

DİL ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN SINIF DIŞI DİL ÖĞRENME DENEYİMLERİNE YÖNELİK GÖRÜŞLERİ

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Öz

Küreselleşme çağında, İngilizce dil becerilerini geliştirmek, dünya çapındaki gelişmelere ayak uydurmak için hayati bir rol kazanmıştır. Konuşma becerisi, dil öğrenenlerin konuşma yetkinliğine sahip olabilmek için en çok geliştirmek istedikleri dört ana beceriden biri olarak görülmektedir. Bu yetkinlik, çeşitli dil öğrenme stratejileri ve teknikleri aracılığıyla geliştirilebilir. Bu çerçevede, bu çalışma, dil öğrencilerinin sınıf dışı İngilizceye yönelik tutumlarını ve sınıf dışı İngilizce'nin yükseköğretim ortamında öğrencilerin sözlü yeterliliklerini geliştirme motivasyonları üzerindeki olası etkilerini araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Ders dışı İngilizce öğretim faaliyetleri, konuşma kulübü olarak düzenlenen sınıf dışı bir ortamda öğrencilere ve gönüllü katılım sağlamak isteyen kurum paydaşlarına sunulmaktadır. Dil öğrenenler, hedeflenen konular, etkinlikler ve dahil edilen tüm materyaller hakkında duygu ve düşüncelerini paylaşma fırsatı buldukları kulüp faaliyetlerine gönüllü olarak katılmışlardır. Çalışmanın bulguları, dil öğrenenlerin konuşma kulübüne yönelik çoğunlukla olumlu tutumlara sahip olduklarını; iletişim becerileri ve sosyo-duyuşsal stratejilerini geliştirmek için anılan ders dışı etkinliklerden önemli ölçüde yararlandıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Kulübün, ilham verici, konuşma kaygısını azaltıcı ve zengin içerikli yapısı nedeniyle dil öğrenenler için çok önemli ve motive edici olduğu bildirilmektedir. Bu çalışma, İngilizce dil müfredatı geliştirme ve hazırlamada, materyal geliştirmede ve dil öğretiminde yol gösterici olabilecek bulgulara sahiptir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: : İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, konuşma becerisi, sınıf dışı İngilizce, konuşma kulübü

Language Learners' Perspectives towards Extramural English

Abstract

In such an era of globalization, improving English language skills has gained a vital role in keeping up with the developments worldwide. Speaking can be one of the four main skills that language learners are mostly eager to have mastery over to be able to have conversational competence. Such competence can be triggered via various language learning strategies and techniques. Within this frame, the current study investigated language learners' attitudes towards *Extramural English* and the possible impact that *Extramural English* has on students' motivation to improve oral proficiency in a tertiary EFL setting. *Extramural English* was offered in an out-of-class atmosphere which was organized as an extracurricular speaking club. Language learners voluntarily participated in club sessions where they had the opportunity to share their feelings and opinions about targeted issues and topics. The findings of the study revealed that language learners mainly held positive attitudes towards speaking club sessions and significantly benefited from these extracurricular activities to improve their communicative skills and socio-affective strategies. The club was reported to be very essential and motivating for language learners due to its inspiring and content-rich nature. This study may provide some important implications for policy makers, material developers, language instructors and learners.

Keywords: ELT, Speaking Skill, Extramural English, Speaking Club

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, English has become an important part of life concerning its position as a lingua franca to gain access to ideas, knowledge, information, and services worldwide. Based on this, English may no longer be regarded as a curricular lesson since it has become a common channel to keep up with the global world and satisfy the needs and interests of individuals.

From past to present, English language teaching can be portrayed by a flow of theories and methods following one another. Each has characterized English language teaching, emphasizing different aspects of the process. However, the rich linguistic and multicultural ecology of English today provides a significant basis to question, revise and update established conceptualizations and perceptions of English language teaching and learning. Since the language evolves depending on many other influences such as globalization, technology, multiculturalism, and migration, so will the way learners learn, and teachers teach this language. Depending on just simple textbooks and traditional curricula may no longer inspire a generation of digital natives since they grow up in the information age and are surrounded by computers, digital technologies, mobile systems, and social media.

In such an era of globalization and digitalization, improving all four language skills has gained greater importance to catch up with what is happening worldwide. However, speaking is one of the four main language skills that learners are eager to develop to have conversational and communicative competence. At the same time, it is considered the most challenging part of language learning to master communicative skills. Learners are challenged, and language teachers experience difficulties in teaching this critical skill. It is at the heart of language learning but somehow neglected due to several possible reasons, such as students' and teachers' tendency to emphasize grammar and difficulties in evaluating and testing it objectively.

