

**Attitudes of the Students Studying at Kafkas University Private Primary EFL
Classroom towards Storytelling and Motivation**

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Abstract

In order to determine their motivation for learning English as a foreign language; their preferred learning activities; and, in particular, their attitudes towards learning English through the medium of storytelling, a questionnaire was administered to 21 students from the 4th year of Kafkas University private primary school in Kars, Turkey. The results show that both story telling and grammar were perceived as very enjoyable by a majority of the participants, 71.43% and 52.38% respectively. Audio and visual teaching aids and comprehension questions were found to make a substantial contribution towards facilitating understanding of the stories. The participants demonstrated various types of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation towards learning English, in particular the belief that English would be useful, in some unspecified way, in the future (52.38% of respondents). The most popular learning activities were found to be first language games, second acting out the stories, and third the stories themselves. The least popular learning activities were found to be tests and writing. However, 47.62% of participants specified that they did not dislike any of their learning activities. The pedagogical implications of the findings are discussed.

Key Words: stories, storytelling, children, young learners, motivation, Kafkas University Private Primary School

Özet

Kars, Kafkas Üniversitesi Vakfı Özel ilköğretim okulu 4. sınıfa devam eden öğrencilerin İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenmeye olan motivasyonlarını, tercih ettikleri öğrenme etkinliklerini belirleme ve özellikle hikâye anlatımı yoluyla İngilizce öğrenmeye karşı tavırlarını belirleme amacıyla 21 öğrenciye bir anket uygulanmıştır.

Sonuçlara göre katılan öğrencilerin çoğunluğu hem hikāye anlatımı, hemde gramer öğretiminin çok eğlenceli olduğunu söylemişlerdir (% 71.43 hikaye anlatımı, 52.38% gramer öğretimi). İşitsel ve görsel öğretim araçlarının ve anlama sorularının hikayeleri anlamayı oldukça kolaylaştırdıkları da gözlenmiştir. Özellikle gelecekte yararlı olur düşüncesiyle, öğrenciler İngilizce öğrenmeye karşı çeşitli iç ve dış motivasyon sergilemişlerdir (katılanların % 52.38'i). En popüler öğrenme etkinlikleri olarak birinci sırada dille ilgili oyunlar, ikinci sırada hikayeleri dramatize etme, üçüncü sırada ise hikayelerin kendileri gelmiştir. En az popüler öğrenme etkinliklerinin ise, sınavlar ve kompozisyonlar olduğu belirlenmiştir. Öte yandan, öğrencilerin % 47,62'si hoşlanmadıkları hiçbir öğrenme etkinliği bulunmadığını ifade etmiştir. Çalışmada bulgular eğitim açısından tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hikayeler, hikaye anlatma, çocuklar, küçük öğrenciler, motivasyon, Kafkas Üniversitesi Özel İlköğretim Okulu.

1. INTRODUCTION

The state school system in Turkey requires that children start learning English in their 4th year at primary school. At the opposite end of the school system, the foreign language component of the Turkish University Entrance Examination takes the form of a multiple choice test which measures the candidates' grammatical and lexical knowledge, and their reading comprehension and translation skills. Inevitably, this has a trickle back effect throughout the entire state school ELT system, in that at every stage of foreign language learning pupils are being trained to cope eventually with such an examination. In consequence, although the newer generation of English teachers may, in theory, prefer an all round communicative approach to teaching English, and although modern course books are designed to promote this, in practice priority is given to grammatical competence, to the acquisition of lexis, and to the ability to reactivate such knowledge under MCT conditions, at the expense of overall communicative competence. Although this is rather an oversimplification of the situation in the state system, in that a number of other factors are involved, it is nonetheless representative, in general terms, of the status quo.

In contrast, an emphasis on achieving all round L2 communicative competence, prompted by recognition of the ever-increasing importance of English as a global language, is one of the features which distinguish many private schools in Turkey from

their state counterparts. Typically, this means that ELT is a part of the syllabus from the first year at primary school, and is often introduced at nursery level. Clearly, the profile and objectives of the particular school influence the degree of priority given to ELT and the nature of its delivery. Nonetheless, again in general terms, private schools are able to devote more resources to ELT than are state schools, and seek to foster in their students a high level of communicative proficiency, as well as the ability to succeed in examinations.

In a study conducted in Turkey, Kavanoz reported this difference between state and private schools in terms of the different attitude displayed by teachers in each type of institution towards the concept of “learner-centeredness”: for state school teachers learner-centeredness meant making the students active by having them do grammar-focused exercises with worksheets, whereas private school teachers defined it as learning by doing (2006, cited in European Commission, 2006).

