




# The Relationship between Participation in Extracurricular Activities and Motivation of Foreign Language Learning\*

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify the link between foreign language learning motivation and English preparatory class students' participation in the extracurricular activities programmes. The differences between the motivation levels of the students based on their participation in the extracurricular activities are defined and students' participation is also compared in terms of gender and education level. The study group consists of 340 students. The data were gathered by "Motivation Scale in English Language Learning". Results indicated a significant difference between the students' motivation level towards English and participation in extracurricular activities in favour of the ones who attended these activities. It is also concluded that participation in extracurricular activities had a significantly positive impact on the students' attitude towards learning English. However, it was found out that there is not a significant relationship between the gender, education level and motivation level of the students participating in the extracurricular activities. The results have been discussed within the context of Socio-Educational Motivation Theory.

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Extracurricular activities, English language learning, motivation.

## 1. Introduction

The necessity to learn English has become nearly compulsory in the contemporary world. One of the most noteworthy reasons can be considered English's being widely used worldwide, particularly in the fields of education and business. Young people must be competent users of a foreign language in their professional and social lives (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Lamb & Arisandy, 2020; Yashima, 2000). Youth mobility is getting more important across the world. To be a part of those programmes, they need to improve their communicative skills, including the ability to express themselves in English. According to Morris (2001), students learn English for a utilitarian value like job opportunities and cultural reasons. Similarly, Lu (2011) points out that students would like to learn English because of socio-economic mobility. Given all that, qualified foreign language education is compulsory for the students to catch up with the modern era since English is seen as a key to opening new doors for young people (Bacon & Kim, 2018; Moyer, 2018).

There are many components of foreign language education programmes. The first thing affecting foreign language education's quality is the philosophy, which all the curriculum and the teaching practices are based

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on. Second, the theories and methods used throughout the teaching practices matter in designing an education programme. The current foreign language programme in Turkey has been grounded on “The Common European Framework of Reference” (CEFR; 2001) by “The Council of Europe”. This programme helps learners reach up to a certain level by using the same curricula, the same objectives and provides a basis for the users. However, foreign language education practices in Turkey leave the education system one legged since English is not used in daily life and the students do not have a chance to practice it in Turkish education system (Çetintaş, 2010; Haznedar, 2010). Hence, curriculum is hardly sufficient to enable students to master their language skills (British Council & TEPAV, 2014).

The students' motivation level is regarded as an important issue affecting the quality of foreign language education (Belaja, Boon Sai & Lin, 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Sengkey & Galag, 2018). Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that there are mainly two types of motivation for learning a language: integrative and instrumental. Instrumental motivation is having a pragmatic reason for a learner to learn any topic. To illustrate, one may wish to learn a foreign language for getting a better education or another for getting a better job. It is regarded as a key in the process of foreign language learning (Taylan, 2017). Integrative motivation supports people to empathize with others and socio-cultural aspects of the language context and it contributes the learners better understand the culture of the target language and the people. (Kashefian-Naeeni, Aminlari & Mousavi, 2018). These two motivation types are important in explaining the reasons why people learn a foreign language.

One of the pioneering motivation theories in teaching foreign language is Gardner's Socio-Educational Motivation Theory (1985). According to Gardner, motivation has a direct impact on learning a second language. A learner adopts the culture of language he/she learns. The learner practices many things in her own culture, accommodates herself in time, and starts thinking in the target language. For this reason, foreign language learning is thought to be more complex than learning other school subjects. Gardner (2006) does not simply connect the concepts of learning a language and motivation with tasks in class. He strongly proposes that there is a powerful link between integrative motivation and motivational behaviour (Gardner, 1985). According to him, knowing the motive of the learner is the key point to increase and maintain the motivation. The theory puts forward four important components: the social milieu, individual differences, acquisition (learning) contexts, and outcomes. The social milieu includes all the beliefs about language that parents, teachers, and peers mainly acquire. Individual differences are closely associated with attitudes towards learning situation, integrativeness and motivation. Krashen (1981) reviews acquisition context component as formal and informal ways. The outcomes of the learning are mainly associated with the language competency and attitude change.

