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Somebody is Watching EFL Classroom:

A project on Improving Students' Performance Level with a Monitoring System*

Suna Akalın

sunaakalin@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to explain a project on supporting students' speaking skills with a monitoring system. The monitoring system is aimed at controlling the usage of English continually in the afternoons, in weekdays, at a room which is being controlled by cameras. The absence of a teacher in the room is more comfortable than the cameras watching. This is a report of the Project implemented in the Department of teaching English, Ataturk University, Erzurum, Turkey. This study was conducted to find out how the usage of English in actual life situations contributes to learners' ability to develop their speaking abilities. The results revealed that learners' teacher's absence anxiety, instructor's attitude toward the speech room, course flexibility in the speech room, course quality, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, are the critical factors affecting learners' perceived satisfaction.

Keywords: Implicit learning, Self-access Study, Monitoring, Speaking, Learning environments

Özet

Bu makale, öğrencilerin konuşma yeteneklerini kamera ile gözlemlene yoluyla geliştirmeye yönelik olarak hazırlanmış bir projeyi anlatmaktadır. Bu proje Atatürk Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Ana Bilim Dalı'nda, Bilimsel Araştırma Projeleri tarafından finanse edilerek yürütülmüştür. Hafta içi her gün öğleden sonraları bir sınıfta öğrencilerin sürekli İngilizce konuşmaları sağlanarak, öğrenciler yerleştirilen kameralar yoluyla sürekli gözlemlenmiştir. Bu proje gerçek yaşam şartlarında İngilizce'nin kullanımının İngilizce öğrenenlerin daha akıcı konuşabilmelerine

* This article is the more comprehensive and modified version of the article, 'Big Brother is Watching EFL Classroom: A Project on Supporting Students' Speaking Skills with a Monitoring System', which was published in Kafkas University Journal of Institute of Social Sciences, in 2009

ne kadar katkı sağladığını araştırmaya yönelik bir çalışmadır. Sonuçlar göstermiştir ki, öğretmenin sınıfta olmayışı kameraların sınıfta oluşundan daha fazla öğrencileri memnun etmiştir. Ayrıca, öğretmenin sınıfta oluşunun öğrenciyi tedirgin etmesi, öğretmenlerin konuşma odasına karşı olan tutumları, odanın kullanılabilirliğinin algılanma düzeyi gibi faktörler, öğrencinin odadan aldığı tatmin duygusunu etkilemektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Örtük öğrenme, Kendi kendine erişim çalışması, Denetleme, Konuşma, Öğrenme çevreleri

1. Introduction

Recent language teaching methods acknowledge that grammar knowledge should be reinforced by letting them practice as much as possible. However, the challenging problem that the students have appears to have little chances of practicing English outside of the classes. Speaking classes are in this sense not satisfactory enough since there is time limit and the authority of a teacher's existence hinders students' effective communication. Most of the students complain that they cannot do anything helpful during their free time and that they kill their free time in the canteen. That is why we have set up a Project in which the students will go to the Speech Room in the afternoons, weekdays, and they will get the chance of using the target language as much as they want.

Monitoring the room with cameras is only for the purpose that only the target language should be used in the room. No other intervention is necessary. This way the utmost need in the department of using the target language other than the classes will be mostly provided. Within the same project, it is aimed that an interactive and flexible atmosphere should help our students learn the target culture and language in a more natural and authentic way. The activities students do and the interaction makes it possible for them to know the target culture by means of the recent magazines and books and even newspapers and via the internet in order to get to the advanced fluency in the target language. Again in the same room the activities like teleconferencing with a class from a university abroad help our students get introduced to the target culture by interacting with their peers in that university. The purpose here is to provide a fluency and practicality in the daily language by getting to know better different cultures in a modern atmosphere with universal activities.

The project implemented a monitoring system of implicit learning, allowing for the provision of more tailored support than had previously been possible. This study focuses on the implementation process of this project and the data gathered from the students about the effective results of the project. Since the very early ages when language teaching became an area of interest, linguists have adopted various approaches and formulated teaching methods of different kinds. The Grammar Translation Method, for instance, was based on the idea that the only way to teach Roman and Greek classics at the time was translating huge books. However, modernisation provided both learners and teachers with broader worldviews and that was also reflected in the methods used in language teaching. Some of them emphasized target language use or student participation while some stressed the role of the learning environment and audio-visual aids. Nevertheless, none of them were totally perfect in practice because their methodologists ignored the specifications of the application process. These specifications include students' multiple intelligences and special skills, their readiness to learn, teacher's attitude towards students, cultural similarities and differences, and an authentic learning environment.

