

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **The effect of an innovative teaching technique on the success and attitudes of sixth grade English language students**

**Kamil Arif Kırkıç**

Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Turkey.

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English language teaching is an area that the Turkish Ministry of Education (MNE) tries to enhance with utmost priority. The 21st century, also known as the Information Age, is an era during which communication is mainly established in English. The main problem encountered by students while learning foreign languages is that teachers focus mostly on correcting grammar mistakes rather than improving communication skills. This has a negative effect on students learning of English and results in the development of negative attitudes among them toward their success in English classes. The aim of this study is to identify how the Boray Technique (BT) affects sixth grade secondary school students' levels of success in their English classes and their attitudes toward English classes. This study collects and compares students' English exam scores, attitude scale scores, and the teachers' opinions about students. The findings of the study showed that BT had a positive effect on both level of success and the attitudes of students toward their English classes.

**Key words:** English language education, language learning, language teaching, English language classes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

English language teaching is one of the priority areas of the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) and they have been trying to improve it over the years. The MNE expended a lot of effort on English language teaching since the beginning of the Republican Era (1923); however, English language teaching became a major priority in the last few decades, since it became more prominent over the other languages in the world. English is the language for global communication in the

21st century, which is called the Information Age. In the past, languages such as Latin and Arabic were used for cross-cultural communication. The communication language of the present century is English. Due to the political and economic status and the influence of the United States of America, there is no doubt that the mother tongue of the United States, which is English, is the main candidate to become the Lingua Franca of our age (Yıldırım, 2012). Although, the Turkish MNE tried

E-mail: [kamil.kirkic@izu.edu.tr](mailto:kamil.kirkic@izu.edu.tr).

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to modernize English language teaching process under the influence of various educational policies adopted over time, everybody in Turkey accepts that students, who take English language classes starting from the elementary school to the higher education, have serious problems in communicating in English. Turkey ranked 50 among 70 countries in 2015 in the English Proficiency Index of the Education First (EF) (<http://www.ef.com.tr/epi/regions/europe/turkey/>).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A news article published on the news website T24 (Paker and Höl, 2012) indicated that 90% of students are not successful in English, despite receiving 1400 h of English education from elementary school to high school. A report submitted to the MNE stated that as students move to higher grades, their interest in and attitudes toward English classes deteriorate. The reason behind this is that students find book-dependent and book-oriented teaching methods boring. The same study revealed that students do not like English course books. Whereas 80% of fifth graders at the first year of the middle school say that they like English classes, only 37% of the twelfth graders at the last year of high school share the same sentiment. Similarly, the percentage of students who like English classes decreases gradually from 80 to 37% throughout the grades. One of the striking points mentioned in the report is that there is a need to focus on communication and daily conversation skills instead of grammatical rules in English classes T24 (2017) ([http://t24.com.tr/haber/neden-ingilizce-ogrenemiyoruz,258240\\_](http://t24.com.tr/haber/neden-ingilizce-ogrenemiyoruz,258240_) September 07, 2017).

Paker and Höl (2012) also state that the MNE needs to change both the teaching programs and the teaching methods of English classes and work harder to ensure that students are more successful in learning English. In Turkey, "providing education in a foreign language" did not solve the problems of learning and teaching foreign languages and there is still a serious need for the foreign language education in Turkey to be redesigned and reorganized so that it can be of better quality and more successful (Bayraktaroğlu, 2012).

The main purpose of English program, which was updated after the age to start learning English was changed to two years, is to make sure that students learning English perceive their English classes as enjoyable (MEB-TTKB, 2013). The most important problem students face while attempting to learn a foreign language is that teachers who adopt a grammar-oriented approach to teaching pay more attention to correcting the grammatical mistakes of students than to improve their communication skills. Teachers place too much emphasis on correcting the grammatical mistakes of students instead of focusing on understanding and explaining what

students are trying to communicate and this makes students quickly and permanently lose interest in the real goal of learning English. This has a negative impact on the attitudes of English learning students toward the classes and the resulting negative attitudes have a negative impact on students' level of success in these classes. The most basic duties of teachers are to prepare a learning environment where students can learn cognitively, which contributes positively to the emotional development of students toward the class and learning in general as well as to maintain this environment throughout students' learning process. Students should feel free and comfortable to orally express themselves. Otherwise, the development of students' conversation skills in English would be inhibited and the language learning process would be inconclusive.

