2022, 1(2), 14-25

Using Oral Communication Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems in English Language Classes

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Abstract
In today's multicultural world, a great deal of importance is given to English language since it is for international communication and it has become the most commonly used language in the current age (Kitao & Kitao, 1996). Since a significant portion of L2 communication in the real world is problematic, L2 learners can benefit from guidance on how to deal with performance issues. It is believed that learners can develop communicative proficiency by developing an ability to use communication strategies that enable them to compensate for their target language deficiency (Bialystok, 1990). Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative study is to investigate oral communication strategies used by EFL students to cope with problems during communication so they can be integrated into language teaching in order to improve their speaking performance. 71 students who are majoring at the School of Foreign Languages, English Language Department at a state university in Ankara during the academic year of 2020-2021 Spring Semester participated in the study. The students are mostly monolingual and their ages range from 18 to 24. The participants completed 5-point likert-type questionnaire on Turkish-language version of the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) developed by Yaman and Kavasoğlu (2013). The correlation between the Turkish and English versions of the inventory was found to be r= .78, indicating acceptable internal consistency with a .83 reliability coefficient. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .90. Seven factors in the test, namely, *social affective, fluency oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy oriented, message reduction and alteration, message abandonment,* and *attempt to think in English* are examined and compared with the participants' speaking proficiency.
Keywords: English as a foreign language, communication strategies, oral communication strategies, strategy instruments, foreign language learning, speaking skill.
Received Date: September 21st, 2022. Acceptance Date: November 20 nd, 2022.

1. Introduction

In the year of globalization, English has become the "Lingua Franca" and teaching English as a foreign language has gained considerable importance. Millions of people all over the world devote effort to learn English. To put it in a different way, millions of EFL learners want to be a "competent speaker" of English. They wish to learn that universal language for many reasons such as getting a job, advancing in the career, doing international business, travelling, communicating with foreign people and many others like that. Ur (1996) states that "people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing" (p.120). Speaking shows an expressive summary of a learner's knowledge, skill and affective domain. Initially, learners need

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to have grammar, vocabulary, phonology, sociocultural knowledge, genre knowledge, speech acts, register and discourse. Next, they require automating all this knowledge to speak fluently. Thus, speaking plays a significant role in the EFL environments.

Although learners in Turkey can achieve high levels of proficiency in reading, listening, and writing, there is a belief that they cannot speak English as fluently as their peers in other areas of the world. This is particularly troubling because these children are required to take both compulsory and selective English classes during their 10 years of obligatory schooling. Moreover, to study English becomes unavoidable and mandatory for anybody who either wants to work or simply wants to follow advancements, innovations and events that meet the age of society, economics, science and technology (Tosun, 2006).

Researchers have made many attempts to demonstrate the effects of learning strategies on the development of a target language (e.g., Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot,1990; Oxford, 1996; Rubin, 1975). Learners make use of learning strategies which are the conscious thoughts and behaviors to help them understand, learn, and remember better the information in the target language. It is also recognized by the researchers that learners can develop their ability to communicate by enhancing learning strategies enabling them to become independent learners of the target language (Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Labarca & Khanji, 1986). There is also a growing belief that the use of communication strategies is related to successful language performance (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Huang & Naerssen, 1987; Rost & Ross, 1991). The key reason is that the implementation of a communication strategy can solve communication problems in the target language and promote interaction (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Faerch & Kasper, 1983a; Tarone, 1980).

Long since, the role of specific techniques such as meaning negotiation has been an important focus of discussion, in particular (e.g., Long, 1983; Pica, 2002; Varonis & Gass, 1985). The majority of the studies have, however, taken place in experimental environments and only some research have examined the real usage of communication techniques of second language learners in classroom setting (Foster, 1998; Williams, Inscoe, & Tasker, 1997). Furthermore, the majority of negotiation research has not considered other sorts of communication strategies for maintaining and developing target language discourse, such as using fillers or shadowing as communication enhancers. Learners must employ such techniques to develop their interaction in realistic communication contexts, as Williams et al. (1997) noted; consequently, it is worthwhile to investigate the impact of such use of strategy.

