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The Effectiveness of Foreign Language Preparatory Program According to the Parents' Opinions

Abstract: This research aims to find out the efficiency of the foreign language preparatory class program. The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews. For data analysis content analysis is used. According to results the program has been partly efficient.

Keywords: Effective management, English preparatory curriculum, secondary school, foreign language administration, parents' expectations

Introduction

Nowadays it is possible to travel abroad to find a job or to get the necessary education. Therefore to teach a foreign language is the prime aim of education in developed countries. Teaching a foreign language aims to make the students communicate easily with the people from different cultures, introduce their cultural values to people in the other countries, and in this way contribute to their country's development. In-state schools in Turkey, foreign language teaching has a long history. Lots of studies (e.g. Acat and Demiral 2002; Dilekli, 2018; Şen Ersoy and Kürüm Yapıcıoğlu, 2015) have been done to find out the problems. In these studies, it is found out that despite increasing the time and expense in foreign language teaching, the expected level hasn't been reached yet. For example, English language teaching has started in the second grade. The education program Dyned has been developed and has been piloted in some schools (Dilekli, 2018). This is a sore, crucial issue for Turkey. Because of the cultural transfer between countries and the increasing possibilities to work abroad, foreign language education becomes essential. Hence having a foreign language becomes gradually important for social and cultural changes.

It is commonly known that students have serious problems in learning a foreign language (Demirel, 2003). This study aims to find out the parents' opinion about the efficiency of the foreign language preparatory program that has been put into practice in Turkey for the fifth-grade students in 2017. This study is expected to reveal the efficiency of the program. Besides, this study is thought to contribute to the literature in terms of parents' opinions of learning a foreign language.

Foreign Language Teaching in Turkey

In Turkish history, the most and precious step about education was the enactment of education law in 1924. With this law uniformity of education in the whole country has been provided and then instead of Arabic and Persian as a foreign language, Western languages like German, French, English have been taught (Akyüz, 2004). With the influence of German trainers who took refuge in Turkey during the Second World War, German became popular. But after the war, all over the world, English has become at the forefront (Ekuş and Babayiğit, 2013). As interstate communication becomes vitally important, it becomes compulsory to learn a western language in Turkey. Accordingly, teaching a foreign language program became compulsory in our national program (Demircan, 1988). After 1980, foreign language particularly English teaching spread throughout the country in all areas of formal education. In 1988, the foreign language program was revised as "The Step Based System" in secondary schools. This system was repealed at the end of the year and foreign language lessons became compulsory again (Akyüz, 2004). In 1997, the law Eight Years of Compulsory Education put into practice and timetables are organized again (Tok, 2008).

In 2012, 4+4+4 system was put into practice. One of the most significant changes in the new system is English language education (MNE, 2012). In the previous curriculum, foreign language learning started in the fourth grade but with the new curriculum, it started in the second grade (MNE, 2017a). With this regulation, the foreign language preparatory classes were designed and piloted in 2017. Therefore, fifth-grade foreign language teaching preparatory classes' program was published in 2017. The program has been applied in 5th grade which is the first grade of secondary schools. The aim of the program is to give chance to the students to use the language effectively in daily life, to make the language learning more interesting and fun by increasing the students motivation, to increase students interested in learning language by giving them a wide range of thinking and communication and to transfer the things they learn to daily life (MNE, 2017b). The preparatory program designed to be interrelated forty units. It involves subjects such as family, friends, animals, and holidays. In addition to this, the program provides teachers enough independence to use various educational tools (MNE, 2017b).

English language learning and teaching haven't been efficient despite the effort and cost so far. According to Oğuzkan (1981) and Bağçeci (2004), factors like crowded classes, teachers' inadequacies in teaching methods, the inadequacy of language teachers, prejudice towards language education, the inadequacy of time to practice, and course load, were reasons of this failure.

Being effective means reaching the goal, and the efforts of teaching English have not been effective so far. Başaran (1982) describes the effectiveness of revealing the aim at the intended level. The degree of effectiveness of a training program is proportional to the degree of achievement of its objectives. In this sense, it is necessary for effective management to determine whether the expectations of the beneficiary of the program and drawbacks of the program are met. Since these reasons are still

on the agenda today, we don't proceed in solving the foreign language teaching problem.

