



Investigation of Self-Regulating Learning Strategies Used by a Student to Improve Her Language Proficiency: Phenomenological Research

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate self-regulating learning strategies used by a student to improve her language proficiency. This qualitative research was designed in descriptive phenomenological design that focuses on self-regulated learning experiences. Criterion sampling was used within the scope of purposive sampling methods to select the participant of this study. The data of the study were gathered through a semi-structured interview developed by the researcher. The researcher revealed the existence, meanings and relationships of words, themes or concepts in the interview content using the content analysis method. Results revealed that Tuana (the student) preferred some self-regulating learning strategies such as educational computer games, "exposure to a foreign language" by movies without subtitles. She compiled unknown words from movies and books and noted them in a notebook to memorize them later.

Keywords: ELL, Self-Regulating Learning Strategies, Learning English

Introduction

Learning a second language has become a necessity in order to be able to synchronize with the world that has become globalized (Akkas & Coker, 2016). English, which is the first language that comes to mind as a second language, is spoken by about a billion people worldwide (Köksoy, 2000). Therefore, compulsory English course is taught in state schools in Turkey (Koçer, 2019). For this purpose, the foreign language-teaching program in our country has constantly changed and updated over the years (Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe, & Baykin, 2014).

Considering the 2011 English course curriculum, it is seen that the program has been prepared in detail and sufficient explanations have been made about the teaching methods and techniques (Can & Kartal, 2020). However, while an individual who graduated from high school in our country should be able to communicate in English, the result is not as desired (Bağçeci, 2004; Aydemir, 2007). Therefore, the problem should be sought not in the structure of the programs, but in how they are implemented (Can & Kartal,

2020). Therefore, the desired success in learning a foreign language is still not achieved (Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe, & Baykin, 2014).

It is believed that multiple factors are effective in the failure of English teaching. Among these, one of the factors is the competence of teachers. Koçer (2019) states that teachers cannot adapt to new education programs and continue to apply classical approaches and methods in their lessons. Others can be listed as the attitude of the students towards lesson and the inadequacy of the course materials (Aktaş, 2005).

Qingzhao (2011) has drawn attention to the importance of students' attitudes towards the lesson. He noted that no matter how excellent the teachers are, student autonomy and using self-regulated learning strategies play an important role in language learning. Students who do not have self-learning and who do not have additional help other than their teacher will not be successful in language learning.

On the other hand, the development of technology has also changed the ways of accessing and learning information. Computers and the internet can be used as course materials in a versatile way. This development has carried teaching and learning activities beyond the boundaries of the school. Students can easily access many different learning materials using technological developments. One of the most effective ways to ensure student autonomy is Computer-Aided Language Learning and Teaching applications (CALLT). These applications have a serious potential to enable teachers to transform their perceptions of teacher centeredness into student centeredness (Kocaman & Cumaoglu, 2014).

Self-access learning plays an important role in language education in many parts of the world. Students can learn English through online games and online courses on digital platforms (Gardner & Miller, 1999). Self-controlled and/or uncontrolled environments interact with the individualization of learning in a unique way.

Many materials and methods are used for teaching and learning English on this platform. One of the methods used in language teaching is the Communicative Approach. In this approach, it is aimed that the learner speaks the target language fluently and the teachers are expected to introduce the learners to the authentic language in real life (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Demirel, 2008). According to this approach, the learner must use different visual or auditory, or both visual and auditory tools to be introduced to the target language.

Stockwell (2007) stated that various digital platforms can be used to develop the entire range of foreign language learning skills (grammar, word learning, pronunciation, reading, writing, listening and speaking). Students can use multimedia including variety of text, images, video and audio formats, as self-regulating learning strategies to improve their language proficiency and vocabulary (Köprülü, 2016; Zeytinkaya, 2018; Aktaş & İşiğüzel, 2013; Kadim, 2012; Shejbalová, 2006; Zengin, 2019; Uluçay, 2013; Craik & Lockhart, 1972).

