



Received: 09.04.2019
Received in revised form: 20.05.2019
Accepted: 04.06.2019

Genç, G., & Kuluşaklı, E. (2019). The evaluation of language teaching program applied in the school of foreign languages. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 6(3). 658-670

<http://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/631>

THE EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM APPLIED IN THE SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Research Article

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Abstract

English language teaching is one of the most crucial issues in the field of education in the world as well as in Turkey. There has been a growing need for adequate English language education programs at schools in Turkey. Preparatory classes of the School of Foreign Languages which offers students a full one year of English education try to fulfil this need regarding the students' needs and wishes into consideration in order to teach English successfully. This study focused on the evaluation of the effectiveness of language teaching program applied in the preparatory classes by the school of Foreign Languages of a state university in Turkey through the perspectives of the students studying English for a year. 270 students attending the preparatory school participated in the study. The data were gathered through a self-reported student questionnaire and were analyzed descriptively through SPSS 20. The results of the study demonstrated that the language teaching program in the preparatory classes of the School served for its purpose not fully but partially. The findings of the study indicated significant implications in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of the program. It would give some clues to the administration to understand the effectiveness of the Program.

Keywords: language preparatory program, foreign language teaching, program evaluation

1. Introduction

We all know that English is a worldwide language and has been gaining prominence among world communities since World War II (Toker, 1999 cited in Tunç, 2010, p. 8). In Turkey, the situation is similar to that of the rest of the world in terms of the prevailing use of English. Among the reasons that English is becoming very popular and to some extent, compulsory in Turkey is “the effect of globalization and strong political ties with the U.S.” (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998, cited in Tunç, 2010, p. 8). Therefore, English language learning and teaching gains importance and has an important role in Turkish education system. According to Konig (1990), English is not an official language or accepted as a second language in the Turkish educational context, however; it is undeniable that English is “the most useful foreign language” (cited in Tunç, 2010, p. 8). Among the reasons given for the necessity of speaking English is getting better job opportunities, keeping up with scientific and technological developments and for academic purposes. Besides, it is mainly important in the field of education especially in higher education as English language is the medium of instruction at some departments of many state or private universities. Accordingly, quite a number of universities in Turkey give much priority to English language learning and teaching in order to meet the demands in the domain of education.

Due to the increasing need for English learning, preparatory schools of the universities provide help for the students by giving them a full one year of English education. The main aim of these schools is to make students follow the courses in English at their departments efficiently by providing them help to increase their proficiency in the target language. As can be understood from the information given above, preparatory schools have an important mission in preparing students for their future majors. However, it has been a debate whether these schools are effective and adequate enough to teach English to learners. With this aim, there is a need to evaluate curriculum of preparatory schools in attempt to identify its weak and strong sides. Moreover, it is also essential to evaluate language teaching programs at the school to understand its effectiveness for the purpose of designing a good quality curriculum for the sake of the students, improving materials and resources and making necessary assessments.

In terms of education, curriculum evaluation is defined as “the process by which we attempt to gauge the value and effectiveness of any particular piece of educational activity – whether a national project or a piece of work undertaken with our own pupils (Kelly, 1999, p.137). Cronbach (1991, p. 236) categorizes three types of decisions that can be employed in the evaluation as in the following:

1. Course improvement: deciding what instructional materials and methods are satisfactory and where change is needed.

2. Decisions about individuals: identifying the needs of the pupil for the sake of planning his instruction, judging pupil merit for purposes of selection and grouping, acquainting the pupil with his own progress and deficiencies.

3. Administrative regulation: judging how good the school system is, how good individual teachers are, etc. (cited in Öner & Mede, 2015, p. 206).

Payne (1994) classifies the roles of evaluation into three sections. The sections are comprised of “development of the program in progress, simplification of comparison between competitive programs and promotion of knowledge concerning an efficient program design” (cited in Tercan, 2018, p. 4).

