IMPROVING THE MOTIVATION OF 6TH GRADE STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH IN RURAL AREAS: DRAMA TECHNIQUES

Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to investigate whether using drama in the English language classes of young Turkish learners enhance motivation and create enjoyable, lively atmosphere. In Turkey, the curriculum of Ministry of Education of 2016-2017 outlines the themes, functions, skills, activity types for the 6th graders; however, they are not sufficient and cannot meet the students’ needs and demands properly. So teachers feel the necessity of practising different implementations related to themes in English subject in order to make the lessons more alive and to improve the students’ motivation, interest, and enthusiasm. This process-oriented research was implemented to 12 sixth grade students during the first term at Yağızlı Secondary School (in a rural area) in Ordu, Turkey. During the whole semester, the students first built stories related to the units’ topics and then dramatized them. The data were obtained from Intrinsic Motivation Inventory, Student Interviews, Classroom Observation and Student Diaries. The results have indicated that drama as an education method improved the motivation of sixth grade students in learning English.

Keywords: Motivation, young language learners, drama technique
Kırsal Kesimde İngilizce Öğrenen 6. Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Motivasyonlarını İyileştirme: Drama Yöntemi

Öz


Anahtar kelimeler: motivasyon, çocukların dil öğrenmesi, drama yöntemi

1. INTRODUCTION

Student-centered methods emphasize the necessity of students' active involvement in their own learning process. This is true especially for young learners since they are always expecting enjoyable activities (Wenden, 2002). They have an incredible ability to adapt to new and different methods and materials brought in an understandable and useful way. Their brains are very flexible to learn foreign languages, and their attitude as well as their enthusiasm is high to learn different cultures and languages. Their world is also different from that of adults. Therefore, teachers should be careful about choosing convenient activities, and they should enrich the curriculum with suitable activities according to young learners’ abilities, units, and topics. As Hudelson (1991, p.258) claims, “if the activities are topic-based, we call it the Topic Approach” ; these kinds of activities include the topics convenient for students’ interests and levels resulting active and collaborative participation in class. When the young learners study cooperatively, their memories bloom; moreover, learning in context helps them to understand better (Cameron, 2003). This golden period is the most appropriate time to teach another foreign language (hereafter L2) at schools.

Motivation is another factor to be considered in the process of learning an L2 since it enhances persistence. As Pintrich and Schunk (2002, p.5) point out, “motivation helps the students to integrate with the topic and activity and maintain them”. Similarly, it “gives dynamism to the nature of the child” (Ellis, 1985, p. 76), but this depends on the topic, activity, context, and task. According to Williams and Burden (1997), every child’s motivation can be affected by social, external and internal factors. Their background is also effective in their learning, motivation, attitudes, and interests. Dörnyei (1994a) asserts that motivation has three levels:

1) The Language Level including the first learning level of L2 and adapting to it in society by speaking;

2) The Learner Level including learners’ self confidence, achievements and ability;
3) The Language Situational Level including extrinsic (environment is effective) and intrinsic motivation (the person by herself/himself is effective) situations. The Dornyei-Otto Model of L2 motivation (Dornyei, 2005), as a process-orientated model, could be effective for language teachers to increase their students’ L2 motivation. It is an appropriate choice especially for the teachers since “the temporal dimension of L2 motivation is a continuing process forming and maintaining learner involvement in learning”. Dörnyei (2001a) asserts that people’s behaviours can be divided into two: direction and intensity, which are closely related to “motivation of students in a particular action, activity or issue and even students’ continuity in them” (p.7).

One of the best ways to achieve this continuous interest in English language classes especially for young learners is to do drama. We all know that children do not like playing in isolation (Lifrieri, 2005); this is one of the main characteristic features of young learners. They like playing together and working collaboratively while enjoying learning very much; moreover, they learn from mimics, gestures, movements and physical activities. Bringing drama into young learner L2 classes not only helps students to learn better in an enjoyable way but also gives chance to them to solve their daily life problems at school and at home (Dodd & Hickson, 1977). Young learners also improve their understanding of others’ emotions since they develop empathy. By helping the students to try to understand the other people’s feelings, emotions and behaviours, drama is a good educational method in visual and physical situations (Courtney, 1980). The school is the example of the society and in this society the students learn how to behave cognitively and emotionally by experiencing (Verrior 1985, p. 181). Furthermore, when students do drama at school for relaxing, they can evaluate their own thoughts, feelings and emotions and also learn how to work collaboratively in a conductive environment. Drama is a natural way of learning a language and it supplies different perspectives to students in their school life.