Teaching aids are also considered to be one of the primal factors associated with the quality of foreign language education. To that regard, extracurricular activities play a crucial role in teaching a foreign language and they can be thought as part of informal learning (Gao, 2008; Reva, 2012). Informal learning can be generalized to all types of daily activities which enable the individuals learn in an unintentional way (Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This generally results in the acquisition of the target language and one way to achieve this can be using extracurricular activities (Van Marsenille, 2015).

Extracurricular activities do not have a common definition in literature (Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka & Garnder, 2012), but according to Enachescu (2019) these activities include the activities that complement normal learning practices. Kassas (2002) highlights the importance of extracurricular activities by stating that learners will practice and internalize what they learn theoretically in class through these activities.

There are several studies related to the effectiveness of the extracurricular activities on learners' development. Some of them highlight the importance of the participation in these activities since they contribute to academic success as well as personal skills like self-confidence, time management and discipline (Barnett, 2007; Cooper, Valentine, Nye & Lindsay, 1999; King, McQuarrie & Brigham, 2020). Some other studies focused on the relation of extracurricular activities and motivation since this maintains a permanent language trend for the learners (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). These studies also stress out the profound effects on

academic success, motivation level, and the students' attitude in terms of learning English, showing a positive correlation between participation in the extracurricular activities and their success in the academy.

Many more studies (Bradford, 2007; Kuimova & Polyushko, 2015; Kyriacou & Zhu, 2008) emphasize the benefits of extracurricular activities such as forming social groups ensuring autonomous learning and peers' getting together and the significance of the purpose of the students to learn a language. While some studies conducted to display the effectiveness of being exposed to the target language is essential to have a higher level of motivation (Ojima, Matsuba-Kurita, Nakamura, Hoshino & Hagiwara, 2011), several studies reiterate the importance of using social media as a means of teaching foreign languages (Ohashi, 2016) and having higher level of socioeconomic status in terms of having access to extracurricular activities (Paek, Park, Runco & Choe, 2016).

### **1.1. Foreign Language Education in Turkey**

English was first introduced into Turkish education system as a foreign language as of the nineteenth century and this was followed by the foundation of the Republic of Turkey (Sarıçoban, 2012). With the Educational Reforms (1997, 2006 and 2012), the position and the effectiveness of foreign language education changed in a salient way (Kartal & Başol, 2019).

In Turkey, foreign language education is currently included in the second year of primary education curriculum. Although it is compulsory, total weekly hour of English courses in primary school is only two hours based on the decision of the Board of Education and Discipline (2013). Since English has widely been taught using traditional methods in primary, secondary and even in higher education; it lacks to fulfil the fundamental objective of foreign language education, which is to equip the learner with the competency of communication in the target language. Traditional methods are being used in general and students are not usually encouraged to practice speaking. It will certainly become difficult to teach English unless a positive perception towards the language courses or a wider use in a social context is ensured.

The studies conducted in Turkey (Bulut Özek & Pektaş, 2016; Çetintaş, 2010; Haznedar, 2010; Kelahmetoğlu & Kaya, 2017; Kızıltepe, 2000, 2003; Sarı, 2012; Soner, 2007; Ulum & Uzum, 2020) reveal that especially state schools in Turkey stick to traditional teaching methods in foreign language education and lack of practice leads to many other problems in this context. Some other research run by external institutions (British Council & TEPAV, 2014; Education First, 2015) demonstrate the cost of the traditional way of teaching for the students in Turkey by having a relatively low English level in the world ranking. Taken all these studies into account, it is significant to evaluate the effectiveness of extracurricular activities as an alternative way of teaching English and implement them into the field of foreign language education in Turkey since traditional ways of teaching as reported above do not to create much difference in terms of competency and motivation levels of the students.

This study was designed to analyse the university students' motivation level towards English based on their participation in extracurricular activities. It is also intended to find out whether the difference in terms of motivation level of the students based on gender, the graduation school, and faculty type they are registered to is significant.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Model**

The design of this study is based on quantitative model principles as the relation between two variables were analysed via empirical data (Büyüköztürk, Akgün, Karadeniz, Demirel, & Kılıç, 2016). Within this frame, causal comparative research was used to analyse the variables correlational without an intervention. Also, short interviews were conducted with the students who show high level of motivation to support the quantitative data.

