The Effect of Active Learning Approach on Student Achievement in Secondary School 5th Grade English Course*

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to determine the effect of the active learning approach on student achievement in the learning outcomes of the 'My Town' unit in the fifth-grade English course in a secondary school. The research was organized according to a quasi-experimental design with experimental and control groups. The experimental (n=34) and the control group (n=31) were chosen by a group matching method among 11 fifth-grade classes in a secondary school in the Elazığ province of Turkey in the fall semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. In the data collection process of the study, a semi-structured interview form and an achievement test was formed considering the fifth-grade English course learning outcomes according to the Ministry of National Education (MONE, 2016). The data collected from interviews were analyzed by a descriptive analysis method. In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the experimental and the control groups and to examine the effect of active learning on permanence, an independent group t-test was used. As a result of the study, it was found that active learning activities contributed to the students in the experimental group in the learning outcomes of the 'My Town' unit of the fifth-grade English course.

Aktif Öğrenme Yaklaşımının Ortaokul 5. Sınıf İngilizce Dersinde Öğrenci Başarısına Etkisi
Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı aktif öğrenme yaklaşımının ortaokul 5. sınıf İngilizce dersi "my town" ünitesi kazanımlarında öğrenci başarısına etkisinin belirlenmesidir. Araştırma deney ve kontrol gruplu yarı deneysel desene göre düzenlenmiştir. Deney (n=34) ve kontrol (n=31) grupları 2016-2017 eğitim öğretim yılı güz döneminde Türkiye Elazığ iline bağlı bir ortaokulda grup eşleştirme yöntemi ile 11 adet 5. sınıf şubesi arasından seçilmiştir. Çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ve Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (2016) 5. sınıflar İngilizce dersi öğretim programı kazanımları dikkate alınarak hazırlanan bir başarı testi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada, görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler betimsel analiz yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Deney ve kontrol grupları arasında anlamlı bir fark olup olmadığını tespit etmek veaktif öğrenmenin kalıcılığa etkisini incelemek için bağımsız gruplar t-testi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, aktif öğrenme etkinliklerinin 5. sınıf İngilizce dersi 'My Town' ünitesi kazanımlarında deney grubundaki öğrencilere katkı sağladığı tespit edilmiştir.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with a rapid change in knowledge, researchers are focusing on various learning approaches to find out how students learn effectively. Because knowledge sources and subjects are constantly growing, there is a huge gap in how students learn efficiently. Therefore, various learning approaches are tested to close this gap and to ensure permanent and effective learning. One of these approaches is active learning.

Active learning is defined as a learning approach in which a student is responsible for arrangements in the learning process by practicing, evaluating and developing and using his/her existing mental abilities to solve complex instructional processes (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Sönmez, 2008). Active learning makes students mentally and physically active in gaining information, thinking and problem-solving activities (Collins & O'Brien, 2003). According to another definition, active learning means that learners are actively involved in the learning process by getting rid of a passive situation and direct dependence on a teacher (Edwards, 2015). In this process, the first goal is to transform the role of the learner from a passive observer to an active participant. However, this is not simply a matter of participation in learning itself, but rather a learning process, which encourages the learner to take actions in various ways concerning how to learn, use mental abilities, think, and interpret the information which has been learned (Kalem & Fer, 2003). The goal of active learning is to ensure that the actions are carried out in the learning environment related to the target concepts which foster student participation. The role of the teacher is to act as a facilitator in this process (Açıkgöz, 2007).