There is not only one model which can be applied in attempt to evaluate the program as the evaluators have different cognitive styles, philosophical ideologies and practical perspectives. Summative and formative models are among evaluation models proposed by Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1987) who state that the main concern of the evaluator in this model is “to draw conclusions and statements about the merit of the program” while formative evaluation focuses on “identifying potential problems, determining areas where there is a need for improvements, identifying, describing, and monitoring program activities in the process of program implementation, and finally testing the achievement of the program periodically” (cited in Tunç, 2009, p. 17). Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) and McNail (1985) present humanistic and naturalistic evaluation and scientific-positivistic evaluation approaches. Robert Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model, Portraiture Model, Illuminative Evaluation Model and Elliot Eisner's Connoisseurship Evaluation Model constitute humanistic and naturalistic models while scientific-positivistic approaches are consisted of Judicial, Provus discrepancy, CIPP and Congruence-contingency models (Tunç, 2009).

There have been various studies on the effectiveness of language teaching programs applied in the Schools of Preparatory departments of both state and foundation universities. A study conducted by Mede and Uygun (2014) sought to explore whether a language preparatory program applied to the students with different majors was effective enough to meet the students' needs for learning. 64 learners completed the questionnaire and were

interviewed for the purpose of the study. The findings of the study indicated that the program assisted them to develop their language skills and to use language learning strategies effectively.

Another study by Özüdoğru (2017) investigated how the students attending to the preparatory class perceived the program provided by the School. The aim of the study was to make the evaluation of the English Preparatory Program of a state university. The program was totally voluntary. 208 students participated in the study having different proficiency levels from low to high. The result of the study revealed that the students thought that the program was partially effective. The instructors and the students were not satisfied with the physical conditions while they found the assessment of the program efficacious.

Tekin (2015) explored how the instructors and the students in the preparatory classes at a state university in Turkey evaluated the current program and its components in terms of teaching methods, assessment and materials and physical conditions. The results indicated that the students hold highly positive attitudes towards the program in the school except for a small amount of them. To be more specific, the students required a Turkish instructor for their listening and speaking lesson and also a separate vocabulary course. Furthermore, the instructors and the students participated in the research both agreed on the idea that the assessment needed to be spread to the whole year. One-thirds of the participants stated that they were dissatisfied with the materials used in the courses.

In another study conducted by Coşkun (2012), different dimensions of the preparatory school program such as teaching, assessment and materials were evaluated by the students and the instructors. In terms of teaching, it was understood that lecturing was mostly preferred method while more learner-centred activities like presentations and role-play were the least ones. The participants complained about the number and the lengths of the exams along with the subjective assessment of speaking and writing skills. Regarding the students' opinions about the material use, there was a need for supplementary materials especially for speaking. As for the teachers' views on the materials, some of them thought that the materials were not academic, in other words, they did not appeal to their students' profile.

Regarding the effectiveness of the modular system of a Foreign Language Preparatory class program in Turkey, Tercan (2018) conducted a study with 132 EFL students and 5 instructors. The participants were required to evaluate the program according to four dimensions as teaching, program, assessment and material. In terms of teaching, the study revealed that methods and activities used in teaching English needed to be revised in order to create more communicative learning environment. Besides, according to the findings obtained from the category of the program, the students did not see the program of the school effective. Specifically speaking, the students saw improvements in their writing skill while speaking skill got low mean value by both students and instructors. In a similar line with these findings, the participants were dissatisfied with the materials used in the program as this category had the lowest mean score among the other sections. On the contrary, the students had positive attitude towards the assessment in the modular system.

The study conducted by Akpur, Alcı and Karataş (2016) aimed to evaluate the instruction program of preparatory class at a state university through CIPP model. The findings of the study indicated that the students were not satisfied with the curriculum in terms of developing their four skills and the balance of four language learning skills. In the context of input factor, audio-visual materials did not meet the students' needs as the items in this category got the lowest mean scores. However, in-class activities were rated high. In terms of the process factor, the students found the activities insufficient and thought that these activities could not

provide them opportunity to practice their skills. For the students, the curriculum did not meet their expectations in terms of knowledge, study habits and following the course.

