

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE METHOD OF PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM

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Abstract

The aim of this study consists in investigating the association between the method of participation in English language teaching programs and academic achievement. From the theoretical perspective, the characteristics of the method of participation in English language teaching and the current studies in this field were analysed. We used two pre-existing groups of English learners and compared their exam successes in two consecutive semesters. The results indicate that in general the mandatory group students statistically have higher mean scores than the volunteer group students. Moreover, the effect of the method of participation did not differ statistically according to gender. However, females were more successful in learning the English prep class material. This study implies that mandatory courses force students to study hard and leads them to be more successful.

Key words: English language, method of participation, mandatory versus voluntary groups

Introduction

Recent research related to teacher education is based on the identification of adequate methods related to foreign language teaching classrooms. Familiarizing future teachers with the techniques and procedures of a specific method is essential because it “provides them with the confidence they will need to face learners and it provides techniques and strategies for presenting lessons”

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(Richards and Rodgers, 2001). With the help of specific methods of English language teaching, prospective teachers will have experience and knowledge that will define an individual approach or personal method of teaching. Arikan (2006) mentioned that “it is not the methods but the particular teaching techniques and strategies of individual teachers that are to be studied and questioned to see how methods work for teachers rather than how teachers work to attain methods”. In this context, teacher education programs should be reconstructed from the perspective of promoting the most effective methods of teaching English to future teachers in order to achieve high-quality academic results. The participation method represents one of the main strategies in the training of language teachers to increase academic outcomes.

The specific of the method of participation in English language teaching

Participation is a central concept in studies of instruction which is associated with socio-cultural approaches to learning and development. Goffman (1981a, p. 137) describes the term *participation status* as referring to a specific participant's relation to a current directive and participation framework to portray the collected relations to this utterance of all the participants in the activity. As pointed out by Melander and Sahlström (2009), within socio-cultural perspectives on learning, participation is primarily used to describe processes developing over longer periods of time and not intended as a technical term for describing the detailed organization of social interaction. At the level of learning and instruction theories, participation is used to describe and analyse teachers and students' moment-to-moment engagement in educational activities. Learning and participation in activities are integrated, as activity is “an integral part of the learning that takes place within it” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 4). After Goodwin and Goodwin (1992), *participation frameworks* are primarily understood as interactively organized within activities and collaboratively produced by participants in those activities closely related to analyses of interactional positions in educational activities. Ekström (2013) mentions that the concept of *participation framework* could be helpful as “a way for teacher educators to analyse students' actions and how they might benefit from various activities in relation to the aims and purposes of the course”.

According to Goodwin and Goodwin (2004, p. 96), *participation frameworks* “encompass at least two different types of phenomena: displays through which participants make visible their current engagement in the activity, and structures that provide for the relevance of particular types of displays at specific moments in time”. Goodwin and Goodwin (2004, p. 97) highlight that “the

analysis of participation within activities make it possible to view actors as not simply embedded within context, but actively involved in the process of building context.”

Following analysis of the literature in the field of teacher training, one can observe that the method of participation is correlated with other teaching and learning strategies. As part of teacher education, peer assessment (Ekström, 2013) is used in the teaching and learning of subject matters and can also serve as a learning exercise for student teachers. In peer assessment, students engage in educational activities under conditions that differ from other classroom interaction. Studying this kind of educational activity places a focus on participation and interactional positions.

Referring to the types of participation in teacher education, the diverse categories of participation within various contexts is extensive (Brodie et al., 2009; Gaventa, 2007). Gaventa’s typology is particularly appropriate because it positions participation as both a situated and relational practice, both of which are central features of the practicum in teacher education. The three elements of Gaventa’s (2007) typology are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of participation in teacher education (Gaventa, 2007)

Types	Description
Closed	The authority (or the more powerful partner) makes decisions with little consultation with the others about the ways in which they (‘the others’) will participate.
Invited	There is a degree of negotiation between the authority (or the more powerful partner) and the others about the ways in which they (‘the others’) will participate.
Claimed	The others act independently of the authority (or more powerful partner) about the ways in which they (‘the others’) will participate.

Brodie, Cowling, and Nissen (2009) introduce the notion of categories of participation to suggest that cooperating teachers participate in different ways: as providers of feedback, gatekeepers of the profession, modelers of practice, supporters of reflection, gleaners of knowledge, purveyors of context, conveners of relation, agents of socialization, advocates of the practical, abiders of change, and teachers of children. According to Clarke et al. (2014), establishing the types of participation provides a new way of thinking about, planning professional development for, and working with cooperating teachers.