With the aim of gathering all the crucial aspects of language teaching under a certain method, linguists formulated what is called "the eclectic method". Eclecticism, in that sense, allows the language teacher to choose the best techniques that will suit most to his/her students' needs and interests. It also provides the teacher with the opportunity to consider different intelligences and learning types as well as the social distance between the native and the target culture. From this point of view, everything seems possible to create a perfect concept of language teaching, except the basic component: creating an authentic learning environment.

The need for an authentic learning environment is especially high in terms of foreign language teaching. In Turkey, for instance, a Turkish learner of the English language has little or no chance of exposure to the native culture or the native language use. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot totally absorb the language without breaking his psychological barriers through communication with native or native-like speakers. Nevertheless, a qualified language teacher can eradicate most of the disadvantages of such situations by creating a real-like learning environment using the existing opportunities.

"Language laboratories" have been the first examples of specially designed foreign language learning units. Although they are equipped with up-to-date

technological devices, the term “laboratory” forms a negative image in learners’ minds and thus they become artificial places to leave as early as possible.

Designing “language classrooms”, the main concern of this study, have recently been popular in eastern countries, as in Turkey. But the academic studies on this issue are not adequate and informative enough. The principal objective in designing a language classroom is to create an authentic learning environment where students can overcome all the side effects of their psychological barriers.

2. Literature Review

Literature emphasizes the advantages of decorating the language classroom because it sets a better, more comfortable and more enjoyable atmosphere for the students of any age. The importance of peripheral learning has long been discussed and validated since it was first pointed out by Larsen-Freeman (1986). Walsh harshly criticizes the education system as being dull by sticking to textbooks only, saying: “As youth continue to demonstrate their multiliteracies proficiency with new literacies emerging from Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs), much English education – particularly curriculum and teaching – remains largely focused on monomodal, print-only literacy practices, even though students increasingly learn, socialise and work in a digital world”. Prescott (2005) outlines “how to recruit the best decorating corps, your students!” The author claims that involving kids not only saves money and effort on your part, but also teachers agree that it increases kids' sense of involvement and respect. In this study, the author presents 10 teacher-tested ideas for a classroom that shines with color and learning: (1) Train of rules; (2) Poems at your feet; (3) Recycling wall; (4) Room with a view; (5) Foam-board kids; (6) Where in the world?. Bullock (1997) argues that classrooms must provide an appropriately stimulating environment that supports learning and provides teachers and students with a comfortable place to learn. The researchers list requisite factors of the school environment including furniture, aesthetics, color, carpet, building maintenance, decorating detail, comfort, space/design, lighting, classroom elements, instructional items, and professional items.

Since Hymes (1972) and Savignon (1983) have seen the limitations of Chomsky’s competence, there emerged some pedagogical reasons for considering non-traditional self-access support. Many researchers talk about the need for a bridge between ‘public domain’ learning as in a classroom, and ‘private domain’ learning (Reinders, 2007). Although classrooms shelter students from the outside world and provide a safe

environment for learning, a freer atmosphere is needed for the potential to make links with the outside world through flexible access to a wide range of (possibly) more authentic materials and opportunities for practice. In practice, however, this does not always happen. In our case we wanted to take up the challenge of integrating English learning more into students' free time activities apart from the classroom activities by making study opportunities available more flexibly. Krashen (1982) claims that learners only learn through unconscious acquisition. Learning, he claims, which is conscious, does not lead to acquisition, which is unconscious, and acts only as a monitor. Brown (1987) encourages language teachers to be more innovative by quoting: "Numerous materials and techniques-readings, films, simulations games, role-plays, culture assimilators, 'culture capsules', and 'culturgrams'-are now available to language teachers to assist them in the process of acculturation in the classroom".

