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EVALUATION OF A PREPARATORY SCHOOL PROGRAM AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN TURKEY

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Abstract

This paper presents qualitative and quantitative results of an evaluation of the English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language and Literature (ELL) preparatory classes of a state university in Turkey. This study basically aims to gather data for an illuminative evaluation of the prep classes program for the purpose of highlighting certain dimensions of the current program as a first step to make the necessary changes. In this respect, 106 preparatory class students and two lecturers participated in the study. To get more reliable results, the data were triangulated with qualitative and quantitative means. The results revealed that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the present program and its components except for physical conditions. Additionally, the lecturers reported the need for a new program that should aim to help students gain more communicative skills. All in all, the analysis of the data collected in the present study revealed that although the majority of the participants are pleased with the existing program, there is still need for a change, especially in terms of the physical conditions.

Keywords: Program Evaluation, Preparatory School, English Language Teaching.

Introduction

Program evaluation is generally defined as the process of gathering information about the totality an educational program, or some aspects of it in order to make decisions and further revisions about the program. From this aspect, evaluating an educational program is a very important but at the same time difficult task, and foreign language instruction is no exception (Lynch, 1990). As Lynch suggests, the aim for an evaluation is sometimes to assess the effectiveness of a program or to identify the elements that need to be changed or reorganized.

Rossi et al. (2004), draw attention to the systematic aspect of program evaluation with components like collecting data, analyzing it, and using the new information in order to answer basic questions about future policies and projects. Similarly, Lynch (1990) defines evaluation as a systematic process during which thorough examination of the current status of a particular program should lay the basis for appropriate decisions and judgments about all aspects of the program in a comprehensive way. In this respect, the aim of an evaluation is sometimes to evaluate how effective an active program is, and at other times the aim is to assess its quality. According to Posavac and Carey (2003), there are six purposes of program evaluation, which are: 1) to assess unmet needs 2) to document implementation 3) to measure results 4) to compare alternative programs 5) to provide information to maintain and develop quality, and finally 6) to detect negative side effects.

According to Brown (1989), the tools used for data collection have a determining power on the purpose of program evaluation, and the types of results obtained. From this viewpoint, two main types of evaluation are realized in the literature, namely, formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Brown further elaborates on this distinction by stating that formative evaluation takes place during the development of a program, and the purpose is to gather

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useful information which can be used to improve the program. The results obtained from this type of evaluation are generally used to make certain modifications and fine tunings of the existing program. On the other hand, the summative evaluation takes place when a program is complete after a period of time during which the program was practiced. The main aim of this second type of program evaluation is to gather information to determine whether the program was successful and effective. Types of decisions that will result from such analyses can result in wide and extensive changes in the evaluated program in order to prepare better the succeeding program. The type of evaluation to be undertaken depends on what is expected to be learnt about the program. From this aspect, Owen (2006) discusses how program evaluators can meet the informational needs of stakeholders and clients by selecting the appropriate forms and approaches to program evaluation.

Research Studies on Language Program Evaluation

The related literature presents a number of evaluation studies on language education programs (e.g., Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005; Lewkowicz & Nunan, 1999; Lynch, 1990; Ross, 2003). More specifically for the Turkish context, some recent studies on the evaluation of university-level preparatory school programs have been carried out. To name a few of them, Akar (1999) evaluated the freshmen reading course at Middle East Technical University. Yılmaz (2004) carried out a needs analysis of preparatory class students at Gaziosmanpaşa University. Tavit (2003) carried out an analysis of the English preparatory students at Hacettepe University; and similarly Payam (2005) analyzed the needs of preparatory students at Police Academy. Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) analyzed an English Language Teacher education program using the Peacock Model. Another recent evaluation of university prep classes was carried out by Tunç (2010), who evaluated the prep school language program at a public university using the CIPP Model. The data collection tool used in the present study was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Tunç after making certain changes. Since focusing on all of the four components in the CIPP model in the true sense would require a long period of data collection, this study, rather than replicating Tunç's work, intended to collect data related to the students' and instructors' perceptions of the content and input components of the current program. In addition to the adapted questionnaire, interviews with two instructors helped to find out about their perceptions regarding the current program. All in all, the data collected from the students and instructors through both qualitative and quantitative means were combined to illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the current ELT/ELL prep school program from the viewpoints of the two main stakeholders, namely the instructors and students, who are directly influenced by different aspects of the current program.

The Study

Aim of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the program of ELT/ELL preparatory classes at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, and to find out the program components that need improvement. To achieve these aims, the study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What are the students' overall perceptions of the emphasis on four skills, grammar and vocabulary learning in the prep classes in relation to their current level of English proficiency?
- 2) What are the students' and instructors' perceptions of the materials, teaching methods, assessment procedures commonly practiced in the program along with the physical conditions and communication facilities?
- 3) All things considered, are the students and instructors satisfied with the current program and its components?

Description of the Program and the Parameters

The evaluated program is a preparatory school program, designed for an instruction period of two academic terms with 26 hours of implementation time a week. The students take eight hours of 'Basic English', seven hours of 'Listening & Speaking', six hours of 'Reading', and

four hours of 'Writing' weekly. The frameworks of these courses are defined according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is a guideline used to describe achievements of foreign language learners across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001).

