



# Education Quarterly Reviews

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**Karaosmanoğlu, G., & Metinnam, I. (2022). Improvisation Strategies in Online Drama Lesson. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, Vol.5 Special Issue 2: Current Education Research in Turkey, 602-616.**

ISSN 2621-5799

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1993.05.04.647

The online version of this article can be found at:  
**<https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>**

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Published by:  
The Asian Institute of Research

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# Improvisation Strategies in Online Drama Lesson

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## Abstract

In drama lessons based on improvisation and role playing, participants express themselves spontaneously, take on various roles and act out by pretending. With improvisation, which is one of the two basic strategies used together with role playing in drama, the participants act in accordance with the designed dramatic fiction. The goal of this research is to determine opinions of the participants about the improvisations performed in online drama lessons. It was attempted in this context to show the influence of participants and instructors on improvisation by determining which strategies were employed throughout the online drama lesson. In this study, interpretative qualitative research design was used and the experiences of the participants were tried to be explored, made comprehensible and interpreted. Participants consist of 21 undergraduate students studying in different departments who attended online drama lessons at Ankara University in 2021-2022 academic year. Participants answered the questions in the "*Assessment Form for Improvisations in Digital Platform*" online. The data obtained in the research were analyzed with the descriptive analysis, and the findings were explained in accordance with the determined themes and categories. The results showed that the participants used some strategies before and during the improvisation, and these strategies made improvisations more qualified. Participants also stated that while improvising on the digital platform, some situations have positive or negative effects, and they try to adapt themselves according to these situations. The research also reveals that the films watched and the topics discussed during lessons facilitate the participants to take roles while improvising, and the examples given about the elements of drama contribute to the improvisation. According to the results, it is recommended to inform the participants before the improvisations in online drama lesson, to create the dramatic fiction with the participants and to make the improvisations in accordance with this dramatic fiction. The elements of drama may be discussed, short films and feature-length films can be shown, examples can be offered, and improvisations can be made more qualified throughout the drama lesson.

**Keywords:** Online Drama Lesson, Improvisation, Digital Platform, Improvisation Strategies, Improvisation in Online Drama Lesson

## 1. Introduction

With Covid-19 process, many lessons have started to be taught on digital platforms. One of these lessons is drama. In drama lessons based on improvisation, role-playing, the participants express themselves spontaneously, take on various roles and by pretending (Adıgüzel, 2021). One of the basic strategies used in drama lessons is improvisation, which in its simplest definition means play without a script (Way, 1967). Participants take on various roles and improvise using these strategies. In drama lessons, a dramatic fiction is designed by the drama

teacher, the participants act in accordance with this dramatic fiction: They ask various questions in or out of the role, and they make various discoveries by following these questions. In this way, improvisation acts as a research tool, a magnifying glass or a lens in the hands of the participants and the drama teacher. Participants take this artistic magnifying glass in their hands and begin to examine different situations, human relations. In this research process, they try to explore various attitudes and reactions, feelings and thoughts. Participants who improvise begin to learn and discover more than they know in this process. Because improvisation is not just an artistic style or acting strategy. Beyond these, it is an independent and transformative way of being and doing something that dynamically penetrates many layers of the person performing the improvisation (Frost and Yarrow, 1989). As such, improvisation can be defined as a comprehensive inquiry, research and discovery process regarding human experience.

Improvisation is not only a strategy applied together with role playing in traditionally accepted mainstream applications of drama, but also an educational and artistic tool that should be used effectively in classrooms (Hornbrook, 1989). From the birth of theater in ancient Greece and the mimesis as a way of understanding human nature, the elements of popular theater of the Commedia dell'Arte and the aesthetic refinement generated by the rigors of French classicism, to the spectacular experimental forms of the twentieth century and its integration as a pedagogical method, improvisation has always accompanied theater, as a revelation of playfulness and freedom of creative expression, based on study and continuous training (Hristu, 2020). Especially with the 20th century, improvisation has become the main tool for creating experimental art forms, especially in the fields of music and dance, by going beyond the boundaries of theatrical art (Frost ve Yarrow, 1998). It can be said that such studies emerged in the 1960s when postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon opened up for discussion the relationship of "truth, language with thought and the world, reason with science and technology, human nature with the self, the individual with the group, power with the oppressed, and aesthetics with creativity" (Cited from Linn, 1996; Slovic, 2020). There is a consensus that a participatory approach, in which the audience is invited to an increasing number of artworks since the 1960s, has emerged, and that this understanding dominates artistic production and exhibition (Stott, 2015). Participation in the arts has emerged in literature as well as theater, dance and music. The famous literary critic Roland Barthes introduced the concept of "scriptable text" as a text that demands the reader's contribution for its completion. This kind of relationship that the reader establishes with the text requires the active cooperation of the reader with the text, the reader becoming a producer of the text rather than a consumer. The concept of scriptable text put forward by Barthes corresponds to the concept of "process" in drama as a new dramatic form (Haseman, 1991). Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1999) also emphasizes problem solving rather than emphasizing plot and character development, as in the conventional form of drama in the dramatic arts. The purpose of drama studies is not to "make a theater" or "to perform" in the conventional sense; It is to understand a historical event on a fictional plane and through improvisation, to discover the world of a novel, to experience the conflict between different cultural groups, to gain information about how the other sees the world by making use of the possibilities of the art used. In this context, it can be stated that drama, which is a teaching method as well as an artistic form, is applied with a production approach adopted by new art forms, as it opens the traditional teacher-student, conventional theater-interactive performance dichotomies to discussion, similar to the dichotomies opened for discussion with postmodernism. The educational and artistic foundations of drama should be sought in its process-oriented nature, which brings with it "ambiguity". Because group members, who move from a starting point in a certain target focus, are not fully aware of what they will encounter in the next stages of the process. In the later stages, the ambiguity, which is the source of the "productive tension", which Heathcote (1991) defines as "leaving to chance something that cannot be completely controlled in the drama process" and that binds the group members to the process, is tried to be clarified with improvisations. The main reason for this ambiguity and the tension it creates is the absence of a completely written text in the drama processes. Therefore, improvisation, which has a long tradition, stands out as a technique that should be included in drama studies as well as forming the basis of them (Haseman, 1991). If we compare improvisation to a way, the improvisation in the drama lesson are both the elements that contribute to the progress of the process and the process itself. It is observed that the participants and the drama teacher look for answers to some questions with improvisation in role, and when they go out of improvisation, they combine the clues for the questions by making aesthetic (for the form of improvisation), intellectual (for the subject discussed in improvisation), and educational assessment (for the objectives and achievements of the drama lesson). Drama also gives participants the opportunity to explore their emotions. The participants take part in the drama work and at the same time they begin to understand how people in the society feel. Similar to Heathcote (1991), who defines improvisation as "*putting*