While doing drama, teachers and students choose a particular activity willingly that motivate them in the learning process. In other words, drama is beneficial for both teachers and students; teachers can achieve active participation in their classes, and students can realize and solve their daily problems because these children live the real ones and try to create a solution in their social world (O’Neill & Lambert, 1989). When they are backed up by this social environment, they can learn and comprehend the foreign languages easily. Moreover, through drama, while improving their speaking skill, children learn new words by using and touching the real objects (Cameron, 2001). Burnett and Myers (2004, p. 24) claim that when the children associate with each other in a language other than their mother tongue, they learn better; with the help of the conversation, they complete their deficient knowledge in speaking and learn some idioms, phrases, and patterns, which improves the meanings in their minds.

2. **THE STUDY**

In the language learning process, young learners’ active participation in class is vital to create an enjoyable atmosphere. As Harmer (2007, p. 424) points out, “teachers can become involved in far more than just materials (or article writing)”. Teaching an L2 requires extra materials, activities, and methods that consider the emotions, feelings, and enthusiasm of young L2 learners. In the curriculum of the 6th Graders in 2016-2017 Academic year, units, themes, functions, skills, language use, tests, and activity types are all suggested by the Ministry of Education in Turkey, though they are not clearly explained (MEB, 2013). Besides, the coursebooks selected for this grade have activities some of which are too boring for the students at this age to do. So it is left
to the teachers’ creativity to liven the classrooms. We believe that when teachers, together with the learners, can build up new stories related to theme suggested in the curriculum and dramatize them in the classrooms, they can create lively and fun classes in order to be motivated to the lesson. In this case study, we investigate the effects of drama as an education method on the 6th grade students’ motivation, attitudes, enthusiasm, and enjoyment in learning English. We particularly selected the case study; as Stake (1995) states, this design is assumed to find out the complexity of a single case and makes “a connection between the instructions and application” (Barkley, Cross and Major, 2005, p.182) by giving chance to students to express themselves, discriminating the positive and negative aspects of the issue in process.

Considering the framework of the case study involved in teaching English to the 6th grade students studying at Yağızlı Secondary School in Yağızlı Village (a rural area) in Ordu, Turkey, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of bringing drama in learning English. We have formed the following research questions:

1) How does drama as an education method improve the motivation of 6th grade students to English lesson?
2) Do drama activities affect the attitudes of students towards learning English?
3) Do drama activities make students enjoy in English lesson?

We did our particular case study with the 6th grade students at Yağızlı Secondary in Yağızlı Village, Ordu, Turkey. It is a small school in a small village with one group for each grade. There were only 10 students (five males and five females) with the mean age of 11 in the 6th grade during 2015-2016 academic year. Since it is a very small village, families had a very similar socio-economic background. Their L1 is Turkish. One of the researchers of this study has been teaching at Yağızlı Secondary school for five years and was their English teacher while conducting the research.

In this qualitative study, we used the triangulation method including application and composition of different sources because, according to Cohen and Manion (2000), it provides very thorough information. We particularly utilized Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), Student Interviews, Classroom Observations, and Student Diaries.

Considering our aim in our study, we adapted IMI (see Appendix I) according to nature of our study to assess the motivation of students in interest/enjoyment, perceived choice, value/usefulness and perceived competence subscales during the process. This scale, as a part of The Self Determination Theory developed and improved by Deci and Ryan (1982) to explain the motivation intrinsicaly and extrinsicaly, provides information about experiences, connections to the other related issues, and working in harmony. It assesses participants’ interests, effort, competence, relatedness, tension and choice.

Student interviews have an important role in case studies, because they give rich sources of data. Interviews provide thorough information about the topic. According to Yin (1994), interviews give basic perceptions about the situation and humans’ affairs” (p. 85). In our case study, we had confidence in interviews to obtain information. Students were interviewed for six weeks after they began to do drama. Then, each week, one or two of the students in class were chosen randomly and interviewed for 15 minutes. The interview questions are:

1) Do you think drama activities motivate you in learning English? Please explain.
2) Do you think drama activities make English lesson more enjoyable? Please explain.
3) Do you think drama activities make you speak English? Please explain.