In the light of the literature given above on language teaching programs offered by the schools in Turkey, this study focused on the evaluation of the effectiveness of language teaching program applied in the preparatory classes by the school of Foreign Languages in a state university through the perspectives of the students studying English for a year. Moreover, this study aims at assisting the Preparatory School administration to identify the effectiveness of the program focusing on the weaknesses and the strengths of it. The evaluation of the program made by the students is believed to provide necessary changes in the curriculum of the school considering the issues raised by the results of the present study. With this aim, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are the students at the Preparatory School satisfied with the program?
2. What are the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the Preparatory School English language teaching program applied in the university?

2. Method

2.1. Setting and Participants

Totally 270 students participated in the study and 258 of them were involved in the analysis of the research. Of the students, 122 were male (47.5%) and 135 were female (52.5%). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 34 with the mean of 20 ± 2.1 . The study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages of a state university. Preparatory class of the School was compulsory for some of the departments in the university, however; those who want to learn English voluntarily could also take one year preparatory education at the School. The students had a total of 24 hours of English which was comprised of 16-hour Main Course, 4-hour Reading and Writing Skills and 4-hour Listening and Speaking Skills courses.

2.2. Instrument

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the model applied in this study is Robert Stake's responsive evaluation as a humanistic and naturalistic model, which stresses on the educational process (Tunç, 2009). The questionnaire was originally developed by Tunç (2009) to evaluate learners' perceptions towards the effectiveness of an English teaching program conducted in a preparatory school in a private university. It was conducted in the participants' native language in order to obtain data. For the current sample, Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire was 0.96 which is quite satisfying. It aimed to assess students' perceptions in five areas. To be more specific, the first section of the questionnaire was devoted to elicit the students' general opinions about the program while the second section was related with the learners' perceptions of the program in terms of their expectations. The third section sought to address the participants' perceptions of content and delivery of instructional process, the fourth section dealt with the students' perceptions of the materials, resources and the use of technology in the program and finally, the fifth section focused on the participants' perceptions of assessment and evaluation process of the program.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

To analyze the data, quantitative process was run. Quantitative procedures involved statistical analyses through descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages and the results were presented in the tables.

3. Findings

Findings of the research are going to be presented under the subtitles in accordance with the research questions.

3.1. Are the Students at the Preparatory School Satisfied with the Program?

Table 1. *Results for the items related to students' general opinions on the program*

ITEMS	1	2	3	N	M	SD
	%	%	%			
1. How would you rate English Language Program at preparatory school in general?	11.0	42.4	46.7	255	2.35	0.67
2. How would you rate the course system appropriate to your proficiency level used at preparatory school?	10.6	52.8	36.6	254	2.25	0.63
3. Do you think that English Language Program in use at Prep. School is efficacious enough to realize your aims regarding language learning?	13.3	52.2	34.5	255	2.21	0.65
4. Do you think that English Language Program in use at Prep. School is efficacious enough for you to follow your classes at your departments?	19.1	45.8	35.1	251	2.15	0.72

1= Does not meet my expectations and needs improvement; 2= Good and meet my expectations; 3= Beyond my expectations (For Questions 1; 2). 1= Not efficacious and definitely needs improvement; 2= Efficacious but still could be improved; 3= Definitely efficacious (For Questions 3; 4).

According to the results shown in Table 1, it is obvious that almost half of the students rate English Language Program at preparatory school in general as beyond their expectations and nearly half of them have the belief that it is good and it meets their expectations. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents believe that the course system used at preparatory school is appropriate to their proficiency level, in other words, it is good and meet their expectations whereas one third of the participants find it beyond their expectations. In both items only a small percentage of the students seem to believe that the program does not meet their expectations and needs improvement. Over half of the respondents declared that the program was efficacious enough to realize their aims regarding language learning but still some improvements could be made. Almost one third of the participants seem to believe that it is definitely efficacious. Finally, nearly half of the respondents believe that the program is efficacious enough for them to follow their classes at their departments but still needs some improvements while some of them seem to be quite confident about the efficiency of the program at this point since they regard the program to be definitely efficacious. However, nearly one fifth of the participants who do not find the program efficacious and believe that it definitely needs improvement cannot be underestimated.