This study aimed to determine the parents' opinion about the fifth-grade preparatory program applied by MNE. It is thought that the results of this study will be useful for MNE, who applied this program to reach the goal, in other words, to put into practice effectively. It is also thought that school administrators will be supported in this way. Eventually, it's assumed that this study will provide guidance for the renewal or development of the program and also will be helpful for the studies to be carried out in this field. For this purpose the determined questions were as follows:

1. What are the parents' opinions about the program?
2. What are the parents' expectations of the program?

Method

Research Model

The study was designed qualitatively. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) stated that qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used. Cresswell (2007) describes qualitative research as the most ideal method for the researches where variables are unpredictable. This is a descriptive study which is prepared by using qualitative research techniques. Kaptan (1998) states that descriptive research aims to reveal the interaction between events by dealing with previous events and conditions.

Study Group

There are four secondary schools as a pilot scheme in Bolu. The sample consists of 20 volunteer parents whose children are students in those schools. Among the sampling methods, the appropriate status method is used in this study. Volunteering was taken as the basis to determine the sample. Therefore the parents who will participate in this study were informed about research to be done in advance and research was conducted with these parents who volunteered. Demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Tab. 1.

Tab. 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic characteristics of the participants			**f**
Gender	Female	(P-1, P-4, P-5, P-7, P-10, P-12, P-13, P-14, P-16, P-17, P-19, P-20)	12
	Male	(P-2, P-3, P-6, P-8, P-9, P-11, P-15, P-18)	8
	Total		20

(*continued on next page*)

Tab. 1: Continued

Demographic characteristics of the participants			f
Educational Status	Elementary school	(P-4, P-9, P-12, P-18)	4
	High school	(P-1, P-2, P-5, P-6, P-8, P-10, P-11, P-13, P-14, P-19, P-20)	11
	University	(P-3, P-7, P-15, P-16, P-17)	5
	Total		20
Age range	30–35	(P-2, P-5, P-12, P-13, P-16, P-20)	6
	36–40	(P-1, P-4, P-10, P-14, P-15, P-18)	6
	41–45	(P-3, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, P-11, P-17, P-19)	8
	Total		20

As seen in Tab. 1, most of the participants are female and graduated from high school. Six of those are aged between 30 or 35, six of them are aged between 36 or 40 and finally, eight of them are aged between 41 and 45 years old.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the interview technique is used. According to Merriam (2013), this technique is used when the researcher doesn't have enough knowledge on the issue. Aimed at the purpose of the study semi-structured interview questions were prepared by the researcher. Piloting has been conducted to test the validity of the interview form. The interview form consists of eight questions to determine the opinions and expectations of the parents. Interviews with parents lasted approximately 15 or 20 minutes. The data obtained in the interview were recorded in writing. The descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the data. The parents have been coded and the first parent interviewed was called P-1 and then the others were called (P-2, P-3…). The answers of the parents participating in the interview have been tried to be reflected objectively and neutrally. And one-to-one quotations are indicated in the findings.

Findings and Comments

The main aim of the foreign language preparatory program is to raise individuals who can communicate successfully with other cultures and communities. The first sub-question of the study was the parents' views on the foreign language preparatory program. The opinions of the participants are explained by giving the theme, code, and frequency in Tab. 2.

Tab. 2: The Opinions of the Participants about the Program

Theme	Code	f
The basic aim of the preparatory class	I think s/he will have these skills. (P-1, P-2, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-9, P-10, P-12, P-14, P-15, P-16, P-18, P-19, P-20)	15
	I don't think s/he will have these skills. (P-3, P-8, P-13)	3
	I think s/he will have these skills to a certain extent. (P-11, P-17)	2
Opportunity to apply knowledge and skills in real life	I think s/he will not have the opportunity to practice in real life. (P-1, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, P-10, P-11, P-12, P-13, P-14, P-15, P-17, P-18, P-19)	17
	I think s/he will have the opportunity to practice in real life to a certain extent. (P-2, P-16, P-20)	3
Evaluation of the students	I think oral methods and techniques are applied. (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-7, P-9, P-11, P-12, P-13, P-15, P-17, P-18, P-20)	12
	I think project methods and techniques are applied. (P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-10, P-14, P-16, P-19	8
	I think class discussion methods and techniques are used. (P-2, P-3, P-9)	3
	I think a self-evaluation form is used. (P-3, P-8)	2
Course hours	I think it will hurt my child's education (P-1, P-2, P-4, P-7, P-8, P-10, P-11, P-13, P-14, P-15, P-17, P-18)	12
	I think it will have a positive effect on my child's education. (P-3, P-5, P-6, P-9, P-12, P-16, P-19, P-20)	8