The Boray Technique (BT) is a successful and effective method of learning English developed by an English teacher who dedicated himself to determine and eliminate the obstacles in English language learning process in Turkey. The technique was developed in Anatolia and it is specifically designed for people living there. It is a goal-oriented system explaining what to do and how to do it instead of providing generalized methods and techniques. It is fully compatible with the learning characteristics of the Turkish people since it was developed locally. Therefore, it yields positive results. Since it is an authentic technique developed locally, it has a high probability of success (Işık, 2008).

This method is about overcoming Turkish people's problems in speaking English no matter what their level is, facilitating the process of learning English, and ensuring that they acquire effective communication skills. Depending on their level and schedule, students are able to learn English within 1 to 5 months. No matter where and how English is taught the primary technique or the constructive-supportive technique can be used individually, in groups, or in classrooms under the supervision of a teacher.

This method prevents individuals from the following issues: (1) constantly worrying about grammar rules; (2) speaking in an exceedingly flat, fast, monotonous, and frigid manner that lacks intonation due to the structure and use of their mother tongue; and (3) hesitation due to the fear of making mistakes and sociological fear such as the fear of being ridiculed by others. This method persuades those who want to learn English, suggesting that English language can be learned by taking a physical and psychological break from their fears and worries. In essence, this method was developed to revolutionize English language education in Turkey, and to liberate students' ability to speak English through the initiative of institutions and teachers.

The Dead Fish Syndrome (DFS) defined by BT, which was developed as an innovative teaching method, is one of the major factors affecting English learning experiences

of students. According to BT, the first step of learning English is to release students from the DFS and motivate them to learn English. While explaining the effects of motivation on learning, Gardner (2001) stated that sufficiently motivated individuals would be able to show an effort to reach their goals, would be able to remain determined by focusing on their goals until the task is completed, and would use their successes as positive reinforcers while applying their strategies and resolutely working on their goals in this process. The purpose of this study is to determine how BT, which is an innovative method of teaching English, affects sixth grade students' levels of success in English as well as how it affects their attitudes toward English classes. The learning environment created in English classes that adopt BT is more participatory as compared to other classes and accordingly, every student actively participates in the learning process. As a result, there is a higher possibility for students to adopt a better attitude toward the class. This is a result of the significant relationship between success and attitudes (Karabiyik et al., 2012).

This study measured and compared sixth graders' levels of success in English classes at a school that used BT and at a school where BT was not used. At sixth grade of the school where BT was not used, the levels of success and attitudes after applying the technique were measured and the effects of BT as an innovative method on the level of success and attitudes in English classes were compared. A study conducted by Kırkız (2010) discovered a moderately positive relationship between the levels of success and attitudes of eighth graders in middle school and 11th graders in high school with regard to their English language classes.

Positive attitudes of students toward their English classes might have a positive impact on their levels of success (Karahan, 2007). Different studies (Firat, 2009; Öner and Gedikoğlu, 2007) indicate that the attitudes that students develop while learning English might have a bigger impact on their success levels than the tools and equipment used in class. Öner and Gedikoğlu (2007) mentioned in their studies that there is a negative relationship between the level of anxiety, which is one of the emotional aspects of students, and their level of success. Their study showed that students who had a higher level of anxiety had lower levels of success, whereas students who had a lower level of anxiety had higher levels of success. Çetinkaya (2009) indicated that the positive attitudes of English language learners have a positive effect on their levels of success. Otherwise, their level of success deteriorates in parallel with their negative attitudes. Kazazoğlu (2013) explains this relation as follows: the emotional characteristics of students consist of the factors that determine the necessary capacity to learn the target language. The most important ones among the emotional factors affecting the process of learning a foreign language are students' attitudes.

Teachers should not underestimate the attitudes of their students and try to involve students in relevant educational programs.