The program at the time of the study was specified by the Foreign Language Teaching Training and Research Center (YADEM) of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University several years previously. The ELT/ELL prep classes program aims to prepare students for the graduate programs at English Language Teaching (ELT) Department of Faculty of Education and English Language and Literature (ELL) Department of Faculty of Sciences and Arts.

Although not clearly defined, the aims and objectives of the program are based on the learners' needs, and their educational objectives. On the other hand, the course syllabi are neither well defined nor adequately specified. The assessment system used for the students enrolled in the program is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Tools of Assessment and their Percentages Used for Each Course in the Program

1st semester			2nd semester			Total	
<i>Midterms</i>	<i>Quizzes</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Midterms</i>	<i>Quizzes</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Average of two semesters</i>	<i>Final exam</i>
30%	10%	10%	30%	10%	10%	50%	50%

The Stakeholders

This evaluation has a number of stakeholders involved. First, the students who spend their one year studying English at the preparatory school are considered the most important stakeholders since they are the ones who are to be directly affected by any change in the current program. The other stakeholders are the instructors who are assigned to implement the syllabi, the lecturers who teach in the ELL and ELT departments; and finally, the administrative staff who are responsible for the prep unit.

Methodology

This study uses various data collection tools in order to obtain more accurate and reliable results. As Patton (2001) argues, to minimize the weaknesses of any single approach, using multiple data sources such as interviews, observations and questionnaires enables the researcher or the evaluator to cross-check the findings. In other words, triangulation strengthens a study by combining a variety of methods; therefore, Patton states that a triangulation approach to research increases both the validity and reliability of the evaluation data.

The reason why an illuminative and formative type of evaluation was chosen for this study was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the current program from the perspectives of both the instructors and learners. After this illumination process, if some components of the existing program is seen to be out of date, and thereby not serving to the needs of those for whom it has been intended in the first place, some changes can be suggested depending on the seriousness of the determined problem; and if on the other hand the stakeholders are generally satisfied with the current program, on the other hand, it can be preserved with some minor adjustments; and finally if this illumination process reveals that the program is not working anymore as a whole, the necessity for a new program can be emphasized.

As an instructor who lectured in ELT/ELL prep classes for 4 consecutive academic years between 2006-2010, the researcher of the current study had noticed that the existing program for the prep classes was no longer serving adequately to the needs of the learners who used to express their boredom and lack of motivation openly. Additionally, the lecturers constantly uttered complaints about their students' lack of motivation too. Besides, with every new academic year, more students began to fail the end-of-year proficiency exam. In sum, it was clear that the existing program needed to be evaluated to illuminate the problematic areas, as

well as to determine the fine-working components, so that necessary changes could be made in the direction of the students' and instructors' perceptions, and desires.

Data Collection Procedures

Tunç's (2010) study, in which she evaluated a language teaching program at a prep school of a public university using the CIPP model was particularly useful, therefore the researcher of the present study adapted Tunç's data collection instrument by making changes in terms of both the length and content. The adapted instrument was then shown to two other colleagues to get their opinions. After minor changes were made in the direction of their feedback, the questionnaire was piloted on a small group of first year students (9 students), who had studied in the prep class the previous year. During the piloting stage, no problem was determined; therefore, the instrument was accepted as the finalized data collection tool for the main study.

As for the administration of the questionnaire in the main study, the researcher contacted one of the prep-school instructors; and with his help, he went to each and every prep class within one day (a total of 4 prep classes) and administered the questionnaire. After this procedure for collecting the quantitative data from the student-participants of the study, the researcher also contacted two of the prep-school instructors in order to arrange an interview schedule with them. In accordance with the availability of each instructor's weekly schedule, different times were set for the interview. To this end, a questionnaire schedule was prepared and followed. Each interview lasted around 15 minutes. For practicality reasons, instead of fully video recording and transcribing the interviews, the most important points were transcribed by the researcher during the interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

The present study made use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire with a 4-point Likert Scale. There was a total of 48 items (excluding the part on personal data but including the two open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire). The questions were presented in seven different parts: the first part included items about how sufficient the students perceived themselves in terms of different English proficiency areas such as grammar, vocabulary knowledge and the four skills; the second part included items about the perceptions of the students related to how sufficiently each proficiency area was addressed by the prep classes program under investigation; and the remaining parts targeted the materials, techniques, assessment procedures used in the program respectively, as well as communication facilities and overall satisfaction with the program. In the original study by Tunç (2010), the items were worded in Turkish to eliminate possible comprehension problems. In the present study, the questionnaire was similarly administered in Turkish. However, the findings are discussed with the English translations of the original items (The questionnaire items were translated to English by the researcher himself and then backtranslated by a colleague to meet the possible concerns about the validity of the translations).

Qualitative data were collected through the two open-ended questions which were placed at the end of the students' questionnaire, as well as the semi-structured interviews with two of the prep-school instructors. The interviews were conducted in Turkish for practical purposes. (The responses were then translated to English by the researcher himself and backtranslated by a colleague to meet the possible concerns about the validity of the translations).

The Findings

Analysis of the Results

For the analysis of the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used on SPSS for Windows v.20. Students' responses to the open-ended comments and suggestions sections of the questionnaire were organized and then typed. The interviews with the lecturers were similarly organized and transcribed to draw certain conclusions about different aspects of the current program.