Kafkas University primary school studied here falls somewhere between the extremes on this state school-private school continuum. Although it is a private school, with an overt commitment to enabling its pupils to achieve all round communicative competence in English, it is in fact constrained on several fronts in its ability to realise this aim. The school was founded only eight years prior to the study, and is still in the position of having to establish itself financially, which means that resources to develop “state of the art” ELT are relatively limited. Moreover, the school has to prove itself academically, if it is to flourish. In practice, therefore, the main priority of the school management, to date, has been to enable its first graduates to achieve excellent results in the Turkish High School Entrance Examination (OKS), which does not include English. Although pupils at the school start learning English in the 1st year (or in nursery class where applicable), their motivation to study the foreign language has been observed by teaching staff to dwindle progressively as they move through primary and middle school towards the 8th year, at the end of which they sit the crucial OKS examination.

The Turkish Ministry of Education plans to replace the OKS examination, with effect from the 2008/2009 academic year, with a series of 3 examinations, which pupils will sit at the end of their 6th, 7th and 8th years of middle school, respectively. Significantly, each of these examinations will include an English component, which will undoubtedly provide many of the older students with an instrumental motivation to study the language (Harmer, 1991). On the other hand, since the format of the examinations is almost certain to be multiple choice testing, this will probably

exacerbate the tendency, already identified in state school ELT, to focus on the competencies required to achieve success in this type of examination, rather than on practical communicative competence. This will inevitably undermine the Turkish Ministry of Education's declared aim of rearranging ELT in Turkey to bring it in line with international standards, as reported by Kavanoz (2006, cited in European Commission, 2006).

The long term challenge facing the English teachers in this case study, and of course elsewhere, is to reconcile the imperative of preparing students to meet the demands of an imperfect examination system with the more fundamental and desirable objective of enabling students to achieve all round linguistic and communicative proficiency. The first class to experience the new system of examinations in its entirety will be the current 4th year. Therefore, it was decided to make this class the focus of the study.

Since "a strongly motivated student is in a far better position as a learner than a student who is not motivated" (Harmer, 1991, p. 9), and since the "method by which the students are taught must have some effect on their motivation" (Harmer, 1991, p. 5), the study aimed to determine which factors motivate these children to learn English at this stage in their development, and which types of learning activities they prefer. In particular, it sought to investigate their attitudes towards learning English through the medium of storytelling, and then to compare these with their attitudes towards studying grammar.

In previous years, the children had followed a conventional course book-based communicative syllabus, supplemented by grammar lessons. In the 2007/2008 academic year, however, a story-based communicative approach was introduced for the first time, as a result of which the students' English lessons are now planned around the course book *Story Magic 4* (House & Scott, 2005).

Each unit of *Story Magic 4* is based upon a story. Some of the stories recount the adventures of a group of children of a similar age to the participants in the study, while others are based upon legends or historical events. Each story is presented early in its unit, in the form of a two-page, illustrated spread, including both dialogue and narrative. Each is also preceded by a song, which enables preliminary vocabulary work to be undertaken. Teaching aids include large colourful story cards and an audio version of the story with some background sound effects. The remainder of each teaching unit

comprises a range of skills-based activities and games, all of which are directly or thematically related to the story itself. Each unit also has a specific grammatical focus.

The children in the study approach each unit through the story, assisted by a native English-speaking teacher, whose role is to assist them with comprehension and to enable them to engage in listening, speaking, reading and writing activities and games, centred on or arising out of the story. Subsequent to the initial presentation of the story, and in parallel with the follow-up activities, a Turkish teacher of English focuses on the grammatical content of the unit, using a combination of L1 and L2, and supplementing the course book activities with worksheets derived from other sources. To complete each unit, the children re-enact the story in groups. They also read about a topic thematically connected to the story and use this as the stimulus to create a similar piece of written work themselves.

The decision by the English teaching staff in the school to switch to a story-based methodology was based on the theory that stories are “a natural way to help children develop skills in a second or foreign language” (Linse, 2007, p.46), and on the view that storytelling lends itself to the introduction and recycling of language in an inherently enjoyable, and therefore motivating, fashion (Slattery & Willis, 2001; Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002; both cited in Linse, 2007). Nonetheless, the storytelling methodology, although now increasing in popularity, is not yet well-established: “It is astonishing that modern language syllabi that focus on communication do not give time to reading and telling stories, which are such a basic and enjoyable use of language” (Hill, 2001, p.303).

This study, therefore, sought to investigate whether the children’s actual attitudes to the storytelling methodology would in fact substantiate the claims of its advocates. It also sought to elicit the children’s own views on why they are learning English, as well as their preferences in terms of learning activities. Finally, it addressed the pedagogical implications of the findings with a view to sustaining the development of the children as English language learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various cognitive, social and affective characteristics distinguish young learners from their adult counterparts. In terms of cognitive factors, children are “above all curious” (Harmer, 1991, p.7); they are eager to expand their relatively limited world knowledge. Moreover, young children learn most effectively through experience. Until