## 2.2. Participants and Procedure

The participants constitute of 340 students from a private university's English preparatory programme and their age range was between 18 and 20. The students in the study group were selected based on their level of English. The study group (Table 1) consists of Turkish students with an intermediate English level attending a preparatory programme at a university in Ankara, Turkey. Students, who were in their first year at university, were given an English proficiency exam and were placed in a suitable level based on their exam results. The levels can be listed as A, B and C from lower to higher and B level represents intermediate level. Students in the study group were chosen among 340 B level students since the ones in A level had difficulty understanding English yet, the ones in C level had been busy preparing for the preparatory class's exit exam and their attendance rate to the extracurricular activities were low.

The study group was offered to participate in various activities to create a real-like context and enable the learners to practice the target language. The extracurricular activities programme has been administered for nearly ten years in the department and was registered with European Language Award in 2012. They are mostly run by the instructors whose mother tongue is English. Although the activities are not based on a specific teaching method, they are structured, and the instructors prepare lesson plans and materials for these activities beforehand. The activities are organised for one hour on a weekly basis for the whole semester. The activities are detailed below:

The native instructors run English Friends Club and it provides learners with an opportunity to exchange cultural knowledge with the facilitators because knowing the culture of the target language can be thought as the most significant step in learning a foreign language. Prep Times is another club where students prepare news by themselves and share them with their peers in the department via a departmental newspaper. Another extracurricular activity is Movie Club where films, documentaries or series are watched and then discussed in English. This activity is a good way to boost listening and speaking skills. Drama Club is an extracurricular activity in which students rehearse and perform an English play to their peers at the end of the semester. Scrabble Club is also a way to enhance students' vocabulary knowledge. In addition to these clubs and activities, students also have a chance to practice on their own as autonomous learners in Self Access Centre in which the learners can enhance four skills in English with the help of a facilitator and Reading Room where students can reach some readers, magazines and books in English. Finally, students also have the opportunity to have conversation classes each week with a native speaker of English after the class hours.

**Table 1.** *Distribution of the Participants*

Variable	Level	f	%
Gender	Female	199	59.00
	Male	141	41.00
	Total	340	100.00
Registered Faculty	Engineering	126	37.00
	Economics & Administrative Sciences	93	27.00
	Fine Arts	60	17.00
	Science and Letters	26	8.00
	Law	26	8.00
	Medicine	9	3.00
	Total	340	100.00
Type of School	Public	125	37.00
	Anatolian High School	96	28.00
	Private	65	19.00
	Science High-School	32	6.00
	Other	22	100.00
	Total	340	

### 2.3. Data Collection

The quantitative data were collected by Motivation Scale in English Language Teaching developed by Mehdiyev, Uğurlu and Usta (2016). The five-point-likert scale was applied to 147 students in the pre-assessment phase and exploratory factor analysis (with 275 students) and confirmatory factor analysis (with 331 students) were carried out to examine the construct validity. Exploratory factor analysis results show that the scale comprises three sub scales: self-confidence, attitude and personal use, and the total variance is explained with a percentage of 51.13%. The self-confidence sub-dimension contains four items (item 1-4) and the Cronbach's-Alpha coefficient for this dimension is .78. The attitude sub-dimension contains five items (item 5-9) and the Cronbach's-Alpha coefficient for this dimension is .77 whereas the personal use sub-dimension includes seven items (item 10-16) and the Cronbach's-Alpha coefficient for this dimension is .85. The Cronbach's-Alpha coefficient for the entire scale is .83.

Motivation Scale in English Language Teaching, which has 16 items and 3 sub-dimensions, was applied to all the students in 20 different classes on a voluntary basis simultaneously after being piloted with 10 students. In order to support quantitative data, nine students who responded the motivation scale and participated in the extracurricular activities were interviewed voluntarily. These students were selected among the ones who got respectively higher results from the motivation scale. Upon their oral consent, these students were asked their general opinion about extracurricular activities and if the activities they participated positively contributed to their learning process or not. The students were asked for the short interview after school hours and interviewed one by one.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

First, normality tests were carried out for all levels of variables. Since the mean, median and mode values were very close to each other and coefficients of skewness and kurtosis were between -1 and +1, the distribution was accepted as normal (McKillup, 2005). To analyse the difference between the students' motivation levels based on the participation in the extracurricular activities, independent samples t-test was conducted.