Results from the Students' Questionnaires

In this part of the paper, the quantitative results from the descriptive analysis of the data collected through the students' questionnaires will be presented and discussed. In this respect, Table 2 presents the item statistics for the participants' perceived proficiency level for different language proficiency. The data on this table, as well as in Tables 3 and 4, were grouped into convenient categories for easy reading and commentation. In other words, in the original 4-point Likert Scale questionnaire, the participants had four options as 'quite sufficient', 'sufficient', 'insufficient', and 'quite insufficient'; however, in the following three tables, the options 'quite insufficient' and 'insufficient' are given under the common title of 'insufficient'; and 'quite sufficient' and 'sufficient' are presented under the title of 'sufficient'. Thus the cumulative percentages of the students' responses are provided under each category.

Table 2: Item Statistics for the Participants' Perceived Proficiency Level for Different Language Proficiency Areas

Item #	Proficiency Areas	Insufficient %	Sufficient %	M	Sd
	<i>How sufficient do you see yourself in the following language proficiency areas?</i>				
1	Writing	68	32	2.31	.73
2	Reading	31.1	68.9	2.73	.72
3	Listening	50	50	2.53	.81
4	Speaking	73.6	26.4	2.10	.80
5	Grammar	19.8	80.2	3.00	.71
6	Vocabulary	44.3	55.7	2.58	.72

A reading of Table 2 clearly indicates that the great majority of the students perceive themselves insufficient in speaking skills (73.6%), whereas the percentage of those who perceive their speaking skills to be sufficient is only 26.4%. It means, among the six language proficiency areas presented in this part of the questionnaire, 'speaking skills' appears as the most problematic one in terms of the participants' perceptions of their proficiency levels. Another skill in which the students perceive themselves insufficient is writing with 68%. As for the other language proficiency areas, half of the participants see themselves insufficient in listening skills, and 44.3 % of them believe that their vocabulary knowledge is not good enough. On the other hand, most of the same students see themselves competent enough in reading skills (68.9%) and especially in grammar with 80.2%.

When we compare Table 2 to Table 3, which is given below, we can reach some conclusions about the parallelism or discrepancy between the students' perceived level of competency in each language proficiency area, and how sufficient they find the prep-school program in terms of the importance attached to each language proficiency area.

Table 3: Item Statistics about How Sufficient the Participants Find the Prep Classes in Terms of the Importance Attached to Each Language Proficiency Area

Item #	Proficiency Areas	Insufficient %	Sufficient %	M	Sd
	<i>How sufficient do you find COMU ELT/ELL prep classes in terms of the importance attached to each language proficiency area?</i>				
7	Writing	9.4	90.6	3.13	.55
8	Reading	7.5	92.5	3.16	.53
9	Listening	29.2	70.8	2.85	.68
10	Speaking	37.7	62.3	2.79	.65
11	Grammar	14.2	85.8	3.02	.62
12	Vocabulary	27.4	72.6	2.79	.67

Table 3 shows that most of the students find the ELT/ELL prep classes sufficient in terms of the importance attached to each language proficiency area in the program. Nevertheless, according to the results, some areas like speaking, listening and vocabulary seem to be less emphasized than some others like reading, writing and grammar. A comparison of these results to the ones presented in the previous table (Table 2) reveals that the skills that the students perceive themselves as the least competent are speaking, writing, and listening respectively; and the skills that are paid the least importance are speaking, listening, and vocabulary. Here, depending on these findings, it would not be wrong to conclude that there is a need for more emphasis on especially speaking, listening and also vocabulary in the program, because almost half of the students see themselves not competent enough in vocabulary knowledge. Besides, vocabulary is one of the three least emphasized language proficiency areas according to the students' perceptions. As for writing, which is the second skill that the students see themselves incompetent, it is attached due the importance according to the majority's perceptions (90.6%).

Another important aspect of the program that has been addressed in this study is the materials used in the lessons. The students responded to a total of seven items concerning the materials that aim to promote different language proficiency areas as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Item Statistics about How Sufficient the Participants Find the Materials Used In Lessons

Item #	Materials	Insufficient %	Sufficient %	M	Sd
	<i>How sufficient do you find the use of the following materials in lessons?</i>				
13	Materials that aim to promote reading skills	27.4	72.6	2.82	.70
14	Materials that aim to promote writing skills	24.5	75.5	2.79	.65
15	Materials that aim to promote listening skills	47.2	52.8	2.56	.76
16	Materials that aim to promote speaking skills	55.7	44.3	2.45	.78
17	Materials that aim to promote grammar	33	67	2.76	.69
18	Materials that aim to promote vocabulary knowledge	43.4	56.6	2.56	.74
19	Audiovisual materials (CDs, videos, interactive programs etc.)	49.1	50.9	2.54	.86

A thorough reading of Table 4 reveals that the students believe that the materials that aim to address especially certain language proficiency areas are not enough. The first of these areas is speaking with a relatively high 55.7%, which shows the percentage of those who find the speaking materials insufficient, and next comes listening with 47.2%. These results are hardly surprising considering that listening and speaking skills are addressed together in one course in the current program, that is, in the 'Listening & Speaking' course. The students think that both the speaking materials and listening materials are not sufficient to help them with their listening and speaking skills. If we remember the results presented in the previous section, we see that they are highly in keeping with them in the sense that for the majority of the participants, speaking and listening skills are the two language proficiency areas that are attached the least importance at the ELT/ELL prep classes under investigation; and here we additionally see that the students are not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the materials used in the listening & speaking course either. The results displayed in Table 4 also show that many students perceive a need for more materials to improve their vocabulary knowledge, which makes sense when it is thought that there is not a separate vocabulary course, and thus a separate vocabulary book, in the program. Besides, half of the students complain about the insufficient use of audiovisual materials in lessons.