around the age of 9, therefore, they are more likely to acquire new language by engaging in activities which require the use of language than by formal study (Moon, 2005). This is because children at a young age are still in the process of developing the conceptual framework which will eventually allow them to handle language as an abstract system (Thornbury, 2006). So, children pay more attention to meaning than to form, picking up on visual and other physical clues, and applying knowledge from previous situations in order to understand what is happening, rather than concentrating on the words used (Moon, 2005). Moreover, children tend to be field sensitive. In other words, they perceive a situation holistically, rather than analyse it in detail (Levine & McClosky, 2006). As a corollary of this, they are able to tolerate ambiguity, in that they do not feel compelled to understand every single word: “they are predisposed to understand messages, even when they don’t recognise the ‘code’” (Thornbury, 2006). On the other hand, young learners have a relatively limited concentration span. They need frequent changes of activity; they enjoy activities which stimulate their curiosity and capture their attention; and they need to be kept active themselves (Harmer, 1991); children prefer kinaesthetic - and visual - learning styles (Keefe, 1979, cited in Peck, 2001). Children will only commit themselves to a task if they find it meaningful on their own terms: “Activities need to be child-centred and communication should be authentic” (Peck, 2001, p. 139). Otherwise, young learners are liable to behave unpredictably and perhaps disruptively (Clark, 1990, cited in Moon, 2005; Gerngross & Puchta, 2005).

With regard to social factors, since children are still in the process of developing their social skills, they may depend more heavily upon the teacher for guidance and support in order to function effectively in the classroom than do adults (Thornbury, 2006).

As far as affective factors are concerned, children may be distinguished from older learners in that they are less self-conscious about expressing themselves in a foreign language, and about expressing themselves inaccurately, or by using minimal output (Thornbury, 2006). They are more likely to play with language than adults are, and enjoy language games. They also enjoy rhythmic and repetitive language more than adults do, and are more likely to be willing to sing and to participate in dramatic activities (Peck, 2001). It is generally accepted that children have a better ear for pronunciation (Moon, 2005). There is also some evidence that they may develop better listening skills (Cameron, 2003).

At the same time, children thrive on encouragement and approval from the teacher (Harmer, 1991). In the primary school EFL classroom, the role played by the teacher in providing guidance and support, and in stimulating interest in learning is, therefore, all the more important, in that young children are much less likely than adult learners to be extrinsically motivated to learn English (Harmer, 1991). Nikolov found that for young learners, who may not fully understand what language learning means or why they are learning a foreign language, the main reason for learning is often whether they like the teacher or the learning activities. She reported that there was little or no evidence of instrumental or integrative motivation in early language learners, but that such forms of motivation emerge as learners progress through adolescence (Nikolov, 1999, cited in Council of Europe Language Policy Division, 2002, and in Moon, 2005). Nikolov has also argued that the priority in ELT at primary level should be to develop positive attitudes towards and an interest in English, which will help to sustain the children's language learning into the future (2000, cited in Moon, 2005).

It is clear then that the methodology adopted in any primary EFL classroom must be consistent with the cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional developmental levels of the children involved. Peck (2001) sets out the following principles:

Focus on meaning, not correctness.... Focus on the value of the activity, not the value of the language.... Focus on collaboration and social development.... Provide a rich context, including movement, the senses, objects and pictures, and a variety of activities.... Teach ESL holistically, integrating the four skills.... Treat learners appropriately in light of their age and interests.... Treat language as a tool for children to use for their own social and academic ends.... Use language for authentic communication, not as an object of analysis (p. 140).

In short, "a second language syllabus should reflect the world of the child and facilitate the bringing of acquisition into the classroom" (Bourke, 2006 p.279). It has been suggested that a methodology involving storytelling fulfils these requirements. Storytelling is a natural, enjoyable and familiar way to enable children to develop skills in a foreign language: the bedtime story is part of the daily routine of most children, and stories help children to develop linguistic and narrative skills in their native language (Linse, 2007). The use of storytelling in L2 learning is, therefore, consistent with the general principle in education that "the beginning of instruction shall begin with the experience learners already have" (Dewey, 1948, cited in Hawkins, 2001). Furthermore,

it is consistent with Krashen's theory of natural language acquisition. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), individuals acquire their mother tongue through understanding "roughly-tuned" input, or language that is delivered at a slightly higher level than they are capable of using, but at a level they are capable of understanding. Language is received through listening and reading, whereas speaking and writing emerge as the new language is internalised. Krashen proposed that the same principles apply in L2 learning. In the L2 learning situation, input should contain new language together with language that the students already know. Context, gesture, visuals, and the speaker's automatic adjustment of his or her speech to the perceived level of competence of the listener, all contribute to enabling comprehension (Chastain, 1988; Harmer, 1991). This combination of familiar with new language, and the use of visuals and other non-verbal aids to facilitate understanding are also characteristic features of the storytelling methodology described here.