*yourself in other people's shoes and using personal experiences to help you understand their point of view,"* participants who improvise in drama lesson put themselves in other people's shoes, trying to think and feel like them.

*"Improvisation, which has never been determined before or is little designed, is spontaneous, takes place freely and exists with people"* (Adıgüzel, 2019) refers to both a strategy and the activity in which the strategy is used. Improvisation, which is not planned in advance and contains ambiguity, creates a feeling of surprise in audience (Metinnam and Karaosmanoğlu, 2021). Improvisation also requires spontaneous speaking and acting without rehearsing by identifying a role (Baldwin, 2019). In drama lessons, the participants try to solve the existing problem by improvising and by taking the roles of different people and determining a place. It can be said that improvisation is both a problem-solving activity and a tool or form used to solve the problem. Improvisation, like other art forms, has certain structuring principles. As an improvised form with principles such as determining, maintaining or terminating a role, it is an effective tool that participants use to explore the solution of certain problems in dramatic fiction.

When participants are going to improvise, they first pull out any situation from the dramatic fiction. This is conveyed to the participants by the drama teacher verbally, with a text, with sound or with a visual (photo, picture, short film, cinema, etc.) or the participants determine this situation themselves. In the improvisation work that can be done individually, in pairs or in groups, the participants try to convey the situation given to them with their voices, gestures and facial expressions or speech to the participants who are integrated audiences. As such, it can be defined as an impromptu performance, animation or a show. However, at this point, the essential thing is to present the improvised content on the axis where creativity, imagination, spontaneity and pretending intersect. It can be said that improvisation should be structured instead of defining improvisation as a performance that is conveyed to the audience in an impromptu manner. In drama lessons, improvisation is not structured step by step, its beginning is determined by the participants or the drama teacher, the middle and the end are not clear. However, it will be meaningful if the improvisation is carried out in accordance with the dramatic fiction, and if it clarifies a question that needs to be answered within the fiction or a curious or suspicious situation.

It can be said that the space where the improvisation takes place has both a physical and a dramatic quality, and the two affect each other. The physical features of the space, defined as the stage or the aesthetic space, should be structured in accordance with the improvisation of the "reserved for improvisation" area. The items to be used in improvisation, the chairs or the objects used by the participants to take the roles constitute this physical space. However, it is a fact that there is no obligation to use similar physical objects in improvisation. Participants can improvise as if there are objects, things, or people they verbalize by pretending. The dramatic or fictional quality of the space, on the other hand, comes into being in the process that improvisers or audiences create in their minds and put their imagination and creativity to work. For instance, a participant in role asked, *"See that tree over there?"*, the integrated audiences create that tree in their minds, even though there is no physical tree in the direction pointed. Along with the COVID-19, digital platforms have also been added to these places. Participants do various activities, take roles and improvise in drama classes held in digital spaces. The digital platform, which has a different meaning from face-to-face drama studies, also directly or indirectly, positively or negatively affects the improvisation studies. For this reason, it is thought that it is important to determine the opinions of the participants about the improvisation studies in digital platforms and to reveal how the participants define the digital environment and the improvisation studies carried out in this environment in order to increase the quality of the future drama studies. The aim of this research is to determine the opinions of the participants about the improvisations made in the digital platforms. For this purpose, answers to the following questions will be sought:

- Which strategies did the participants improvising in the digital platform use before improvising?
- Which strategies did the participants improvising in the digital platform use during improvisation?
- What are the situations that affect the participants positively or negatively in the improvisations made in the digital platform?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Research Design*

In this research, it is aimed to evaluate and interpret the improvisations carried out in the digital platform. During the research, participants reflected their perspectives and experiences on improvisation, and shared their thoughts on which strategies they used before and during improvisation. Participants gave examples of positive and negative situations they encountered in improvisations. As such, the research can be defined as an interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In the research, the experiences of the participants who improvised in the digital platform were tried to be discovered, made understandable and interpreted. It was tried to interpret how the participants interpreted their experiences, how they construct the world around them semantically, and how they made sense of their experiences, based on the feature of "individuals are based on the idea that they construct reality in interaction with their social world", which is the most characteristic feature of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Patton (2015); The common question of studies constructed using basic qualitative research is "*What are the practical implications and useful applications of what we can learn about this topic or problem?*". The main reason for using basic qualitative research in this study is to understand and increase the application possibilities of improvisation, which is the basic strategy in drama studies, which started to be applied online intensively with COVID-19. It is thought that the views of the participants who took the drama lesson will contribute to this purpose, and the results obtained with the designed and implemented online drama lesson program will make the application examples more understandable. For this reason, information about the content of the lesson and the context of the improvisations performed in the lesson is given below:

### **Online Drama Lesson Program**

The online drama lesson topics can be expressed as "*Theoretical information about drama, Similarities and differences between drama and theater, Elements of drama, Improvisation and role-playing strategies, Improvisations, Analysis of movies in accordance with the elements of drama, and Improvisations related daily life*". Practical studies were carried out after the lectures were made with the participants in accordance with the theoretical dimension of drama. The following situations were used in the improvisation studies carried out in the online drama lesson. Some situations were determined by the drama teacher, while others were designed with the participants. The participants were asked questions regarding the following situations, which can be considered as the pretext or the beginning of the dramatic fiction; The elements of drama such as human context, role, space, time, tension, atmosphere, focus and symbol were discussed.

