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An assessment of high school students' opinions on the use of methods and techniques in English classes

Mehmet Nuri Gömleksiz^{a*}^aFirat University, Faculty of Education, Department of Education Sciences, 23119, Elazig, Turkey

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore students' opinions on the use of methods and techniques at English classes in a Turkish high school context. Data for the study were collected through a 23-item, five-point Likert scale from a total of 798 students at high schools in Elazığ city, Turkey. The independent groups *t*-test and one way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. Statistically significant differences were observed in the gender, school type and grade level of the students. Male students considered methods and techniques more effective than female students did. They also found communication at English classes more sufficient and effective than females did. Findings revealed that female students were not satisfied with what the teachers used as teaching methods and techniques in English classrooms. Besides, statistically significant differences were observed among students' opinions in terms of grade level and school type variables. Additionally, some useful implications are discussed based on the research findings to construct and conduct English classes effectively.

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Keywords: Learning English; English language teaching; high school; high school student; teaching methods

1. Introduction

Learning at least one foreign language has gained importance more than ever before in this rapid changing world. This is because globalization impacts language policies of educational systems in every part of the world as it has affected many things such as commercial life, finance and banking, science, technology, cultural life and

*Corresponding name: Mehmet Nuri Gömleksiz, Tel.: +90 424 237 00 00 Ext: 49 36 ; fax: +90 424 236 50 64.

E-mail address: nurigomleksiz@yahoo.com

international affairs. In this context, effective English language teaching has always been among the priorities of Turkish educational system starting from primary education to university level.

Linguists and language teaching specialists have always searched the best ways to improve the quality of language teaching. Several language teaching approaches, methods and techniques have been developed so far (Richards and Rodgers, 1997: 20-21). Audiolingual method, communicative approach, total physical response, the silent way, community language learning, the natural approach and suggestopedia are among the best known approaches and methods. New developments in education sciences and psychology will lead new approaches, methods and techniques.

Teacher is an important factor to practice the methods and techniques effectively in language classroom. Gömleksiz (2012) stresses “creating a student-centered, creative, and effective learning environment allows students to express themselves better and gives them the opportunity to understand themselves in terms of strengths and weaknesses”. To do that, teachers should be aware of what they have to do correctly during their language teaching practices in their classrooms. In this context, McDonough (1995) argues that “teachers are involved in learning strategies in two obvious ways: knowing about, supporting, managing, and occasionally teaching, the strategies used by their students; and using a range of strategies of their own”.

The quality of language learning environment is closely associated with a well-designed environment. This not only helps teachers and language learning practitioners realize effective learning but also enhances students' learning by leading him/her to higher learning achievement (Gömleksiz, 2012). Effective classroom management should meet students' abilities and choice of teaching strategies. As Reece and Walker (1997) points out “the choice of teaching strategy can have an effect upon motivation and interest of the student”. By increasing student motivation and desire to learn a language is thought to be much more important than the social factors (Lennartsson, 2008). The methods and techniques play a vital role both on students' motivation and achievement in language classes. The purpose of this study is to determine high school students' views about the effectiveness of language teaching methods and techniques used in English classes. We aimed to see if high school students' opinions toward use of methods and techniques used by their teachers in English classes differed in terms of gender, school type and grade level variables.

2. Method

This is a descriptive study in nature and survey was conducted to collect the data. In accordance with this approach, the opinions of students enrolled at several types of high schools located in Elazığ city, Turkey, towards the use of methods and techniques used at English classes have been studied. The population of the study comprised of 9th, 10th and 11th grade students enrolled at vocational /technical high schools, general high schools and Anatolian high schools in Turkey. The sample consisted of 798 (427 male and 371 female) students selected randomly. The gender proportions of the respondents were 53.51% male and 46.49 % female. 614 of the students are 9th grade, 269 of the students are 10th grade and 265 of them are 11th grade students. As to the school type, students are distributed in three schools as follows: Vocational and technical high schools (n:224), general high schools (n:263) and Anatolian high schools (n:291).