As seen in Tab. 2 they think that their children can reach the determined goals. It is seen that this opinion is followed respectively by the opinions that they cannot have these abilities and they will have it partially. Some examples of parents' opinions are given below:

"*I do not think that my child can have the skills mentioned at the end of the preparatory program. The structure and content of the program are not considered appropriate for students age group, besides, how can a program compressed only one year be effective?*"(P-3).

"*Of course we would be very happy if the main purpose of the preparatory class is realized. But this is the first year of the program and I think it's unprepared. I doubt whether conditions are favorable. I don't know if we have the necessary circumstances. I hope we get the desired result."* (P-17).

One of the main objectives of foreign language preparatory program is to make the students who attend prep class use the knowledge and skills in real life. The opinions of parents about the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned by their children in real life are shown in Tab. 2. As seen in Tab. 2, the majority of the parents have the idea that their children won't have the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills in real life. However, some parents think that their children will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills in real life to a certain extent. Some examples of parents' opinions are given below:

"*We live in a village near the city center. I don't think that she can improve these skills with her friends in the village. But as her mother I know little English and I try to help. Besides my daughter's aunt is an English teacher at a health vocational high school. She finds an opportunity to apply what she has learned in class to some extent.*" (P-16).
"*I know how important it is to be exposed to the language in foreign language learning. But I do not know how my child will face such a situation. This is almost impossible in our country. It is just what they learn in class.*" (P-7).

It was emphasized that in the foreign language preparatory program the evaluation of the students should be done with different methods and techniques as well as the written examinations. In this context, the opinions of the parents participated in the search for the children's evaluation are shown in Tab. 2. As seen in Tab. 2, the majority of the parents thinks that oral methods and techniques are applied to evaluate their children. In addition to this, some parents said that project methods and techniques, in-class discussion methods and techniques, and self-assessment methods and techniques are also used. Some examples of parents' opinions are given below:

"*Oral evaluation and visual activities as project work are organized. In this way, the subjects become more permanent for the students. I'm convinced that by doing oral studies, our students will improve speaking skills which they have the biggest deficiency."*(P-1).
"Sending and receiving letters are very good experiences for children. I know that this project work is used very often. My student is very fond of doing this work. This work should be used more for evaluation. I think my student will get better marks and will also understand better."(P-4).

Due to the intensive foreign language preparatory program, some of the courses (e.g. maths, science) have been reduced and some (e.g. art, music, P.E, ICT) has become optional. As seen in Tab. 2, the majority of the parents think that reducing some courses will hurt children's education. On the other hand, some parents

believe that the change will have a positive effect on the students' development. The noteworthy examples of parents' opinions are given below:

> *"(…Courses like music, art, PE attract more attention to fifth-grade students. therefore making these courses optional will reduce the students' interests in school."* (P-11).
> *"(…I'm very happy with the program. Reducing the other courses' hours is not a problem because these courses can be compensated with after school courses."* (P-16).
> *"(…Making some lessons like art, PE, or music optional is not a good idea. Because these lessons are very important for the development of students' social aspects and abilities. The lack of these lessons makes the students leave school. Besides, the reduction of the course time of some lessons like maths and science caused their program to be squeezed."* (P-13).

There are 40 different units in foreign language preparatory program. Each unit is designed for students to develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. The expectations of the parents who participate in the research from the foreign language preparatory program are shown in Tab. 3. The second sub-question of the study was the parents' expectations for foreign language preparatory program. The expectations of the participants about the program are explained in Tab. 3.

