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Teacher Opinions on the Applicability of the 2017 Secondary Education English Curriculum Based on the Blended Learning Approach*

Harmanlanmış Öğrenme Yaklaşımına Dayalı olarak Hazırlanan 2017 Ortaöğretim İngilizce Dersi Programının Uygulanabilirliğine İlişkin Öğretmen Görüşleri

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to determine the views of teachers about the applicability of the 2017 Secondary Education English Curriculum based on blended learning. Phenomenology, a qualitative research design, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and content analysis, one of the data analysis methods, were used in the study. In the study, 20 English teachers from Anatolian high schools in Kocaeli were interviewed. The findings were evaluated in view of the readiness of the teachers for the curriculum, of the practices carried out by the teachers in the courses, of student readiness and technological competence, and of institutional infrastructure and expert support. Despite the positive opinions of teachers toward the blended learning approach, the study concludes that a number of obstacles are encountered in the implementation of the 2017 English Curriculum due to several reasons such as; lack of necessary in-service training for teachers on blended learning, lack of appropriate content in Education Informatics Network (EBA) and Dynamic and Education (DynEd), low level of technological literacy of students, and the inadequacy of institutions in providing services like internet connection, computer supply and expert support.

Keywords: Blended learning, information technologies, secondary education, English curriculum

Öz. Bu araştırmanın amacı, harmanlanmış öğrenme yaklaşımına dayalı olarak hazırlanan 2017 Ortaöğretim İngilizce Dersi Programının uygulanabilirliğine ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerinin belirlenmesidir. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenoloji, veri toplama aracı olarak araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen görüşme formu ve veri analiz yöntemlerinden içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada Kocaeli'de bulunan Anadolu liselerinde görev yapan 20 İngilizce öğretmeniyle görüşme yapılmıştır. Bulgular öğretmenlerin program hazırbulunuşluğu, öğretmenlerin derslerde gerçekleştirdikleri uygulamalar, öğrenci hazırbulunuşluğu ve teknolojiye sahip olma, kurumsal alt yapı ve uzman desteği başlıklarında değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmada, öğretmenlerin harmanlanmış öğrenme yaklaşımını olumlu kabul etmelerine karşın gerekli hizmet içi eğitimi almamaları, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığınca sağlanan ders materyallerinin harmanlanmış öğrenme yaklaşımını destekler nitelikte olmaması, EBA ve DynEd'in ortaöğretim İngilizce dersine uygun içerik barındırmaması, öğrencilerin teknoloji okuryazarlığının düşük olması, kurumların internet bağlantısı, bilgisayar temini ve uzman desteği sağlamada yetersiz kalması gibi nedenlerle 2017 İngilizce Dersi Öğretim Programı'nın uygulanmasında engellerle karşılaşıldığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Harmanlanmış öğrenme, bilişim teknolojileri, Orta öğretim İngilizce öğretim programı

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Introduction

In parallel with the developments in science, technology, sociology and culture, the needs are changing and the changing needs affect the required qualifications of the individuals and thus, the curricula as well. Within the scope of "renewing and changing the studies in curricula" carried out by Head Council of Education and Morality (Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı[TTKB]) in 2017, Secondary Education English Curiculum -2014 has been renewed to meet the changing requirements of the age and society in line with the innovations and developments in learning and teaching theories and approaches (TTKB, 2017). The newly introduced Secondary Education English Curriculum-2017 has been declared to be based on blended learning by the ministry (The Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2017).

When the related literature is examined, it is seen that face-to-face learning has both drawbacks and benefits. Addressing a limited number of students at a certain time and place (Çevik, 2006), some students' lack of self-confidence within the presence of others (Jensen, 2006), and the adverse effects resulting from physical conditions of the school environment like having extremely hot or cold, noisy or uncomfortable classrooms (Erdiller and McMullen, 2003) are some of the drawbacks of face-to-face learning. That the students generally have a listener status, that there is not enough time for repeating the subjects and for student questions, and the large scale effect of individual characteristics and competences of teachers (Cebeci & Bek, 1999) are shown as some of the other drawbacks of face-to-face learning. On the other hand, it has some advantages like group interaction, experience and emotion sharing, self-expression in the community and building self-confidence (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Schacht, 2002).