Analyses were conducted to figure out if there is a significant difference between the motivation level of the students who participated and did not participate in extracurricular activities based on their gender, the type of high school they graduated and the faculty they were registered based on their motivation level. The impact of the gender on the participation of the students in the extracurricular activities was tested through independent samples t-test. Since the categorical variables (type of high school and registered faculty) were not distributed evenly, non-parametric techniques were used with the variables. Kruskal Wallis test was used to identify if the high school the students graduated and the faculty they are registered create a variation in the students' motivation level who participated in the extracurricular activities.

### 3. Findings

The link between participation in extracurricular activities and the motivation level is the main concern of this paper. Within this context, the results of the independent samples t-test (Table 2) analysing the motivation levels of the students revealed significant differences between the mean scores of the students participating in the extracurricular activities and those who did not participate in the English Language Learning Motivation Scale ( $p < .05$ ). It can be concluded from the results that the students benefited by the extracurricular activities by gaining integrative motivation.

**Table 2.** Motivation Scale Scores

	N	$\bar{X}$	S	df	t	p
Participants in ECAs	118	4.0	.57	388	2.489	.01
Non-participants in ECAs	222	3.8	.66			

$p < .05$

Although the results of the t-test regarding the sub-scales (Table 3) did not show significant differences based on self-confidence and personal use sub-dimensions, participation in extracurricular activities may be concluded to change the students' attitude towards English in a positive way compared to those who did not attend the extracurricular activities when evaluated with the interview results ( $p < .05$ ). This supports the idea put forward in the Socio-Educational Motivation Theory (1985), especially with the individual differences and outcome components that affect the students by changing their attitude and integration positively.

**Table 3.** Differences between Motivation Scale in English Language Learning Self-Reliance, Attitude and Personal Use Sub-Scale Averages

		N	$\bar{X}$	S	df	t	p
Self-Reliance	Participants in ECAs	118	2.36	0.92	338	1.801	0.07
	Non-participants in ECAs	222	2.56	1.01			
Attitude	Participants in ECAs	118	3.00	2.92	338	2.301	0.02
	Non-participants in ECAs	222	2.80	2.00			
Personal Use	Participants in ECAs	118	4.15	0.66	338	1.570	0.12
	Non-participants in ECAs	222	4.02	0.78			

$p < .05$

The second main purpose of this study is to examine whether the motivation levels of the students participating in extracurricular activities show a significant difference as per their gender, the type of high school they graduated and their faculties in the university. The motivation level of the students (Table 4) attending the extracurricular activities does not vary significantly based on the gender, type of high school they attended or the faculty they are registered ( $p < .05$ ). It is vital to note that gender and education level are not common variables studied in most of the research done in the field of extracurricular activities.

**Table 4.** Gender, School Type and Faculty Differences on Motivation Levels in English Language Learning

		N	$\bar{X}$	S	df	$X^2$	p
Gender	Female	76	3.95	0.53	116	0.518	0.60
	Male	42	3.90	0.63			
Type of High School Graduated	Basic High School	48	4.04	0.57	5.11	8.877	0.06
	Anatolian High School	33	3.90	0.59			
	Private High School	20	3.88	0.63			
	Science High School	8	0.60	0.29			
	Other	9	3.92	0.30			
Registered Faculty	Engineering	47	3.75	0.64	5.11	11.313	0.06
	Economics and Administrative Sciences	25	4.14	0.35			
	Fine Arts	21	4.07	0.47			
	Science and Letters	9	3.80	0.53			
	Law	10	4.13	0.71			
	Medicine	6	3.79	0.46			

$p < .05$ .

Interviews with the students who attended the extracurricular activities were conducted to get more detailed understanding of the quantitative data. Interviews indicate that students find it boring to attend the classes where English is taught with classical methods. Thereby, they report that they expect the learning process to be more enjoyable for them with the use of extracurricular activities. One of the students describes the foreign language learning process she desires as:

S1: "Sometimes we study just for the exams and therefore, we generally forget that we are learning English. Extracurricular activities teach us to use English and experience it in all domains of life if we want to learn it."