With several data analyses, the current study aims to provide many insights into whether the usage of a specific communication strategy has an influence on EFL speaking performance. College students enrolled in English preparatory classes at a state university in Turkey participated in the study. The study investigated how the participants use oral communication strategies in the online classroom setting and whether those strategies contributed to the development of oral proficiency in the learning environment. For this purpose in mind, the following four research questions were addressed:

1. Among seven oral communication strategies, which one is used most by the participants?
2. Is there any possible gender difference in participants' use of oral communication strategies in the online learning process?
3. Is there a correlation among participants' use of different oral communication strategies in English speaking?
4. Do participants' use of oral communication strategies in English predict their speaking proficiency scores?

2. Literature

Bialystok (1990) described communication strategies as a technique that a speaker uses to explain its meaning in a challenging situation. It is a mutual endeavor by two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in circumstances where the required meaning structures are not shared, according to Tarone (1980). Communication strategies are also potentially purposeful approaches for resolving issues in achieving a certain communicative goal

(Faerch & Kasper, 1983). They are methods for dealing with issues in communicating in a second or foreign language that is not well understood (Stern, 1983).

Communication strategies are instruments that are used by students to improve their understanding of meaning and to express their message during their interaction. Tarone (1977) categorized communication strategies into five key elements based on the interactional approach to identifying communication strategies: *paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, mime and avoidance*. Faerch and Kasper (1983), Bialystok (1990) and the Nijmegen Group (i.e., Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; and Kellerman, 1991) have also taken a different method to defining communication strategies such as the psycholinguistic method. Faerch and Kasper (1983) claim that communication strategies are seen by two interlocutors as an individual's mental reaction to a communication challenge rather than as a shared reaction. Communication strategies are then defined as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p.81). Faerch and Kasper (1983) propose two strategies in general for solving a communication problem: *avoidance strategies* and *achievement strategies*. *Avoidance strategies* include *formal reduction strategies* and *functional reduction strategies*. On the other hand, *achievement strategies* include *compensatory strategies* and *retrieval strategies*. There are some similarities between the compensatory strategies of Faerch and Kasper (*code switching, transfer, inter-language based strategies, cooperative strategies, and nonlinguistic strategies*) and Tarone's taxonomy although they are categorized in different perspectives.

When reviewing measurement instruments related to speaking in the literature, it has been shown that such instruments as a *speaking strategy checklist* (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996), *language skills development strategy questionnaire* (Oxford, Cohen & Chi, 2002) are facing challenges like a lack of reliability and validity issues. Moreover, in Turkey, most research of speaking methods (Kılıç, 2003; Gümüş, 2007) are based on inventory used in the West and intended for second-language learners, irrespective of their compatibility with the Turkish culture (Yaman & Kavasoğlu, 2013). Because of the gap in the field, Nakatani (2006) developed the *Oral Communication Strategy Inventory* (OCSI) on Japanese learners, so it was designed with the communication problems that people learning English as a foreign language. It looks into how college English majors use speaking strategies. Speaking strategies are categorized by Nakatani (2006) as *social-affective, fluency oriented, negotiation for meaning, accuracy oriented, massage reduction and alteration, nonverbal strategies while speaking, massage abandonment,* and *attempt to think in English strategies*.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative research design was utilized in this study. As Kothari (2004) explains, in a quantitative research methodology, there is a measurement of quantity or amount. A phenomenon is expressed with regard to quantity. Similarly, Dörnyei (2007) asserts that in a quantitative research, numerical data is reached at the end of data collection procedures. The numerical data is analyzed with the use of statistical methods. There are some characteristics of a quantitative research, such as the use of numbers, a priori categorization, variables rather than cases, statistics and the language of statistics, standardized procedures to assess objective reality, and quest for generalizability and universal laws (Dörnyei, 2007). For a quantitative researcher, the variables he works with well is defined and logical scale of values are assigned to these variables, which is well explained in numbers. Therefore, the strength of quantitative research paradigm is that in the scientific method there is a tool to discover questions in an objective way of interpretation. This way, the influence of any researcher is minimized. The result is an accurate and reliable description of the world, since it is closely associated with numerical values and statistics.