Data for the study were collected through a 23-item five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *never* (1) to *completely* (5), developed by the researcher himself. Reliability of the scale was calculated with a sample of 347

students and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the overall scale was calculated to be .91, spearman-brown reliability coefficient was measured to be .76 and Guttman split half reliability coefficient was calculated to be .74.

Factor analysis process was performed and at the beginning of factor analysis process Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted. KMO and Bartlett's tests show whether the sample size was sufficiently large to ensure factor analysis. In this study, KMO value of the scale was measured to be .93 and Bartlett's test result was found statistically significant ($p=0.000$). The results showed that the sample size was enough to analyze and that subtests were related to each other. According to the factor analysis results, a scale including 23 items with two factors was developed. The items covered the areas; effective use of methods and techniques (11 items) and effective communication (12 items) at English classes. So the factors were entitled effective use ($\alpha=.79$) and effective communication ($\alpha=.74$). The researcher himself administered the scales among the students in their classrooms and collected the data in the same way. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the participants. Independent groups t test was carried out at the analysis of differences of students' opinions towards the use of methods and techniques at English classes in terms of gender variable. One Way ANOVA and LSD tests were utilized to see the differences between students' opinions in terms of grade level and school type variables. Results with $p<0.05$ were considered statistically significant.

3. Findings

In this section, the t test and one way ANOVA findings showing whether there are statistically significant differences between opinions of high school students with respect gender, grade level and school type variables are presented. Independent groups t test results for gender on students' opinions towards effective use of methods and techniques in English classes are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Independent samples t test results for gender on effective use subscale

Subscale	Gender	n	\bar{X}	sd	df	t	p
Effective use	Male	427	3.35	0.62	796	-8.876*	0.000
	Female	371	3.75	0.65			

* $p<0.05$

As it is seen in Table 1, students' opinions towards effective use of strategies, methods and techniques at English classes differed significantly in terms of gender of the students [$t_{(796)}=-8.876$; $p<0.05$]. A higher mean rating in subscale indicate that female students had more positive opinions towards the use of methods and techniques effectively than the male students did.

Table 2. ANOVA results for grade level on effective use subscale

Subscale	Grade level	n	\bar{X}	sd	df	F	p	LSD
Effective use	9 th grade	264	3.07	0.47	2	173.397*	0.000	2-1 3-1
	10 th grade	269	3.56	0.59	795			
	11 th grade	265	3.97	0.60	797			
	Total	798	3.53	0.67				

* $p<0.05$

The results of ANOVA for effective use subscale in Table 2 show that there is a significant difference in students' opinions in terms of grade level [$F_{(2-795)}=173.397$; $p<0.05$]. LSD results reveal that 10th and 11th grade students' views towards the effective use of methods and techniques were more positive than the 9th grade students.

Table 3. ANOVA results for school type on effective use subscale

Subscale	School type	n	\bar{X}	sd	df	F	p	LSD
Effective use	Vocational and technical school	244	3.06	0.45	2	114.765*	0.000	2-1
	General high school	263	3.75	0.61	795			3-1
	Anatolian high school	291	3.74	0.67	797			
	Total	798	3.53	0.67				

* $p<0.05$

As shown in Table 3, ANOVA results indicate significant differences between the opinions of the students in terms of effective use subscale [$F_{(2-795)}=114.765$; $p<0.05$]. LSD results show that students of general and Anatolian high schools found methods and techniques used at English classes more effective than the students of vocational and technical high school.