There might be many reasons why learners face difficulties in gaining mastery of oral production, such as lack of motivation and self-confidence, insufficient guidance, lack of extra practice and input, and inadequate variety of teaching aids. Among these, motivation is widely accepted as one of the key difference signs of success in language learning (2018, Lajtai). However, where motivation derives from, how it becomes sustainable, and how it is translated into an actual effort to learn a language has long been a complex issue. In his L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei (2005) conceptualized language learning motivation with three main dimensions: 'Ideal L2 Self' referring to the integrative motivation of learners' hopes, ambitions, and desires; 'Ought-to L2 Self' standing for learners' self-image based on externally imposed motives and finally 'L2 Learning Experience' representing the learning situation, learning environment, and learning context. These constructs have been revealed to significantly impact learners' motivation for language learning behavior.

Self-confidence has also directly influenced language learning attitudes and motivation (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998). Similarly, feelings of anxiety and fear can also be other negative factors that may result in learners' avoidance of language production. Horwitz (2016) suggests 30-40% of language learners experience general language anxiety on different levels, from moderate to severe and that language teachers need to show sensitivity to their needs. It is closely related to learners' willingness or reluctance to participate in social contact in the language. MacIntyre et al. (1998) investigated different variables impacting a learner's willingness to communicate. According to their study, using language for a communicative desire is influenced by certain motives, such as group relations and learners' characters. It is also driven by more situational factors, such as state communicative confidence, which refers to a situational feeling of confidence

and desire to speak to a certain person. These factors ultimately contribute to learners' efforts to be willing to participate actively in language learning.

Collaborative learning has also been found to have satisfying effects on learners' speaking achievement. In his *Sociocultural Theory*, Vygotsky (1978) focuses on the constructive effects of social interaction and collaboration on language development. As collaborative learning promotes a conducive atmosphere for learners, it encourages them to exchange opinions and increases the social and motivational advantages to improve speaking proficiency. *Scaffolding* (Vygotsky, 1978) has been outlined as a tool for learners' growth in language learning through collaboration with peers. With the social support surrounding them, learners practice new things, maintain meaningful interactions with others, and become more confident.

Students can acquire English language skills and raise their motivational attitudes through exposure to many other means aside from their English curriculum due to the rapid increase in digital accessibility. They can get access to as many resources as possible depending on their needs and interests. When there are many alternatives and options, sticking only to traditional curriculum-based methods and approaches would be irrelevant and insufficient to the learners' context. The current study investigates students' attitudes towards extramural activities to encourage peer interaction and collaboration and its possible impact on their motivation to improve oral proficiency in a tertiary EFL setting.

Extramural English can be defined as 'English outside the walls,' which refers to English that learners come in contact with outside the classroom walls (Sundqvist, 2009). Several other relevant terminologies describe learners' involvement in second language learning in an out-of-class context, such as 'out-of-class learning' and 'self-directed naturalistic learning' (Benson, 2001), and 'spare time English' (Lundahl, 2009). Benson (2001, 2007) and Sundqvist (2009) linked their studies on Extramural English to learner autonomy which is the ability to take control and responsibility for one's learning. What is emphasized in both studies is the voluntary nature of *Extramural English* on the part of learner involvement. The concept encompasses not only input but also output aspects of language contact, and learning can be intentional and unintentional depending on the intentions and motivations of learners.

In their study on *Extramural English*, Sundqvist and Sylven (2016) highlight the global dominance of English, focusing on its two major implications as a sociolinguistic reality: norms for L2 English assessment and the diversity of L2 English classrooms (cited in Crystal, 2003). According to the first, a successful L2 user should be the new benchmark for L2 English proficiency rather than the utopian native-speaker ideal. The second one suggests that there should be a wide range of practices in ELT classrooms to meet the needs of language learners today. According to Sundqvist (2009), *Extramural English* is a path for development for learners of English as a global language due to the opportunities it gives to use the language beyond the classroom, initiating an autonomous learning process.

When learning outcomes are considered, *Extramural English* has been observed to be most effective in promoting learners' oral competencies (Sundqvist, 2009). In her study, Sundqvist (2009) investigated the potential effects of *Extramural English* on learners' oral proficiency and vocabulary. She concluded that *Extramural English* positively impacted learners' speaking performance and vocabulary knowledge.