A further connection may be made between Krashen's theory of natural language acquisition, the storytelling methodology, and the technique of "scaffolding" in ELT which is integral to the methodology. Following the psychologist Vygotsky, Bruner argued that learning depends upon the provision of appropriate social interactional frameworks. In the case of a young child learning his or her native language, a caregiver, who is usually the mother, provides that framework by using extremely familiar contexts and routines, such as reading books together or conversations at mealtimes, to continually enhance the child's linguistic performance (1978, cited in Foley, 1994). Applebee and Langer applied this concept to formal instruction, using the term "instructional scaffolding". Here, the language learner is assisted in a new task by the teacher, a more skilled language user, who provides a framework for the building of competence in the language. Using familiar routines and procedures, the teacher models the language task; asks questions to probe and extend the knowledge the learner already possesses; gives support and encouragement; and provides additional props to facilitate understanding and eventually internalisation of the new language (1983, cited in Foley, 1994). So, applying the terminology of Foley (1994) and Hawkins (2001) to the storytelling methodology studied here, the teacher, who already knows the content of the story and how to arrive at an understanding of it, uses narrative, questions and a variety of teaching aids to enable the young learners to go beyond their initial level of competence and reach the position where they not only

understand the new language involved, but are also increasingly able to take productive control of it.

Sweeney has argued that, as a classroom resource for 8 to 12 year olds, stories are “motivating.... versatile.... satisfying.... educational” (2005, p. 12). Ellis has stated that stories provide “the starting point and rich context for developing a wide variety of related language and learning activities involving children personally, creatively and actively in an all round whole curriculum approach” (n.d.). She has noted that the use of stories, either as supplementary materials or as the basis for self-contained teaching units, is starting to become increasingly common in the teaching of English to young learners (TEYL) worldwide, as teachers become more familiar with an acquisition-based methodology, and because stories comply to the major linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social and cultural objectives for such teaching in most countries (Ellis, 2002). Elsewhere, Ellis and Brewster have given various arguments for the inclusion of stories in TEYL, highlighting the benefits which accrue in terms of the child’s linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and social development: Stories exercise the imagination, and enable a productive link to be made between the imagination and the child’s real world; storytelling in class is a shared social experience; since children enjoy listening to the same story several times, repetition allows language items to be acquired and reinforced; listening to stories develops the child’s listening and concentration skills; stories create opportunities for developing continuity in children’s learning by making connections across the curriculum; stories are enjoyable, motivating, and can help develop positive attitudes towards the L2 (1991, cited in Loukia, 2006).

For Lemke, language is “not just vocabulary and grammar: Language is a system of resources for making meanings” (1993, p. ix, cited in Hawkins, 2001). While for Carter, a language-based approach to literature - in our case children’s stories - is “student-centred, activity-based, and process-oriented in that classroom tasks help students support their interpretation of a text by engaging them in the process of meaning-making” (McKay, 2001, p. 321). Children will listen to a story in their L2 because they want to make sense of it, to find out what happens in the end. They will use all the resources available to them because they are motivated to try to understand the story. When they reach that understanding, they experience the satisfaction that comes from using a foreign language to achieve a real goal: “Motivation becomes

synonymous with a process of engagement through which the learners begin to feel a sense of involvement with the target language” (Sivasubramaniam, 2006, p 262).

In the light of the above research, our study investigates the attitudes to learning English and the motivation of a group of young learners being taught using a storytelling methodology.

3. METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The participants in the study were 21 students of mixed ability, aged between 9 and 10, from the 4th year of Kafkas University private primary school in Kars in north eastern Turkey. Most of the pupils were now in their fourth year of learning English. The general level of proficiency in English in the class may be described as elementary.

Instrument

A questionnaire (Appendix A), adapted from Levine and McClosky (2006) designed for the study, was used to determine the children’s motivation for English as a foreign language; their preferred learning activities; and in particular their attitudes towards learning English through the medium of storytelling.

The questionnaire was designed in English. However, in view of their relatively low level of L2 proficiency, the students were asked to complete a version of the questionnaire which included a Turkish translation.

In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to read a series of ten pairs of antithetical statements and, in each case, to decide which of the statements best reflected their own attitude. They were then asked to choose between two check-boxes to indicate how closely they agreed with the statement.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the children were asked to respond, in Turkish or English, to a series of three questions soliciting, respectively, their reasons for learning English, their preferred learning activities, and their least favourite activities. No limit was placed on the number of reasons for learning English or on the number of learning activities which the participants might specify.

Procedure

The study commenced in March 2007 upon having an official permission from the school authorities. The purpose of the study was explained to the students at the beginning of one of their scheduled English lessons. The questionnaire was then distributed to the children, and its format was explained in Turkish. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire individually, without reference to their classmates. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The percentage of students who marked each response box was calculated for each pair of antithetical statements in the first part of the questionnaire.

The participants' responses to the three open-ended questions in the second part of the questionnaire were collated, categorised and analysed as follows: -

The students' reasons for learning English were categorised according to whether the type of motivation stated was extrinsic or intrinsic, and the results were expressed in terms of the percentage of students giving each response.

Learning activities specified as enjoyable or unenjoyable by the participants were categorised by type and given a numerical weighting according to the order of preference assigned to them by the students; this enabled the most popular and the least popular types of learning activity overall to be determined. A number of participants responded to this part of the questionnaire only in terms of their preferred and least favourite stories. Their responses were noted but excluded from the calculation.

5. RESULTS

Table 1 (Appendix B) shows the percentage of students who marked each response box in the first part of the questionnaire.