- When the fisherman, who is married and has two children, goes to his boat, where he earns his living by fishing, he encounters a very strong storm. The fisherman owes it to dangerous people. Today is the last day of payment. He remains undecided whether to go fishing.
- After a while, a family that does not consume anything other than broccoli moves to the neighborhood where people who only like to eat cauliflower live. The neighbor, who hospitably welcomes the family, changes his/her attitude when he/she learns the details of broccoli.
- The gardener who has been tending the roses in the garden of a large house for many years learns that the new owner of the house has decided to cut the roses and organize the garden for a different purpose. The rose garden is very important for the gardener. Because the roses are inherited from the former owner of the house.
- Students who go to the library to prepare for the exams begin to argue with the people listening to loud music on their headphones.
- The customer, who realizes that the yoghurt he/she bought from the market has passed its expiry date, takes the yoghurt back and wants to return it. But the cashier doesn't want to take the yogurt back.
- A university student who is not happy in her department wants to take the university exam again, but his/her family is against this situation.
- Living in a town where dancing is prohibited, a young woman dreams of becoming a dancer. That's why she does secret dance practice. One day, one of the inhabitants of the town sees her. He runs to inform the others.
- A villager living in the Amazon Jungle of South America is forced to leave his village due to climate change. He lost his wife a year ago. They migrate to a big city with their three children. However, the city does not welcome them very warmly.
- A university student hides his real financial situation from his friends. An unexpected coincidence reveals the truth. The relationship of the student with his friends is no longer the same as before.

## 2.2. Participation Characteristics

During the COVID-19, many lessons were held in a digital space, and educators and students participated in these lessons by using the possibilities of the digital environment. In the lessons, various possibilities of the digital platform, and tools such as camera, microphone, chat box, waiting room were used to enrich the lesson. The participants of the research consist of 21 undergraduate students (17 women, 4 men) studying at different departments at Ankara University, who attended the online drama lessons in the 2021-2022 academic year. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 35. All of the students who continue their undergraduate and associate degrees in the departments of different faculties are in the first year. In order to create the study group, the purposeful sampling technique, which was created with examples that would present the richest and closest data in the focus of the research, was used (Yin, 2016). The students included in the study group were required to have chosen the drama course definitively. The faculties and departments of the students are given in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Faculties and departments of the participants

Faculty	Department
Faculty of Language, History and Geography	Turkish Language and Literature (3), Folklore (2), Arabic Language and Literature (1), Anthropology (1), Korean Language and Literature (1), Italian Language and Literature (1)
Faculty of Science	Physics (1)
GAMA Vocational School	Alternative Energy Resources (1), Electricity and Energy (1)
Faculty of Nursing	Midwifery (1)
Faculty of Law	Law (1)
Faculty of Health Sciences	Child Development (1), Health Management (1)
Health Services Vocational School	Medical Documentation and Secretarial (1)
Faculty of Applied Sciences	Real Estate Development and Management (1)
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	Veterinary (3)

It can be said that the pre-research drama experiences of the participants were quite limited. 15 participants had not participated in the drama study before. One of the participants took drama lessons in primary school, two of them participated in improvisation studies before, and three of them took part in the theater group in secondary school, high school or university.

## 2.3. Data Collection Tools and Data Collection

Data were collected online with "*Assessment Form for Improvisations in Digital Platform*" which was developed considering the research questions<sup>1</sup>. The interview is carried out in order to express a behavior, action, belief or point of view of the person participating in the study (Yin, 2016). In this study, it was aimed to reveal the perspectives and evaluations of the participants regarding the improvisations they made in online drama lessons through an interview. Opinions were received from two experts working in the field of drama during the preparation of the form, from an expert who had experience in collecting data through interviews in qualitative research processes, and from a language expert who reviewed the interview form with the focus of language and expression. The electronic link address of the interview form, which was finalized in line with the expert opinions

<sup>1</sup> The research process was carried out by the Ankara University Ethics Committee within the framework of the ethics committee decision dated 25/04/2022 and numbered 10/121.

received and transferred to the online environment, was shared in the communication groups of the sample participants, and the participants were expected to answer the questions. The participants consisted of students who decided to take the elective drama course, whose registration was finalized and who participated in the course.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by descriptive analysis, and the findings were explained according to the determined themes and categories. The data were summarized and interpreted according to the previously determined themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). The data obtained from the participants' opinions were categorized according to the determined themes and the relationship between the codes, and the created categories were explained in detail under the themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, the relationship between the research problem and the purpose of the study was taken into consideration, and a sample selection was made in accordance with this relationship. In addition, data collection tools were developed to be relevant to the purpose of the study to ensure validity. All the data were recorded in reliable ways (the interview form created in the electronic environment records all the writing as soon as it is answered), deciphered without any intervention, the opinions of the participants were conveyed as they were, and an objective point of view was tried to be made by minimizing the researcher bias. In addition, procedures such as data analysis and presentation were carried out considering the purpose of the research. One of the most common methods used to ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative research and to strengthen its credibility in this way is triangulation (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Triangulation/diversification can be performed by employing any of the ways such as data sources, researchers working on the same research, the theoretical approaches and methods to be used while interpreting the data set (Yin, 2016; Patton, 2015). In this study, a variation was made on the data analyzes carried out independently by the researchers working on the research, and an opinion was taken from another expert about the data analysis. Thus, it was tried to ensure consistency between codes, categories and themes. Because a qualitative research should be able to convey the reality it tries to describe at the highest possible level. This is called the reality value of the work (Noble & Smith, 2015). Consistency between coders is a part of the strategies applied to reflect the reality that qualitative research deals with in the most accurate way. In addition, direct quotations containing the views of the participants supporting the themes were included in order to strengthen the reliability of the research. These quotations were chosen with care to show the variety in the sample. While interpreting the direct quotations, the prejudices of the researchers were suspended as much as possible and the reality to be reflected was tried to be conveyed in all its dimensions. Another strategy to increase the validity, reliability and credibility of qualitative research is applicability/transferability. The results of a qualitative research should be such that it can be a source for other research and can be used by other researchers (Noble & Smith, 2015). In order for the results of the study to be a source for new research in the literature, attention was paid to associating the categories and themes with the common concepts used in the literature, and the findings were tried to be presented by associating them with the main discussions in the literature.