3.2. Setting and Participants

71 EFL preparatory students of English Language Department at a state university in Turkey during the 2020-2021 academic year spring semester participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 18-24. The participants were a

homogenous group in terms of their educational and socio-cultural backgrounds. The participants' proficiency level in the English language was determined as independent user, B1 & B2 based on the proficiency levels in Common European Framework of References (CEFR).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Participants in the Study

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	31	43.7
Female	40	56.3
Age		
18	9	12.7
19	27	38.0
20	26	36.6
21	6	8.5
22	1	1.4
23	1	1.4
24	1	1.4
Department		
Business	27	38.0
International Relations	33	46.5
English Language and Literature	11	15.5
Total	71	100

3.3. Instrumentation

The data collection tool implemented in this study was originally developed by Nakatani (2006). The inventory includes both listening and speaking skill strategies, however, they are not integrated and they can be analyzed separately. The researcher in the current study intended to examine the speaking skill. Therefore, Yaman and Kavasoğlu's (2013) Turkish version of OCSI, covering only the speaking skill strategies is used. The items related to speaking skills in OCSI, the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost true of me) to 5 (always or almost always true of me), consists of 32 items (see Appendix A). The Turkish version of the OCSI includes seven factors*: social affective, fluency oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy oriented, message reduction and alteration, message abandonment, and attempt to think in English.* As explained briefly in Yaman and Kavasoğlu (2013), the correlation coefficient between two inventories, Turkish and English versions, was found over .70. The items of which correlation coefficient was below .70 were revised in terms of wording and structure. Finally, the correlation between the Turkish and English versions of the inventory was found to be r= .78, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the whole inventory was found as .83. The reliability coefficients were found to be in the 0.55-0.83 range, which shows high reliability coefficients. The Cronbach's alpha level for this study was found to be as .90.

As for comparing the participants' use of oral communication strategies in English with their English speaking proficiency, English speaking test developed by the testing unit of School of Foreign Languages was used in the study. The test is applied three times each semester. The first one is a part of the third Progress Test, the second one as a part of the sixth Progress Test, and the third one is implemented at the end of the academic year, in the Exit Test. The students take the test individually and they are assessed by two raters at a time. For each student, different questions are asked, each question is asked just for once. At the same time, the same questions are consulted synchronously in each exam room. The test consists of two parts. In the first part, a testee is expected to answer two discussion questions in two minutes and in the second part he is provided a picture card. A minute is given for him to look at the picture and read the situations and prompts under the picture. Then he is expected to talk about the picture in three minutes. When a student finishes his talk, he leaves the exam room and raters assess him according

to the rubric provided by Testing Unit. The rubric involves four evaluation categories; grammar, vocabulary, fluency and communication. Each part is evaluated over five points. A testee is assessed over twenty points.

3.4. Data Collection and Ethical Procedures

The data were collected in the academic year of 2020-2021 during the spring semester at a state university in Turkey. The quantitative data were collected from 71 randomly selected students at a preparatory English language program through the OCSI. Firstly, an online consent form was provided to the participants. Following this, they were requested to fill in the online inventory in ten minutes. They were asked to complete the OCSI considering the strategies while they are speaking in English. The data of the inventory were collected in three days. On the other hand, speaking proficiency test applied by the School of Foreign Languages in the third Progress test was used for achievement scores of the participants' speaking proficiency.

3.5. Data Analysis

Following the data collection procedures, the data was entered to SPSS 25. The gathered data was taken to analysis with the identification of the demographic information first. Means, standard deviations and frequencies were noted for each test item as a part of descriptive statistics in order to spot "...general tendencies in the data and the overall spread of the scores" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 213).