Since students' attitudes toward their English classes are so crucial (Bağçeci, 2004), schools associated with the MNE should pay attention to have students develop positive attitudes toward English classes and this factor should be taken into consideration when preparing and implementing educational programs. Additionally, it is suggested that some changes are made to employ different techniques and methods to promote correct English speaking and to encourage fluent speaking and communication besides vocabulary and grammar. Kocaman (2014) points out the problems in foreign language teaching programs and states that the methods should be revised and more useful, beneficial methods should be developed. In his study, Şahin (2005) mentions that native English teachers are more successful in teaching English to their students because they help students develop positive attitudes toward English language. In the same study, Şahin concludes that the attitudes of students toward English classes directly affect their levels of success.

Kızıltan and Atlı (2013) point out that the attitudes of elementary school students toward English classes affect their level of success in learning English; hence, teachers should measure students' attitudes before and after the learning process. Yavuz and Yağlı (2013) demonstrate that the attitudes of 10th graders toward their English classes do not change in parallel with their levels of success in these classes.

Students' attitudes affect their behaviors and thus, determine their level of success (Kara, 2009). There is a very strong relationship between students' levels of success in learning a foreign language and their attitudes toward that language and toward learning a foreign language (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Levine, 2003; Fakeye, 2010; Gömleksiz, 2010).

### **The purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of BT on sixth graders' levels of success and attitudes of toward their English classes and English language.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was designed to use an experimental comparative method. However, we had to change the methodology, since the school hosting the classes, which was to be used as the planned control group of the study, decided not to share the relevant data.

In this study, to examine the effects of BT on the level of success in and the attitudes toward English classes, we planned to observe 15 sixth grade students at a private school where BT was not used during the fall semester but it began to be used in the spring semester, and 39 sixth grade students at a private school where BT

**Table 1.** The year end English scores of sixth and fifth grade students (SGEYES and FGEYES).

Data coupling	Average	Number of individuals	S. Deviation	S. Error
SGEYES	82.27	15	11.190	2.889
FGEYES	79.53	15	13.341	3.445

**Table 2.** The year end English scores of sixth and fifth grade students (SGEYES and FGEYES).

Wilcoxon test results	SGEYEC - FGEYEC
Z	-0.369
P	0.712

**Table 3.** English scores at the end of the spring and fall semesters of sixth grade (SGSSS and SGFSS).

Data coupling	Average	Number of Individuals	S. Deviation	S. Error
SGSSS	85.13	15	12.005	3.100
SGFSS	79.33	15	11.932	3.081

**Table 4.** The results of the Wilcoxon test for English scores at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade (SGFSS and SGSSS).

Wilcoxon test results	SGFSS and SGSSS
Z	-2.332
P	0.020

was used since the fall semester. However, since we failed to acquire data from the school with the said 39 students where BT was used, we completed the study with the group consisting of only 15 students. The study has a one-group experimental AB research design (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 219).

### Sample

As BT is a new method, it is not widely used. Therefore, we had to select the sample from schools that already used or decided to use BT. While choosing the sample size of the study, we opted for the appropriate sampling method (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 92), as the sample had to consist of students from schools that decided to implement BT. Since the number of schools using BT was not sufficient, we selected a school that had recently decided to use this technique and was able to teach it to their teachers. A class consisting of 15 students and their English teacher at the said school participated in the study.

### Data collection tools

Fifth and sixth grade school reports of students, the teacher's opinion note sheet, and English attitude scale prepared by Kırkıç

(2010) as data collection tools were used. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the Attitude Scale for English Class prepared by Kırkıç, which was used to determine whether students express different attitudes, was calculated as 0.93 in the study conducted by Kırkıç (2010).

### Data analysis

The data was analyzed using the SPSS 22.00 program package. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test and effect size test values were used. We calculated the effect size using the formula  $r = z/\sqrt{N}$ . The results were interpreted according to the criteria of Cohen (1988) ( $r = 0.1$  small,  $r = 0.3$  average, and  $r = 0.5$  big).