In terms of the grammar component of their lessons, 52.38% of the participants claimed to enjoy grammar very much; 38.10% enjoyed grammar to some extent; 4.76% found grammar rather boring; and 4.76% found it very boring. A total of 19.05% of students reported that they found learning and remembering grammar very easy; 71.43% found it fairly easy; and 9.52% found it fairly difficult.

The percentage of students who reported enjoying the stories used in their English lessons very much was 71.43%; a further 14.29% stated that they enjoyed the stories to some extent; while 14.29% found the stories rather boring.

For 23.81% of the participants, understanding the stories was very easy; for 66.67% it was fairly easy; and for 9.52%, it was fairly difficult. In terms of facilitating comprehension of the stories, 66.67% of the students found the illustrations in the course book very useful, and 23.81% found them quite useful; 61.90% of the students found that answering the teacher's questions about the large story cards was very helpful, and 28.57% found it quite helpful; while 66.67% of the students found that listening to the stories on DVD was very helpful, and 14.29% found it quite helpful. The stories could be understood by 4.76% of the respondents without the aid of the pictures or the DVD; and 14.29% of respondents stated that listening to the DVD did not make much difference in helping them to understand the stories better.

With reference to productive activities arising out of the stories, 28.57% of the students enjoyed talking about the stories in English very much; 47.62% enjoyed this activity to some degree; while 19.05% did not really enjoy it much. For 52.38% of the respondents, acting out the stories was very enjoyable; for 33.33%, it was fairly enjoyable; while 14.29% did not enjoy this activity very much.

In terms of the cross-curricular relevance of the stories, 71.43% of the participants felt that they learned something new, apart from English, from the stories.

Table 2 (Appendix C) shows the percentage of students expressing various types of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation for learning English.

The most commonly expressed extrinsic motivation to learn English was the belief that English would be useful to the participants, in some unspecified way, in the future (52.38% of respondents), which may also be linked to the idea that English is important in many, again unspecified, areas of life (9.52%). Specifically job-related extrinsic motivation was claimed by 19.05% of participants. The value of English in enabling communication in foreign countries or with foreigners was cited as a reason for learning English by 23.81% of the students. The ability to use Internet sites in English motivated 4.76% of students. A belief that it is more difficult to learn English when one is older motivated 4.76% of students.

In terms of intrinsic motivation, 4.76% of respondents stated that English lessons are enjoyable in themselves; while 4.76% said that they were learning English to broaden their knowledge.

Table 3 (Appendix D) show the most popular and the least popular types of learning activity overall.

The most popular learning activities overall, scored and ranked in order of preference were: first language games (11), second acting out the stories (10), and third the stories themselves (9).

The least popular learning activities overall were tests (5) and writing (5), then grammar exercises (1).

6. DISCUSSION

The results of our study show that a sizeable majority of the participants (71.43%) enjoyed the storytelling methodology very much. This is despite the fact that only 23.81% of the participants found understanding the stories very easy. These findings are consistent with the claims in the literature that the use of stories in primary ELT will both satisfy and motivate children (Ellis & Brewster, 1991, cited in Loukia, 2006; Sweeney, 2005). Not only did the methodology provide an appropriate level of challenge - for most of the children it was neither too difficult nor too easy and, therefore, it was not demotivating (Harmer, 1991) - but the children's approach to comprehending the stories was also found to be consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982, cited in Chastain, 1988), and with the reported developmental characteristics of children at this age (Moon, 2005; Levine & McClosky, 2006; Thornbury, 2006). As expected, the participants approached the task of understanding the stories holistically and did not appear to be deterred by any initial difficulties presented by the text alone. Rather, they tended to use the available non-linguistic clues to facilitate comprehension: for example, the course book illustrations were cited as being very useful by 66.67% of the students and quite useful by 23.81%, which is consistent with Keefe's assertion that children prefer visual learning (1979, cited in Peck, 2001). Similarly, the teacher's questions about the large story cards were found to be very helpful by 61.90% of the participants and quite helpful by 28.57%. This finding is also consistent with the theory that "scaffolding" by the teacher enables the learner to build on previous knowledge and facilitates comprehension (Applebee & Langer, 1983, cited in Foley, 1994).

Interestingly, in terms of the child's reported ability to grasp meaning and use limited language resources (Halliwell, 1992, cited in Teacher's Manual, 2002), although listening to the story on DVD was also cited as very helpful by 66.67% of the participants and as quite helpful by 14.29%, a total of 19.05% of the respondents indicated that it did not make any or much difference to their understanding of the stories. This figure may be contrasted with the rather lower figure of 9.52% of participants who claimed, in each case, that the illustrations and the story card work did not make any or much difference to their ability to understand the story. This discrepancy may be interpreted in two ways: either that simply listening to the story on DVD at the outset is of a similar level of difficulty to reading the text alone and is, therefore, an insufficient aid to comprehension; or, that the visual clues and the scaffolding provided by the teacher are sufficient in themselves for a large proportion of the students (90.48%, respectively), so that listening again to the story on DVD does not add anything to the level of understanding achieved.