The sessions were video-taped during the interviews and then transcribed for the analyses.
Observation plays an important role in case studies in teaching process. They help to understand the interaction between the individuals. In our study, we observed the students during drama activities. They were conducted in class, and the students’ motivation, interest, enthusiasm, involvement and social interaction were observed. The observation lasted for fifteen weeks because there was a three-week period for each unit. The researcher utilized an observation checklist adapted from Deci and Ryan (1985) and Dörnyei (2001b) and took notes on the observation checklists to complete the overall picture obtained from the other data sources. In our observation checklist, there were five items including motivation, interest, enthusiasm, involvement and social interaction.

Diaries are also good sources for experiences and “hidden messages” of students, as Bailey and Ochsner assert (1983, p.189). They provide good information about different aspects of language learning, interaction of students in language learning, and students’ interaction and relationship with each other. In our study, students were expected to reflect their ideas and feelings in their diaries about the role of doing drama in English learning process. For this very reason, each student in our study was asked to keep a personal record as a reflection of drama activities. They kept diaries after completing each drama. The diaries were gathered at the end of each implementation period and were subjected to content analysis to complement the overall data.

During drama activities, students were asked to create a story related to theme for each unit and then do a drama about the story. There were 10 units in the curriculum but since the study lasted only one semester (15 weeks; 4 hours per week), we included the first five units in the curriculum. First, the students studied the unit in the classroom. After the unit is completed, they were asked to create a story related to the unit theme. They wrote the characters and cues of the story by using grammar and vocabulary of the unit. Then, they did a drama in class. They chose their roles before doing drama. While doing drama they added some sentences, vocabulary, cues, acts and mimics as in the nature of drama. Moreover, they used face masks, puppets, clothes bringing from their houses and materials used at school. Consequently they did different kinds of drama activities in learning process. So, they took part in the activities actively, worked collaboratively, enjoyed, motivated themselves, understood better and spoke English.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The IMI

As the first data collection order to evaluate drama activity experiences of students in classroom, we administered the IMI. Due to the small sample size, while scoring, we just got the frequencies for each subscale and each activity according to the options “I agree”, “I partly agree” and “I don’t agree”. To calculate the numbers of students appropriately according to subscales of IMI, the items with (R) symbol were reversed (see Appendix I). Items 3, 4, 8, 13 and their choices were changed from “I don’t agree” to “I agree” and the choice of “I partly agree” remained unchanged. There are four subscales in the instrument: interest/enjoyment, perceived choice, value/usefulness, and perceived competence. This counting system shows that the higher the percentage of the “I agree” choice in each subscale is, the higher the students’ intrinsic motivation is.

The students did five dramas related to the theme of each unit (totally five units in one semester) in their course book. The dramas were named after the units’ titles. First of all, we studied the unit and taught the theme and at the end of the unit the students wrote the stories related to the theme together and dramatized them. After each drama, we applied the IMI. Table 1 presents the percentages of the students’ choices according to each subscale for each drama activity.
Since none of the participants disliked doing drama, this is very encouraging for the teachers. Most of the students were interested in the dramas and enjoyed the class. Their perceived choice in performing the drama is the reflection of their doing the drama by appreciating it. When we look at the value/usefulness subscale, we see that most of the students gave value to the dramas and they believed that it was useful for them. Moreover the percentage of the perceived competence subscale show that the students believed themselves and thought that they could do the drama.

