided and equipped with the necessary practice, knowledge and skills to master English.

Studies have shown that student attendance, which can be defined as a student's physical presence in the classroom, is an important factor in all educational levels and courses. Attendance was found to be positively correlated with pre-school (Becker, 2010; Hubbs-Tait, 2012), primary and secondary school (Lamdin, 1994; Roby 2004, Gotfried, 2009, Sawyer & Gibson, 2012; Morrissey, Hutchison & Winsler, 2014), and high school (Berenson, Carter & Norwood, 1992; Moore, Jensen, Hatch, Duranczyk, Staats & Koch, 2003; Nichols, 2003; Spradlin, Cierniak, Shi & Chen, 2012) performance. Besides, the positive relationship between attendance and achievement is also well documented in the higher education setting as well (Marburger, 2001, Woodfield, Jossep & McMillan, 2006; Halpern, 2007; Newman-Ford, Fitzgibbon, Lloyd & Thomas, 2008; Wigley, 2009; Torenbeek, 2012).

A survey of related literature in the field of foreign language education shows that studies exploring the link between attendance and foreign language achievement are rare, which might be attributed to the obviousness of the importance of attending foreign language classes (Fay, Aguirre & Gash 2013). Not surprisingly, researches that focused on this link have also yielded positive links and effects. In a study involving participants studying Romance languages in the U.S., Siciliano (1978) concluded that attendance affected grades and that it was not possible to achieve success with chronic absenteeism in conversational classes. Moreover, in a study carried out with non-native participants with different native language backgrounds from seven different states of the U.S., Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon (2002) found regular attendance in adult ESL literacy programs to have a positive effect on reading comprehension and oral English skills.

Investigating the effect of attendance on exam grades in an introduction to Japanese course as measured by exam grades, Gump (2005) found a positive significant impact. Gottfried (2009) also found attendance and achievement to be positively linked for English language learners in his study conducted at urban U.S. schools with students from different backgrounds. In a study carried out in Taiwan, Kelsen and Liang (2012), investigated the indicators of achievement in EFL classes and found that attendance was among the most significant indicators of achievement. In another study undertaken with Chilean students enrolled into an English pedagogy program; Fay et al. (2013), found that missing classes had a negative effect on performance as well as the mastery of the target language and content. To our knowledge, there are only two studies that investigated the relationship between attendance and English achievement in the Turkish higher education setting. In the study carried out by Özkanal and Arıkan (2011), it was concluded that attendance significantly contributed to high achievement in English for Turkish preparatory school students; moreover the results showed that the correlation between attendance and achievement was significant with respect to student majors whereas it was insignificant with respect to gender. Similarly, Bahar (2015) who investigated the relationship between achievement and various variables including attendance found that attendance and achievement in English were positively correlated in the Turkish higher education preparatory school context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Aims of the Study

The review of related literature shows the link between attendance and success in language or more specifically English classes is a scarcely studied topic. The results of the few studies that did actually focus on this relationship in the foreign language learning context revealed that there mainly exists a positive correlation between class attendance and course performance, but as it is mentioned above, the number of studies exploring the attendance-performance link in the foreign language learning context is very limited and there is a need for further confirmation regards the link between attendance and student achievement in English language classes. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether there is any significant correlation between attendance and English learning achievement at Ufuk University Preparatory School determined by the end of year English proficiency exam. In doing so, the results of this study will add to the limited amount of literature on the link between attendance and foreign language learning achievement in the world and Turkish higher education context. In light of this aim this study explores the following research questions:

1. Is there any correlation between attendance and English achievement?
2. Is there any correlation between attendance and English achievement controlling for gender?
3. Is there any correlation between attendance and English achievement for age?
4. Is there any correlation between attendance and English achievement controlling for student majors?