In terms of the productive activities arising out of the stories, the positive attitude displayed by the participants towards acting out the stories – 52.38% of the respondents found this activity very enjoyable, and 33.33% found it quite enjoyable – is consistent with Keefe's assertion that children prefer kinaesthetic learning (1979, cited in Peck, 2001). On the other hand, only 28.57% of the students enjoyed talking about the stories in English very much; 47.62% enjoyed this activity to some degree; while 19.05% did not really enjoy it much. The difference in the attitudes displayed towards these two productive activities may be attributed to the difference between the activities themselves, and is again consistent with the literature. For instance, children are known to enjoy participating in dramatic and collaborative activities (Peck, 2001), and are less self-conscious than adults about expressing themselves in a foreign language (Thornbury, 2006). On the other hand, the reluctance of some of the children to talk about the stories is consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982, cited in Chastain, 1988). Although most of the children were able to arrive at an understanding of the stories through reading and listening, aided by contextual and visual clues and interaction with the teacher, it may be that a number of them had not yet internalised the new language to the extent that they were able to use it productively in speaking.

Our finding that 71.43% of the participants in the study believed that they learned something new, apart from English, from the stories supports the argument of Ellis and Brewster that storytelling should be used in TEYL because it creates

opportunities to strengthen children's learning by making cross-curricular connections (1991, cited in Loukia, 2006). It could be argued from this that rather than using a story-based course book, stories should be selected from various sources to enable a closer match to be made with other areas of the curriculum.

Some of the most interesting findings of the study concerned the attitudes of the participants towards studying grammar. The 9 to 10 year olds in the study appeared to have reached the cognitive threshold where they could begin to conceive of language as an abstract system (Thornbury, 2006) and of themselves as language learners (Djiugunovich, 1995, cited in Council of Europe Language Policy Division, 2002). To varying degrees, many displayed positive attitudes towards studying grammar. Although the proportion of students who claimed to enjoy the stories very much was higher (71.43%) than the proportion who claimed to enjoy grammar very much (52.38%), and although 4.76% of the participants claimed to find grammar very boring, nonetheless if those students who claimed to enjoy storytelling or studying grammar to some extent are also taken into consideration, then grammar (90.48%) emerges as even more popular than the stories (85.72%). Various factors might be responsible for this: for example, attitudes towards the teachers involved, or the fact that some of the techniques involved in studying grammar might be reassuringly familiar to students brought up in the Turkish educational system which, although slowly changing, tends to emphasize rote learning and heavy reliance on the teacher. This might also help to explain why only 9.52% of participants reported finding some difficulty in learning and remembering grammar. In fact, 19.05% of students reported that they found learning and remembering grammar very easy and 71.43% found it fairly easy, which again suggests an appropriate level of challenge. The positive attitudes of the participants towards studying grammar may be contrasted with the literature. For instance, Ytreberg has argued that there is little point to teaching grammar in the early stages of foreign language learning in primary schools (1997, cited in Tierney and Gallestegi, 2005). Likewise, Haudeck has reported that many learners have difficulty in internalising grammar rules, despite the intensive teaching of these (1996, cited in European Commission, 2006). The question therefore arises of whether it is, in fact, productive to teach grammar at this stage, regardless of how enjoyable the pupils may find it. In a study focused on a slightly younger age group of 6 to 8 year olds, Bourke argued, in line with Krashen's theory of natural language acquisition, that "children need exposure to 'whole instances of language use' and not a series of disjointed bits of language" (2006,

p. 282). Bruner claimed that children's linguistic development depends upon their perceptions of meaning (1986, cited in Astorga, 1999). This is reflected in Lemke's argument that language is more than just vocabulary and grammar; that it is "a system of resources for making meanings" (1993, p. ix, cited in Hawkins, 2001). Recent research has highlighted "the capacity of young learners to internalise target language structures implicitly as well as explicitly, given suitable input, interaction and support from their teacher" (European Commission, 2006, p. 67). In our study, then, the pupils' perception that learning and remembering grammar is easy may in fact be a consequence of their internalisation of language through repetition and familiarisation in the storytelling context rather than of memorising rules. For Mitchell, second language learning is a complex and recursive process in which there are what she calls "multiple interconnections, backslidings and complex trade-offs between advances in fluency, accuracy and complexity" (2003, cited in European Commission, 2006, p. 66). It seems clear, then, that further research is needed into the relationship between the storytelling methodology and grammatical accuracy.