## RESULTS

Tables 1 to 8 demonstrate the study's data in detail. Fifth and sixth grades year end English scores of the classes were calculated where BT was used as 79.53 and 82.27, respectively. When we looked for a meaningful difference between these two scores of students, we found out

**Table 5.** The English teacher's opinion scores at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade (ETOSEFS and ETOSESS).

Data coupling	Average	Number of individuals	S. Deviation	S. Error
ETOSESS	75.00	15	23.299	6.016
ETOSEFS	65.33	15	30.441	7.860

**Table 6.** The results of the Wilcoxon test for the English teacher's opinion scores at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade (ETOSEFS and ETOSESS).

Wilcoxon test results	ETOEFS and ETOSESS
Z	-2.714
P	0.007

**Table 7.** The Attitude test scores at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade (ATSEFS and ATSESS).

Data coupling	Average	Number of individuals	S. Deviation	S. Error
ATSESS	3.8200	15	0.73747	0.19041
ATSEFS	3.4500	15	0.89781	0.23181

**Table 8.** The results of the Attitude test at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade (RATEFS and RATESS).

Wilcoxon test results	RATESS - RATEFS
Z	-1.706
P	0.088

that there was not a meaningful difference between the year end average English scores in fifth and sixth grades, as shown in Table 2.

When students' year end average English scores in fifth and sixth grades were compared, it was found that the average English score of sixth grade students was 79.33 in the fall semester and 85.13 in the spring semester. As shown in Table 3, the average English score of the class in the spring semester, during which BT was used, is higher than their average English score in the fall semester. When the effect size of the year end average English score in fifth and sixth grades was calculated, it was found to be  $r = 0.07$ . This is a very small value.

According to the results of the Wilcoxon test conducted to determine whether the difference between sixth grade students' scores at the end of the fall semester and at the end of the spring semester was meaningful, the semester end average English scores when BT was used were

significantly higher than the average English scores of the semester during which BT was not used.

The English teacher's opinion notes regarding students' performances during the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade was also taken into consideration. The opinion notes assigned by the English teacher to each student were compared. The average opinion score assigned to students by the English teacher was 65.33 for the fall semester and 75.00 for the spring semester, which are shown in Table 5.

The results of the Wilcoxon test conducted to determine whether the resulting difference is meaningful are shown in Table 6. According to Table 6, there is a meaningful difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level between the English teacher's opinion scores assigned to students for both semesters, which indicates a significant increase in the spring semester. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicate that the effect size between the English teacher's opinion scores for students in the fall and spring

semesters of sixth grade is  $r = 0.43$ . This effect value indicates a significant difference.

The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicate that the effect size between the English teacher's opinion scores for students in the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade is  $r = 0.50$ . This effect value indicates a significant difference.

The difference between students' year end English scores in fifth and sixth grades is similar to the difference found by Kırkıcı (2017). However, the difference between students' average English scores at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade and the English teacher's opinion scores assigned to students at the end of the fall and spring semesters of sixth grade are very similar to the difference found in the previous study (Kırkıcı, 2017).

When students' responses to the attitude test at the end of the fall semester and those at the end of the spring semester were compared, it was found that there was a difference between their attitude levels in favor of the spring semester. As seen in Table 7, the attitude test scores of students who participated in the study increased by 0.37.

As a result of the analysis of the attitude tests using the Wilcoxon method, the values were obtained as shown in Table 8. Although we found a higher value in favor of the spring semester when comparing the attitude scores of the fall and spring semesters, there is not a significant difference between the scores at the level of 0.05. However, we calculated the effect size as  $r = 0.31$  using the  $z$  value in Table 8. This value indicates an average effect size in favor of the attitude scores of the spring semester.

## DISCUSSION

BT is a method developed by a teacher. The purpose of the technique is to increase students' interest in English language thus increasing their level of success, and to help them overcome the "I understand but I cannot speak" prejudice associated with the process of learning English in Turkey, and to make English a language that can be spoken in Turkey.

In this study, the effects of BT on students' level of success and attitudes toward learning English at a school which decided to use BT were examined. One of the main findings of the study is that there was no significant difference between the year end English scores of fifth and sixth grade students participating in the study ( $z = -0.369, p > 0.05$ ).