3.2. Participants

The study comprised of 244 students at Ufuk University Preparatory School in Ankara, Turkey in the 2014-2015 academic year. Both female (68.98%, n=169) and male (31.02%, n=76) students were used as participants in the study and they were aged between 17 and 29. Participants were majoring in different fields including Business Administration, English Language Teaching, Law, Political Sciences and International Relations, Medicine, Nursing, International Trade, Psychological Counselling and Guidance, and Psychology departments. As part of the preparatory school program which is compulsory for students who get a grade lower than 60 out of 100 in the English placement test conducted by the University at the start of the academic year or who fail to submit a proof in English language proficiency via national or international English proficiency test certificates. Students who are to take the preparatory English course receive 784 hours of English instruction and are required to pass the achievement test at the end of the academic year. Students who fail to pass this test in two consecutive attempts are dismissed from the university.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to assess the relationship between attendance and English language achievement, the formal attendance records of the students and the results they obtained from the English language achievement test conducted by Ufuk University Preparatory School in the 2014-2015 academic year were investigated. The attendance rates of the students were calculated as the total number of hours they attended English classes. On the other hand, English achievement scores students obtained were the results of the end of year English language achievement exam prepared by Ufuk University testing office assessing students' proficiency in listening (10 points), speaking (10 points), reading (30 points), writing (15 points), grammar (15 points), vocabulary (10 points) and translation (10 points) from which the students could get a maximum of 100 points. The data were entered to and analyzed by using the statistical software SPSS 20.0. This study deals with the analysis of the correlation between two continuous variables namely attendance and English achievement. In order to analyze the data set with respect to research question 1, a Pearson-Moment Correlation analysis was carried out; as this analysis is the suitable type of analysis for investigating the relationship between two continuous variables. In addition, partial correlation analyses were carried out to investigate research questions 2, 3, and 4, which sought to determine whether there is a correlation between classroom attendance and English language achievement even after controlling for age, gender, and student majors respectively.

4. Results and Findings

The present study was designed to investigate whether there was any correlation between attendance and achievement in the Turkish higher education EFL context and whether gender, age, and students' majors had any effect on the relationship between these two variables. The data were analyzed and presented below.

The descriptive statistics regards students' English achievement determined by the end of year English achievement exam totaling 100 points and the number of hours students attended English classes is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for English achievement and attendance

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
English achievement	244	13,00	84,00	55,55	13,34
Attendance	244	619,00	759,00	659,16	36,02

As it can be seen in Table 1, the average English achievement determined by the end of year English achievement exam was 55.55 (SD= 13.34) while the minimum and maximum achievement scores were 13 and 84 respectively. On the other hand, the average attendance determined by the number of hours students attended English classes was 659.16 (SD= 36.02) while the minimum and maximum hours of attendance were 619 and 759 respectively.

In order to assess the relationship between student attendance and English achievement, which falls within the scope of research question 1, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed and the results of the relevant analysis is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pearson's product moment correlations for attendance and English achievement

	1	2
1. English achievement	1	.51**
2. Class attendance	.51**	1

**p<.01

As can be seen in Table 2, There was a moderate positive correlation between the two variables ($r=-0.51$, $N=244$, $p<0.05$). Overall, there was a moderate positive correlation between the number of hours of English classes students attended and their English achievements. That is to say, increases in the number of hours students attended English classes were correlated with increases in student achievement denoting that higher attendance is a contributing factor leading to higher achievement in English classes.

Research question 2 was aimed at ascertaining whether there was any correlation between attendance and English achievement after the effect of gender on this relationship was controlled and the results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Partial correlation of attendance and English achievement after controlling for gender

	1	2
1. English achievement	1	.51**
2. Class attendance	.51**	1

**p<.01

As seen in the Table 3, the correlation between attendance and English achievement was calculated controlling for gender. The reason for conducting such an analysis was to see if there were any significant differences in the correlation between

attendance and English achievement when the effect of gender was controlled. An investigation of the correlations controlling for gender ($r=.51$, $N=244$, $p<0.05$) show that gender is not an important factor in affecting the relationship between attendance and achievement in English.

Research question 3 was aimed at investigating whether there was any correlation between attendance and achievement in English after the effect of age on this relationship was controlled and the results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Partial correlation of attendance and English achievement after controlling for age

	1	2
1. English achievement	1	.49**
2. Class attendance	.49**	1

** $p<.01$

As it can be seen in the Table 4, the correlation between attendance and English exam scores was calculated controlling for age. The reason for conducting such an analysis was to see if there were any significant differences in the correlation between attendance and achievement in English when the effect of age was controlled. An investigation of the correlations controlling for age ($r=.49$, $N=244$, $p<0.05$) show that age is not an important factor in affecting the relationship between attendance and English achievement.