2. Review of Literature

In the most basic terms, active learning is a process in which the learner is active and responsible for the learning process, and the learner is forced to use his or her mental skills during learning (Açıkgöz, 2011). The active learning approach requires that an individual can transform his learning into practice and participate actively in the learning process (Demirel, 2010; Şahinel, 2011). In this approach, students are not in a passive position but are in a position to share their duties and responsibilities with a willingness to shape their own learning (Ünal, 1999; Hazzan, Lapidot& Ragonis, 2011). Moreover, active learning gives students an opportunity to use their own learning methods and techniques such as self-assessment and self-regulation by making them free to do so (Sönmez, 2008). According to Ayhan (2011), active learning emphasizes that learners should improve their thinking skills in practice, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation stages and acquire knowledge through activities rather than conveying information in direct instruction. From this perspective, it can be said that active learning has emerged in response to the monotonous narrative technique in the traditional teaching method and the student's passive receptive position. In other words, traditional teaching methods are obliged to adapt to new learning approaches, such as active learning, because the traditional approach cannot meet the requirements of the 21st century in terms of enabling the learner to be productive.

The active learning approach not only improves the learner's interest in the lesson, but it also reduces the intervention in courses and the dependence on the teacher in the learning process (Simons, 1997; Petress, 2008). In traditional education, the length of a lecture is long, so the attention of the learner is dispersed quickly. There is pressure to memorize in traditional education; however, in the active learning approach, learning by doing, researching and practicing are key elements. Students learn how to work as a team, take responsibility, help and find a common opinion, not just to follow the teacher's instructions (Demirel, 2010). In

addition to collaborating, there is positive motivation, low stress and fun in active learning (Şahinel, 2011). This positive atmosphere created for children increases the students' motivation for the intended subject. In highly motivated lessons, children participate more happily in activities, and their learning becomes more permanent (Senemoğlu, 2013). According to Silberman (1996), research in the field of education shows that students are more receptive to practical learning rather than theoretical knowledge. Briefly, in literature it was concluded that the teaching with active learning techniques is more successful than the classical education styles (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Silberman, 1996; Collins & O'Brien, 2003; Kalem & Fer, 2003; Açıkgöz, 2011; Aytan, 2011; Koç, 2011; Maden, 2013; Çınar & Buyrukçu 2016; Yıldız et al., 2016; Bulut, 2018).

The facts mentioned above are also valid for teaching a foreign language. Courses in foreign language teaching, especially for children, should be engaging, entertaining and interactive. Considering that children in the early and middle school age are quickly distracted, activities should be given at regular intervals and should be able to address all four language skills. In fact, physical activities, visual materials, games, songs, and dramatizations are particularly effective at enhancing learning (Hisar, 2006).

Research has highlighted the benefits of active learning in terms of achievement, motivation, and skills. Aydede and Matyar (2009) found that the active learning approach enhances the success of students in secondary school science lessons, and students have a positive opinion of this approach. Moreover, Akbulut (2004) determined that active teaching methods and techniques in geography teaching are effective in the learning outcome of knowledge and achievement of goals. Similarly, Kalem and Fer (2003) determined that active learning principles were more entertaining for students compared to traditional teaching methods, and the active learning approach facilitated students' understanding and comprehension and helped them develop productive and creative learning skills. In his study, Aytan (2011) stated that teaching by active learning techniques improved listening skills; students showed positive attitudes towards Turkish lessons, and the lessons were educational and entertaining. In Yıldız, Keskin and Ozan's (2016) study with seventh-grade students, active learning techniques improved the listening skills, and students' Turkish course grades increased. In a similar vein, Koç (2011) found that active learning is more effective on students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills than direct instruction methods. Corroborated by previous studies, Bulut (2018) identified that the active learning model applied in the seventh-grade Turkish course is influential on the students' critical thinking tendencies, and according to the results of interviews with students in the experimental group, students' social communication and interaction skills improved, and their mental thinking processes were positively affected. In his study on active learning in middle school, Edwards (2015) stated that middle school students perform learning activities through different approaches. While they do so, they are active in scientific, social and physical interaction, and that all these activities can be gathered under the active learning framework.