In the present study, the techniques used in the lessons were also investigated, and the results are given in the following table (Table 5). The items are again presented in two categories for easy reading as the cumulative percentages for students' responses related to the techniques that are never, rarely and sometimes used are presented in one column; and the

cumulative percentages for the ones that are often and always used are presented in the side column.

Table 5: Item Statistics of the Students' Perceptions Related to The Frequency of Use of Some Common Techniques in ELT

Item #	Techniques	never/rarely/ sometimes %	Often /always %	M	Sd
	<i>How often are the following teaching techniques used in your classes?</i>				
20	Question asking (the students ask questions)	28.3	71.7	4.11	.84
21	Role-play	95.3	4.7	1.9	.96
22	Group work	22.6	77.4	3.8	.73
23	Lecturing (the instructor lectures)	15.1	84.9	4.4	.82
24	Pair work	14.2	85.8	4.05	.68
25	Question answering (the students answer questions)	17.9	82.1	4.06	.79
26	Discussion	70.8	29.2	3.04	1.04
28	Presentation (students give presentations)	94.3	5.7	1.58	.95

Table 5 displays quite useful results about the student participants' perceptions of what is actually going on in the classroom in terms of activity use. The percentages given in this table clearly point to the dominance of classical teacher-centered activities such as 'lecturing' and 'question-and-answer' to the disadvantage of more student-centered ones like role-plays, discussions and student presentations. In fact, almost half of the students (44.3%) indicate that they do not do any role-play activities in class, and the other half report that they rarely (26.4%) or sometimes (24.5%) have this activity type in class (a summative percentage of 95.3%). Thus, the percentage of the students who have reported that they often have role-play activities is only 4.7%. The number of the students who claimed that they never give presentations is even larger with a percentage of 67%; and the others reported that they rarely (14.2%) or sometimes (13.2 %) present topics in class. All these results show that the number of student-centered activities such as students' presentations and role-plays is quite insufficient for a program which has a claim to be communicative-based. Although most of the students' responses show that they always or often have pair-work (85.8%) and group-work (a cumulative of 77.4 %), they still look insufficient when compared to the dominance of teacher lecturing (84.9%) and question-and-answer technique (82.1 %). Besides, it appears that the students are not given enough opportunities for discussion activities, which would certainly contribute to the improvement of their speaking, listening and other communication skills.

The next dimension of the program that was addressed through the students' questionnaires was the assessment component, the results related to which are given in Table 6 below. When the participants were asked about their opinions concerning a number of statements all related to the assessment procedures followed in prep classes, they indicated whether they 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the each of the given statements. The negative responses (strongly disagree and disagree) are presented under the 'disagree' category; and the positive responses (agree and strongly agree) are presented under the 'agree' category in the following table, as well as in Tables 7 and 8, which will be discussed later.

Table 6: Item Statistics about the Students' Perceptions Concerning Assessment Procedures

Item #	Assessment	Disagree %	Agree %	M	Sd
	<i>What is your opinion about each of the following statements concerning the assessment procedures followed in prep classes?</i>				
29	Exams and quizzes reflect the content of the courses	.9	99.1	3.5	.52
30	Mid-terms and quizzes help me learn better	23.6	76.4	3.01	.80
31	The difficulty levels of exams are generally consistent with each other.	32.1	67.9	2.74	.81

32	I have a positive attitude towards the grading of my performance in class	29.2	70.8	2.83	.98
33	I have a positive attitude towards portfolio assessment	18.9	81.1	2.88	.72
34	The number of exams is sufficient	10.4	89.6	3.23	.71
35	The number of exams is more than necessary	72.6	27.4	2.27	.92

Concerning the first item in this part, namely 'Exams and quizzes reflect the content of the courses', almost all of the students (99.1%) agree with it. Therefore, it would not be wrong to claim that the students are pleased with the exams in terms of their content, that is, how much they reflect the content of the courses. Furthermore, 76.4% of the students believe that exams and quizzes help them learn better, therefore, they see exams necessary and beneficial for the improvement of their English proficiency. In the analysis of the third item, we see that 2/3 of the students (67.9%) find the difficulty levels of exams as consistent with one another whereas there is still the 32.1% who think the opposite. 70.8% of the students do not have any objection for being graded in terms of the performance they display in lessons (participation); however, 29.2% are not comfortable with in-class performance grading. The percentage of those who have a positive attitude towards portfolio assignment is relatively high with 81.1%. Finally, the last two items of this section give us an idea concerning what the students think about the number of exams that they take each semester. In this respect, almost 90% of the participants find the number of exams sufficient whereas 27.4% also think that there are too many exams and quizzes. From these results, we can conclude that the majority of the students are satisfied with the assessment procedures; however improvements can still be made in terms of preparing exams which have more consistent difficulty levels with each other.