Kwakman (2003) identified the factors of participation in professional learning activity: Personal factors (professional attitudes, appraisals of feasibility, appraisals of meaningfulness, emotional exhaustion, loss of personal accomplishment), task factors (work pressure, emotional demands,

job variety, autonomy, participation) and work environment factors (management support, collegial support, intentional learning support).

Along with the method of participation, other specific techniques are used which are recommended for the advantages they present in the training programs of English language teachers. Bolsunovskaya et al. (2015, p. 177) consider that the project-based method can be “successfully implemented in teaching foreign language for specific purposes as it aims for hands-on outcomes, accommodating students’ needs and satisfying their interests”.

There are studies whose objective consists in investigating participation in educational research. Based on a conceptualization of teacher workplace learning as participation in professional learning activities, the study achieved by Kwakman (2003) highlights the factors affecting teachers’ participation in professional learning activities. Results reveal great discrepancies between theory and practice in opportunities for professional learning at the workplace. The internal factors which affect teachers’ participation in professional development activities are teacher attitude and self-efficacy. Participation in professional learning activities depends to a large extent on personal characteristics of teachers themselves. Patton and Parker (2017) explored physical education teacher educators' understandings of how their participation in a community of practice supported their own professional development. Results indicated that engagement in communities of practice provided a foundation for collaboration and reduced isolation, allowing participants to extend teaching and research capacities. According to the results obtained in a study achieved by Rybczynski and Schussler (2011), some students prefer study groups, because they need help or clarification and enjoy the benefit of social learning.

Methodology

Sample and Course Description

Students were male and female in nearly equal numbers, and student ages ranged from 17 to 20 with occasional older students returning to university to pursue an undergraduate degree for the first time. Monday through Friday the students attended six 55-minute English lessons per day, consisting of 2 grammar classes, 2 listening and speaking classes, and 2 writing classes. In the spring quarter, conversation classes were also offered for qualified advanced students. Students were assessed via oral and written exams at the end of each learning period. Placement level exams were administered at the beginning of the school year and at the end of each semester. Student placements were determined by their scores. Class groupings were designated as A1, A2,

and A3, in descending order of fluency for the most advanced students; B1, B2 and B3 for intermediary students; and C1, C2 and C3 for the least fluent students. A passing score of 70 was required for students majoring in English. For students majoring in Turkish language programs the passing score was 65.

The teaching staff consisted of 16 non-native instructors and 4-6 native English-speaking instructors from the US, the UK, Canada and Ireland. Foreign teacher turnover accounts for the variable number. Native English-speaking teachers taught listening and speaking, writing, and conversation classes. Non-native teachers focused more on grammar but sometimes also taught listening and speaking if there was a need. Teachers were monitored by the Director of Professional Development and were required to share current instructional research, participate in conferences, and lead staff in-services.

Oral and written examinations were administered at the end of each 4-week learning period. Exams were prepared by a designated committee of non-native teachers, utilizing concepts drawn from instructional texts. Native English-speaking teachers revised the exam drafts for accuracy. The lowest grade to pass the exam was 70 for students pursuing a degree in English language instruction. For other students the passing score was 65. Level exams were administered three times per year to determine student class placement.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The aggregate of student success was determined by data collected and analysed by the English Department administration using Moodle. We gather students' exam results of the first and second quarter of the fall semester from Moodle.

The data were analysed using the statistical package SPSS, with the significance level for statistical tests set at .05. Descriptive data analysis was conducted for each exam type (speaking, writing, level exam) and method of participation independently. The statistical differences between the means of voluntary and mandatory groups were assessed with the t test. Using the SPSS program, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the interaction effect between the method of participation and gender.

Results

To assess whether students in the mandatory or voluntary group are more successful in language learning there were compared ten exam results. These were speaking, writing and level exams at two consecutive quarters. In other words, at both quarters, students had two speaking, two writing

and one level exam. The descriptive statistics regarding the exams that students had are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The results of descriptive statistics (mean exam scores, Std. deviation)

	Exam	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Quarter 1	Speaking 1	voluntary	66.21	14.25	34
		mandatory	73.13	18.51	30
	Speaking 2	voluntary	69.91	15.71	34
		mandatory	79.37	13.60	30
	Writing 1	voluntary	80.85	10.90	33
		mandatory	88.29	5.83	28
	Writing 2	voluntary	64.30	15.02	33
		mandatory	77.50	8.34	28
	Level	voluntary	73.26	12.99	31
		mandatory	84.93	8.26	28
Quarter 2	Speaking 1	voluntary	71.03	17.20	35
		mandatory	76.79	8.36	29
	Speaking 2	voluntary	69.89	18.61	35
		mandatory	73.50	12.54	30
	Writing 1	voluntary	66.12	17.08	34
		mandatory	76.64	11.12	28
	Writing 2	voluntary	59.69	17.04	32
		mandatory	70.35	12.74	29
	Level	voluntary	63.78	11.73	32
		mandatory	70.07	7.31	27

As seen in Table 2, there are ten exam results and students' mean scores on these exams vary between 59.69 (voluntary groups' Writing 2 exam in the second quarter) and 88.29 (mandatory groups' Writing 1 exam in the first quarter). In all results the mandatory group students have higher mean scores than the voluntary group students. The significance of the mean differences are assessed by a series of t tests (See Table 3).