As can be seen in the previous studies, the effects of active learning have been studied in different domains such as science, physics, chemistry, mathematics, Turkish and geography. However, the studies on the role of active learning in English language teaching, especially in English as a foreign language in the context of secondary schools, where foreign language education is widely held, is quite limited. For this reason, it is considered that examining the effects of the active learning approach, in which students learn by doing and having fun, on student success in an English course will add to the literature in the field. Thus, the aim of the

study is to determine the effects of the active learning approach on the success of students in the learning outcomes of 'My town' unit in the fifth-grade English course in secondary school. Within the scope of the overall aim, answers to the following questions were sought:

- In terms of teachers and students who have already taught or studied this unit in the previous year, what are their views on the implementation of the unit?
- Does teaching a fifth-grade English course using the active learning approach bring about significant differences with regard to students' academic achievement?
- Does teaching a fifth-grade English course using the active learning approach have any impact on the permanence of the unit learning outcomes?

3. Method
3.1 The research design and procedures
A quasi-experimental research design was employed with experimental and control groups using pre- and post-tests in this study. A quasi-experimental design provides a number of facilities for the researcher to determine control and experimental groups. This design allows the choice of which class is the experimental group and which class is the control group, but it is important that the participants have similar qualities (Karasar, 2012). After it was determined that the pre-test results measuring the preliminary knowledge on the learning outcomes of the fifth-grade "My Town" unit of the control and experimental groups in the study were equal to each other, the implementation phase was applied. In the experimental group, the techniques based on an active learning approach were used, such as games, role-playing, group work, discussion, brainstorming and project work. In the implementation process of active learning techniques, a smart board was also utilized. On the other hand, in the control group, the traditional direct instruction methods were used which depended on the textbook and some visuals. After four weeks of the implementation, both groups took a post-test to measure achievement on the learning outcomes of the unit. Finally, four weeks later, the post-test was administered again to measure the permanence of education.

3.2. Participants
The participants of this study were fifth-grade students in a secondary school in the Elazığ province of Turkey during the fall semester of 2016-2017 academic year. The experimental and the control group of the study consisted of two equal groups which were chosen by a group matching method among 11 fifth-grade classes. The group matching method is the formation of two equivalent groups in terms of group averages of related variables (Büyüköztürk, et .al, 2014, p. 208). The grade point averages of the students were taken into consideration in group matching. The experimental group (n=34) consisted of 16 male and 18 female students, while the control group (n=31) consisted of 19 male and 12 female students.

3.3. Instruments
3.3.1. Semi-structured interview form
During the needs analysis phase of the research, three English teachers and 15 students from the sixth grade were interviewed voluntarily. A semi-structured interview form with four open-ended questions, which were prepared by the researchers, was used to get opinions and suggestions from teachers and students about the chosen unit.

3.3.2. Achievement test
Considering the learning outcomes of the fifth-grade English language teaching curriculum of the Ministry of National Education (MONE, 2016), an achievement test was prepared by the

researchers. The test was applied to the experimental and control groups of the study. The achievement test consists of 38 questions prepared in different question types. To ensure the content validity of the achievement test, expert opinions were received from three English teachers. Content validity defines the extent to which the questions on the test coincide with the learning outcomes that are intended to be measured (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014, p. 117). English language teachers expressed that the questions covered the goals and learning outcomes of the unit. However, it was emphasized in the interviews that the achievement tests of English can be expanded by including different types of questions, such as understanding simple directions; giving directions in a simple way and understanding information about important places. Therefore, the question types of the test were further diversified. Since the achievement test includes questions of different types and scoring, a test-retest method was determined to estimate the reliability of the measurement. The test-retest method is used to calculate measurement reliability. The test re-test method is based on the determination of the relationship between scores of a test applied twice for the same individuals (Aiken, 1991). In this context, a pilot achievement test was conducted twice over a three-week period with a group of 25 students who were in the fifth grade. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the two tests in the study was .83. This result indicates that the stability coefficient of the test is high.

3.4. Implementation

In the study, firstly the needs in the course were determined by applying a semi-structured interview technique to three teachers, who had taught the fifth-grade English course in the previous academic year, and 15 sixth-grade students, who had taken the course in the previous academic year. As a result of the interviews, it was determined that teachers pay attention to the richness of the activities in the course. Teachers have stated that students in this age group can get bored quickly, and it is difficult for the student to give their attention to the course for a long time; therefore, different activities should be applied.