On the other hand, more recently, Varnosfadrani (2009) claims that developmental early features are better learned with explicit correction and developmental late features with implicit correction. To be more moderate, explicit learning should be supported by some implicit activities in the advanced level and this may not be limited to classroom-limited activities. Usually, formal aspects of language are taught quite successfully at the advanced level but the informal daily language cannot be fully conveyed to the students in school settings. At this point, the implementation of the speech room is of crucial importance. Ellis (2006) indicates that metalinguistic explanation benefited implicit as well as explicit knowledge and point to the importance of including measures of both types of knowledge in experimental studies.

Chaudron, (1977), Doughty (1994) and others have emphasized the importance of feedback and Chaudron developed a model that may be of use to both teachers and students in learning to identify corrective techniques and to be sensitive to the function of various kinds of feedback. Since this study also tries to be of use to learners, we could use such feedback in Speech Room too. Chaudron (1988) also reveals limitations both of research findings and of the methodology for classroom-oriented research. Doughty (1994) also suggests communicative focus on form. Gass (1997), Long (1997), and Mackey (1988) all accept that language is constructed in social interaction. Lyster (1998b, 1997) has come to recognize that foreign language classroom is a myriad. Stern (1990), Swain (1998) and Krashen (1982) all agree that conventional language teaching should be substituted with communicative – experiential procedures and natural language use. Chaudron (1988) says the most pressing need at the moment is for contextualized

research, that is, research that is carried out in real classrooms, not in simulated environments that are constituted for the purposes, not of teaching and learning, but of research.

Horowitz (1988) mentions that integrating Interactive Response System (IRS) with a classroom computer is an inexpensive and promising means to overcoming or alleviating obstacles of in-class teacher-student and peer interactions. Chun (1994) alerts the importance of learners' accessing foreign language documents and communicating with native speakers with computer labs, internet and e-mail. Coverdale-Jones (2000) say the benefits of computer technology and internet make them a potentially ideal tool for learning languages, communicating, and community building. Kern (1995) studies the effect of language students' synchronous interaction via a local computer network. The research confirms previous findings in the advantage of using similar applications, and indicates that students and teachers hold a generally positive view towards this technology integration into the classroom. Recently interest has grown concerning the use of online communication for language teaching. Warschauer (1997) points out that this growing interest in computer-mediated collaborative language learning has not been matched by adequate research and theory.

This study introduces a conceptual framework for understanding the role of computer-mediated interaction based on a sociocultural analysis of the relationship among text, talk, and learning. Then it analyzes current research according to five features particular to online interaction. All this research makes it proper to implement a project on a classroom in which students can freely and actively practise their language skills independent of a teacher .

3. Speech Room

There has always been a demand for a space other than classrooms in which they could move around more freely and self-learn at the ELT department. It was a great idea to encourage students to use more English and to offer a friendly and fun environment for them to do so using less formal types of language learning materials. After all the technological equipment was designed, the process of decorating the class with authentic materials has been put into application. Some people would NOT like to be watched by a video, but that is different for everyone. As for measuring the effectiveness of this type of intervention, fluency would be, most probably, one of the criteria and also looking at the additional factors, such as motivation and/or the students' own perceptions of their

learning (e.g. do they enjoy their English learning more in this way), and their autonomy - does using English in this way help them self-direct their learning? would provide considerable data. So we thought only a multi-faceted approach like this would fully do justice to our intervention. It would be challenging, but worthwhile. One important point to consider was what exactly our 'intervention' would be. Is it the activities the students engage in, in the room? Or is it the 'big brother' monitoring? We chose the latter type of intervention but this would be difficult to investigate. Some people may question the use of this type of monitoring as it seems to conflict with the more autonomy-oriented activities, and seems more like a classroom-type environment; but it should be emphasized here that the intervention is limited only to warning the students when they use any other language but English. They can talk freely and move around the room as they want unless there is any offensive speech or aggressive action. The intervention is limited only to these two conditions. This also removes the tension of the existence of a teacher in the classroom and makes it possible for the teacher in the monitoring room to control the atmosphere without being actually in the classroom.