What is certain, however, from our findings regarding the positive attitudes displayed towards both grammar and storytelling is that the participants in this study possess high levels of intrinsic motivation towards learning English. Indeed, when asked to specify which learning activities they preferred, 9.52% of respondents claimed to enjoy all activities, while 47.62% reported that there were no activities which they disliked. This is in line with some of the research of Nikolov, who reported that in primary classrooms motivation appears to be associated initially with pleasurable activities, and then becomes increasingly associated with the pleasures of learning and cognitive challenge. In our study, for instance, 4.76% of respondents stated that English lessons are enjoyable in themselves, while 4.76% gave broadening their knowledge as their reason for learning English. On the other hand, our finding of high levels of extrinsic motivation is in marked contrast to Nikolov's results, in that she found little evidence of either instrumental or integrative motivation in young learners, and asserted that extrinsic forms of motivation only become common in adolescence (1999, cited in Council of Europe Language Policy Division, 2002). In our study, however, 52.38% of the 9 to 10 year old respondents held the belief that learning English would benefit them, in some unspecified way, in the future; 19.05% demonstrated a specifically job-related instrumental motivation; and 23.81% displayed integrative motivation in that they believed that learning English would help them to communicate abroad or with

foreigners. It may be that the globalisation of English and the evidence of this available to many children through the Internet, together with the expansion in international tourism and the strong possibility of meeting foreign tourists in Turkey, have increased the likelihood of extrinsic motivation towards learning English occurring at an earlier age. Indeed, 4.76% of respondents gave the ability to use Internet sites in English as their reason for learning the language. On the other hand, the participants' reasons for learning English were often couched in rather vague terms, such as "English is important in many areas of life" or "It is important to learn a second language". This suggests that, in some cases at least, the apparent extrinsic motivation of the children towards learning English may simply reflect attitudes inculcated in them by their parents or other influential adults. This is probably also true of the argument that it is more difficult to learn English when one is older, which 4.76% of participants gave as their reason for learning the language.

Nonetheless, overall the participants in the study demonstrated positive attitudes towards learning English. This was also apparent in the results of our investigation into learning activities. Whilst a variety of activities emerged as popular, only three activities were specified as unpopular. Indeed one of the latter, grammar exercises, also featured amongst the popular activities. As might be expected, tests were the least popular activity; writing was equally unpopular. The finding that the productive skill of writing was relatively unpopular recalls the reluctance of some of the children to talk about the stories in English, and may likewise be interpreted in terms of Krashen's Input Hypothesis which postulates that speaking and writing emerge only after new language has been internalised through listening and reading (1982, cited in Chastain, 1988).

Language games emerged as the most popular activity overall, a finding consistent with Peck's assertion that children enjoy playing with language (2001). The second and third most popular activities were acting out the stories, and the stories themselves. Again, this finding reinforces the view that the use of storytelling in ELT is a methodology appropriate to the interests and learning styles of many children in this age group, and is as a consequence intrinsically motivating (Ellis & Brewster, 1991, cited in Loukia, 2006).

Interestingly, 33.33% of the participants answered the questions about their preferred learning activities solely in terms of their favourite and least favourite stories, which may suggest that they misunderstood the intent of these questions. On the other

hand, it may reflect the extent to which the storytelling methodology has for them become synonymous with learning English.

7. CONCLUSION

This study is limited in that the number of participants was low; it was restricted to only one age group within the primary school range; and thorough statistical analysis was not undertaken. Moreover, no attempt was made to determine whether there was any relationship between the storytelling methodology and the participants' actual proficiency in English. In a review of the literature on storytelling pedagogy, written in 1998, Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm stated that "Qualitative and quantitative studies focusing on specific linguistic, interpersonal, and cognitive aspects of storytelling are needed. Interdisciplinary research would be particularly helpful in understanding the full benefits of storytelling from both a teaching and a learning perspective". Today, this remains an area where further research would be most welcome.

Subject to these limitations, the following conclusions and pedagogical implications may be drawn from our study. The attitudes of the participants towards the use of storytelling in their English lessons, and the behaviour they reported in relation to working with the stories were found to be consistent with the theory that the methodology is appropriate for young learners at this level of cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development. Despite the initial level of challenge presented by the stories, the natural curiosity of the children, their holistic approach to learning, the use of visual aids, and the provision of scaffolding by the teacher enabled them to make the stories meaningful. Moreover, the storytelling technique was found to be intrinsically motivating: both the stories themselves, and many of the learning activities arising out of them were found to be popular. Given this diversity, the potential inherent in stories for generating a wide range of follow-up activities may be seen as important not only in relation to the all round linguistic development of the young learner but also in terms of fulfilling the pedagogical imperative to cater for children with different learning styles and strategies, as well as for the need of children in general for frequent changes of activity.

In terms of the grammatical component of their lessons, the participants in the study appeared to have reached the threshold where they could conceive of language as an abstract system. Moreover, they displayed a generally positive attitude towards the

study of grammar, which appears likely to remain a fixture in ELT in Turkey for the foreseeable future. If this level of motivation can be sustained, then the likelihood that these children will succeed in the English language component of the new Turkish examination system may be enhanced. Of course, this leaves unresolved the question of the extent to which it is truly productive to teach grammar to young learners in relation to the development of all round linguistic and communicative competence, which should surely be the real target. Indeed, the respondents' perception that learning and remembering grammar is easy may simply be evidence of the internalisation of language as a result of the storytelling methodology.

The question of the extent to which the storytelling methodology can or should be sustained as these young learners continue their primary and middle school education should also be addressed. If storytelling is regarded as the first rung on the ladder of literature, then the use of age-appropriate children's literature as a component of ELT methodology through the higher stages of young learner development would appear to be indicated, in that it offers similar learner-centred opportunities for language acquisition, all round integrated language skills development, cross-curricular learning.