Table 4. Independent samples t test results for gender on effective communication subscale

Subscale	Gender	n	\bar{X}	sd	df	t	p
Effective communication	Male	427	3.09	0.66	796	-12.112*	0.000
	Female	371	3.62	0.57			

* $p<0.05$

As illustrated in Table 4 , independent groups t test results revealed statistically significant differences between male and female students in terms of effective communication in English classes [$t_{(796)}=-12.112$; $p<0.05$]. Female students found communication at English classes more efficient than male students. ANOVA results for grade level on students' opinions towards effective communication in English classes are given in Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA results for grade level on effective communication subscale

Subscale	Grade level	n	\bar{X}	sd	df	F	p	LSD
Effective communication	9 th grade	264	2.77	0.48	2	237.585*	0.000	2-1 3-1
	10 th grade	269	3.47	0.49	795			
	11 th grade	265	3.76	0.63	797			
	Total	798	3.34	0.68				

* $p<0.05$

Table 5 contains the summary of analysis of ANOVA for effective communication subscale comparing the mean scores of students' opinions. The results indicate significant differences between the opinions of the students in terms of effective communication subscale [$F_{(2-795)}=237.585$, $p<0.05$]. LSD results indicate that 10th and 11th grade students accepted communication at English classes more efficient than the 9th graders. ANOVA results for school type on students' opinions towards effective communication in English classes are given in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA results for school type on effective communication subscale

Subscale	School type	n	\bar{X}	sd	df	F	p	LSD
Effective communication	Vocational and technical school	244	2.70	0.44	2	257.789*	0.000	2-1
	General high school	263	3.62	0.53	795			3-1
	Anatolian high school	291	3.62	0.59	797			
	Total	798	3.34	0.68				

*p<0.05

As can be seen in Table 6 above, the result of ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences between the students' opinions in terms of effective communication subscale. The significant F value (257.789; p<0.05) obtained for school type variable demonstrated that the students of general high schools and Anatolian high schools felt communication at English classes more effective than those of vocational and technical high schools.

Results and discussion

The quality of English language teaching/learning process has always been one of the most important concerns in Turkish educational system. Lyons (2001) argues that learning is a complex activity, and is affected by several factors such as students' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes; teaching resources; teachers' skill; curriculum; physical condition; and the design of the school facility. Teaching strategies, methods and techniques play a vital role to provide in designing effective language teaching/learning process. It is important to how to relate these key factors to realize effective language teaching.

The present research evaluated and compared high school students' perceptions of methods and techniques used at English classes in Elazığ city, Turkey. The results of the present study indicate that high school students' perceptions of effective use of methods and techniques at English classes differed significantly by gender. One of the most significant conclusions to be drawn from the findings was that female students found English language teaching methods and techniques more efficient than male students did. This result can be based on the interest of female students towards English language learning.

Statistically significant differences were observed between male and female students' opinions toward the effective communication between students and teachers at English classes. Female students considered communication activities more efficient than the female students did. A significant difference was found between students groups in terms of effective communication based on grade levels in English classes. Tenth and eleventh grade students found school climate from the point of building good communication better and more efficient than did ninth graders. Ninth graders found it insufficient. Building good school climate based on effective communication between teacher and student in the classroom has a direct impact on how a teacher manages the classroom.

High school students' opinions toward effective use of language teaching methods and techniques differed significantly related to school type. Students of general and Anatolian high schools indicated that their teachers used teaching methods more effectively than those of Vocational and technical high schools. This may be related to the conditions of vocational/technical high schools in recent years. The number of students selecting vocational/technical high schools decreased significantly because of the conditions of university entrance exam. But the system has changed and future studies may present different results.

Students' perceptions of effective communication in English classes have also differed significantly in terms of school type. General and Anatolian high school students declared that they found communication between teacher and students in English language teaching classes more efficient and sufficient than the vocational and technical school students did.

Given these findings, it would be useful for teachers to use effective methods and techniques that will meet students' needs. Teachers must design teaching and learning methods/techniques in their classes to improve the quality of language learning environment. Because effective use of teaching/learning strategies, methods and techniques encourages students in a positive and supportive manner and helps them participate actively in the teaching-learning environment.

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