3.1 Services offered in the Speech Room

There are five main types of support offered at Speech Room. All weekdays in the afternoons, the students can use the Speech Room. The activities include satellite dish broadcasts of TV channels, BBC and CNN. Students enjoy free time by practising English. Seminars and conferences can be delivered; students may prepare a subject beforehand to deliver a speech to the rest of the room, watching movies in English, meeting with classes from the target culture universities via internet using language learning materials in the room. Not all students make use of all. Many students only come to make use of the materials. Those with more complex learning needs are encouraged to watch movies without translation. There is no predetermined order in which students make use of these services. Some students only come and see the movies and never use the materials, some use the materials first before meeting with the other students, and others hardly ever utter a word. Only being the class is enough for some of them.

4. Research

At the end of the two-month process of hard work, the participants created an ideal language classroom and called it “the speech room”. The renovations can be listed as below:

1. Continuous internet connection was set up in the class computer that also enabled the students to make presentations.

2. A teleconference system was set up by the use of the already existing satellite connection.

3. The walls and columns were covered with pin boards (the largest wall consisted of texts about the differences between the British English and the American English; the columns were decorated with enjoyable and informative visuals appealing to students' interests)

4. A class library was set up (with English classics, novels, fairy tales and any possible sources that students may need)

5. Near the library, a shelf was hung on the wall for newspapers and magazines in English (the students could not subscribe to a newspaper or magazine because of financial problems)

6. An elaborate archive was formed with carefully chosen films, music CDs and educational programmes.

7. A small word box and a wish box are among the small details.

Table 1. The details of the renovations listed above

GROUPS	I. GROUP	II. GROUP	III. GROUP	IV. GROUP
SUBJECT MATTER	British English	American English	Class library & Columns	Interesting Texts
C O N T R I B U T I O N S	British history British culture: -traditional dishes/drinks -family life -idioms -superstitions British education system Pronunciation differences	Historical background of American English American culture: -traditional clothes -family life Cultural/educational/ linguistic differences between the USA and the Great Britain Pronunciation differences	Library: -20-25 English classics -dictionaries -an archive of music/educational programmes Newspaper and magazine shelf Funny corner -anecdotes Film corner: -posters & CDs Caricature corner Horoscope corner Word box	2011 Universiade Winter Games Sports news Do you know these? Language teaching methodology News of education What is dyscalculia?

When the decoration project was over, the participants wanted to ask others to comment on the work. However, it was the end of the second semester, the time for final exams, and they could not get substantial reaction (positive or negative) as they had expected.

In the next semester (the second half of the year 2009), the participants decided to ask for the comments of the other students in the same department. Some comments were gathered through oral interviews while some were deduced from the short notes written by those who had courses in that “speech room”. Here are a few of these comments:

“That’s my first experience to attend a speech room. The room is designed marvellously and the technological devices are in a perfect harmony with the rest.”

“The texts on the walls are full of new and enjoyable information and thus we spent most of our break time reading them.”

“Especially the sound system and cameras are carefully designed. However, the texts and newspapers should be renewed and I think we can do this together.”

As one can understand from these comments, most of the students are pleased with the design. For some it is a new experience to have courses in such a room, but some are experienced enough to criticise inadequacies. Besides, they are aware of the necessity to renew the written texts and to increase the amount of magazines and newspapers from time to time.

Some negative comments about the camera-microphone system were also made because of misunderstandings by the newcomers. They supposed that the cameras and the microphone were always recording the lectures and that made them uncomfortable during especially the speaking courses. Nevertheless, the researcher gave the information that those systems are turned on when the lecturer finds it necessary.

4.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 63 third-year undergraduate students majoring in English Language Teaching Department at Ataturk University in Turkey. They are going to be English teachers in one year. They had previously carried out many small group projects and were familiar with the concept of such activities. Besides, they had attended courses related to language teaching methodology and language acquisition. The participants were also aware of the necessities of a good language learning environment because everyone in the class had already given examples of the application of the eclectic method within temporary classroom settings. They are also taught to demand their own language classroom to design and decorate as an English classroom when they will be appointed to a primary education school in the national education system. They will not teach at a classroom in which children had already had a Geography lesson or Maths then English but they will let their students in the classroom like a house owner

accepting his/her guests. Consequently, in addition to the teaching of basic four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Sarıçoban, 2000), this study claims that the language teachers of the future should also be trained for designing and decorating language classrooms as a necessary component of the teaching of the basic skills.