This study sought answers to these questions within this frame: 1) How do English language learners at School of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University in Adana view out-of-class speaking activities? 2) What are the emerging themes related to speaking club activities?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were 73 preparatory language students (34 females and 39 males) at the School of Foreign Languages of Cukurova University, Adana, in Türkiye. All participants voluntarily attended speaking club sessions at the time of the study. The participants, all Turkish, ranged between 18-20 years of age and had an A2 level of English.

Speaking Club Setting

This club was initiated in 2021, where all A2 level preparatory students could attend at least one class hour per week. Students were allowed to discuss and share their opinions and comments on the targeted and parallel issues in the institutional curricula. The club was mentored and guided by one of the full-time language instructors at the institution under the full supervision of SoFL administration. Students who voluntarily attended these club sessions could exchange their ideas with their peers and instructors (guest instructors were also welcome at times) on some specific topics. The mentor provided students with resources such as videos, quotations, posters, and some provoking questions to encourage students to speak up during the club sessions. The idea behind organizing such club sessions was to create an out-of-class atmosphere where learners could use *Extramural English* without feeling pressured to complete a curricular task. They were able to use English freely to communicate their ideas.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire from the participants during the first term of the 2022-2023 academic year. This tool aims to elicit existing views of club participants to better the club facility. Since this club has been one of the newly integrated practices in the institution, such elicitation played a significant role in evaluating and planning the current application. All emerging themes were analyzed based on students' comments gathered throughout the questionnaire. The research method focused on a qualitative approach. This descriptive study tried to present various perspectives of language learners in the targeted institution.

Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis was benefited for all responses perused for recurring themes. Additionally, common themes were later assigned numerical values to substantiate the analysis procedure, and a frequency test was run to identify the most common themes. Valid percentages were taken into account for data interpretation. Due to the descriptive nature of the study, the analysis only focused on themes with percentages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were grouped into three main categories: *the place of speaking in learning English*, *the benefits of speaking club*, and *recommendations and other opinions regarding club activities*.

As for the place of speaking in learning English, the theme of *speaking as the most important skill* (17%) emerged with the highest percentage. Participants emphasized the importance of communicative skills in learning English, referring to oral proficiency's central role in academic and business life. This may be due to the dominance of conversational skills in language proficiency. They mentioned that they now have a better understanding of the fact that knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, which they used to put the most emphasis on, was the basic skills they needed to acquire to improve their productive skills, such as speaking and writing. Other emerging themes were

speaking as the base of communication with 12% and *speaking as the essence of learning a language* with 11%. Both themes imply that learners acknowledge speaking as the core of language learning. They also state that they can *increase their communication and interaction through a good command of speaking*, which was outlined as another theme with 10%.

Moreover, some learners (9%) also explained that they could *express themselves better* by improving their speaking skills. They noticed they could exchange opinions with peers and transfer their messages in English in these club sessions. The final theme emerging (7%) in the category of the place of speaking in learning English was that improving their oral proficiency would make learners *more open and social*. They suggested that acquiring communicative skills help them raise their self-confidence and become more social and interactive.

As for the second category – the benefits of speaking club – the most emergent theme, with 33%, was the opportunity the club provides to *practice speaking*. Most participants stated that the speaking club was the only place they could use English outside their classrooms. 15% of the participants focused on the benefits of the club to *build self-confidence*. The club sessions boosted their self-esteem and triggered their motivation to speak up. *Improving fluency* (12%) was another point they highlighted as one of the most important benefits of joining the club activities. Of the participants, 11% also pointed out that the Extramural English that the club offered contributed to their *knowledge of vocabulary*, which is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Sundqvist (2009), emphasizing the positive impact of *Extramural English* on learners' lexical knowledge. Another emerging theme (10%) was *socializing* with regard to the benefits of the speaking club. Learners mentioned that the club sessions helped them practice speaking and socialize with peers outside of their curricular class hours. Some learners (8%) stated that during club sessions, they could find *a relaxing chat environment* in which the curricular class hours may not always offer to use English in a non-threatening environment, which was also outlined in Söderqvist, 2018. 6% of the participants mentioned that participating in *Extramural English* activities also enabled them to learn about *various sentence structures* that they did not learn during their class hours. *Pronunciation practice* (6%) was another theme emerging as one of the benefits of the speaking club. Learners highlighted that they improved their pronunciation skills by interacting with peers and the club instructor. The fact that club sessions created a very interesting and joyful atmosphere was another theme mentioned by 5% of the participants. The final theme (5%) in this category was learners' emphasis on the opportunity that club sessions offered them to *put the theory into practice*. They suggested they could use many things they learned during their curricular hours in club activities.