Similarly, there are some studies on the benefits and drawbacks of e-learning, too. Past studies have shown the adaptation of e-learning to be effective in connecting people and resources, in facilitating active learning and understanding, enhancing critical thinking skills as well as in promoting creative communication (Romero-Frias and Arquero, 2013; Khan, Hasan, &Clement, 2012). Cheong (2001) states that e-learning eliminates the necessity of going to class every day or working on a printed material and it provides the individuals with the opportunity to work in a desired environment and time. E-learning supports permanent learning through a variety of materials it provides, while it facilitates communication with different students and getting instant feedback (Kruse, 2004). However, major drawbacks in integrating e-learning into education include high initial costs for preparing content materials, substantial costs for system maintenance (Özdil & Çelik, 2000) as well as feeling of depression and isolation in virtual environment (Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2012). Materials used in e-learning are problematic for teachers and students who do not have a required level of computer and internet literacy. In addition, e-learning can be ineffective in teaching real-life skills, and it may be useless for individuals who are not aware of their individual needs and of the learning methods appropriate for themselves and for individuals who do not have working discipline, and it may even result in the loss of perception of animacy in young students due to the virtual environment (Yılmazçoban & Damkacı, 1999). In addition, the low completion rates of e-learning courses, and the importance of instructor-student and student-student interactions in classrooms points to the fact that e-learning alone was unlikely to be the most effective strategy for teaching and learning (Glazer, 2012; Reich, 2015).

In recent years, blended learning, a convergence of e-learning and face-to-face learning (Allan, 2007; Rovai & Jordan, 2004), has emerged to be a promising alternative learning approach compared to conventional e-learning approach (Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2012). Graham (2013)

argued the blended learning to be the "new traditional approach" in education because it maximized the best advantages of face-to-face and e-learning approaches. Claiming that blended learning does not merely imply a new method of learning, Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) emphasize that the concept refers to the harmonious use of the stronger aspects of the methods and techniques of e-learning and of face-to-face learning to increase quality and efficiency of the learning process. By further elaborating this view, Abate (2004) posits that blended learning compensates the limitations of both approaches. According to him, the disadvantages of the isolated environment offered by e-learning can be minimized by the social interaction and guidance provided by face-to-face learning. It also compensates for the slow-paced learning resulting from individual differences in face-to-face learning and for the inability of some students to reach the desired results in time, with the opportunities of e-learning such as permitting learners to follow an individualized study or by enabling them to interact with other groups and resources.

Studies highlighting the importance of blended learning are not limited to the aforementioned ones. Futch (2005) and Graham (2006) state that blended learning provides a more effective pedagogy than existing approaches by providing diversity in terms of group interaction, course content and of student needs. The need for resources to be spent on education is reduced as blended learning provides flexibility and ease of access to education (Futch, 2005), and assesment and evaluation activities can be made by saving time and effort (Vaughan, 2003) thanks to information technologies (IT). In addition, with the support provided by the teacher in and outside the classroom via online means, the students gain the ability and get responsibility in managing their own learning processes (Vaughan, 2003). Also, they can accurately evaluate the information they get and classify it in order of importance and transfer it to different situations for different uses (Masie, 2006). Some researchers also have identified blended learning as having a potential to enhance and increase student engagement (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010; Dzuiban, Hartman, Cavanagh & Moskal, 2011). Recent meta-analyses have shown that blended and online learning, when compared to face-to-face instruction, have experienced greater gains in student performance and satisfaction (Bernard et al., 2009; Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013).

On the other hand, blended learning is a complex approach to put into practice. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) indicate that the balance between online and face-to-face learning may vary from course to course. For this reason, the focal point in the creation of a blended learning environment is to render the highest possible compatibility among its components by choosing the right method and tools to be used and by determining which component will be used more in line with the curriculum needs. Singh and Reed (2001, p.5) state that four elements should be taken into consideration when creating a blended learning environment:

I. **Audience Analysis:** gathering information on the learning types of individuals, their readiness and motivation levels, and on their knowledge about the subject to be taught and on the time they can devote to face-to-face education.

II. **Content Analysis:** Analysis of the information to be transferred through the blended learning environment in order to decide on the duration of the teaching and the method / technique and tools to be used and on how to transfer it better.

III. **Financial Analysis:** Cost analysis of the materials to be prepared and used.

IV. **Infrastructure Analysis:** Number and capacity of classrooms, qualifications of existing materials, technology infrastructure, number of students and similar other components.