### 3. Results

In this section, the findings obtained as a result of the analysis of the research data, the themes and categories related to the findings are given. As a result of the content analysis of the qualitative data in the research, the themes and categories in *Table 2* were reached.

Table 2: Themes and categories created with the results obtained

Themes	Categories
Strategies Before Improvisation	Conversations about elements of drama
	Information sharing about dramatic fiction
	Talking about conflict/tension resolution
	Making movie analysis
Strategies During Improvisation	Voice and breathing exercises
	Making use of the elements of the drama

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating dramatic fiction (Thinking about dramatic fiction)</li> <li>Using experiences</li> <li>Empathy (Putting yourself in the character's shoes)</li> <li>Thinking about the characteristics of the characters</li> <li>Trying to be solution oriented</li> <li>Guessing what the other would say</li> <li>Focusing on role</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involvement of drama teacher or other participants</li> <li>Effective use of the microphone</li> <li>Not using the camera</li> </ul>
Factors Affecting Positively	Affecting	Improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quiet and organized place</li> <li>Preparation before lesson</li> <li>All participants have to improvise</li> <li>Supportive attitude of drama teacher or participants</li> <li>Effective use of message section</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of a suitable place to connect to the lesson</li> <li>Gestures and facial expressions do not cross over</li> <li>Leaving the microphones on</li> </ul>
Factors Affecting Negatively	Affecting	Improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not using the camera</li> <li>Stress, excitement, anxiety</li> <li>Inability to focus (lack of attention)</li> <li>Repetition of the same sentences, short answers, immediate persuasion</li> </ul>

### 3.1. Strategies Before Improvisation

Participants make a plan in their improvisation work and act in accordance with this planning. In this respect, the improvisation design of the participants has different stages. Improvisation, which can be handled under two headings as pre-performance and performance process, includes various strategies. The findings obtained in the research stand out as the strategies used by the participants *to talk about the elements of drama before improvisation, to share information about dramatic fiction, to think about the resolution of tension or conflict, to make use of or analyze movies, and to do sound and breath exercises*. Participants also said that they prepared for the performance before improvisation. Although the preparation includes intellectual and physical skills, it contains clues for a dramatic fiction. Because improvisation, which is the process of creating an intellectual fiction and performing with body language, gestures and mimics, verbal and vocal open to all kinds of surprises, requires an intellectual and fictional planning. The statements of the participants show that they made some preparations and used some strategies before improvisation in planning based on fiction.

The research findings show that the participants talked about the elements of the drama before the improvisation, and they benefited from these elements about how the improvisation would progress. It is seen that the participants, who define improvisation as creating a framework, create a framework for themselves with the elements of drama and improvise using this framework. At this point, P8 said, *"After determining the characters, dramatic tension, time and place, we established a bond between them to create an event. Then we improvised and produced solutions for conflicts or problems,"* and P12 said, *"First of all, I did not make any preparations because it was a certain situation, subject, time, place and person, or because it continued with the improvisational flow,"* and emphasized the elements of drama are used effectively before improvisation. In P8's words, it shows that it provides the connection to create the event (dramatic fiction). P14 said, *"I thought of a text, one of the indispensable elements of dramatic fiction, and used whatever should come in order. They were like a recipe for me while I was preparing my improvisation,"* she said that she used the elements of the drama before improvisation, and she did it in a sequence.



Participants state that they see improvisation as a fiction, a sequence of meaningful actions or a plot. One of the participants, P21, who stated that she thought about a dramatic fiction before improvisation and benefited from the elements of the drama in the process of creating this dramatic fiction, said, *"I think examining the elements of the dramatic fiction helps us a lot about the improvisation we will do. Because it allows us to understand what kind of situation we are in if we have never faced such a situation before: 'Are we nervous? Are we happy? Are we living in ancient times? Are we in today?'"* questions help us. At the same time, it gives me clues about what the atmosphere is like, what kind of character I play, what job I'm doing, what kind of dramatic tension will develop." She said that with these words, they created a fictional life by using elements of drama, and the questions they asked about the dramatic fiction made their job easier. P16 said, *"While creating the dramatic fiction one of the elements always stood out for me. For example, a symbol. I was able to create many situations using it,"* and expressed that she planned to improvise using one of the elements of the drama.

One of the strategies that the participants used before improvisation was the films that were discussed and analyzed in the lessons. The films, which were examined in accordance with the elements of the drama during the lesson, facilitated the work of the participants in the improvisation design. For example, P1 *"After talking about drama and its elements, we focused on what is required for improvisation and how to take the role. We did a lot of improvisation and short film work. We watched movies suitable for elements of dramatic fiction and analyzed them. Since almost every lesson we did an improvisation or film analysis, we were already prepared. Since I came to the new lesson by looking at the topics we covered in the previous week, I never had any problems,"* in her words, she talked about the effect of films before improvisation, the use of concepts such as dramatic structure and dramatic fiction.