The last category was about recommendations and other opinions regarding club sessions. The most emergent theme (22%) was about students' recommendations for *increasing the number of club sessions available*. The participants stated that they would love to attend such out-of-class activities more often as they felt motivated and encouraged by the non-threatening atmosphere in which they could participate in communicative interactions. Of the participants, 21% suggested that *more variety* could be added to the flow of club sessions. They expect to see many more topics on different disciplines to discuss and share their viewpoints. Another emerging theme (12%) was the *inclusion of interactive games into the club sessions*, as they were believed to create a joyful and interactive atmosphere. Some participants (10%) mentioned that it would be better if *fewer people* joined the club sessions. They suggested that with fewer people, the activities would be much more efficient, and they would benefit more from their interactions. A group of participants (8%) suggested *the integration of drama* as it was believed to bring variety into the club. Finally, 4% of the participants suggested that in each club session, they should decide on *a single topic and discuss it in a lengthy way*. They stated that they would like to discuss a topic from different angles and feel more satisfied and self-confident as long as they regularly participate in long discussions and debates.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' attitudes towards *Extramural English* and its possible impact on their motivation to improve oral proficiency in a tertiary EFL setting. The goal was to examine whether language learners benefited from spending some time in an out-of-class atmosphere in which they could have the chance to interact and collaborate with their peers through the use of English. Extramural English was offered through a speaking club which language learners could voluntarily attend for at least one hour per week. During these club sessions, language learners use English to communicate their ideas with their peers on certain topics chosen by the collaborative work of the club instructor and the participants. The club instructor guided and mentored language learners by integrating different materials into club sessions, such as videos, songs, posters, and quotations. The study's findings were categorized into three main groups, which identified language learners' perceptions about the place of speaking in learning English, the benefits of speaking club, and recommendations and other opinions regarding club activities.

As for the place of speaking in learning English, there was a common consensus on the significance of communicative skills and oral proficiency in language learning. Language learners were observed to be challenged by speaking as a language skill the most but still, they considered speaking as being at the heart of language learning. The participants were very well aware that communication skills play a crucial role and that they need to have mastery over these skills to achieve their ambitions in both their academic life and career. Regarding the benefits of the speaking club, language learners stated that the club was the only out-of-class atmosphere where they could practice English with peers. They emphasized that these extracurricular activities provided them with a relaxing environment and improved their knowledge of vocabulary and syntax. They suggested they encountered various sentence structures and lexical items in their interactions with peers and the club instructor. The club was also reported to boost language learners' self-confidence in oral communication.

Extramural English has positively impacted language learners' attitudes and motivation toward improving their speaking skills. In addition to plenty of benefits, it contributed to language learners' oral proficiency and motivation; it has also been recommended to be improved in certain aspects. The participants mainly emphasized that the number of club sessions should be increased and that the number of learners attending each session must be fewer to maximize the benefits they get through their interactions.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction: In the current era of globalization, English has become an important part of life concerning its position as a lingua franca to gain access to ideas, knowledge, information, and services worldwide. Based on this, English may no longer be regarded as a curricular lesson since it has become a common channel to keep up with the global world and satisfy the needs and interests of individuals. From past to present, English language teaching can be portrayed by a flow of theories and methods following one another. Each has characterized English language teaching, emphasizing different aspects of the process. Since the language evolves depending on many other influences such as globalization, technology, multiculturalism, and migration, so will the way learners learn, and teachers teach this language. Depending on just simple textbooks and traditional curricula may no longer inspire a generation of digital natives since they grow up in the information age and are surrounded by computers, digital technologies, mobile systems, and social media. In such an era of globalization and digitalization, improving all four language skills has gained greater importance to catch up with what is happening worldwide. This study sought answers to these questions within this frame: 1) How do English language learners at School of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University in Adana view out-of-class speaking activities? 2) What are the emerging themes related to speaking club activities?

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Conclusion: As for the place of speaking in learning English, there was a common consensus on the significance of communicative skills and oral proficiency in language learning. Regarding the benefits of the speaking club, language learners stated that the club was the only out-of-class atmosphere where they could practice English with peers. They emphasized that these extracurricular activities provided them with a relaxing environment and improved their knowledge of vocabulary and syntax. They suggested they encountered various sentence structures and lexical items in their interactions with peers and the club instructor. The club was also reported to boost language learners' self-confidence in oral communication. Extramural English has positively impacted language learners' attitudes and motivation toward improving their speaking skills. In addition to plenty of benefits, it contributed to language learners' oral proficiency and motivation; it has also been recommended to be improved in certain aspects. The participants mainly emphasized that the number of club sessions should be increased and that the number of learners attending each session must be fewer to maximize the benefits they get through their interactions.

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