In order to create a successful blended learning environment, a balance should be established in the environment by taking all these variables into account in the process (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). On the one hand, blended learning might be the possible solution theoretically but on the other hand, the current situation of all variables in an education system should be suitable for the implementation of blended learning. Stabback (2016) categorizes these variables of the implementation process as students, teachers, schools and other learning environments, material designers, and education managers. Considering that the most important of these variables are teachers, Gömleksiz (2007) posits that the level of achievement of the objectives of a curriculum can be causally related to the adoption and implementation of the curriculum. In this context, in the evaluation of the curriculum designed based on the blended learning approach, it is important to consider the opinions of the teachers to shed a light on the current situation. In other words, considering the views of the practitioners can be the best starting point for finding solutions to the problems that might be encountered in future in the execution of a given curriculum.

According to 2014-2019 Strategic Plan of MoNE (2015) the weaknesses of education system in Turkey include issues such as regional differences in accessing to education opportunities and the differences in the number of students per classroom in different zones; high cost of the rapidly developing and changing technological equipment, and inefficiency of in-service teacher training. Therefore, considering the weaknesses that are highlighted in the Strategic Plan, there may be difficulties in the successful implementation of blended learning. In order to understand these difficulties, a request was made to T.R Prime Ministry, Communication Center (BIMER) to get the results of the study titled 'Determining the Competencies of Teachers in Using Information Technologies' conducted by MoNE but no answer was received.

When the related national literature was examined, it has been seen that although there are some studies on the efficiency of blended learning in the courses in higher education institutions and the effect of blended learning on student achievement in various learning areas, the number of studies about the infrastructure of institutions and the readiness of teachers and students for the implementation of blended learning in English courses are limited. Furthermore, no study is encountered on the applicability of the 2017 Secondary English Language Curriculum. Therefore, there is a need for studies to reveal the suitability of the current situation for the applicability of blended learning in secondary school English. The teachers are the common element of each one of the stages of the process, such as the implementation of the method-technique necessitated by blended learning, the preparation and use of the tools and instruments and the implementation and evaluation of the teaching activities. Therefore, the evaluation of the experiences and views of the teachers regarding the implementation of the curriculum and the approach on which the curriculum is structured is an important source of feedback for the improvement and development of the process. This study aims at finding out the extent of applicability of the 2017 curriculum through the perspectives of teachers. It also aims at reflecting a light on the problems experienced in fulfilling the general objectives of the curriculum. The research questions of this study are as follows:

What are the views of teachers about the applicability of the 2017 Secondary English Language Curriculum which is based on blended learning approach?

1. What does teachers know about the current English curriculum and blended learning?
2. How do teachers perform the practices based on blended learning?
3. What is the situation of students' readiness for blended learning practices and their accessibility to technological tools?
4. What is the situation of institutional infrastructure and facilities for blended learning?

Method

Research Design

This research was carried out according to descriptive/ hermeneutical phenomenology pattern which is one of the qualitative research paradigms. This approach refers to the study of personal experience and requires a description or interpretation of the meaning of the specific phenomena (Creswell, 2013), Secondary Education English curriculum in this research. In the human sphere this normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive methods such as interviews or discussions. Following the stages of the phenemological study pattern, firstly the research questions were prepared, the institutions and teachers to be included in the research were designated, and the data obtained were analyzed, interpreted and reported in relation to the research questions. Four important dimensions of blended learning; teachers, students, learning environment and institutional capacity are taken into consideration through the lens of teachers in the study. In accordance with the principle of induction, which is dominant in the qualitative research approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: p. 52) the obtained data were clarified, analysed and interpreted for the benefits of the individuals who are dealt with the Secondary English curriculum.

Participants

The participants consist of 20 English teachers working at the Anatolian High Schools[*] in Izmit District of Kocaeli in accordance with Cropley's (2002) "research focus and amount of data" (p. 34) principles in due consideration of the accessibility of the researchers to the study area.The Anatolian High Schools were chosen due to the fact that the weekly course hours were the same in all and that they used the same curriculum and they were within the scope of the 'Fatih Project [†]'conducted by the MoNE. 14 of the teachers in the study graduated from English Language Teaching Department; four from English Language and Literature Department; and two from Department of Translation and Interpreting. Six of the teachers have an experience of 10-15 years; seven, of 16-20 years; six, of 21-25 years; and one, of 26-30 years.