Teachers said that they did not generally have many problems while they were teaching the 'My town' unit, but they also stated that some students had difficulty forming sentences, learning vocabulary, and giving directions found in the unit. When we asked for their recommendations for the course, three teachers highlighted the themes of 'entertaining teaching' and 'activity diversity.' They also emphasized that playing games and using visual materials, such as writing words on cardboard or using flashcards, resulted in more permanence in learning.

We asked the students how they would like to learn in the English course. They generally stated that the course would be more interesting if they could play games, do projects, match English words with picture cards, do enjoyable activities, and have a quiet environment in the class. The themes that students focused on were 'playing games' and 'enjoyable activities.'

To the question "Were there any parts you had difficulty in the 'My town' unit last year?", six students answered that they had no difficulty; four students responded that they had moderate difficulty, and five students stated that they had difficulty. Opinions of the students who had difficulty in this course are as follows:

> Sometimes in *my town* unit, I'm confused about the directions. I make a mistake mostly in describing the places. (S. 2)

…describing a place and making a sentence about these topics. (S. 11)

Yes, it was difficult because I did not know much how they are pronounced. (S. 14)

I was writing according to their pronunciation, but generally, they were wrong. (S. 8)

In the study, the class activities were conducted by the same teacher in both the experimental and control groups over a period of four weeks (12-course hours). In the control group, the regular (classical) teaching process was maintained, that is, the direct instruction method, question-answer techniques, adherence to the textbook and some slide presentations. However, the experimental group played educational games based on the active learning approach, such as role-playing, collaborative group work, and brainstorming techniques, and they used visual aids such as a smart board and the materials that students prepared like direction dialogues and place-direction posters. Firstly, the teacher used activities based on active learning to draw students' interest. Then he conducted activities to increase their understanding and to motivate them to the presented topic. Below are some examples of the activities and visuals used in the lessons:

In the engagement period of the lesson, interesting visual materials (flashcards related to sketches and prepositions about the place and directions) were used, and dialogues were made about them. Then the teacher asked questions to set the structure of the lesson. For example, in the first lesson, students were asked what types of buildings people can commonly see in a city. The teacher explained the kinds of buildings in the city where they live. Then a sketch showing important places of a city was shown to the students, and they were asked what they saw in this sketch (Photograph 1).

Photograph 1
A visual reference to common areas in a city used to draw attention to the lesson
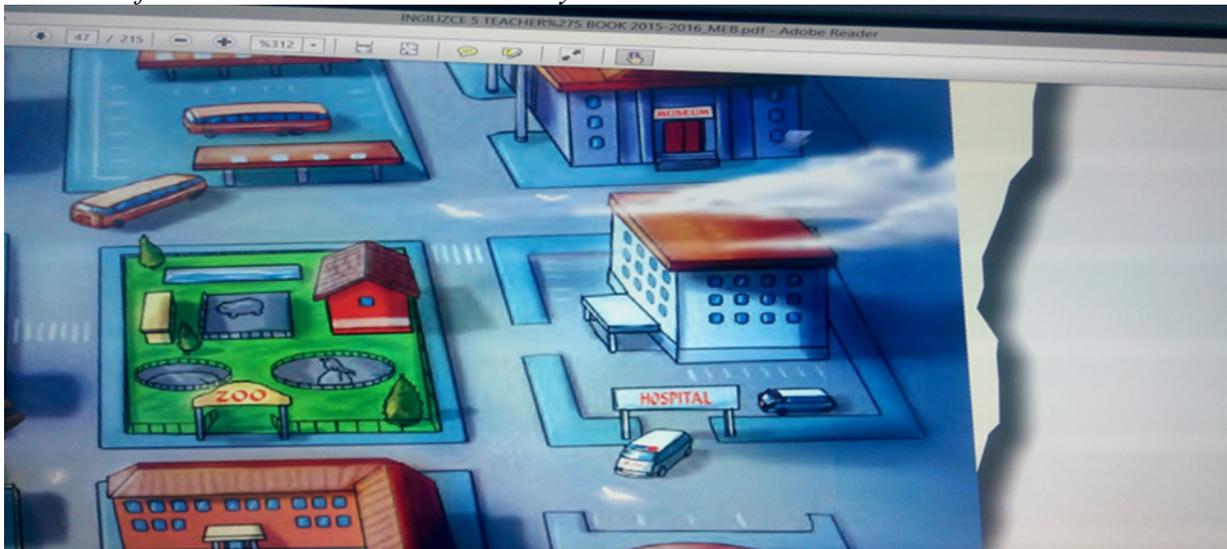