Table 3. The results of t test statistics

	Exam	t	df	p	Mean Difference
Quarter 1	Speaking 1	-1.94	69	.057	-7.55
	Speaking 2	-2.85	71	.006	-9.75
	Writing 1	-2.69	65	.009	-6.52
	Writing 2	-3.22	71	.002	-10.04
	Level	-3.40	71	.001	-9.67

Quarter 2	Speaking 1	-1.87	70	.065	-6.18
	Speaking 2	-.92	71	.360	-3.39
	Writing 1	-2.82	70	.006	-9.83
	Writing 2	-2.39	68	.020	-9.31
	Level	-2.44	66	.018	-6.24

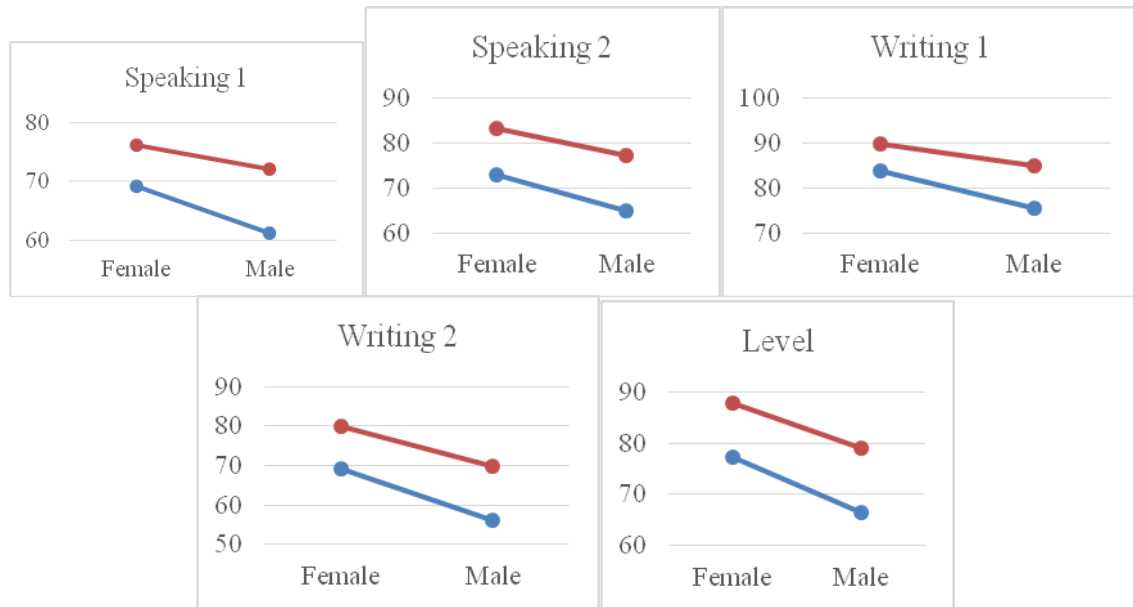
The t test for equality of means revealed that the mean difference was statistically significant for four exams at first quarter (Speaking 2, Writing 1, Writing 2, Level), and significant for three exams at second quarter (Writing 1, Writing 2, Level). The mean difference between voluntary and mandatory groups was largest for Writing 2 exam at the first quarter and smallest for Speaking 2 exam at the second quarter.

Since there were two levels of the gender (male and female) and two levels of method of participation (voluntary versus mandatory) we looked at any interaction effect. In other words, we looked if the effect of the method of participation differs depending on the level of the gender. We looked at the interaction effect for all ten exams, however no interaction effects were observed. This conclusion was based on the analysis (Tests of Between-Subjects Effects) presented in Table 4 and also in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Table 4. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