Another aspect that was addressed through the students' questionnaire was the students' perceptions concerning the ease of communication, that is, whether they can reach their instructors, and whether or not they can easily communicate their ideas in class, and ask questions, as well as the extent to which their ideas are taken into account in teachers' choice of classroom activities. The item statistics presented in Table 7 provide useful information about the students' perceptions of the communication dimension.

Table 7: Item Statistics about the Students' Perceptions of the Ease of Communication

Item #	Communication	Disagree %	Agree %	M	Sd
	<i>What is your opinion about each of the following statements?</i>				
36	I can reach my instructors whenever I want.	35.8	64.2	2.67	.72
37	When I have a question, I can easily ask my instructors.	1.9	98.1	3.47	.53
38	When I have a problem, I can easily share it with my instructors.	17	83	3.11	.69
39	I can easily express my opinions in lessons	15.1	84.9	3.14	.70
40	Our opinions about class activities are taken into account	23.6	76.4	2.97	.74

The descriptive statistics given in Table 7 clearly reveal that the majority of the prep-class students do not have communication problems in lessons or with their instructors. For instance, approximately 2/3 of the students (64.2%) can reach their instructors whenever they want to; almost all of them can easily ask their instructors when they have a question in their minds; 83% of the students can share their problems with their instructors; 84.9% claim that they can express their opinions in class without hesitation; and for 76.4% of them, what they suggest about class activities are taken into consideration. In this table, the most problematic area seems to be the students' out-of-class communication with the instructors, because although the majority of them report that they can reach their instructors anytime they want, there is still 35.8%, who claim just the opposite. Considering that the validity of this questionnaire highly depends on the participants' sincerity, and that the students may not reveal their true ideas about their instructors for various reasons, there may even be more students who are not happy about the instructors' unavailability after class.

The final structured section in the students' questionnaire included seven items about the participants' perceptions related to how satisfied they are with being a student at COMU ELT/ELL prep classes in general and with the education provided there as well as the physical conditions, academic staff and the materials in particular. The analyses of the students' responses are given in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Item Statistics about the Students' Perceptions of their General Satisfaction with Different Components of the Prep Classes' Program

Item #	General satisfaction				
	What is your opinion about each of the following statements?	Disagree %	Agree %	M	Sd
41	I am generally happy about being a student at ÇOMÜ prep classes.	16	84	3.02	.73
42	I am generally happy with the education provided by ÇOMÜ prep classes	13.2	86.8	3.01	.56
43	I am generally pleased with my instructors	2.8	97.2	3.29	.51
44	I am generally happy about the materials used in the lessons.	40.6	59.4	2.57	.71
45	I am generally happy about the building and classrooms where the ÇOMÜ prep classes are currently giving service.	71.7	28.3	2.13	.70
46	I believe that my current prep class plays a significant role in the development of my language skills.	14.2	85.8	3.02	.68

Table 8 displays a high level of general satisfaction with different components of the program. More specifically, the highest level of satisfaction is with the instructors; In fact 97.2% of the participants indicated that they were pleased with their instructors. Besides, again the results show that the great majority of the participants (86.8%) are reportedly happy with the education provided by the prep-school; and 84% are generally happy about being a prep-class student, and not surprisingly, 85.8% believe that their current prep class plays a significant role in the development of their language skills.

A closer reading of Table 8 reveals that the item that the students are least satisfied with is the physical conditions such as the buildings and classrooms. As a matter of fact, 71.7% of the participants openly voiced their discontent with the current physical conditions, which is not surprising at all considering that the buildings where the prep classes were giving service at the time of the study (the buildings of the faculty of education) were old. Besides, the classrooms were not equipped with recent technology. Most of the time, there were not enough chairs and some of the existing ones were broken. The rectorate has been planning to demolish the existing buildings to replace them with more modern ones but it has not been realized yet. Another plan is to move the prep classes to the building of the School of Foreign Languages, which has recently been completed. Finally, this section on general satisfaction with the components of the current programs reveals that when compared to the other items on the list, the students are less satisfied with the materials used in lessons, which is also in keeping with the results presented the previous parts.

Results from the Semi-Structured Interviews with Instructors

Two prep-school instructors who were working for the ELT/ELL prep classes at the time of the study were interviewed in order to get in-depth information regarding their perceptions of different aspects of the program. The analysis of the interviews focused on three major factors about the preparatory school program: aims and objectives, content and materials, and student assessment.

In general, lecturers drew attention to some deficiencies in students' basic language skills such as problems with speaking, writing, reading and speaking. They also complained that most of the students were not taking the responsibility of their learning process, but they rather memorized the things that seemed to be important in terms of getting a high grade in the exam, and unfortunately they forgot them quickly. Therefore, some of the instructors suggested strategy training for students and more motivating assignments that will keep them busy with English after class too.

Some points raised by the instructors on aims and objectives are:

Instructor 1: First of all, the students are expected to have mastered basic language skills to succeed in the first year's courses. Therefore all of the courses offered to prep students should aim to make sure that the students are endowed with the required skills to follow the courses when they begin the program in their departments.