In order to increase understanding and permanence, basic headings and key words supporting the understanding of each lesson were given to the students. Later on, the sketches about the region where the students live were drawn, and examples and analogies were made, such as giving directions or asking place-names about real places. At this stage, lessons were often supported with visuals, such as slides, posters, maps, and flashcards. The researcher asked students to give examples about the presented subject and concept. Throughout the

presentation, short activities such as games, songs, dialogues were done to foster understanding of the related subjects. In this context, the researcher evaluated the students' learning needs. Most important of their needs is the learning by games, which is in line with the "self-regulation of learning" principle related to active learning. According to the needs of the students, the researcher used educational games to practice giving directions, such as 'word bingo,' 'hand bing,' 'chair grabber' and 'finding lost items in classroom.' In addition, especially at the end of the unit (according to the plan), students were asked to make dialogues related to the description of directions to practice socializing and develop pronunciation. Besides, some activities related to these aims were conducted on the whiteboard (Photograph 2) and the smartboard.

Photograph 2.
Example of a schematic drawing on the activity of asking for a place
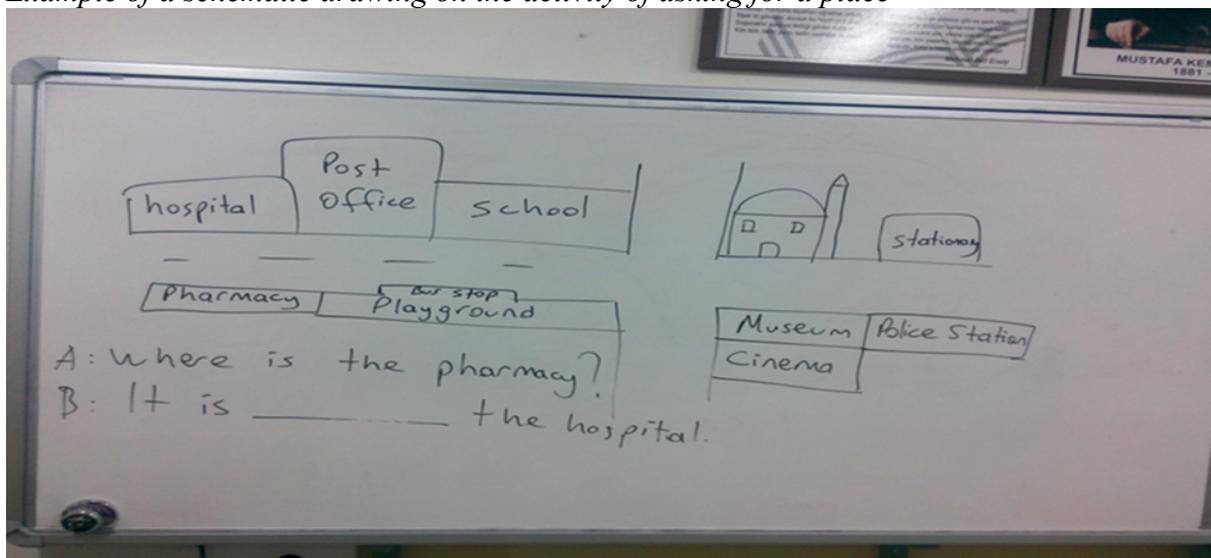
In order to reinforce learning, students were given a problem or a project based on the related subject. They were asked to prepare posters showing buildings, to make dialogues about directions and to evaluate themselves and their friends.