In improvisation based on a tension, people try to resolve or to overcome this tension, which can be defined as conflict. Tension works like a mechanism that guides improvisation in this process. In the absence of tension, it becomes difficult for the participants to take a role and maintain the role. In the drama lesson, the participants, who create the dramatic fiction by determining the tension (conflict) before the improvisation, also share their ideas on how to resolve the tension or conflict. This sharing also gives the participants an idea about how improvisation will progress or end. In this regard, the words of P8, *"After we understood the conflict well to take the role, we thought about solutions,"* shows that understanding the conflict is as important as finding solutions. The participants, who created a framework for the design of improvisation, said that it is important to talk about how long the tension, which is one of the most important elements in this design, will be sustained. It is very important for the participants how they use their voices during improvisation and how their voices reach other participants. In a situation where only the microphone is used, in other words, the only communication tool is the microphone, the voice must effectively convey the improvised dialogues to the other party. It is seen that some participants practiced sound before improvisation in the drama lesson, where the cameras were not turned on and the microphones were turned on only during speaking. For example, P5 said, *"I went to a quiet place and checked my breath and tried to adjust my tone,"* and he stated that he prepared for improvisation by controlling his voice and breathing, and P14 said, *"Because it was online, I felt like I was talking to myself because I was giving alternative talks to myself while my other friends were improvising,"* while other participants said that they made individual preparations while improvising.

### 3.2. Strategies During Improvisation

The participants, who create the dramatic fiction before improvisation, make a performance in accordance with the dramatic fiction during the improvisation. Since improvisation is not a process in which the participants memorize a text by studying over and over again and then act it out on stage, and it is clear what the improvisers will say and what kind of actions they will take after the improvisation starts, it is necessary to develop various strategies during improvisation. Improvisation is not only a simple technique, but also a process of designing an intellectual plot in which the dramatic fiction is spontaneously constructed. Since this process is not always individual, a collective dramatic fiction is created with the group members who will take part in the improvisation. In improvisation, mutual interaction, creativity, spontaneity and contribution to collective production progress simultaneously. Improvisation is always open to surprise, as it is not clear what, when and how it will emerge. Although a framework is created before improvisation, it is a dramatic fiction that only has a clear beginning, middle and end. However, improvisation may not progress as previously discussed. Different solutions can be

found or it is possible to go out of the planned fiction. In the online drama lesson, the participants benefited from *the elements of drama during improvisation, creating dramatic fiction (thinking about dramatic fiction), starting from experiences, empathizing (putting yourself in the character's shoes), thinking about the features of the character, trying to be solution-oriented, predicting what the other party would say*. They stated that they applied the strategies of focusing on the role. Some of these strategies (utilizing the elements of drama, creating dramatic fiction, thinking about dramatic fiction, starting from experiences) are similar to the strategies used before improvisation. The main reason for this is that although improvisation includes certain stages, it is a whole in itself and each of the parts has an effect on the whole. In addition, the elements of the drama act as a kind of compass, as improvisation is an impromptu and unscripted animation. The framework created through the elements of drama before the improvisation is an important tool that enables the improvising participants to deal effectively with uncertainty and solving the problem causing tension.

Improvisation can also be defined as making a new proposal to the person or persons opposite. This offer requires people in the role to communicate, to create a shared story and to discuss a specific topic within the role. Participants stated that during improvisation, *they used the elements of drama to create a common story and created an intellectual dramatic fiction*. It can also be defined as the process of creating an improvised, collective dramatic fiction that requires creating an instant fiction, designing the performance step-by-step in mind, and giving consistent and appropriate responses to the dramatic fiction. This process, which requires thinking about dramatic fiction, invites the participants to make an in-depth research on the role characters of the improvised situation and their relationship, space, time or tension. This process, which starts before the improvisation, does not end with the beginning of the improvisation, on the contrary, the participants continue to develop the story spontaneously, taking into account the framework they have created. By putting themselves in the place of the characters in the dramatic fiction, the participants try to overcome the problem they face or to reflect on the problem. Participants stated that they created a fiction in their minds before improvisation and that they acted in accordance with this fiction. In addition, they stated that they benefited from the elements of drama in the process of creating dramatic fiction, and that they created an alternative fiction in their minds. P21 said, *"I think I could take a role more comfortably by using my body if it was face to face, but if I had to give an example, what would I do if I were a boatman or a hairdresser, what kind of environment would I have grown up in, what is the climate of the place I live in, what kind of people are around me, I don't speak a dialect of a place. I tried to integrate myself as much as possible with all the characters I played, thinking about all the details I could think of, such as whether I am speaking with a dialect or in a proper Turkish,"* in her words, she explained elements of drama she used during improvisation and the dramatic fiction she created. P13, *"I adjusted my speaking style in the role and what I would say according to the progression of the tension,"* in her words, she stated that she also determined how the improvisation of tension, one of the elements of drama, would progress.

Drama studies are based on role playing and improvisation. In drama studies, the participants choose some roles and try to make these roles visible. This means that the participants act like the person in the role they have determined, they speak like this person, they improvise taking into account the characteristics of this person. At this point, it can be said that experiences are very important in drama. Participants review their previous experiences while role-playing or improvising. Participants stated that they benefited from the situations they observed in their lives during improvisation. At this point, it is possible to say that while determining a role or improvising, the participants set off from their experiences and at the same time improvise the situations they see in daily life. Experiences are effective both when preparing improvisation and when designing improvisation. In other words, experiences are effective before and during improvisation. P8 said, *"The events we improvised were things you encounter in real life. I think that the solutions that we think and produce on these conflicts can work in my life,"* and she stated that experiences in daily life are used in improvisation and at the same time, the solutions in improvisations contribute to her. Similarly, P9 said, *"There were examples from the events we encountered in our lives and we heard many different reactions. Therefore, we thought, yes, we imagined it would be like this, and this affected our reactions as well,"* adding that the exemplary situations in her life were reflected in improvisation. P16 said, *"Of course there was, for example, the concept of space helped us a lot in how we should behave even if we were in such a place or environment as a spectator,"* in her words, she emphasized that the use of space in improvisation was supported by experiences in daily life. The statements of the participants about the experiences show that their previous experiences, the people they observed, the places, situations or problems were effective in their role during improvisation.