Instructor 2: It is my opinion that, a student who graduates from the prep class should have the abilities of analyzing and synthesizing the information given in a text, to organize the information in a text and make judgments on the given information. For instance, as their reading instructor, I am trying to do my best to assure that my students attain the abilities of understanding academic books and articles, preparing research projects, writing homework, and synthesizing ideas in a written text. But unfortunately most of the students cannot meet these requirements when they start taking academic courses. Although the majority of the students report reading as the most comfortable skill, none of them can claim to understand a text completely. To me this is interesting because the reference books and the course content for the course I give are not challenging. Conversely, these sources contain comprehensible texts too. I have observed that the students have difficulties in scanning, skimming, understanding the general idea. I also observe that the students have difficulty in interpreting the ideas. I think this is a result of poor background information. So, as we talk about objectives and aims specifically for the reading course, these reading deficiencies of the students cannot be isolated from their entire background information. As a result, we should question the whole program for the problems I have stated.

As to content of the courses, the common argument is that, the course contents should be organized and tailored according to the determined deficiencies and needs of the students; and that contents should be supplemented with authentic materials as suggested by Instructor 2.

Instructor 2: I believe that the students join the program with some basic skills and background information on all four skills. But still there are some skills to be improved. So the content of the courses should be designed by considering these aspects. Also, authentic materials should be used as much as possible.

When the instructors were asked about the assessment of their students, most of them suggested the use of different testing styles.

Instructor 2: The students' performances can be assessed by using various means. For instance, home assignments can be given as a part of the students' assessment. The assessment should not be dependent the exams only. Instead, the assessment should be spread to the whole year. As I have stated before, the use of authentic materials in testing is essential in testing too.

Instructor 1: I think the exams should test students' ability to see the whole picture. What I mean is, instead of focusing on specific vocabulary or focusing on the analysis of single sentences in a reading passage, for example, the students should be given exams that test the general reading comprehension and understanding abilities of the students. Furthermore, listening exams should aim to develop general listening skills in students. I mean they should listen for the general message of the text as well as some specific details. In short, I believe our students focus on details so much that they lose the big picture, and I think it is not good for their overall language development.

Students' Responses to the Open-ended Questions in the Questionnaire

In addition to the structured questions, the questionnaire also included two open-ended questions, so that the willing students could further comment on the different aspects of the program, and also write the solutions that they have come up with about the problems they observe. They could also make some suggestions based on their perceptions of the overall success of the program. These extra comments and suggestions have revealed that in general, students' views about the program are positive. Students' responses to the open-ended comments and suggestions part will be presented in five major categories as: their responses concerning the content of the courses (both from the activities and materials perspective), assessment procedures, weekly schedule, physical conditions and competency of the instructors.

As to the course content, the students who wrote extra comments mostly complained about the activities and materials used in the 'Listening & Speaking' course. As a solution to this problem, they suggested the use of activities and materials from a larger array. Some of the students (see student 17 below for example) suggested more role-play activities; and some others like Student 21 demanded more interactive activities with more music and videos in lessons. A demand uttered by Student 6, as given below, was an increase in the number of vocabulary exercises. All these demands and suggestions are highly in keeping with the findings reported in the previous parts. Because, as can be remembered, the analysis of the structured items in the questionnaire had revealed that the majority of the students saw themselves insufficient in vocabulary knowledge, listening, and speaking skills. Furthermore, they had reported that these three language proficiency areas were the least emphasized areas in the program with a lack of good activities and materials, therefore, not surprisingly, the extra comments and suggestions mostly centered on these areas as given below:

Student 6: The content can be enriched with more subjects and materials, but in general I am happy with the program. The time allocated for vocabulary is not enough. We should do more vocabulary exercises.

Student 1: Better activities can be found to improve our speaking skills.

Student 13: I wish our instructors forced us to speak more English in lessons. Nothing can be learned without pushing.

Student 14: We learn too much theory, but what we actually need is practice.

Student 17: The activities and materials used in the Listening & speaking course are not good enough. I especially want more role-play activities in this course.

Student 19: In general, the education we receive here is good, but the Listening & speaking course can be improved. We need more listening and speaking exercises.

Student 20: Speaking activities are not enough. We need more and better activities to help improve our speaking skills.

Student 21: I think the listening & speaking course can be more beneficial with interactive activities such as role-plays, songs, and movies.

Student 26: You have taught us grammar for years, but we still can't talk. So, do you think the program is good? For me, it is not...

One of the participants even suggested a student-mediated curriculum knowingly or unknowingly when s/he wrote:

Student 27: I think a curriculum that is to be shaped together with the students will be much more useful. Even if we don't have textbooks, we can still learn English by bringing real-life events and activities to the classroom.

One of the students complained about the books in the set they had to but at the beginning of the semester, especially the grammar book when s/he wrote:

Student 28: The books in the 'prep set' are not good enough, especially the grammar book.