Finally, perhaps the most salient finding of this study was the high level of motivation towards learning English displayed by the young learners involved. The methodology employed appeared to be successful at least in terms of the argument that the main objective of primary ELT should be to develop positive attitudes which may be built upon in the future.

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APPENDIX A

LEARNING ENGLISH QUESTIONNAIRE

Please mark **(X)** **one** box in each row. **A** means that you agree most with the statement on the left. **D** means that you agree most with the statement on the right. **B** means that you agree more with the statement on the left, but that you do not completely agree with it. **C** means that you agree more with the statement on the right, but that you do not completely agree with it.

	A	B	C	D	
I enjoy grammar very much					I find grammar very boring
I find learning and remembering grammar very easy					I find learning and remembering grammar very difficult
I enjoy the stories in Story Magic very much					I find the stories very boring
I find understanding the stories very easy					I find understanding the stories very difficult
The pictures in the book help me to understand the stories					I can understand the stories without looking at the pictures
Answering the teacher’s questions about the story cards helps me to understand the stories better.					Answering the teacher’s questions about the story cards doesn’t help me to understand the stories

Listening to the stories on DVD helps me to understand them better					Listening to the DVD doesn't help me to understand the stories any better
I enjoy talking about the stories in English					I don't like talking about the stories in English
I enjoy acting out the stories					I don't like acting out the stories
Apart from English, I learn something new from the stories					I just learn English from the stories

1. Why do you think you are learning English?
2. Think of all the different activities that you do in your English lessons. Please list those that you enjoy most, in order of preference.
3. Think of all the different activities that you do in your English lessons. Please list those that you do not enjoy, starting with the one you like the least.

APPENDIX B

Table 1: Student responses to the first part of the questionnaire, expressed as the percentage of participants who marked each box

LEARNING ENGLISH QUESTIONNAIRE

Please mark (**X**) **one** box in each row. **A** means that you agree most with the statement on the left. **D** means that you agree most with the statement on the right. **B** means that you agree more with the statement on the left, but that you do not completely agree with it. **C** means that you agree more with the statement on the right, but that you do not completely agree with it.

	A	B	C	D	
I enjoy grammar very much	52.38%	38.10%	4.76%	4.76%	I find grammar very boring
I find learning and remembering grammar very easy	19.05%	71.43%	9.52%	0%	I find learning and remembering grammar very difficult
I enjoy the stories in Story Magic very much	71.43%	14.29%	14.29%	0%	I find the stories very boring
I find understanding the stories very easy	23.81%	66.67%	9.52%	0%	I find understanding the stories very difficult
The pictures in the book help me to understand the stories	66.67%	23.81%	4.76%	4.76%	I can understand the stories without looking at the pictures
Answering the teacher's questions about the story cards helps me to understand the stories better.	61.90%	28.57%	9.52%	0%	Answering the teacher's questions about the story cards doesn't help me to understand the stories

Listening to the stories on DVD helps me to understand them better	66.67%	14.29%	14.29%	4.76%	Listening to the DVD doesn't help me to understand the stories any better
I enjoy talking about the stories in English	28.57%	47.62%	19.05%	0%	I don't like talking about the stories in English
I enjoy acting out the stories	52.38%	33.33%	14.29%	0%	I don't like acting out the stories
Apart from English, I learn something new from the stories	71.43%	9.52%	14.29%	4.76%	I just learn English from the stories

APPENDIX C

Table 2: Reasons for learning English expressed by the participants

Responses have been collated and are categorised according to the type of motivation expressed. The percentage of students expressing each reason is given.

TYPE OF MOTIVATION EXPRESSED			
EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION		INTRINSIC MOTIVATION	
English will be useful to me in the future	52.38%	English lessons are enjoyable	4.76%
English is important in many areas of life	9.52%	To broaden my knowledge	4.76%
English will enhance my future job prospects	4.76%		
English is necessary in many jobs	14.29%		
It is important to know a second language	9.52%		
English enables communication with foreigners	9.52%		
English enables communication in foreign countries	14.29%		
It enables you to use Internet sites in English	4.76%		
It is difficult to learn when you are older	4.76%		

NB: No limit was set upon the number of reasons for learning English which the participants might express.

APPENDIX D

Table 3: The most popular and the least popular types of learning activity overall

MOST POPULAR LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE	
TYPE OF EXERCISE	SCORE
1. Language games	11
2. Acting out the stories	10
3. The stories themselves	9
4. Learning tenses	5
4. Pair games	5
6. Projects	3
6. Question and answer	3
8. Storycards	2
9. Grammar exercises	1
10. Reading	1
11. Listening exercises	1
LEAST POPULAR LEARNING ACTIVITIES, STARTING WITH THE LEAST POPULAR	
1. Tests	5
1. Writing	5
3. Grammar exercises	1

NB: No limit was set upon the number of learning activities which the participants might specify.

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