### Table 1. The Distribution of the Percentages of Students’ Choices for all Dramas

1. **“After School” Drama**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSCALES</th>
<th>I DON’T AGREE</th>
<th>I PARTLY AGREE</th>
<th>I AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interest/enjoyment</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 6</td>
<td>% 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived choice</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 8</td>
<td>% 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value/usefulness</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 5</td>
<td>% 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived competence</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 6</td>
<td>% 94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **“Yummy Breakfast”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSCALES</th>
<th>I DON’T AGREE</th>
<th>I PARTLY AGREE</th>
<th>I AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interest/enjoyment</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 6</td>
<td>% 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived choice</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 7</td>
<td>% 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value/usefulness</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 3</td>
<td>% 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived competence</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 4</td>
<td>% 96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **A Day in My City**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSCALES</th>
<th>I DON’T AGREE</th>
<th>I PARTLY AGREE</th>
<th>I AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interest/enjoyment</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 4</td>
<td>% 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived choice</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 5</td>
<td>% 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value/usefulness</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 1</td>
<td>% 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived competence</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 2</td>
<td>% 98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Weather and Emotions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSCALES</th>
<th>I DON’T AGREE</th>
<th>I PARTLY AGREE</th>
<th>I AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interest/enjoyment</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 2</td>
<td>% 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived choice</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 2</td>
<td>% 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value/usefulness</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 1</td>
<td>% 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived competence</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 1</td>
<td>% 99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **At the Fair**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSCALES</th>
<th>I DON’T AGREE</th>
<th>I PARTLY AGREE</th>
<th>I AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interest/enjoyment</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived choice</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value/usefulness</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived competence</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 0</td>
<td>% 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the subscales, almost all the students found the dramas valuable and useful. From the beginning they never had a negative attitude towards dramas. They seem to be willing to be active participants in their own learning process. They really enjoyed it. They had good time while performing them. We also observed a gradual development in their perception since after the last drama they all agreed that they enjoyed and perceived the choice and competence (100%). The results show that at the beginning, they had positive attitude towards the drama and they enjoyed so much while doing the drama activity, but at the end of the last drama these opinions were at peak. They became more competent and active. They not only got used to doing the drama but also learnt how to do it and developed self-confidence. So we can say that they were motivated intrinsically.

**The Interview**

The analyses of the second data collection tool, the interview questions, support the findings above. When we asked the students whether they thought drama activities motivated them to learn English, the results yielded positive answers. Eight out of the ten participants accepted that their motivation to English lessons became higher while doing drama activities. The other two participants told that they had more enthusiasm, interest and aspiration to the activities and learning English after starting these dramas. In their own words, the students expressed their ideas as follow (translated by the researcher):

- *The activities are very interesting and motivating. I’m looking forward to attending to the new drama activity after finishing one.*
- *My motivation is high and I can focus on easily, I cannot realize how time passes.*
- *I feel happy while doing drama. I wish we did drama in all lessons.*

Similarly, as for the second question, they claimed that drama activities made English more enjoyable. When we looked at the content of the answers of the students, we clearly see the frequency of the words such as “enjoy”, “enjoyment”, and “enjoyable”. The answers for this question can be summarized as:

- they enjoyed the drama activities very much
- they found English lesson enjoyable
- they had good time and have fun.

In their own words students said these (translated by the researchers):

- *Doing drama activities are quite enjoyable. I say “yippee!”.*
- *I like group working. We do everything together. We enjoy so much.*
- *Drama activities make English lesson more enjoyable.*

The last interview question was asked to find out the effect of dramas on their speaking ability. The students indicated that their speaking skill improved and also they were less scared to speak in English. They also pointed out that with the help of drama activities, they learnt more new words and their pronunciation became better. Here are some of the examples from students’ own words:

- *I can speak English more compared to the past. I am happy about that.*
- *I pronounce words better. I can speak English because of the dramas, yippee!*  
- *When my friend ask me a question, I can answer easily. I trust myself.*

Considering the overall responses to the interview questions, we can confidently claim that the implementation of drama activities in the classroom setting motivated the students to English lesson. They found drama activities enjoyable and they had fun in English lesson.

**Observation Checklist**
The third data collection tool was classroom observation checklist. With the aim of observing the whole situation of students’ motivation and attitudes to English lesson while doing the dramas, we used Observation Checklist detected by Deci and Ryan (1985); Dörnyei (2001b) and adapted from them. The classroom observation checklist we used included five criteria: Motivation, interest, enthusiasm, involvement and social interaction. We had two categories for each criterion. If the students’ conditions were low while doing drama activities, we chose “weak” category; if their conditions were high, we chose “rich” category. Table 2 below presents the results.