Teaching vocabulary in the target language, which is associated with and supported by visual techniques, is a more effective way than classical vocabulary teaching (Seghayer, 2001; Kadim, 2012; Uluçay, 2013; Gee, 2003; Yağız, 2007). Students will be able to learn the words and their compensations in the target language comfortably in these platforms (Kadim, 2012; Uluçay, 2013; Gee, 2003; Yağız, 200). One of these platforms is Duolingo that includes all kinds of applications for vocabulary, grammar topics, and pronunciation (Seljan, Berger, & Dovedan, 2004).

The aim of this study is to analyze the experiences of a student's self-regulating learning strategies of learning English outside of school and to reveal the online platforms he uses, the methods and techniques she uses. It is thought that the findings of the study will help researchers and individuals trying to learn English.

Method

The study is qualitative research. In qualitative studies, different qualitative data generation methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used. In this way, it is ensured that perspectives, perceptions and events are revealed in a realistic and holistic way in the natural environment (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

Phenomenology is used for studies aimed at investigating phenomena that we often encounter on a daily basis that are not foreign to us but whose exact meaning we cannot comprehend (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 69). The research is a qualitative study conducted by adopting the phenomenological semi-formal interview method. In order to understand a person, the phenomenological approach advocates understanding what is meaningful in his life, what he is trying to achieve, understanding the conditions that create the phenomenon, and then understanding the behavior in order to understand (Cüceloğlu, 2010). So in the study, we asked, 'how? Since it is desired to reach the answer to the 'question', it is preferred to conduct qualitative research.

Setting and Participants

In this study, an interview was conducted with a student who used self-regulating learning strategies to improve her language proficiency. Our student's name is Tuana who is currently studying in the 8th grade. She is fourteen years old. She has no sister or brother. Although she has no interest in mathematics and science, she is very successful in English. Despite the fact that her teachers say that Tuana has a very good memory, she describes herself as a timid student. If Tuana does not like a teacher, she notes that she does not participate in the activities practiced by that teacher, when teachers ask questions, she does not want to lift her finger and answer questions, even if Tuana knows the answers to her questions.

Data Collection Method

In order to gain the student's trust, intimacy was established and conversations were held for a period of 2 months. During this time, their efforts were appreciated. At the end of this period, she was asked whether she would participate in the research. She prefers to read books in English instead of reading books in Turkish. As she indicated, she had no previous knowledge about TOEFL and according to some tests on the internet her English level shows a B1 and B2 level.

The purpose of the interviews is to reveal people's experiences, attitudes, thoughts, comments and reactions that cannot be observed. Therefore, it is the main requirement of the interview method to ensure that the other party reacts in a comfortable, honest and correct way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

The researcher first prepared a suitable research ground for phenomenological research. The interviews were started with open-ended questions prepared after a detailed literature review. We tried to ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and not forced to think that this was part of the evaluation process. The dialog started asking the participant to "help us understand your unique experiences and become co-researchers with us". Thus, it is aimed to obtain data that are more detailed during the interview. During the designing of interview questions, attention was paid to the basic principles such as being easily understood and one-dimensional, not directing the respondent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Data Analysis

In this study, content analysis method was used in order to systematically analyze the qualitative data. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) define data analysis as the process of systematically searching and editing interviews' descriptions, field notes, and other materials obtained to understand the situation and present what has been discovered to others. In content analysis, qualitative research data are analyzed in four stages a) Coding the data, b) Finding the themes, c) Editing the codes and themes, d) Defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

At the end of the interviews' descriptions, the researcher extracted separate lists of themes and codes from the interviews and diaries kept, and then tried to interpret the findings by integrating these themes and codes into a single list.

Findings

The data obtained from the analysis of the interview are presented in the form of topics that have been turned into themes. The findings of the study were gathered and

presented under 6 themes.