3.2. What are the Students' Perceptions about the Effectiveness of the Preparatory School English Language Teaching Program Applied in the University?

Table 2. Results for the items related to students' perceptions of the program in terms of their expectations

Items	1	2	3	4	5	N	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%			
1. The goals of the Language program at Preparatory School mostly comply with my aims /goals.	18.3	25.8	39.2	12,5	4,2	120	2.58	1.05
2. The language program at Prep School meet my expectations to a great extent.	19.6	21,6	40,0	15,7	3,1	255	2.61	1.06
24. Thanks to the program, my grammar has improved at a satisfactory level.	8.8	16,8	31,2	30,8	12,4	250	3.21	1.13
25. Thanks to the program, my writing skills have improved at a satisfactory level.	14.3	15,1	31,9	30,7	8,0	251	3.02	1.16
26. Thanks to the Program, my speaking skills have improved at a satisfactory level.	14.3	17.9	30.2	27.0	10.7	252	3.01	1.20
27. Thanks to the Program, my listening skills have improved at a satisfactory level.	13.0	17.4	30.8	28.1	10.7	253	3.05	1.18
28. Thanks to the Program, my reading skills have improved at a satisfactory level.	10.0	14.7	27.1	33.1	15.1	251	3.28	1.18

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree

Considering the results as indicated in Table 2, it can be understood that almost half of the students unfortunately are neutral about the consistency between students' own goals or expectations and the goals of the program. In addition, the students having negative perceptions are far more than the ones having positive perceptions with regard to the goals and expectations. As for the benefits of the program in terms of improving language skills, it can be seen that around one third of the students are neutral in all the items. More specifically, the students do not present positive or negative views about the improvements in grammar, writing, speaking, listening and reading skills. Nevertheless, the percentage of the students having positive perceptions in all the items is higher than the ones having negative perceptions.

Table 3. Results for the items related to students' perceptions on content and delivery of instructional process

Items	1	2	3	4	5	N	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%			
4. I think the time for the course I am currently in is adequate in the program.	12.5	17.3	28.2	27.8	14.1	255	3.13	1.22
5. The course I am currently in matches the level of each student.	16.3	19.5	33.9	23.0	7.4	257	2.85	1.16
13. The instructors teaching at Prep. School use various methods to make the lessons more interesting and motivating.	17.0	19.8	28.1	28.1	7.1	253	2.88	1.19
14. Technological means such as visuals and audios are used in the classroom for reinforcement.	8.0	16.5	22.9	33.3	19.3	249	3.39	1.20
15. There is enough focus on group work in the classroom.	13.1	19.9	27.9	31.1	8.0	251	3.00	1.16
16. The lessons are generally student-based.	10.5	18.1	28.2	33.5	9.7	248	3.13	1.14
17. I think that instructors provide me with enough practical examples for me to practice for the exams.	11.6	14.9	32.5	29.7	11.2	249	3.14	1.16
20. I support the idea of making use of more technology in the classroom.	14.7	21.6	29.4	26.5	7.8	245	2.91	1.17
21. I support use of audio-visuals in the classroom	14.3	21.8	29.0	25.0	9.9	252	2.94	1.19

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree

In the category of the perceptions of content and delivery of instructional process, the results as demonstrated in Table 3 indicate that students mostly believe that the time for the course they are currently in is adequate in the program for them. However, one third of them are neutral about whether the course they are currently in matches the level of each student and instructors provide them with enough practical examples to practice for the exams. In terms of using technology and audio visuals in the classroom, it has been seen that the students mostly have positive perceptions and mostly believe that they are necessary and adequately used in their classrooms. In the other items, related to the delivery of instructional process such as using various methods to make the lessons more interesting, having group works and student centred applications, it can be concluded that students mostly revealed positive attitudes as well as being neutral.