3.5. Analysis of data
In the study, the data collected by semi-structured interviews, which were prepared for the needs analysis, were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The normality analysis was performed with the Shapiro-Wilk test before the analysis of the achievement test results of the experimental and control groups in the study. As a result of the normality analysis, it was concluded that the mean scores of the participants in the experimental (Shapiro-Wilk = .62, p>.05) and the control (Shapiro-Wilk = .58, p>.05) groups showed normal distribution. Therefore, in order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the experimental and the control groups and to examine the effect of active learning on permanence, an independent group t-test was used. The level of significance in the interpretation of the analysis results was accepted as .05.

4. Results
Before examining the effect of active learning activities on student success in learning outcomes of the fifth-grade 'My town' unit, pre-test results of the experimental group and the control group were examined by t-test to discern whether the preliminary knowledge of the

groups showed a meaningful difference. Pre-test averages and t-test results of the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
T-Test results of pre-test scores of experimental and control groups related to learning outcomes of my town unit

Group	N	$\overline{X}$	ss	t	p
Experimental	34	53.39	15.81		
Control	31	52.42	18.80	-.22	.83

p>.05

In the results of the t-test, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups [t (63) = -. 22, p> .05]. In the pre-test made before implementation, the average score of *my town* unit achievement test of the experimental group was 53.39, while the control group was found to be 52.42. These results show that both groups are equal in terms of my town unit learning outcomes.

Whether there is a significant difference between the scores of the experimental group and the control group regarding the learning outcomes of the unit after the implementation was examined by t-test analysis of the post-test results. The t-test results of the post-test scores are given in Table 2.

Table 2
T-Test results of the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups related to learning outcomes of my town unit

Group	N	$\overline{X}$	ss	t	p
Experimental	34	85.21	12.84		
Control	31	74.81	12.02	-3.38	.001

p<.05

In the results obtained, the average of the post-test scores of both groups showed an increase with respect to the pre-test score averages. However, in the post-tests there was a significant difference between the average score of the experimental group ($\overline{X}$= 85.21) and the average of the control group ($\overline{X}$= 74.81). This difference was found to be significant with respect to t-test results [t (63) = - 3.38, p <.05]. It can be said that this difference between the experimental group and the control group is due to the education based on active learning activities in the experimental group.

The permanence of teaching based on the active learning approach in the study was also examined. For this purpose, four weeks after the post-test, the same achievement test was applied again to the control and experimental groups. The results obtained from the independent groups t-test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
T-Test results of permanence test scores of experimental and control groups related to learning outcomes of my town unit

Group	N	$\overline{X}$	ss	t	p
Experimental	34	82.81	12.39		
Control	31	69.90	12.09	-4.26	.00

p<.05

In the permanence test results, both groups showed a decrease according to the post-test score averages. However, this decrease was 2.70% in the experimental group and 4.91% in the control group. In other words, the difference between the achievement test scores between the experimental ($\overline{X}$=82.81) and control ($\overline{X}$=69.90) group was further increased. This difference was also significant with respect to t-test results [t (63) = - 4.26, p <.05]. This result can be interpreted as active learning-based education has a more permanent influence on student achievement than education based on traditional learning methods.

5. Conclusion and Discussion
In this study, the effect of active learning activities on student achievements of fifth-grade English course learning outcomes of *my town* unit was examined. According to the aim of the study, in order to investigate the effect of the active learning approach on the experimental group, active learning based teaching was carried out. Before the implementation, three teachers and 15 students were interviewed about how the implementation could be more effective, and where the students had more difficulty in the unit. Then, the activities were organized in line with the needs analysis, and the activities were implemented. As a result of the study, it was determined that active learning activities contributed to the students in the experimental group in my town unit learning outcomes when the t-test results were taken into consideration.