Tab. 3: The Participants' Expectations about the Program

Theme	Code	f
Reading, writing, listening and speaking skills	I expect s/he will gain all the abilities. (P-1, P-2, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, P-10,P-12, P-13, P-15, P-16, P-18, P-19, P-20)	14
	I expect s/he will gain some of the abilities. (P-3, P-9, P-11)	3
	I'm not sure whether these abilities will be gained or not. (P-17, P-10)	2
	I expect s/he will gain none of the abilities. (P-14)	1
Teachers and managers	I expect there will be seminars on languauge education at school. (P-4, P-5, P-6, P-8, P-9, P-11, P-12, P-13, P-14, P-15, P-16, P-18, P-19, P-16, P-18, P-19, P-20)	17
	I expect school administration,parents and teacher cooperation will be increased. (P-1, P-2, P-5, P-8, P-9, P-10, P-11, P-14, P-15, P-16, P-17, P-19)	12
	I expect they will create a good atmosphere for the students to love the lesson. (P-3, P-4, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-16)	6
	I expect informing about the development of my student will increase. (P-5, P-8, P-10, P-13, P-19)	5

(*continued on next page*)

Tab. 3: Continued

Theme	Code	f
Classroom, tools, and equipment	I expect the number of students in the class will be decreased. (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, P-10, P-11, P-12, P-14, P-15, P-17)	14
	I expect there will be equipment like smart board,notice board. (P-1, P-3, P-6, P-8, P-9, P-11, P-13, P-15, P-16, P-18, P-19, P-20)	12
	I expect there will be English language classes and laboratories. (P-6, P-7, P-9, P-11, P-13, P-14, P-17, P-20)	8
	I expect course books and supplementary materials are sufficient. (P-4, P-7, P-11)	3
	I hope the tools will be clean and functional. (P-6, P-9)	2
Teaching universal values	I expect the values will be gained with the help of the program. (P-1, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, P-10, P-12, P-13, P-14, P-19, P-20)	12
	I expect the values will be gained by the program to some extent. (P-2, P-13, P-14, P-16, P-17)	5
	I expect the values will be developed with the help of other courses. (P-3, P-4)	2
	I expect the program will be inadequate to have the values gained by the students. (P-1)	1

As seen in Tab. 3, the majority of the parents think that their children will gain all the abilities at the end of the program. Besides some parents think their children will gain some of the abilities while some of them think the opposite or aren't sure whether their children will gain the abilities or not. The noteworthy examples of the parents' opinions are given:

"*I expect that the end of the year with the help of the outcomes of the units my child will gain all the abilities effectively. Because the program, units, and sources are well organized. In addition, our teacher makes a lot of effort to improve my child's abilities. A suitable environment has been created in the school.*" (P-16).

"*The program is very wide. Also, there are no course books to follow the program. There is no distinction between reading, writing, listening and speaking courses. All of them are mixed. Students have the lessons the way the teacher likes. Under these circumstances, I don't think they will gain these abilities at the end of the year.*" (P-14).

As seen in Tab. 3, the majority of the parents are expecting to have seminars about language education in the schools. Some examples of parents' expectations are given below:

"I think foreign language teaching starts with love. One of my twin daughters is eager, loves the lesson and she learns more quickly. But my other daughter says she doesn't like the lesson. Therefore, her marks are very low, we have to revise all the time. So the teacher and the school administration should give more activities that will encourage the students." (P-7).

"*I would like the English teachers and the school administration to inform us about the program.How will English education continue in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades? How will they study English in their further education? I would like to know all about this.*" (P-13).

"*In fact, the teachers' reaching the target depends on the links. If one of the links is weak, the system weakens. To see students' development, simple weekly report cards for parents can be sent or some social apps like WhatsApp can be used. So we know better about the development of our children."* (P-10).

The equipment of the school must be suitable for education if they want to achieve the aim of the program. As seen in Tab. 3, the majority of the parents expect the number of students in the classroom is decreased. Some examples of parents' expectations are given below:

"(…) *Having crowded classes is a very negative situation. In some classes, they don't have smart boards or they have broken ones. As they don't have special language classes, they can't have effective English lessons. And also they can't use the notice boards effectively because they don't have only one special class.*" (P-6).