Table 1: The themes of the findings

Theme	Description of the theme
The needs	Expressions about why it is necessary to learn English.
Motivations	Expressions about people and events that motivate her to learn English
Ability	Expressions about personal abilities required for learning English.
Interests	Expressions about her interest in learning English and learning methods.
Materials and methods	Expressions about the method, technique and materials used while learning English.
Experiences	Expressions summarizing her experiences while learning English

Explanations of these themes and excerpts from the interview are given below.

The Needs to Learn English

Tuana realized that she needed to learn English when she started playing games on the computer. She explained as follows.

“When I was 6 years old, my stepfather bought a computer. I started playing games on the computer but the games' languages were in English. I had to learn the meanings of the English words.”

Motivations for Learning English

Tuana has noticed that there are too many English words in computer games. She stated that she was trying to learn the meanings of words to play games. Her parents noticed Tuana's effort and they directed her to learn English. She explained as follows.

“My parents realized that I had an interest in English. They advised me to watch cartoons in English. ...and my learning English was influenced by no one but my stepfather.”

Tuana noted that her stepfather not only gave directions on how to learn English, but also spoke English with her.

“My stepfather has worked abroad in the past; therefore, he can speak English. My stepfather still has acquaintances abroad. He has been a constant support to me in my English learning.”

Tuana added that if she does not like a teacher, she does not participate in the activities practiced by that teacher. Tuana stated that she did not receive efficiency and motivation from school until the 8th grade due to this character.

“Learning English in our schools starts in the second grade, but I didn't learn much from school until now (8th grade). For example, in the beginning of this year, our English teacher was Mr. Ilhan who was very disciplined, but he would make fun of us when we did something wrong. I didn't like to participate in his lessons. If I don't like the teacher, I won't attend the class even if I know the subject. I have such a character. If the teacher asks a question, I'll tell my friend the answer. I'll get him to join the practice.”

Tuana stated that she was also influenced by the practices of some of her teachers and participated in these practices. She explained as follows.

“Mrs. Elif is our English teacher now. I really like the way of teaching Mrs Elif because, unlike Ilhan, she relaxes me in her lessons. Mrs. Elif is also a disciplined teacher. Although most students don't like her, I like her and her lecture methods. For example, Mrs. Elif uses the following method to prevent students from cheating in English class. She gives us 100 English words to write them down in the notebook and to memorize them in 3 weeks. After 3 weeks, she writes the words on cards. Then she throws them into a deep bag and mixes them up. We put our hands in the bag to pull out a word card. Then she wants us to translate it into Turkish. I really enjoy this method.”

Ability to Learn English

Tuana has stated that she has a good memorization ability and that she likes to memorize English vocabulary.

“My teachers say I have a good memory. Therefore, I have no difficulty learning the meaning of English vocabulary.”

Tuana primarily tries to understand the meaning of the English words from the facial expressions and lip movements of actors in English-language films.

“I watch English-language movies without subtitles. When watching movies, I first try to understand the meaning of words from people's facial expressions and mimics.”

Interests in Learning Languages

Tuana has said that she does not read books and watch TV in her native language, she only likes to read books and watch TV in the language she has learned.

“I don't like to read books in Turkish, but I like to read books in English very much. Similarly, I watch more news on TV at home. I follow the news on English channels.”

Tuana has said that she has wanted to learn not only English but also French and Chinese since she was a child, and that she has watched movies aimed at these languages.

“English is not the only foreign language I am interested in. I am not only interested in learning English, I also want to learn French and Chinese. I have loved French since my childhood. And Chinese, I think, is the foreign language of the future.”

Materials and Methods Used for Learning and Developing English

Tuana has stated that she uses CALLT to memorize words. She pointed out that the method of erasing the score of these applications by giving points to the correct answers and gaining points from the wrong answers motivated her more.

“Although it is an effective way to learn English from a live teacher from the UdeMy platform, I don't give up using the Duolingo application which uses the game method in teaching English. This method is effective in my English learning. Namely, when I do something wrong during the game, my score goes away. When I do it right, it gives me points. That's why I'm trying to increase my scores by practicing so as not to get kicked out of the game. The increasing points strategy is a very effective way to learn English vocabulary for me.”