[*] **Anatolian High School** or **Anadolu High School** (Turkish: **Anadolu** Lisesi), refers to public **high schools** in Turkey that admits their students according to nationwide standardized test (TEOG) scores.
[†] Fatih Project refers to the comprehensive educational movement implemented by MoNE for the use of educational technologies to provide every student with the best education, the highest quality educational content and equal opportunities.

Data Collection Tools

The interview, which is used as the data collection tool in the study, is one of the methods that gives positive results in the collection of data about "the experiences, attitudes, opinions, feelings, beliefs and complaints of individuals" (Briggs, 1986, 152). In this study, Interview Response Technique, which includes the list of subjects or questions to be used during the interview with a view to obtain the same kind of information from different people, was used (Patton, 1987). Interview Response Technique gives the interviewer the flexibility to ask for additional questions or change the order of questions when necessary (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

The questions related to blended learning and 2017 Secondary Education English Curriculum were added in the interview form. Question types in the interview forms included open-ended questions which aimed at collecting detailed and in-depth data on the views and experiences of the particpants, as well closed-ended questions such as the one inquring if they have participated in any in-service training. Alternative questions were provided in case of misunderstandings by the teachers. After getting the opinions of the experts working in Computer and Information Technologies (4), Curriculum and instruction (2) and Assessment and Evaluation in Education (1), the interview form was revised. As a pilot study, the interview form was applied to two English teachers serving in secondary education. During the pilot study, because of the difficulties encountered in getting the responses, some of the questions were rearranged into indirect questions. The renewed interview form was approved after evaluation for the second time by the same experts.

Data Collection

In the data collection stage, Patton's (2002) principles were taken into account: (1) The sequence of questions was changed during the meetings in order to avoid interrupting the natural flow of the interview. (2) In order to make the participants feel comfortable, interview questions were asked in a conversational tone and eye contact was established. (3) During the interview, in order to get in-depth information, feedback was given based on words, gestures and mimics, but the manipulation of participants was avoided. (4) In the cases that the participants moved away from the subject, their interest was directed to the focus of the interview without demoralizing them. The participants were informed about the duration and purpose of the interview, and an appropriate interview time was determined for each. Interviews were conducted in the teachers' own schools in order to provide comfortable communication. The duration of the interviews was between 20-40 minutes. With the permission of the teachers, the interviews were digitally recorded and the researchers took notes when necessary.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to reach the concepts and connections that can explain the data obtained (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and for the in-depth analysis of the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 243). In the first step of the analysis, the voice recordings received in the interviews were converted into written text by giving codes to the teachers, and the data obtained were analyzed, divided into meaningful parts and coded on the basis of research questions and conceptual frame. The data not related to research were not coded and maximum care was

exercised for the concepts used in coding to effectively represent the meanings and events in the relevant section.

In the study, the mode of "coding in a general framework" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 p. 67) which is based on predetermining the general themes and establishing the detailed codes under the themes during the examination of the data, was preferred. General themes were determined by the two researchers by taking into consideration the four components of blended learning; teachers, students, content and infrastructure. Financial analysis is exluded because it is beyond participants' knowledge.

In order to increase the internal and external validity and reliability, the research steps were clearly stated (Miles & Huberman, 1994); the relationships between the identified and presented findings, the results obtained from the findings and the significance of the results are explained in details. In sharing the findings, the actual expressions of the participants were used in direct quotations; participants were adressed with other names starting with initials instead of their real names. For expertise review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) "Method" and "Findings" parts of this research were confirmed by an academician specializing in qualitative research methods.

In the data analysis process, after the interviews were converted into written texts, codes and themes were created separately by the two researchers and the codes that were seen to differ upon comparison were assigned to appropriate themes or were removed altogether (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two researchers were involved in text analysis of the interviews. As a former English teacher the first researcher works in Curriculum and instruction department and she is an expert on teaching techniques and second researcher works at an Anatolian high school as a teacher of English. The ratio of the total number of agreed codes to the total number of differing codes is calculated and the coding reliability score is figured out to be 85%.

Findings

In order to facilitate the interpretation of the findings, the predetermined themes formed in line with the purpose of the study are presented in Figure 1.