This result is consistent with other studies in the literature since it shows that the active learning approach positively affects students' achievement. The findings of this research both support the results of previous studies and show similar conclusions (Collins & O'Brien, 2003; Kalem & Fer, 2003; Akbulut, 2004; Aytan, 2011; Koç, 2011; Maden, 2013; Freeman et al., 2014; Edwards, 2015; Çınar & Buyrukçu 2016; Yıldız et al., 2016; Bulut, 2018). Koç (2011) found that active learning is more effective than traditional teaching methods on the success of reading comprehension in Turkish courses. In his study, Aytan (2011) has reached the result that teaching with active learning techniques has developed students' listening skills. In parallel, Maden (2013) stated that instructional work and tactics of active learning have a functional characteristic in teaching basic language skills. Akınoğlu and Özkardeş-Tandoğan (2007) determined that implementation of a problem-based active learning model had positively affected students' academic achievement and their attitudes towards the science course.

Eison (2010) found that the use of active learning instructional strategies in lectures would improve students' learning and motivate them towards lessons. In Kılıç and Gültekin's work (2015), active learning techniques were stated to have a positive effect on developing self-management skills, such as respecting the rights of students' friends, interacting with friends with learning difficulties, being honest, being aware of their feelings, expressing feelings and thoughts and taking responsibility in social studies courses. Similarly, Aydede and Kesercioğlu (2012) found that activities based on active learning have an impact on students' self-learning abilities. In addition, it is understood from the studies that active learning

increases the speed of learning when it is supported by a semi-supervised learning model (Tür, Hakkani-Tür, & Schapire, 2005) and has positive effects on student achievement in science, engineering and mathematics fields (Freeman et al., 2014).

In the study, how the learning process of the courses might be more effective for the students was investigated. Because active learning creates a better learning environment for students and allows learning in different styles and stimulates interest and desire. In the results of the needs analysis and the observations of the implementations made for this purpose, it was determined that students are more active with active learning techniques, such as learning with games, creative drama, and visual material preparation. Similar results in studies by Gökçe (2004) and Aydede and Matyar (2009) show that active learning makes the courses amusing and enjoyable.

In general, this kind of practical teaching process is not preferred by teachers because students' success depends on exam results in Turkey (Can, 2017).In other words, because of the pressure to succeed on national tests, both teachers and students sometimes think that more test questions can be solved instead of spending time on these activities. In this context, the present research shows findings parallel with other research. For example, Kalem and Fer (2003) determined that the atmosphere of active learning had a positive effect on communication and active participation of students, but they also stated that the physical conditions of the classroom cannot be ignored because the class size and crowded classroom affect the teaching process negatively. Likewise, Çınar and Buyrukçu (2016) found that teachers of religious culture and moral education had high regard for the active learning model, but that teachers could not use the active learning methods and techniques too often because they encountered different problems such as time inadequacy and interruption in learning and teaching process.

For this reason, the researcher informed the students that they can play educational games, role play and regulate their own learning during the courses by peer to peer evaluations, making presentations and giving examples. This is actually a natural form of learning that people learn through doing. Edwards (2015) also stated that passive learning approaches in primary and secondary education cannot be withdrawn entirely from classrooms; they should not be as intense as they currently are, and students in this age group need social, cognitive and physical learning activities.

The findings of this study offer some implications for effective teaching and students' learning. In order to increase students' learning and participation, the creation of an active learning environment, which results in a more enjoyable, attractive and participative learning atmosphere, might be accepted as a viable alternative to the traditional teaching process. These inferences made provide teachers with a more specific methodology for students and teachers to shape the learning environment together.

The following recommendations can be made from the results of the study: It can be said that if the active learning activities, which were conducted for the learning outcomes of my town unit, are used by the teachers over an entire school year, a positive development for student achievement could be realized. In this study, active learning activities were applied to a secondary school fifth-grade English course over a four-week period. In further studies, longer studies can be done for different courses and student groups. More in-depth studies might be done to show how and why active learning has an impact on teaching and learning.

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