We understand from the results that during the first three weeks, the students showed low conditions. They seemed to have difficulty in adapting to what is going on in their classroom. This reaction was expected since it was a different and new method for them; they were accustomed to traditional ways such as writing the text in the course book and memorizing grammar rules or vocabulary. However, that new form was student-oriented, and the students were learning through the various meaningful tasks and activities. The results were in accordance with the IMI and showed that students enjoyed and improved their capabilities by implementing the activities. All of these nourished their persistence and motivation to the activities. As a result, we confirmed with the observation checklist that the motivation of students improved.

**The Analysis of Student Diaries**

For the last tool, we asked the students to keep diaries from the very beginning of the semester. Our aim was to find out their attitude, motivation, interest, joy, fun and enthusiasm. They submitted their writings to us at the end of the semester. While analyzing the diaries, we found out that almost all the students emphasized positive feelings about their desire and motivation to
English lesson. During our readings of the diaries, trying to reach the students’ deeper feelings on drama activities, we found numerous comments reflecting the motives of the drama activities. After reading all of the diaries carefully, we conducted content analysis and we discovered some notions which were often repeated by students. These notions were motivation, enjoyment, fun, interest and enthusiasm. Students almost in each diary stated that they enjoyed, had fun in the drama activities. They also emphasized that they were motivated to English lesson and their interest and enthusiasm were getting more and more because at first they built up a new story related to theme and then they dramatized it in a new and different form in each drama activity. Thus all of these increased their interest and enthusiasm. When we looked at the students’ diaries for each drama activity one by one we can say that students were particularly reflective and self-exploratory on their motivation for the drama activities. To confirm these judgements, we would like to cite some quotes from student diaries. They are as below (translated by the researchers):

- My motivation is well to learn English.
- My motivation is getting higher and higher in English lessons because of making drama collaboratively.
- I love English.
- I can speak English, Oh my God! This is incredible.
- I am not afraid of English any more and I enjoy so much even I can speak.
- I improved my pronunciation. I also have fun, I love English.
- I am very enthusiastic in each new drama activity.

The analysis of the diaries confirmed the data gathered from the other tools. To sum up, the data obtained from IMI, Student Interviews, Classroom Observations and Students’ Diaries revealed that drama activities motivated the students to English lesson. They also improved students’ enjoyment, having fun, interest, enthusiasm, involvement and social interaction. The study proved that the motivation of the 6th grade students improved through using drama as an education method in learning English.

4. CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that motivation has a very important role in language learning process. When the convenient atmosphere is created, motivation of students can be improved in learning process. According to Dörnyei (2005), motivation is effort, desire and attitude toward learning and teaching. Teachers should pay attention to motivating their students as a priority (Dorneyi, 2005; Dorneyi, 1990; Dorneyi, 1994b; Dorneyi, 2001a; Dorneyi, 2001b; Dorneyi, 2006; Dorneyi and Skehan, 2003). In L2 teaching, in recent years student-centered education is important which favors students’ being active in language learning and teaching process. Young learners are motivated to English lessons and their interest, enthusiasm and social interaction increase through enjoyable activities. Drama activities are surely one of them for young learners. Considering our findings, we intended to improve the motivation of 6th graders in learning English and even in speaking English via drama activities. Having a social interaction in activities affect students’ attitudes and even motivation help students develop a positive attitude towards learning L2.

Our findings are in line with those of Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne (2003) as the instructions, particular goals, needs, achievement, interest and enthusiasm are related to each other in certain and specific activities in teaching and learning process. The students displayed a faltering attitude in their performance at first, but with the help and guidance of their teacher as it
should be in drama activities they started to be accustomed to doing activities and understand better.

REFERENCES


IMI (Intrinsic Motivation Inventory). Retrieved December, 2013 from: www.selfdeterminationtheory.org


**Appendix I Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I don’t Agree</th>
<th>I partly agree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Likert Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoyed doing this activity very much</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This activity was fun to do</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I thought this was a boring activity</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>This activity did not hold my attention at all</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I would describe this activity as very interesting</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I thought this activity was quite enjoyable</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>While I was doing this activity, I was thinking about how I enjoyed it</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I did this activity because I had to</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I did this activity because I wanted to</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I want to do this activity again</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>This activity is useful</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I think I am pretty good at this activity</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>This was an activity that I couldn't do very well</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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