For an effective coordination, the participants were divided into four main groups at the beginning of the two-month process. Each group was going to work on a different part of the language classroom and the group members attended to each group considering their interests and capabilities.

4.2. Procedures

This study of designing and decorating a language classroom consisted of two phases: the preparation phase and the operation phase.

At the beginning of the preparation phase, the participants spent two courses' time in the classroom to be decorated with the aim of deciding on the changes and renovations. In the light of their background knowledge, the participants discussed on the project and exchanged ideas about the necessities of a language classroom. At that point, they drafted a framework like below and were divided into four groups according to the subject matters.

1. Continuous network connection
2. A class library and archive
3. Pin boards (to have print everywhere for an ideal periphery)
4. Subscription to newspapers and magazines in English
5. Coffee, tea, music CDs and a changeable sitting arrangement etc. to create a comfortable atmosphere

It should be noted that the camera and voice systems to record the lectures when necessary and the satellite connection to English channels had been installed beforehand by the authorities under a project Akalın (2009) has outlined.

During the next four weeks, the participants analysed many different studies carried out before on the same subject. They searched all the possible resources to find sample studies and research as a literature review to shed light on the way they will follow during the project. In the meantime, some of them volunteered to share with their friends the information they collected from various academic studies. Their presentations took place within the classroom in question and this enabled the participants to realize and comment on the different sides of the matter via long-lasting discussions.

After the preparation phase, during which the participants built an overall concept for the project, they were ready for the operation phase. This three-week period required both mental and physical effort as the participants were to think over the details and create the best peripheral items. Accordingly, group meetings were held two or three times a week to review what had been done and to decide on what to do next within a good coordination.

Nearly all the participants were aware of their responsibilities within their groups and so within the whole project. However, they faced financial problems most of which they solved themselves with the help of the coordinator (the lecturer and researcher in that case).

As seen in table 1, pre-test mean score of control group was 54,58, while post-test mean score of the control group was 65,41. On the other hand, pre-test score of experimental group was 63,33, yet post-test score of it was 85,83. These scores indicate that there was an improvement between pre-test and post-test scores of both groups, yet even though there was no real difference between pre-test scores of both groups in terms of their speaking skill, also recognizable difference between post-test scores of both groups is obvious. However, students who attended the speech room sessions were more successful than students who attended regular classes. In addition pre-test median score of control group increased (57,50) to 60,00 in post-test score. Pre-test median score of experimental group increased (65,00) to 90.00 in post-test score. The same situation is also available for mode scores of both groups. Pre-test mode score of control group remained same (60.00). On the other hand, pre-test mode score of experimental group increased (70.00) to 90.00 in post-test scores.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test scores of groups

Group	n	Mean	Mean Difference	Median	Mode	Z	Sig.
Pre-test Control Group	24	54.583		57.50	60.00	-	
Pre-test Exp. Group	24	63.333	8.750	65.00	70.00	2.504	0.012
Post-test Control Group	24	65.416		60.00	60.00	-	
Post-test Exp. Group	24	85.833	20.417	90.00	90.00	4.257	0.000

P=< 0.05 (Z=1.96)

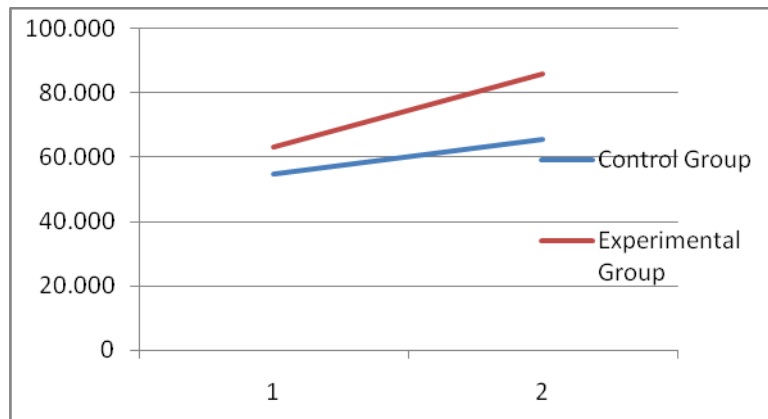


Figure 1. pre-test and post-test score level for experimental and control group

This graph shows the experimental group (the red line) increases from a 63.333 pre-test score to a 85.833 post-test score, while the blue line of the control group increases less from 54.583 pre-test score to 65.416 post-test score. This was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of experimental group and a significant difference again was seen in terms of post-test scores between experimental group and control group. In conclusion, it can be said that the speech room has an effect on learners' speaking abilities.