Another student suggested a translation course for the following reason:

Student 29: We need a translation course, so that we can better understand the structures of English and Turkish

When the students were asked about the assessment, the majority of them explained their dissatisfaction about the assessment system. The complaints about the assessment focused on three major aspects: The difficulty of the texts given in the exams, the number of exams they take each semester, and the contribution percentage of the quizzes, mid-terms and the final exam to their cumulative grade. Most of them also stated that the grades do not reflect their actual performance and success. The students' comments on assessment procedures are given below:

Student 16: I think there are too many exams. We memorize a lot of things for exams, and then we forget them very quickly. That is why I think, instead of too many exams, we should do more practice with the language.

Student 17: There are too many exams and quizzes. I find quizzes useful, but I think one mid-term would be enough for one semester. In the mid-terms, we are only asked about the exact same things we learn in lessons, so we memorize.

Student 18: English cannot be taught with exams and grades. That is why Turkish people cannot learn English. Instead of using entertaining activities that will help students enjoy English, you only give importance to exams and grades.

Student 20: Why are the exams and quizzes so difficult?

Student 23: The exams should be easier; we need more exercises to practice our English.

Student 30: We have a lot of exams. To me, there is nothing wrong with this. But I think the percentages of the exams are not fair. For each term, we have at least three or four quizzes; but, the contribution of the quizzes to the cumulative grade is only 10%. In my opinion, it should be higher than 10%.

Student 31: During the whole year we are given a lot of quizzes and four midterm exams. But when it comes to the calculation of the percentages, the whole year performance is regarded as important as the final exam. The contribution of each is 50%. We study during the two semesters and have a lot of exams, but a 90-minute final exam is considered as equivalent to a whole academic year. This is not fair, and this causes stress on us as the end of the year gets closer.

Student 5: I am aware of my positive development in this class, and it motivates me. Easier exams will increase my self-confidence too.

Another source of complaint was about the weekly schedule and the early class hours, some of which are as follows:

Student 2: Lessons start too early and coming to school early in the morning is difficult for the students who live away from the campus.

Student 3: The weekly schedule is a problem in itself, because the lessons have been scattered throughout the week in a very unbalanced way. We have just two class hours one day, and yet on another day, we have eight hours.

Student 10: I want classes to begin a little bit later...

Student 14: I wish the lessons started after 11.00 a.m.

According to the questionnaire results and extra comments, some of which are given below, the physical conditions seem to be the least satisfying component of the education given at prep classes. In fact, as discussed in the section on general satisfaction, the students are mostly satisfied with the program, but the majority of them (more than 70 %) also state that

they are not happy with the building, and classrooms. The comments given below also support these statistics. Some of the students who complain about the physical conditions also complain about the materials.

Student 7: I want the new buildings that this university deserves.

Student 8: I am not pleased with the materials and classrooms.

Student 9: The classrooms are too old and small. Most of the chairs are broken. I want to be educated in a more modern atmosphere.

Student 4: The classrooms are really terrible.

Student 11: The biggest problem is the physical conditions, especially the classrooms and chairs. The materials are not very good either.

Student 12: Not enough chairs. The physical conditions in the classrooms need to be improved. The number and variety of the materials should be increased.

Students 15: I find the materials quite insufficient. We don't even have a classroom of our own. We need more technological materials too.

Student 22: We certainly need a more modern campus.

Student 24: How do they expect me to write on a broken chair?

Finally, some of the students' comments were related to the competencies of the instructors. The comments in this category are generally positive except one negative comment on the Fulbright instructors who give the 'Listening & Speaking' course as can be read below:

Student 15: Our instructors can spend more time with their students after class. Thus, we will have an opportunity to speak English after class too.

Student 3: The instructors are trying to do their best, but the buildings are not suitable for education.

Student 29: The instructors are knowledgeable and experienced enough, but I wish Turkish instructors gave the 'Listening & speaking' course, because, Fulbright instructors are too foreign to us.

Student 15: I can easily say that the education we are currently receiving in the prep class is very useful, because it gives us the basics about English. I like my instructors too.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this section of the paper the results collected from the teacher and learner participants through questionnaires and interviews will be further interpreted to find an answer to each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the students' overall perceptions of the emphasis on four skills, grammar and vocabulary learning in the prep classes in relation to their current level of English proficiency?

An analysis of the data collected through the students' questionnaire has revealed that the students see themselves competent and sufficient in mostly receptive language proficiency areas such as grammar and reading but they claim to be insufficient in more productive skills such as speaking and writing. They also report that they need more listening and vocabulary exercises. As for their perceptions of to what extent their needs are met by the current program, they hold varying opinions. Most of the students believe that the current program provides enough opportunities to improve their grammar, writing, and reading, but it does not emphasize the other areas like speaking, listening, and vocabulary knowledge. Among these three areas, especially listening and speaking stand out, because both in the structured part of the questionnaire and in the open-ended comments and suggestions part, they mostly complained about the lack of materials and useful activities in their listening and speaking course.

Research Question 2: What are the students' and instructors' perceptions of the materials, teaching methods, assessment procedures commonly practiced in the program along with the physical conditions & communication facilities?