During the improvisation, the participants tried to empathize by putting themselves in the characters' shoes. Empathy not only reduced the distance between the characters and the participants, but also created a suitable environment for the participants to own the dramatic fiction, to take the initiative and act on the development of the dramatic fiction. P18 said, *"I think putting myself in someone else's shoes while improvising increased my empathy ability, it also gave me practicality, that is, it made me think quickly when there was a problem and taught me that sometimes both sides can be right."* and emphasized that she used his empathy skill in the improvisation and that improvisation improved this skill. Empathy, as P18 expressed, is one of the requirements of improvisation, just like creativity, spontaneity or pretending. In other words, the participants need to use their empathy skills when taking on a role and improvising. They also develop their empathy skills through improvisation. At this point, P14's statements, *"I improvised by putting myself in the role I was going to play. When I take a role, I remind myself of this and act according to that person's feelings."* also supports P18.

The participants stated that they thought about the features of the characters in the dramatic fiction as an improvisation strategy, tried to be solution-oriented and predicted what the other participants would say, and focused on the role. For example, P6 said, *"I can say that reading other friends' thoughts helped me, it helped me find my own ideas."* and tried to read the thoughts of the people she improvised with her words, and P12 said, *"I tried to be solution-oriented or I used to compel strategies, depending on the situation,"* and she stated that she was trying to be solution-oriented. *"I tried to give as many different situations and reactions as possible. I tried to predict the characteristics and reactions of people in order to portray the same situation differently,"* expressing herself with these words, P11 said that she thought about the characteristics of the role. The findings show that the participants use different strategies during improvisation, and these strategies are effective in the progress of the dramatic fiction.

### 3.3. Factors Affecting Improvisation Positively

Improvisation can be defined as a planning process that includes not only speaking spontaneously, unpreparedly, and unbound to the text, but also taking on a role, maintaining a role, and terminating a role. In this planning, the participants create an intellectual dramatic fiction and take care to act within this fiction. In order for the participants to improvise on dramatic fiction, some conditions must be met. The results show that there are situations that positively affect the improvisations made in the online drama lesson. In the online platform, the participants do not see each other and cannot use forms of expression such as body language, gestures and facial expressions in improvisations based on sound and speech using only a microphone. In improvisation studies, the involvement of the drama teacher or group members, the effective use of the microphone, the absence of a camera, a quiet and orderly environment, preparation before the lesson, the obligation to participate in improvisation, the supportive attitude of the drama teacher or the participants and the effective use of the message section affect the participants positively. In order for the online drama lesson to be more effective, there are some situations related to the online or physical environment, the drama teacher and other participants, and the people who improvise. The positive effect of these situations contributes to the better improvisation of the participants.

Participants stated that the spontaneous involvement of drama teachers or other participants during improvisations or when improvisation does not work properly is effective in terms of the quality of improvisations or observing different perspectives. About this subject, P2 said, *"The teacher's encouraging the students or starting improvisation by himself, when necessary, had a positive effect on the lesson. When someone got stuck, our teacher or another friend immediately stepped in,"* and P7's statements, *"Our teacher helped us progress by contributing to the flow of improvisation, and the other students followed the flow so that the next one could continue comfortably,"* show that there is a spontaneous outside intervention in the improvisations in online drama lesson, and that this happens in a way that does not spoil the fiction. Participants described this intervention as a situation that positively affects improvisation and enables it to continue. According to the participants, there are some positive aspects of not using cameras in online drama lesson. P6 said, *"I don't think it's much different than face-to-face, I can only say that it was for the benefit of some shy friends."* and stated that not using a camera, shy people improvise more easily, and P9 said, *"Partly it's easier actually because they don't see you, you don't see the reactions and it's easier. You are not affected by the counter-reactions,"* and she stated that they were not affected by the reactions of the other participants in an environment without a camera. Not using the camera, which is normally a negative situation for an online drama lesson, was evaluated positively by some participants. With

her statements, *"We did not open the camera, our friends who did not have a microphone also participated in the chat section by writing, and this is how we solved the problem,"* P14 said that the chat section was used in case of a technical problem.

Online drama lessons require some technological opportunities. Students need a device with computer features (desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile phone), a healthy and stable internet connection, camera and microphone that will connect to the digital platform where the course is held. Students should also be in a quiet environment and not be in a noisy place that will negatively affect them during improvisation. It is considered important that the environment is calm, quiet and orderly for the participants who connect to the online drama lesson from a different environment. One of the participants, P18, said, *"In general, I take care not to have distracting objects around, I pay attention not to have too loud noises,"* and stated that she took care to keep the place she was tidy and quiet. Similarly, with the words, *"The situation that makes it easier is that the environment is calm. I can focus and improvise more easily in a calm and quiet environment,"* P20 emphasized the importance of space.

### 3.4. Factors Affecting Improvisation Negatively

There are negative situations as well as situations that affect the participants positively in online drama lessons. These situations, which negatively affect the participants' role playing and improvisation, vary depending on the place, the person making the improvisation, other participants or the internet connection. In improvisation studies, *lack of suitable space, stress, excitement, anxiety, gestures and mimics do not cross over, inability to focus, lack of attention, repetition of the same sentences, leaving the microphones on, not using the camera, short answers and being quickly convinced* affect the participants negatively.

Research findings show that the problem that most affects improvisations is the lack of suitable venues for participants to attend the online drama lesson. Due to the fact that the lesson is online, it can be said that the students are connected to the drama lesson from places such as the canteen, an empty classroom or the school garden on the days when there are face-to-face lessons. With the words, *"I couldn't attend very comfortably when the room was not empty because I was staying in the dorm, it looked a little funny because I was playing different roles on the phone by myself, but I didn't see a big negative side of it,"* P6, stated that she had some difficulties participating in the lesson indoors or in an open area. P18 said, *"I think it has a negative effect because sometimes we can be in places that are not very suitable, and it can be difficult to turn on the microphone at such moments or our voice may not be very clear in a noisy environment,"* and she mentioned that the noise in the environment affects the improvisations negatively. P2 supported P18 with the words, *"Yes, there was a lot of noise when I entered the school and a lot of movement around disturbed me. It was more productive when I was able to enter the dormitory. But it didn't matter to me because I loved the lesson so much,"* and she said that her interest in the lesson was effective in overcoming the problems.