As for the qualitative data, students were also asked for some open ended questions investigating their views about the contributions of the speech room. The students stated that they liked the room and its function and this room helped strengthen their self-confidence. They also pointed out that they learned many new phenomena about English both implicitly and explicitly and continue to attend the room.

5. Conclusion

Despite the years spent applying different teaching methods, which are not totally perfect in practice, linguists are now aware of the fact that the ideal way of language teaching is the eclectic method. For an eclectic method to reach the full success, the educators should create an authentic learning environment. The results of this study support that the act of creating a language classroom should be done in coordination with the students who will use it. The equipments and even the small details should be decided and prepared through mutual discussions and negotiations. Students' interests should be reflected in every inch of the classroom and every piece of the decoration should serve their needs and the necessities of a good language learning environment.

Overall, the comments reflect a positive and encouraging attitude towards the activation of the room more fully in the department. The students all agree with the effectiveness of the project, though they may be individually reluctant to attend the sessions for reasons for being shy in interactive communication. The key concerns in self-access and implicit learning are to develop students' ability to learn autonomously and interactively, to raise their awareness, to motivate them, and a range of other outcomes that cannot easily be measured.

This study helps us to get a comprehensive picture of the work students do in a flexible environment as in the Speech Room. By looking at how students respond for example to the prompts they receive from the Speech Room and whether or not their learning behavior changes over time, we can gauge changes in how students approach their independent language learning. By looking at how the students complete and revise their language learning as in speech and their needs we can identify changes in their awareness. Although much progress has been made, much exciting work still lies ahead.

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Suna Akalın is an Assistant Professor at Erzurum Ataturk University. Her areas of expertise and interest include linguistics, language teaching methodology, teacher education, language acquisition, computer assisted language learning, mentoring, macro teaching.

Appendix One: The results of pre-tests and post-Tests

Mann-Whitney Test						
Ranks						
	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank		
Pre-Test Scores of Groups	Experimental	24	29.48	707.50		
	Control	24	19.52	468.50		
	Total	48				
Ranks						
	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank		
Post-Test Scores of Groups	Experimental	24	32.96	791.00		
	Control	24	16.04	385.00		
	Total	48				
Group Statistics						
	Groups	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Min	Max
Pre-test	Control Group	24	54.583	12.240	30	75
	Experimental Group	24	63.333	9.286	40	80
Post-test	Control Group	24	65.416	15.316	40	90
	Experimental Group	24	85.833	10.179	70	100
Test Statistics						
		Pre-test	Post-test			
Mann-Whitney U		168.500	85.000			
Wilcoxon W		468.500	385.000			
Z		-2.504	-4.257			
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		0.012	0.000			

Appendix 2: Standard deviation and mean of each item in the questionnaire

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
1- I enjoyed the speech room				
24	1.00	5.00	3,6250	1,34528
2- I learned a lot from the speech room activities				
24	1.00	5.00	3,5417	1,31807
3- I found that the speech room was well presented.				
24	1.00	5.00	3,9167	,88055
4- I gained confidence in my ability to use the speech room for learning purposes				
24	1.00	5.00	3,5417	1,14129
5- The experience in speech room language learning made this department more interesting				
24	1.00	5.00	3,9167	1,1007
6- I would like to use more speech room language learning activities during class time				
24	1.00	5.00	3,4167	1,24819
7- I would like to access speech room myself outside class time				
24	1.00	5.00	3,2500	1,15156
8- I am comfortable with the cameras in the speech room				
24	1.00	5.00	2.5000	1,14208
9- I feel bad about being watched in the speech room				
24	1.00	5.00	3,1667	1,34056
10- I enjoyed the absence of a teacher in the classroom				
24	1.00	5.00	3,2917	1,36666