Table 4. Results for the items related to respondents' perceptions of the materials, resources and the use of technology in the program

Items	1	2	3	4	5	N	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%			
3. I think English Language Program is efficacious in term of resources and materials.	1.32	22.6	27.2	28.4	8.6	257	2.96	1.17
6. The textbooks used in the program match my level.	11.2	17.8	26.0	32.9	12.0	258	3.16	3.14
7. The textbooks used in the program match my goals.	14.8	12.8	28.8	30.1	13.2	257	3.14	1.24
8. The textbooks used in the program are interesting.	16.1	18.4	29.8	23.1	12.5	255	2.97	1.25
9. The textbooks used in the program are efficacious for me to get prepared for exams.	15.1	20.9	24.4	28.7	10.9	258	2.99	1.24
10. The exercises in the books are sufficient for me to get prepared for the exams.	14.3	16.7	25.6	32.6	10.9	258	3.08	1.22
11. I think that extra materials are beneficial.	20.2	18.1	26.7	27.6	7.4	243	2.83	1.24
12. I think that the extra materials are more beneficial than textbooks in terms of getting prepared for the exam.	13.9	19.0	36.9	23.0	7.1	252	2.90	1.12
29. The reading passages in the textbooks are interesting.	17.1	17.9	26.3	29.9	8.8	251	2.95	1.23

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree

Regarding the students' perceptions about the materials, resources and the use of technology in the program, the results in Table 4 indicate that over one third of them agree that English Language Program is efficacious in term of materials and resources. Almost one third of the participants are neutral about the efficacy of their textbooks used in the program. To be more specific, they are neutral about whether the textbooks match their levels or goals, they are interesting and they are efficacious for them to get prepared for exams. However, more than one third holds positive perceptions of the efficacious of the exercises in the books and find reading passages in the textbooks interesting. In terms of the benefits of extra materials, one third of them are neutral while more than one third shows positive attitudes towards it.

Table 5. Results for the items related to respondents' perceptions on assessment and evaluation process of the program

Items	1	2	3	4	5	N	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%			
18. I think weekly quizzes, making up a part of the total grade, are beneficial.	13.3	14.1	24.9	33.7	14.1	249	3.21	1.23
19. I think that weekly quizzes are effective in preparation for the other exams.	13.1	16.7	21.9	32.3	15.9	251	3.22	1.27
30. The activities provided in the text books are similar to the ones in the exams.	11.9	17.8	27.3	35.6	7.5	253	3.09	1.14
31. Text books are suitable for the exams.	10.3	14.7	24.2	39.3	11.5	252	3.26	1.15
32. My grammar knowledge is tested at a satisfactory level in the examinations.	9.2	19.2	23.6	37.6	10.4	250	3.20	1.14
33. My speaking skills are tested at a satisfactory level in the examinations.	9.5	18.7	25.8	33.3	12.7	252	3.21	1.17
34. My listening skills are tested at a satisfactory level in the examinations.	11.5	15.9	25.8	35.3	11.1	252	3.17	1.18
35. My writing skills are tested at a satisfactory level in the examinations.	11.5	13.1	23.4	38.5	13.5	252	3.29	1.19
36. My reading skills are tested at a satisfactory level in the examinations.	12.4	13.5	27.1	38.6	8.4	252	3.17	1.15
37. The writing questions in the exams are consistent with the writing exercises in the class.	11.6	17.2	30.4	31.2	9.6	250	3.10	1.15
38. The reading questions in the exams are consistent with the exercises in the class.	10.7	21.0	28.2	30.6	9.5	252	3.07	1.15
39. Listening comprehension questions are tested in parallel to the content of the lesson.	12.4	15.2	32.0	28.0	12.4	250	3.12	1.18

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree

Finally, in terms of the assessment and evaluation process of the program and the consistency between the knowledge presented during the courses through textbooks and extra materials and exams, Table 5 reveals that most of the participants (almost half of them in most items) are seen to have positive perceptions in changing degrees. They imply that during the exams they are assessed based on what they are offered during the courses. Majority of the students also seem that weekly quizzes help them prepare for the midterm and final exams. In addition, most students believe that their grammar knowledge and all

language skills are tested at satisfactory levels in the exams. Finally, they agreed that the activities used listening; speaking, reading and writing courses are all related to the exam questions. However, in all the items almost one fifth of the participants rated that they are all neutral while around one fifth of the participants reveal negative perceptions towards items of this category.

4. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the effectiveness of language teaching program in the school of foreign languages in a state university in Turkey through the students' perspectives. For that reason, the first research question was elicited to explore whether the students at the preparatory school were satisfied with the program. The data obtained from the first section of the questionnaire which focused on the participants' general opinions on the program revealed that in general, the students are satisfied with English Language Program applied at preparatory school as it is beyond their expectations, good and at the same time, it meets their expectations. More specifically, the program provided opportunity for them to raise their awareness of goals in learning a language and to follow their classes at their departments. However, the program also needs some improvements to have a better education from the participants' views.

As for the second research question, it was explored what the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Preparatory School English language teaching program applied in the university are. Regarding the participants' perceptions of the program in terms of their expectations, they have less positive perceptions towards the teaching program conducted in the school in terms of their expectations. The findings revealed that many students are neutral about the objectives of the school and objectives and expectations of them. Specifically, they are neutral about whether their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills along with grammar knowledge are improved with the help of the program.

Moreover, in terms of content and delivery of instructional process, their perceptions about the delivery of instructional process show difference as both positive and neutral. In other words, it is not wrong to say that they have more positive views about the efficacious of the time for the course, the use of audio visuals and technology and delivery of instructional process. The result concerning the use of audio visuals is not in line with the study conducted by Akpur, Alcı and Karataş (2016) who state that the students have negative perceptions of the use of audio visuals effectively. However, they are neutral about whether the course appeals to the students having different levels of proficiency and their teachers assist them to prepare for the exams providing practices.

Concerning the participants' perceptions of the materials, resources and the use of technology in the program, the students find the school program adequate regarding resources and materials, which shows inconsistency with the findings of the study by Coşkun (2012) and Tercan (2018) who claims that the students are not satisfied with the materials and would like to have more extra speaking materials. However, many of students are not sure about the effectiveness of the textbooks in terms of their expectations from textbooks such as whether they get their attention and prepare them for the exams. However, they find the exercises, reading passages in the textbooks and extra materials beneficial and adequate. In general, they mostly have positive perceptions towards the materials used in the program.

Lastly, regarding assessment and evaluation process of the program, most students have positive perceptions of the weekly quizzes which provide assistance for other exams such as midterms and final exams. They also state that there is a correlation between the questions asked in the exams and the related practices in all courses in the school. This result

is in line with the results obtained by Özüdoğru (2017) who found that the students found the assessment of the preparatory class program efficacious. However, there are some students who hold neutral or negative views about these items.

5. Implications and suggestions

Based upon the results of the study, it would not be wrong to say that the prep program was found to be partially effective and partially served for its purpose. This study shows that it is necessary to do some compulsory changes by the administration to strengthen the weaknesses of the school program according to the findings obtained from the questionnaire. In order to improve the effectiveness of the English language teaching programs, the objectives which the students are expected to attain at the end of one-year preparatory class program can be explained explicitly in order to raise their awareness of their learning process and meet their expectations by the administration at the beginning of the academic year through orientation meetings or brochures. Besides, the classes need to be arranged according to the similar English proficiency levels of the students at the beginning of the school and rearranged if it is necessary, in other words, when the students reach the expected level of English. Regarding the selection of the textbooks, the students' opinions should be taken into consideration and textbooks should be supported by providing extra materials. Moreover, the curriculum of the school needs to be designed in order to give more priority to the improvement of four skills of the students in learning English. In terms of the teachers' role in improving the effectiveness of the school, they should provide assistance for the students to prepare them for the examinations throughout the classes.

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ENDNOTE

The preliminary findings of this study were orally presented during 18th INGED International ELT Conference held at İstanbul Aydın University, Turkey on 20-22 October 2017.