Tuana stated that although CALLT have benefits for vocabulary memorization, CALLT never replaces a live teacher.

“Although I use various Android applications such as Duolingo to improve my English, taking lessons from UdeMy platform is more effective for me as well. UdeMy platform has live teachers. It is more effective to study with live teachers.”

The Experiences of Learning English

Tuana says that the easiest and most effective way to learn English is to "get exposed to the language". She explained as follows.

“I think it should be by hearing, not with English grammar. Language should be learned by hearing. You should be exposed to foreign languages. That's how it should be learned.”

Tuana explained that she not only learned English by being exposed to a foreign language, but also developed a specific method for learning a foreign language.

“Here are the steps I have taken to learn English. First of all, I watch

English language movies without subtitles. I pay attention to the facial expressions of people while watching movies. I try to make out the meaning of words. Then I watch the same movie with Turkish subtitles. I note the words that I don't know. I write vocabulary in my notebook to learn and memorize them later. I'm trying to learn French in the same way.”

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was planned to reveal the experiences of a student learning English as a foreign language outside of school and the methods and techniques she uses, and the data were discussed together with the literature under this title.

Tuana has stated that the easiest way to learn a foreign language is to be exposed to that language. For this purpose, she watches movies without subtitles. Köprülü (2016) similarly states that a language can be acquired more easily in its natural environment. Thus, audio–visual materials such as movies that reflect the natural environment can be an effective language teaching tool. Similarly, Zeytinkaya (2018) stated that the lessons can be designed more interesting with films in foreign language teaching to gain oral communication skills. Aktaş and İşigüzel (2013) emphasized that watching a movie can help children to learn foreign languages by activating their speaking and listening skills.

One of the methods of teaching languages is games. Tuana has stated that she uses games to learn words, even if they are not as effective as live teachers for language learning. This finding is similar to the results of Kadim (2012) and Uluçay, (2013) who stated that games are effective in learning foreign languages. Tuana immerses herself in the content of the games and achieves the desired goal. Gee (2003) states that in well-designed computer and video games, players closely match themselves with characters, albeit in a virtual environment, so that they learn a lot of things while having fun.

Many commands and features that are encountered in computer games are in English. Therefore, students learn the meaning of many words consciously or unconsciously. Tuana stated that she had started learning English to understand the words of games. She has been playing games to improve her vocabulary. Shejbalová (2006) mentions that vocabulary learning is one of the most significant components of learning a new language. According to Zengin (2019), besides educational purposes, computer games actually contribute to students in terms of learning vocabulary without them realizing it. This result is parallel to the findings of the study. Digital games can be used to expand vocabulary in foreign language teaching, teaching grammar rules, improving listening comprehension and reading skills (Uluçay, 2013).

During the interview, Tuana states that she reads books, watches movies and keeps a vocabulary book. She collects unknown words from books, movies and/or games.

Vocabulary development is a very important foundation for students who are learning a language because a word is a tool that conveys its meaning to our minds (Dewey, 1910). Craik and Lockhart (1972), as a result of their research, stated that the key to word memorization is the depth of processing. The depth of processing implies not only simply taking notes of new words, but also recording them in accordance with certain principles. Detecting which unknown words to write on vocabulary notebook, constantly reviewing them, greatly helps to master the learning the meaning of words (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Tuana stated that she primarily studies the gestures and facial expressions of actors for word learning. This is a recommended language learning method in the literature (Demirel, 2015; Turgut, 2006).

Results revealed that Tuana preferred some self-regulating learning strategies such as educational computer games, "exposure to a foreign language" by movies without subtitles, then compiling unknown words from movies and books and noting them in a notebook to memorize them later. It is thought that using these methods in combination with the existing curriculum, which is also recommended to other students, will be more effective for students to learn English.

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