As to the evaluation of content and materials, a major issue raised by the participants is the selection of course materials. According to both students and lecturers, using authentic materials should be an essential part of the program. As discussed earlier, many students are not satisfied with the content of the 'Listening & speaking' course. At the semester when the study was conducted, for the first time this course is given by four native speakers who have come from the USA on a Fulbright program. It seems that the students are not happy with the teaching practices of these instructors, as well as the materials and activities they use in the lessons. In fact, one of the students voiced her/his dissatisfaction with his/her Fulbright instructor with the following statement which was taken from the comments and suggestions part of the questionnaire:

Student 25: I think, the Fulbright instructors affect all of us in a negative way. Instead of helping us, they do things that demotivate us. A Turkish instructor could encourage us more and give us morale too.

As this statement suggests, some of the students would prefer a Turkish teacher, and their current instructors seem to be an important part of their dissatisfaction with the Listening & speaking course. Therefore, next year when nonnative speakers start to give this course again, the problem will hopefully be solved.

Depending on the results, it would not be wrong to claim that most of the students also feel and utter a necessity for a separate vocabulary course. In fact, vocabulary exercises are done in two hours of the six-hour reading course every week but vocabulary does not have an official status within the program yet. The results show that may be it is time to give the two-hour vocabulary practice an official status within the program in parallel with the demands of the students. Besides, one-thirds of the students are not satisfied with the materials used in the lessons. In addition to their dissatisfaction with the speaking and listening materials, some of the students also complain about the materials set they purchased at the beginning of the semester. Some of the instructors also complain about the materials in this set. Therefore, revising the books in this set can help reduce similar complaints which are likely with the future students to be enrolled in the program.

An evaluation of the students' perceptions about the teaching methods used in the courses revealed that traditional teaching methods such as 'lecturing' and 'question-and-answer' drills still dominate the lessons, and almost no time is allocated for more communicative activities such as role-plays and students' presentations. Considering that most of the participants will be teachers in the future, good presentation and acting skills are important elements in their education. Therefore, the students need to be given more opportunities for such interactive activities especially as a part of the listening & speaking class. These activities will also help them with their communication skills in addition to their listening and speaking skills, in which they reportedly find themselves insufficient. When the instructors were asked about the teaching methods, they admit that they need more communication activities in their classes, but some of them also complain that the students are not very willing to participate in such activities, because they are either too shy or too frightened to use English in class. According to the instructors, waiting for a student until s/he feels more comfortable in class, or letting him/her choose his/her partner in pair and group-work activities may help to some extent. On the contrary, forcing them to participate will just deteriorate the situation. The instructors' observations about the students are in direct contrast with what the students think on some issues. For example, the results from the questionnaire reveal that most of the students can reportedly express their feelings and thoughts in class easily. One explanation can be that the instructors may just be focusing on bad examples, and another explanation can be that the students may be too much impressionistic about themselves while answering the questions. In either case, bringing more interactive activities to the classroom and helping students enjoy

these activities may help in terms of a better classroom practice. The discussion of the findings addressing the assessment procedures revealed a number of issues related to the materials used for assessment, the percentages and the frequency of the exams given. The major argument of the instructors is about the use of authentic materials in assessing the students' performance, and spreading the assessment to the whole academic year instead of some specific periods of time for exams. Similarly, some of the students suggest that a quiz should be given at the end of each unit, and the percent of the whole year's assessment should be more than 50%, so that the works of the students during the whole year would become more important, and this would motivate them to perform better.

Finally, as for the communication facilities and comfort with expressing themselves in and out of class, the great majority of the students seem to have no complaints. As a matter of fact, a very small group of them report that they have difficulty in expressing themselves by asking questions in class or sharing their problems with teachers. A major problem that appears here is with the availability of the instructors, because more than one-thirds of the students state that they have difficulty reaching their instructors, which is hardly surprising considering that most of the instructors have more than 25 hours a week and some of them have other academic and administrative work too. In this respect, reducing the weekly lecturing hours of the instructors may help.

Research Question 3: All things considered, are the students and instructors satisfied with the current program and its components?

In general, the students' responses revealed that their views on the ELT/ELL prep-school program were quite positive with the exception of some students who expressed their dissatisfaction with certain components of the program both by means of the structured items and more open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Since the items that the students displayed dissatisfaction with have already been discussed several times and certain suggestions have been made, they will not be mentioned here again. On the other hand, the common issue reported by the instructors was related to the redesigning of the course requirements in accordance with the specific requirements of the ELT/ELL departments, but all in all they were satisfied with working for the prep school.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The present study was carried out as an evaluation of a preparatory school program based on students' and teachers' perceptions about the different components of the program. In other words, the present study was illuminative in nature. Further studies should evaluate the whole program from a more objective perspective through observations and by taking into account all of the stake-holders' perspectives for a better understanding of the entire program. Trying to understand the quality and quantity of all the courses offered within the preparatory school program through more objective non-impressionistic means will hopefully yield more reliable and accurate results.

This evaluation study used a quantitative tool which was designed by Tunç (2010) and adapted by the researcher himself to the specific requirements of the present study. Therefore, it would be useful to draw attention to the fact that different results could be obtained by the use of more standardized tools. Further studies can make use of standardized instruments as well as a needs analysis questionnaire and a diagnostic test for each course in the program. As it has already been discussed, this study revealed the necessity for change in several components of the current program. The redesigning procedures can be carried out by a project similar to the METU Curriculum Development Project. In this respect, program designers and specialists should involve in the revision process of the program as outsiders too.

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