"*The school is not in good condition technically. They only have smart boards. And I think that is not enough. To do the listening activities we need headphones and special classrooms. When needed, the classes should be separated. There must be practical workshop lessons. As this is the first year, I believe course books are inadequate.*" (P-7).

"*I can list my expectations on this subject as follows: The number of the students in the classroom must be decreased, different methods must be used in language teaching, different audiovisual materials must be used, all the other activities to help the students develop the foreign language must be done in the school. For example, products sold in the canteen should be written in English, too.*" (P-15).

It is aimed that with this foreign language teaching program, students should gain some universal values (like environmental and historical awareness, patience, respect, responsibility, patriotism, and liberty). As seen in Tab. 3, the majority of the parents expect that their children will gain these values with this program. Some examples of parents' expectations are given below:

"*Our culture is a value. It is important to explain this value in both our native tongue and other different foreign languages. I hope that with the help of this preparatory program my child will get an opportunity to explain it in another language."* (P-10).

"*It is impossible to teach a value in a foreign language unless you teach it in your native language. First, values need to be internalized in our language.*" (P-11).

"*I think these values can be gained not only in this course but also the whole educational life of the children. All the other courses are responsible for helping the students gain values. Besides these values should be gained by living not writing."*(P-4).

Discussions Results and Recommendations

It is discovered that most parents' views on the program are positive, and expectations were high. People realize the importance of early age in foreign language education in Turkey as in all other countries. The majority of the parents believe that their children can successfully communicate with other cultures at the end of the program. Beisdes; they think their children do not have the opportunity to practice foreign language knowledge and skills in real life. Very few think that their children can develop skills with family members or close relatives who speak foreign languages. Considering the views of the parents on evaluation, they believe that mostly order and project-based methods are used. Parents generally state negative opinions about reducing the number of courses. They stated that making some lessons like Art and PE optional harm students' physical and emotional development.

Parents have a positive expectation that their children will gain speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. They expect the teachers and school administrators to hold a meeting to inform and increase school and family cooperation. They state that they want to be decreased the number of students in the classroom, to have smart boards and notice board in class, special English language classes. Finally, they expect their children will have enough knowledge and skills about the values at the end of the program.

Ekuş and Babayiğit (2013) found that the majority of English teachers agreed on the preparatory class idea positively by emphasizing the importance of language at an early age. Teachers who have a negative attitude towards the preparatory class said the classes are crowded. Also, they agree on having too many outcomes. These results are similar to the results of this research. In studies conducted parents supported the preparatory class however they state that crowded classes may have a negative effect. Seçkin (2011) and Parmaksız and İncirci (2016) found that teachers see the English language program as intense. Merter, Kartal and Çağlar (2012) and Aslan and İzci (2017) concluded that foreign language textbooks are generally not understandable. This data is important to emphasize the importance of parents' opinion (I expect textbooks and supplementary materials to meet students expectations). Because having an effective course book and supplementary materials are very important in terms of students' success. Dilekli (2018) found that teachers think positively about the content, education level, evaluation and the readiness of the students but there are too many outcomes. Eventually, teachers are in favor of the idea of the preparatory class program. Zehir, Topkaya and Küçük (2010) found that it would be positive to continue preparatory class. The support of the program by teachers is similar to the research results. These results seem to support the study in terms of parents' expressing generally positive opinions about the preparatory class.

Consequently, effective in-service training can be provided for teachers and administrators involved in the program. In language teaching, lesson materials, tools, and the atmosphere of the class are important. For this reason, there should

be language laboratories in all schools where there are foreign language preparatory classes. And also class arrangements should be appropriate for language teaching. Because of the social environment in language teaching is important. The setting should be prepared for the students to use their knowledge and skills. For this purpose, methods, and techniques such as live chat on social media, having a pen friend can be applied. As the cooperation of parents and school in education is very important, there should be seminars and meetings to make the parents involved in the program. Before applying for this program all across the country, the number of language teachers should be adequate and also we should bring unity in language teaching.

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