In Turkey, attending prep class is regarded as a lost year in university education both by the students and the parents. For this reason, the students have been asked the question "Has attending these activities contributed to your English language learning process?" to understand their attitude towards this one-year education. A student responded as follows:

*S2: "I believe there has been a huge gap. I feel lucky since I attended prep class and these activities. The activities are really helpful, and they make students socialize. I had a chance to know a lot of people and interacted with them. When I could interact with people, especially in English, this gave me confidence. I had the image that I could speak in English."*

As can be understood from these comments that students use the target language in a daily context change their misinterpretation regarding their prior knowledge which the following students also support:

*S3: "These activities are really encouraging, but most of the students see them as burden. I took part in the drama activity and it helped me improve my speaking skill as well as social skills since this was a way for my friends and me to socialize."*

*S4: "When we learn something here theoretically, we generally do not use it in our daily lives. But when we join these activities, we can use them and have a chance to practice. I would also like to state that the number of the activities should increase to get more attention since people's interests may differ."*

#### **4. Conclusion and Discussion**

This specific study aimed at displaying the effectiveness of the extracurricular activities in higher education level in Turkey, especially in the context of preparatory class students by highlighting the differences in terms of the participants and non-participants. This paper explored whether participation in extracurricular activities and being exposed to the target language significantly affect the students' motivation level towards English. The results show that the students participating in extracurricular activities have a higher level of motivation than the non-participants. Similar studies (Berg, 2013; Bulut Özek & Pektaş, 2016; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Henry, 2014; Kelahmetoğlu & Kaya, 2017; Murray, 2011; Reva, 2012) indicate a parallel pattern as of the students' responses in the motivation scale and in the interviews. In this study, the term motivation has been used to refer to inner motivation. Many studies (Çelik & Bayraktar Çepni, 2020; Harter, 1981; Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002) stress the importance of inner motivation in foreign language teaching field. The extracurricular activities seem to have a positive effect on the inner motivation level of the students who attended the activities based on students' self-report. Even though the students had some worries about learning English, they reported to feel more motivated and would like to attend the activities more often with the help of these activities.

The results of attitude sub-scale indicate that students participating in extracurricular activities had higher scores than non-participants did. The interviews with the students also support this finding. The students who took part in the interviews stated that they had worries about learning English before they started the preparatory programme. In addition, their attitude towards learning English was in a negative direction which is caused by their perceptions and assumptions about learning a foreign language; however, during the interviews they mentioned that their attitude towards learning English also changed in time. Although this contradicts the findings obtained from the attitude subscale, it supports Gardner's (1985) Socio-educational Motivation Theory. It alleges that the learners' attitude and motivation levels are closely related.

This study suggests that curriculum designers should be inclined to raise the authorities' awareness in the field of education and create an initiative for a change of practice in the field of foreign language learning to raise the students' motivation level towards learning foreign languages. Within this framework, in-service training should be organised for foreign language educators in different education levels in Turkey. The trainings should include what extracurricular activities are and how they should be implemented to go in line with our curriculum.

Turkey, still being among the very low proficiency level (46.81) category countries in the world- ranking 76 out of 85 countries, should take precautions to improve this learner profile (Education First, 2019). This is possible to enhance the level of motivation of the students through the use of experimental ways of teaching

rather than sticking to conventional methods (Demydovych & Holik, 2020). Another step to address this problem is to change the students' perception towards English (Tatar, 2017). It is also important for the instructors to encourage learners to be active participants in this process, which is thought to positively influence the students' motivation level. This is believed to have a profound impact on students' forming social groups and becoming autonomous learners as well.

With this permanent informal learning trend, the motivation levels of the students will go up. This suggests an important indicator of how foreign language education should be organized in Turkey since students benefited from these activities. However, the main focus of the activities was not grammar teaching. Therefore, there should be a gradual shift from the grammar-based teaching methods and the curriculum should be re-organized with the inclusion of practice-oriented activities. In this way, the students will be exposed to the target language, easing their foreign language learning process.

To conclude, the number of research on the effectiveness of extracurricular activities should follow up with higher education in Turkey and the other education levels, especially in foreign language education. This is mostly because of the fact that the students in Turkey are not educated as autonomous learners and this can be the first step of breaking out of the conventional ways of teaching.

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