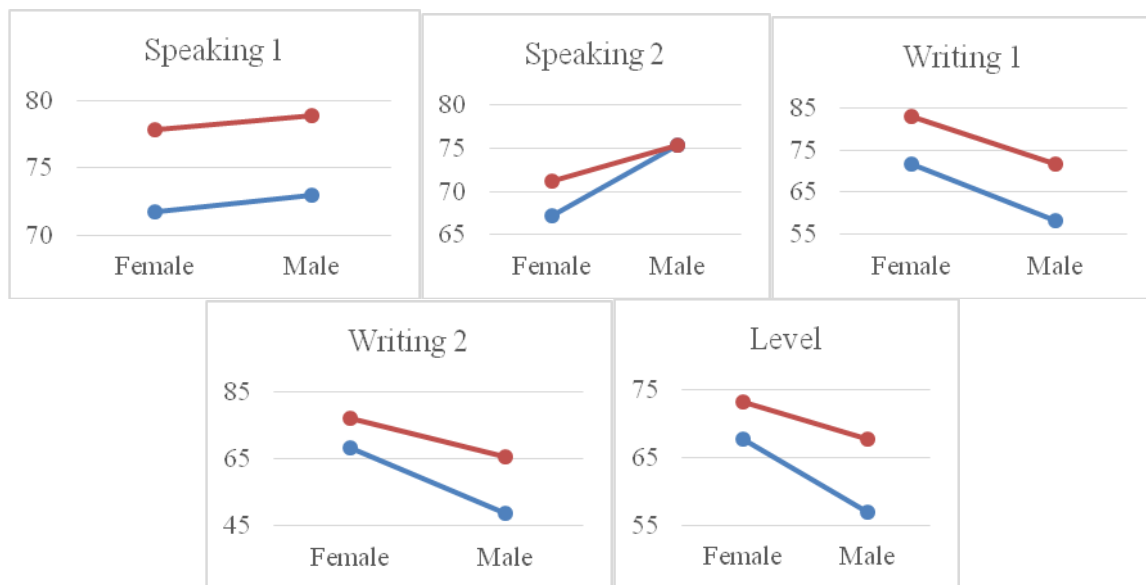
Quarter	Gender * method of participation	Type III Sum of Squares	df	F	p	Partial Squared	Eta
Quarter 1	Speaking 1	61.90	1	.231	.632	.003	
	Speaking 2	14.84	1	.072	.790	.001	
	Writing 1	44.64	1	.500	.482	.008	
	Writing 2	40.53	1	.273	.603	.004	
	Level	13.98	1	.110	.741	.002	
Quarter 2	Speaking 1	.19	1	.001	.975	.000	
	Speaking 2	72.20	1	.295	.589	.004	
	Writing 1	20.24	1	.109	.742	.002	
	Writing 2	242.75	1	1.154	.287	.017	
	Level	121.77	1	1.258	.266	.019	

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that none of the interactions between gender and method of participation (voluntary-mandatory) are significant. All p values indicated in the table are bigger than .05. To visualize the interaction effect Figure 1 for exams in the first quarter and Figure 2 for exams in the second quarter were constructed.



Note: Red lines represent the values for mandatory students and blue lines indicate the values for voluntary students.

Figure 1. Interaction effect for exams in the first quarter



Note: Red lines represent the values for mandatory students and blue lines indicate the values for voluntary students.

Figure 2. Interaction effect for exams in the first quarter

In both Figure 1 and Figure 2, mandatory students' mean scores are higher than those of voluntary students. Moreover, the condition does not change for female and male students. In

other words, for example for the level exam in the second quarter female students in the mandatory group have higher mean scores than female students in the voluntary group. Similarly, male students in the mandatory group have higher mean scores than male students in the voluntary group. These results exist for all exams in both quarters. This means that there is no interaction effect. When Figure 1 and Figure 2 are examined further, female students have higher mean scores than male students, except for the speaking 1 and speaking 2 exams in the second quarter.

Conclusions

This study was designed to test the association between the method of participation (mandatory or voluntary) in English language teaching program and academic achievement. As a result of the analysis of studies based on the investigation of the relation between the types of participation and academic achievement, it can be observed that there is little research in this field.

The research results indicate that the mandatory group students have higher mean scores than the voluntary group students. According to gender, female and male students in the mandatory group have higher mean scores than female and male students in the voluntary group. The results show that mandatory participation determine the achievement of better academic results than voluntary participation. When compared to the voluntary group, the superiority of the mandatory group in learning English may be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, in order for the mandatory group to continue their education in their respective departments in the ensuing years, they were required to be successful in the prep class. Secondly, the mandatory group is to have all their future courses, such as Physics and Mathematics, in English. We suggest that these two factors combined have been the primary cause for the motivation and related success of the mandatory group. The present study can be continued by carrying out a new research to investigate the reasons for these differences. Teachers in higher education can exploit the fact that students get better performance if they apply mandatory participation.

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