Firstly, the data was checked with regard to normality and linearity to decide which tests to use; parametric or non-parametric. Therefore, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks tests were employed. Then, independent samples t-test, correlation and a standard multiple regression analyses were used in the data analysis process.

Table 2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	***df***	***Sig.***	**Statistic**	***df***	***Sig.***
OCS	.22	71	.000	.75	71	.000

According to the use of oral communication strategies in the online learning process inventory, the mean values and the trimmed mean values were found to be similar (*N*=71, *M*=105.5, *SD*= 21.18, *Trimmed M*= 108.0). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov results suggested that the data was found to be normally distributed (see Table 2). Also, "this is quite common in larger samples" (Pallant, 2007, p. 63). Further analysis based on the Q-Q plots showed that the d.ata was normally distributed.

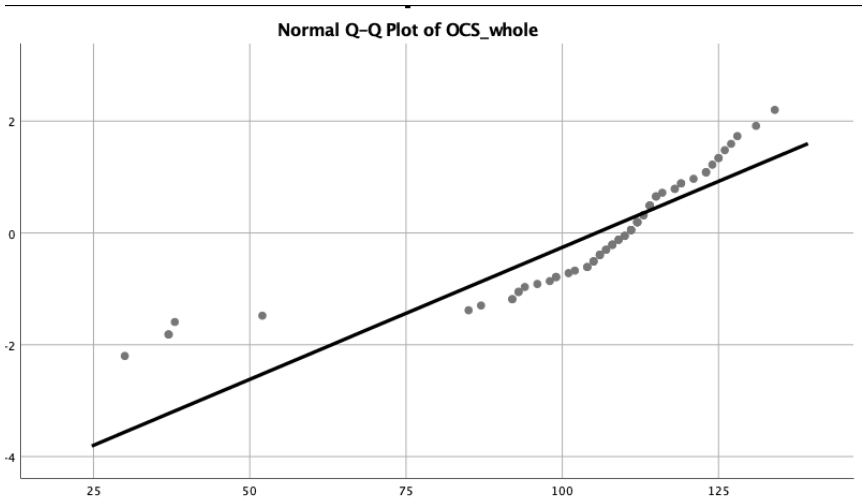

Figure 1. Normal probability plot of OCSI

The Q-Q plots for all the variables were found to be straight and linear, and so the data was found to be normally distributed. Based on this assumption, the research questions (RQs) were analyzed using parametric tests.

The data analysis started with descriptive statistics. After decided that the data was normally distributed, the research questions were analyzed by using parametric tests.

4. Findings

RQ1. Among seven oral communication strategies, which one is used most by the participants?

The rank order of any statement in the Communication Strategy Inventory was determined using descriptive data, from most preferred to least preferred. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Desriptive statistics for the use of OCS in the study

Use of oral communication strategies	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Message abandonment		3.00	15.00	8.4	2.91
Negotiation for meaning		7.00	35.00	27.4	6.23
Social affective		5.00	24.00	16.5	4.90
Message reduction and alteration	71	4.00	20.00	14.1	3.85
Attempt to think in English		2.00	10.00	6.70	1.94
Accuracy oriented		2.00	10.00	7.15	1.82
Fluency oriented		5.00	25.00	18.0	4.05

Table 3 demonstrates that the most preferred factor among the participants is negotiation for meaning while using oral communication strategies (M=27.4). According to the means of the descriptive statistics data, fluency oriented strategies (M=18.0) come in second. Then, social affective strategies (M=16.5) come in third in terms of frequency of use.

When students experience challenges during interaction, they engage in negotiating behavior for meaning while employing oral communication strategies. They're utilized to keep the conversational goal in mind when speaking with others (Nakatani, 2006). Turkish EFL students prefer to use communication methods, according to an inventory developed by Yaman, Irgin, and Kavasoglu (2011).

RQ2. Is there any possible gender difference in participants' use of oral communication strategies in the online learning process?