Sixth graders at the school where the study was conducted were transferred there from different schools at the beginning of the academic year. Therefore, the fact that they did not study in the fifth grade at that school caused problems regarding their English scores at the

end of fifth grade. Moreover, the year-end scores of sixth graders were calculated by taking the average of the fall and spring semesters. Thus, the scores of the fall semester, during which BT was not used, were included in the year-end scores alongside the scores of the spring semester when BT was used. These might have affected the chance of detecting a possible difference between the year-end English scores of sixth graders and fifth graders. There is a meaningful difference ( $z = -2.332, p < 0.05$ ) between students' average English scores at the end of the fall semester during which BT was not used, and their average English scores at the end of the spring semester during which BT was used. When the effect size of this difference was calculated the difference was found as  $r = 0.43$ , which is accepted to be an important effect.

Another difference was found between the English teacher's opinion scores assigned to students at the end of the fall semester when BT was not used and at the end of the spring semester when BT was used. The opinion scores were assigned by the teacher according to various criteria, such as students completing their homework and participating in class discussions. The average opinion score was higher in the spring semester when BT was used than in the fall semester when it was not ( $z = -2.714, p < 0.05$ ).

The effect size of the difference between the teacher's opinion scores for the two semesters was calculated as  $r = 0.50$ . This value indicates that the difference in the opinion scores of the teacher between the two semesters was significant.

Upon examining the attitude scores of students at the end of the fall and spring semesters, it was found that there was a difference of 0.37 between the scores in favor of the spring semester during which BT was used. Although the results of the Wilcoxon test were not meaningful ( $z = -1.706, p > 0.05$ ), the effect size value between the attitude scores of the two groups was  $r = 0.43$ , which was in favor of the spring semester. This value shows that there was a significant development in the groups during the two semesters.

In addition to a small number of studies arguing that there is no relationship between students' level of success and attitudes toward learning English language (Yavuz and Yağlı, 2013), there are many previous studies that obtained results similar to the present results. The positive attitude toward English classes increases students' level of success in English classes and as their level of success increases, their attitudes toward learning English language become more positive (Karahana, 2007; Fırat, 2009; Öner and Gedikoğlu, 2007; Şahin, 2005; Kara, 2009).

If students' attitudes are important for the process of learning English, English learning programs should aim for emotional achievements, such as attitudes, in addition to obtaining cognitive achievements (Kazazoğlu, 2013;

Kızıltan and Atlı, 2013).

Another important suggestion is that speaking skills are more important for students who want to learn a foreign language (Ismail, 1991; Jaseem and Jaseem, 1997; Leong and Ahmadi, 2017). Boray Technique has an emphasis on the development of speaking abilities to make students more motivated to learn foreign language. Dewi et al. (2017) stated that motivational tools like games enhance students' speaking skills and like in Boray Technique, students can learn to speak a foreign language. According to Kuşnierek (2015) who found that role play helps students to grasp the speaking ability in a foreign language because role play motivates students.

## RECOMMENDATION

As an innovative technique, BT leads to a positive change in students' attitudes and increases their levels of success. However, studies about the effectiveness of this technique can only be conducted if schools themselves want to adopt this technique. In order to achieve more comprehensive results, various studies need to be conducted at different schools and with different teachers, which is only possible if this technique becomes more commonly implemented. The presence of a significant connection between the attitudes and levels of success of students who want to learn a foreign language demonstrates that emotional achievements should also be included in the goals of the lessons during preparation of the educational programs and the teachers should pay attention to students' emotional achievements (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Levine, 2003; Fakeye, 2010; Gömleksiz, 2010). Therefore, in accordance with the findings of the Kocaman's (2014) study, the educational programs need to be revised and reorganized in a way that would eliminate the current problems with English language teaching with regard to the methods and techniques. A regulation as such would increase students' levels of success and make their attitudes toward learning English more positive. The effects of the new and innovative methods and techniques in teaching should be carefully assessed through comprehensive studies and their findings should be taken into consideration for future improvements.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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