The results of the research show that emotional states such as stress, excitement and anxiety affect the participants negatively. P1, *"For me personally, yes, there were places where I got stuck in the beginning, and this was due to a situation that was completely related to myself. Even though it was involuntarily online, our lesson dominated the stress activity,"* she emphasizes that speaking in front of the crowd is also difficult on digital platforms. Similarly, P5 said, *"Even being aware of the existence of people listening to you, even if not face to face, creates some pressure, and I can say that it contributes to controlling the pressure when speaking to the crowd and reducing the stress caused by the pressure,"* and he talks about the difficulty of improvising in front of a crowd with his words. It can be said that if the participants are stressed, excited or anxious, they have difficulty in taking the role because the excitement is higher in the crowded group.

In online drama lessons, the first of the problems that negatively affect the improvisations are the problems arising from the connection. Problems such as gestures and mimics not moving to the other side of the screen, inability to focus, lack of attention, leaving microphones on, not using cameras affect improvisations negatively. P1 emphasized that connection problems in digital platforms negatively affected the lesson or that gestures and facial expressions did not pass to the other side during improvisation. P1 also stated that problems such as lack of attention and inability to focus occur in online lessons. Positively, she said that she could research a topic on the internet during the lesson whenever she needed it.

*In terms of negativity, I can also state the following. Since the lesson is online, we encountered connection problems during participation. Or online lessons may be insufficient in terms of the reflection of our gestures and facial expressions. In fact, this situation has both pros and cons. Missing part: Although it provides convenience for some, the online lesson has always created a missing part for me. Because when it is outside of the classroom environment, it is highly likely to experience a lack of attention. Or we may have to deal with more than one thing (especially for a married person who looks after his/her family). The plus is that when we encounter a concept we do not know during the lesson; we can make instant research on the internet and make progress more consciously."*

P8 said, *"We couldn't improvise face-to-face because our lesson was online. I think there is a deficiency in this regard, especially since mimics and gestures are effective on improvisation,"* and she similarly stated that connection problems negatively affect improvisations. Some problems that negatively affect improvisations in online drama lessons are about the participants. *Situations such as repetition of the same sentences, leaving the microphones on, short answers and immediate persuasion* cause the participants to have problems in improvising. With the words, *"The short answers given by the other participants sometimes prevented the continuation of the improvisation."* P18, underlined the short answers during the improvisation prevented her from continuing the role, and P17 said, *"The fact that the other party was immediately convinced, that is, that he did not continue the role for a long time, both prevented me from continuing the role and reduced my motivation a little,"* and emphasized that the immediate persuasion of the other participants in improvisation reduced his motivation to continue the role for a long time. P2 also, *"After a while, he/she started repeating the same sentences, I got stuck in a certain place, I couldn't think of anything,"* with her words, she said that the other party's repetition of certain sentences prevented her from continuing the improvisation. In addition, the poor connection, disconnection during the lesson, and freezing caused problems in maintaining the role of the participants.

#### **4. Discussion**

In this study, it was aimed to determine improvisation strategies used by the participants who improvised in online drama lessons before and during the improvisation, and to determine the situations that affect the improvisations positively or negatively according to the opinions of the participants. As a result of the findings, the themes of *"Strategies Before Improvisation, Strategies During Improvisation, Factors Affecting Improvisation Positively and Factors Affecting Improvisation Negatively"* emerged. The results of the research reveal that the participants determined some strategies in order to improvise with a higher quality, and they used these strategies before, during improvisation, or in both situations.

The improvisations in drama lessons form the core or heart of the lesson, where the actual learning takes place. Through improvisations, the aesthetic and educational achievements of the lesson are reached, the participants acquire some attitudes and behaviors, review themselves, and observe the different perspectives of the other participants. As such, improvisation activities need to be carried out completely, in accordance with the purpose and in accordance with the dramatic fiction discussed. For this purpose, the participants benefited from the elements of the drama included in the syllabus before and during the improvisation. It was observed that the participants talk about the elements of drama before improvisation, share information about dramatic fiction, think about the resolution of tension or conflict, make use of or analyze movies, and do sound and breath exercises. Since improvisation takes place spontaneously and freely (Adıgüzel, 2019), the strategies developed on how to improvise before improvisation may not be sufficient. Therefore, the person performing the improvisation must develop strategies during improvisation in order to continue his role by coping with the unpredictability and ambiguity that arises due to the nature of improvisation. Within the scope of the research, the participants used the elements of drama during improvisation, creating dramatic fiction, using experiences, empathizing, thinking about the features of the characters, trying to be solution-oriented, predicting what the other party would say. It was concluded that they used strategies such as predicting and focusing on the role. Among these strategies, especially the strategies of using the elements of drama and thinking on dramatic fiction are similar to the strategies developed before improvisation.

Although improvisation can be performed individually, it often takes place embedded in a social setting (Zenk & Hynek & Schreder & Bottaro, 2022). The conditions of the environment in which the improvisation is embedded determine the conditions that affect the improvisation process positively and negatively. The research results reveal that the participants expressed some situations that they think affect the improvisation process positively and negatively. Conditions that positively affect improvisation according to the participants; the involvement of the drama teacher or group friends, the effective use of the microphone, the absence of a camera, a quiet and orderly environment, preparation before the lesson, the obligation to participate in improvisation, the supportive attitude of the drama teacher or the participants, and the effective use of the message section. Situations that negatively affect improvisation are expressed as lack of suitable space, stress, excitement, anxiety, gestures and mimics do not cross over, inability to focus, lack of attention, repetition of the same sentences, leaving the microphones on, not using the camera, short answers and being quickly convinced. Some of the situations that affect improvisation positively and negatively complement each other in the opposite direction. While the effective use of the microphone is seen as a positive situation, it is seen as a negative situation if the microphone is turned off or left on unnecessarily. Likewise, a quiet and orderly environment is expressed positively, while the absence of a suitable place to improvise is shown as a negative situation. The fact that the cameras are turned off is seen as a positive situation, which is a remarkable result. Some participants stated that being off the camera reduces the excitement and anxiety of improvisation.