First of all, the data was inquired by descriptive statistics to see tendencies and means of the students' scores. Then, the participants' use of oral communication strategies in the online learning process were examined to check whether they were significantly different in terms of their gender. The data was checked for any possible outliers and there were no outliers. Then, it was determined to run independent samples t-test for the data analysis.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test results for OCSI use of male and female students

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
OCS	male	31	106.1	22.7	4.07	.24	69	.81
	female	40	104.9	20.2	3.20			

For the online use of oral communication strategies of the participants (Table 4), it was found that male students' beliefs on OCS (M = 106.1, SD = 22.7) do not differ significantly from female students' (M = 104.9, SD = 20.2), $t_{(71)}$ = .24, p =.81.

RQ3. Is there a correlation among participants' use of different oral communication strategies in English speaking?

In the scale, there were seven categories for the use of oral communication strategies in English which were *social affective, fluency oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy oriented, message reduction and alteration, message abandonment,* and *attempt to think in English.* To explore the relationships among participants' use of different oral communication strategies, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was conducted.

Table 5. Pearson-Product Correlation-Coefficients of the Variables

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Message abandonment	1						
2	Negotiation for meaning	.37**	1					
3	Social affective	-.02	.61**	1				
4	Message reduction and alteration	.70**	.63**	.32**	1			
5	Attempt to think in English	.53**	.47**	.26*	.69**	1		
6	Accuracy oriented	.24*	.62**	.40**	.45**	.29*	1	
7	Fluency oriented	.31**	.79**	.54**	.56**	.38**	.64**	1

** p < .01 (2-tailed).
* p < .05 (2-tailed).

Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. The results (Table 5) suggested that message abandonment strategies have a positive significant correlation with negotiation for meaning strategies (r = .37, p = .002) at a medium effect size explaining 14% of variance; with message reduction and alteration strategies (r = .70, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 50% of variance; with attempt to think in English strategies (r = .53, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 28% of variance; with accuracy oriented strategies (r = .24, p = .05) at a small effect size explaining 6% of variance; with fluency oriented strategies (r = .31, p = .01) at a medium effect size explaining 10% of variance; however, they have a negative non-significant relationship with social affective strategies (r = -.02, p = .89).

Negotiation for meaning strategies have a positive significant correlation with social affective strategies (r = .61, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 37% of variance; with message reduction and alteration strategies (r = .63, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 40% of variance; with attempt to think in English strategies (r = .47, p = .000) at a medium effect size explaining 22% of variance; with accuracy oriented strategies (r = .62, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 38% of variance; with fluency oriented strategies (r = .79, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 62% of variance.

Social affective strategies have a positive significant correlation with message reduction and alteration strategies (r = .32, p = .01) at a medium effect size explaining 10% of variance; with attempt to think in English strategies (r = .26, p = .03) at a small effect size explaining 7% of variance; with accuracy oriented strategies (r = .40, p = .001) at a medium effect size explaining 16% of variance; with fluency oriented strategies (r = .54, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 29% of variance.

Message reduction and alteration strategies have a positive significant correlation with attempt to think in English strategies (r = .69, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 48% of variance; with accuracy oriented strategies (r = .45, p = .000) at a medium effect size explaining 20% of variance; with fluency oriented strategies (r = .56, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 31% of variance.

Attempt to think in English strategies have a positive significant correlation with accuracy oriented strategies (r = .29, p = .014) at a small effect size explaining 8% of variance; with fluency oriented strategies (r = .38, p = .001) at a medium effect size explaining 14% of variance. Accuracy oriented strategies have a positive significant correlation with fluency oriented strategies (r = .64, p = .000) at a large effect size explaining 41% of variance.

RQ4. Do participants' use of oral communication strategies in English predict their speaking proficiency scores?