Research question 4 was aimed to examine whether there was any correlation between attendance and English achievement after the effect of student majors on this relationship was controlled and the results are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Partial correlation of attendance and English achievement after controlling for student majors

	1	2
1. English achievement	1	.52**
2. Class attendance	.52**	1

** $p<.01$

Table 5 shows the calculation of the correlation between attendance and English achievement controlling for student majors. The reason for conducting such an analysis was to see if there were any significant differences in the correlation between attendance and achievement in English when the effect of student majors was controlled. An investigation of the correlations controlling for student majors ($r=.52$, $N=244$, $p<0.05$) show that student majors is not an important factor in affecting the relationship between attendance and English achievement.

5. Discussion

The analyses of the data revealed that there was a significant positive link between the attendance rates and English achievements of Ufuk University Preparatory School students. Such a result implies that students benefit from attending classes. Moreover, this result is consistent with existent literature in terms of the positive correlation between attendance and English language learning success (Condelli et al, 2002; Gotfried, 2009; Özkanal and Arıkan, 2011; Kelsen and Liang, 2012; Fay et al, 2013; Bahar, 2015) and attendance and foreign language learning (Siciliano, 1978; Gump, 2005). In other words, the results of this study further confirms that attendance is a significant factor affecting achievement in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) context. This result seems natural given that language or more specifically English language learning is largely dependent on the active involvement and extended periods of practice on part the students at school as argued by Kelsen and Liang (2012) which can only be realized with students being present in their classes. Furthermore, the link between attendance and English achievement was found to be moderate. This might be attributed to the wide range of personal differences in learners like extroversion and risk-taking behaviors; and various other cognitive and affective factors influencing student success in language learning such as intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitudes and learner beliefs. Yet, according to the results of this study, it can firmly be argued that attending classes contributed to students' language achievement and that attending English language classes, which are interactive learning environments, add to student success in the mastery of English. Moreover, it was also manifested that the significant positive correlation determined between student attendance and English achievement was not affected by the age, gender and majors of the students. This denoted that attendance is an important variable in determining achievement in English classes irrespective of the age, gender and majors of the students.

7. Conclusion and Implications

The results of this research has contributed to the limited amount of research carried out so far in the foreign and English language learning context with regards to the relationship between attendance and achievement. Moreover, the results of the study asserted further evidence in the relevant line of literature on the positive relationship between attendance and achievement in English and achievement in general. Considering the results of the study, it is believed that policy makers, administrators, and professionals in the field of education and language education, more specifically, should take the results of studies on the relationship between attendance and achievement seriously. They should utilize programs and implement strict practices that promote and foster regular attendance and raise student awareness regards the positive effects of attending English language classes. Moreover, administrative bodies of universities may consider incentives for improving attendance rates, which may lead to more instructional hours per school year for students. Higher education institutions, which have high student attendance averages, may be contacted to see if they adopt certain programs or incentives for improving and maintaining student attendance. Even though many variables may affect attendance throughout Turkish higher education institutions, efficient student attendance efforts should be uncovered and considered for institutions with attendance concerns and problems.

The implications of this study were constrained by a number of limitations. The study data included formal records of attendance of one university preparatory school department; a larger and varied sample including other higher education institutions and more variables would enhance the study. Moreover, studies involving interviews or group discussions may shed light on some important facts regards student attendance. A study on student and teacher perceptions and beliefs regards the importance of attendance, their views on the ways to promote and improve attendance and the causes and consequences of irregular attendance may reveal important and interesting results that may illuminate future practices.

Furthering research on factors that influence student achievement in the EFL context will add to our understanding of performance related variables. This will in turn assist policy makers, administrators, and professionals in the field of English language education to develop curricula and policies that are aimed at achieving greater learning outcomes and aid educators in bettering classroom practices. Therefore, furthering studies in this direction and on topics that may seem intuitive like attendance is of great importance.

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