In drama works, improvisations gain continuity with conflicts arising from a dramatic tension. Real-time action, reaction and interaction (Zenk & Hynek & Schreder & Bottaro, 2022) is required to do what is said. If dramatic tension is not strong enough, it can reduce the quality of the conflicts. Therefore, improvisation is short-lived as it cannot be continuous. One of the reasons for short answers and being quickly convinced, repetition of sentences, and lack of attention, which the participants expressed as one of the situations that negatively affect improvisation, can be shown as the inability to create a strong enough tension for improvisation. Since tension is the core of dramatic fiction, it directly and positively affects the belief in the role and the fiction, the motivation to stay in the role, and the desire to resolve the conflict. One of the most important situations that positively affect improvisation is that the drama teacher supports the process by taking roles. The role of the drama teacher motivated the participants and helped them become more willing to improvise. Making supportive comments about the improvisations performed was another positive situation. In online drama lessons, the internet infrastructure, the digital platform and equipment such as mobile phones, computers, cameras and microphones are as effective as the environment in which the students attend the lesson. It can be stated that the chat box of the digital platform where the drama lesson is held stands out as a feature that solves the participation problem arising from the environment and equipment. If the participant who entered the class at the time of the lesson was not in a suitable environment and did not have the appropriate equipment, he/she participated in the lesson by writing from the chat section. This can be seen as one of the advantages of the online drama lesson.

Considering the themes that emerged in the research and the opinions of the participants regarding these themes, it can be concluded that the basic principles or planning steps of improvisation do not differ in online and face-to-face environments. Real-time action takes place with very little preparation for improvisation, both online and face-to-face. In both environments, there are unpredictability and ambiguities arising from the nature of improvisation, and improvisation has a beginning, a middle and an end. In both environments, the form of improvisation is created by utilizing the elements of drama and by thinking about dramatic fiction, especially tension. Strategies such as thinking about the characters, predicting what the other party will say, and being solution-oriented are strategies that can be applied both online and face-to-face before and during improvisation. Again, in both environments, participants may experience excitement, anxiety and stress, and they may perform improvisations that are quicker and unsatisfactory due to some disruptions in creating the dramatic fiction. However, the products that are the output of the improvisation may differ in the online and face-to-face environment. Since the online environment is limited in terms of physical meeting, contact, use of the body and the senses, technological equipment and infrastructure play a major role in ensuring the necessary communication and interaction. The role of technological infrastructure and hardware becomes more important, especially in an event such as improvisation that requires real-time action, reaction and interaction. This is also the reason why the participants think that they cannot adequately convey their emotions, gestures and facial expressions while playing a role.

The results of the study are similar to other studies on improvisation. Ebert (2004) states that in improvisation, the actor finds and implements action and text on the stage, unprepared, but adhering to a theme or a certain event, but not depending on a text. Meyer (2021), on the other hand, states that the improvising individual works on two elements. The first is the process of introverted experience, and the other is the outward transfer of it. From the results of the study, strategies such as thinking about the elements of the drama before and during the improvisation, dramatic fiction, and the role character are the main tools to find and apply the action and text directly on the stage. In addition, the same strategies are effectively used for exporting introverted experiences. In Zenk & Hynek & Schreder & Bottaro's (2022) study, in which they investigated improvisation as a phenomenon by conducting in-depth interviews with experts working professionally in highly dynamic fields such as art, entrepreneurship and emergency response service, they would encounter unpredictability in situations where they thought they were improvising, and to cope with it. It has been revealed that they know that they can prepare themselves in a very short time. It has been stated that the mentioned short preparation period includes simulating in mind what they can do through alternative scenarios they may encounter, or physical or cooperative warm-up exercises. The pre-improvisation strategies of the interviewed experts in this study are similar to the preparation processes for improvisation in their own professional fields. The results of Granholt and Martensen's (2021) research on the use of improvisation in design, regarding the importance of active listening and acting to continue improvisation with the other party, are similar to the results of this research being solution-oriented and empathizing with the other party. In another study (Crossan & Cunha & Cunha & Vera, 2002), which deals with the role of improvisation in the improvement of time planning in an organization, it was concluded that improvisation gave positive results in planning time based on creativity and spontaneity in a limited time, and employees benefited heavily from their past experiences in this process. Making use of past experiences was expressed as one of the strategies used by the participants while preparing for improvisations. In the study (Roud, 2021), which was carried out with experts working in jobs requiring emergency response, focusing on the uncertainty of emergency response and the necessity of quick response skills, the importance of increasing the collective improvisation skills of organizations working in this type of work was emphasized. It was stated that collective improvisation skills would be developed more effectively by building trust between institutions. In this study, the role of the trainer, which the participants showed as examples of situations that positively affect improvisation, and everyone's participation in improvisation, has an effect on increasing in-group confidence. In other words, it is important in terms of making improvisation happen better.

As a result, there are some difficulties in conducting drama lessons and performing improvisational activities online. Despite these difficulties, it is possible for the participants to improvise using only microphones, express themselves in role and act in accordance with the dramatic fiction. According to the results, it can be recommended to inform the participants about improvisations in terms of form and content in the studies to be carried out online, to create the dramatic fiction with the participants before the improvisation, and to improvise in this direction. Improvisation studies can be made more qualified by giving various examples during the lesson, by talking about the elements of dramatic fiction during the role-playing stage, or by watching short and feature films.

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