Seven different self-efficacy factors which are *social affective, fluency oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy oriented, message reduction and alteration, message abandonment,* and *attempt to think in English* were analyzed as independent variables in the study. For the third research question, they were arranged, a model was created. Before the analysis, the preliminary assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity and outliers through Mahalanobis and Cook distances were checked, and there weren't any outliers to be excluded from the analysis. Accordingly, a standard multiple regression was run to predict the participants' English speaking proficiency scores.

Table 6. A standard multiple regression for use of oral communication strategies in English predicting English speaking proficiency scores

	Descriptives					**Standardized Coefficients**			**Correlations**			
OCS	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**Df**	**F**	**Beta**	**t**	**p**	**Zero Order**	**R^2**	**Partial**	**Part**
Message abandonment		8.40	2.91			-.048	-.264	.792	.007		-.033	-.031
Negotiation for meaning		27.4	6.23			.091	.393	.696	.066		.049	.046
Social affective		16.5	4.90			.084	.522	.603	.101		.066	.062
Message reduction and alteration	71	14.1	3.84	7	1.234	.032	.142	.888	.053	.121	.018	.017
Attempt to think in English		6.70	1.95			.084	.511	.611	.093		.064	.060
Accuracy oriented		7.20	1.82			-.433	-2.728	.008	-.194		-.325	-.322
Fluency oriented		18.0	4.10			.190	.919	.361	.067		.115	.109

The variables used in the model explained only 12% of variance in the speaking proficiency of the learners (R^2 = .121), F (7, 71) = 1.234, p = .298. It was found that among the variables in the model, only the use of accuracy oriented strategies predicts the academic success of the students (β=-.43, p=.008) explaining 12% of the variance.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In an increasingly globalizing society, it is necessary to recognize the importance of international communication. A person's communication strategies contribute to his or her fluency in a foreign language. EFL students are expected to employ meaningful communication strategies. Additionally, they are required to be highly driven to initiate oral communication, to improve engagement during encounters, to solve their communication problems in order to accomplish communicative goals, and to transmit the appropriate messages. Foreign-language learners must be motivated to take chances in communicating and employ communication strategies. They should make use of available resources without fear of making communication errors; nonetheless, they should be aware of communication strategies utilized by proficient students, such as social affective techniques, fluency oriented tactics, and nonverbal techniques while speaking. To improve their communication skills, Turkish EFL students should pay close attention when utilizing strategies in both speaking and listening.

The use of communication techniques does not differ significantly by gender and competence level, according to this study. It means that gender variables may not be determining factors in communication strategy preference, but they should not be seen in isolation because there are differences in how females and males employ communication strategies, even within the same society. In determining communication techniques utilized by pupils, other characteristics such as individual characteristics, background knowledge, and motivation should be taken into account. Moreover, in this study there were some significant positive correlations among students' use of *social affective, fluency oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy oriented, message reduction and alteration, message abandonment,* and *attempt to think in English* strategies, with only a negative correlation between the use of *social affective* and *message abandonment strategies.* Lastly, the students' English speaking proficiency was regressed with their use of oral communication strategies in English. The results elicited only the use of *accuracy oriented strategies* as a predictor of the academic success.

Among the many hurdles of enhancing EFL learners' oral production capabilities, issues with language teachers cannot be overlooked. Because Turkish EFL students have little direct interaction with the L2 population, the classroom is their only opportunity to practice speaking. The major hurdles to improving that competence in the Turkish educational system are the teacher-centered language teaching tradition, which is based on rote memorization and form-focused instruction (Çetintaş, 2010; Haznedar, 2010).

Furthermore, the society in which a person grows up affects a person's views toward learning a foreign language, as well as their characteristics and educational environment. Learning takes place when students participate in the learning process and interact with their environment (Yurtsever-Bodur, 2015). The success of learning a foreign language is related to the social structure that must be considered (Işık, 2008). As a result, it's understandable when students complain that they can't learn a language because no one speaks English around them or because their parents don't speak English (Yurtsever-Bodur, 2015). If they need English for a professional career in the society they live in, it becomes more valuable and worthwhile to learn. As a result, it should be accepted that English will be useful in their everyday lives.

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