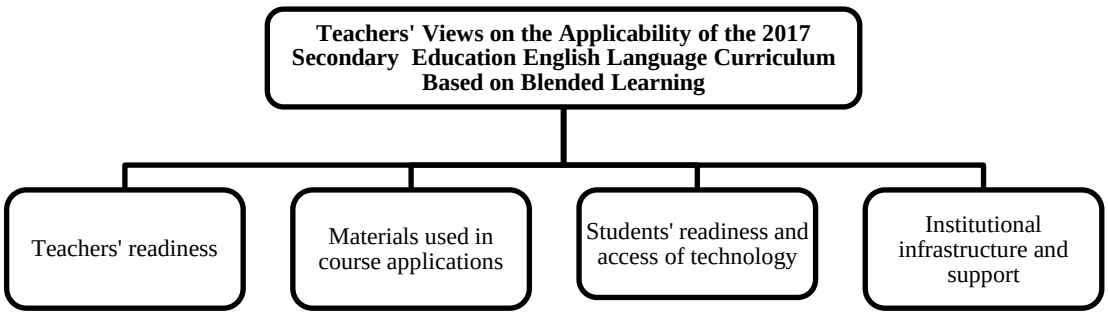

Figure 1. Main themes of the content analysis

As shown in Figure 1, the main themes of the study based on the research subject and purpose are (1) teachers' readiness, (2) materials used in course applications, (3) students' readiness and access to technology, (4) institutional infrastructure and support. These themes are consistent with Singh and Reed's (2001) views in terms of the dimensions that need to be addressed in creating a blended learning environment.

Findings on Teachers' Readiness

Teacher readiness is characterized by having the knowledge, skills and willingness to apply an approach, or an activity (Bandura, 1995). As seen in Figure 2, the findings of the teachers' readiness are grouped into four categories: teachers' views on the curriculum, their knowledge about the curriculum, IT literacy, and material development through IT.

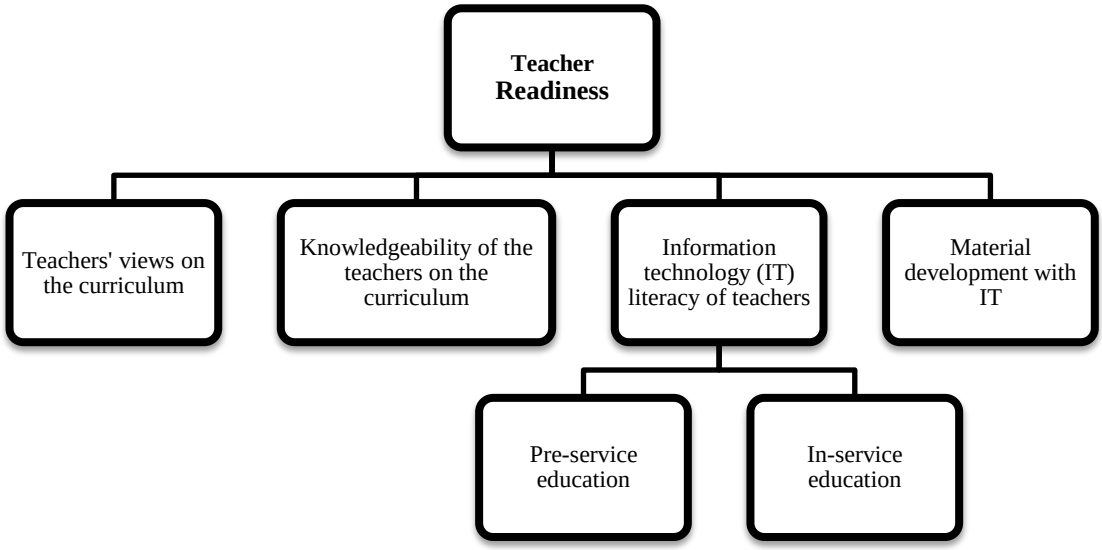

Figure 2. Themes related with teacher readiness

Teachers' views on the curriculum

Responses[‡] to "Teachers' Views on the Curriculum" were referred under "positive" and "negative" captions and placed in Figure 3.

The teachers with a positive opinion, justified it on the ground that the curriculum raises inquisitive and independent students and highlights applied language teaching.

> *Suzan: "In this curriculum, there are activities that direct students to do research about the subjects in the course. Students don't just listen and write."*

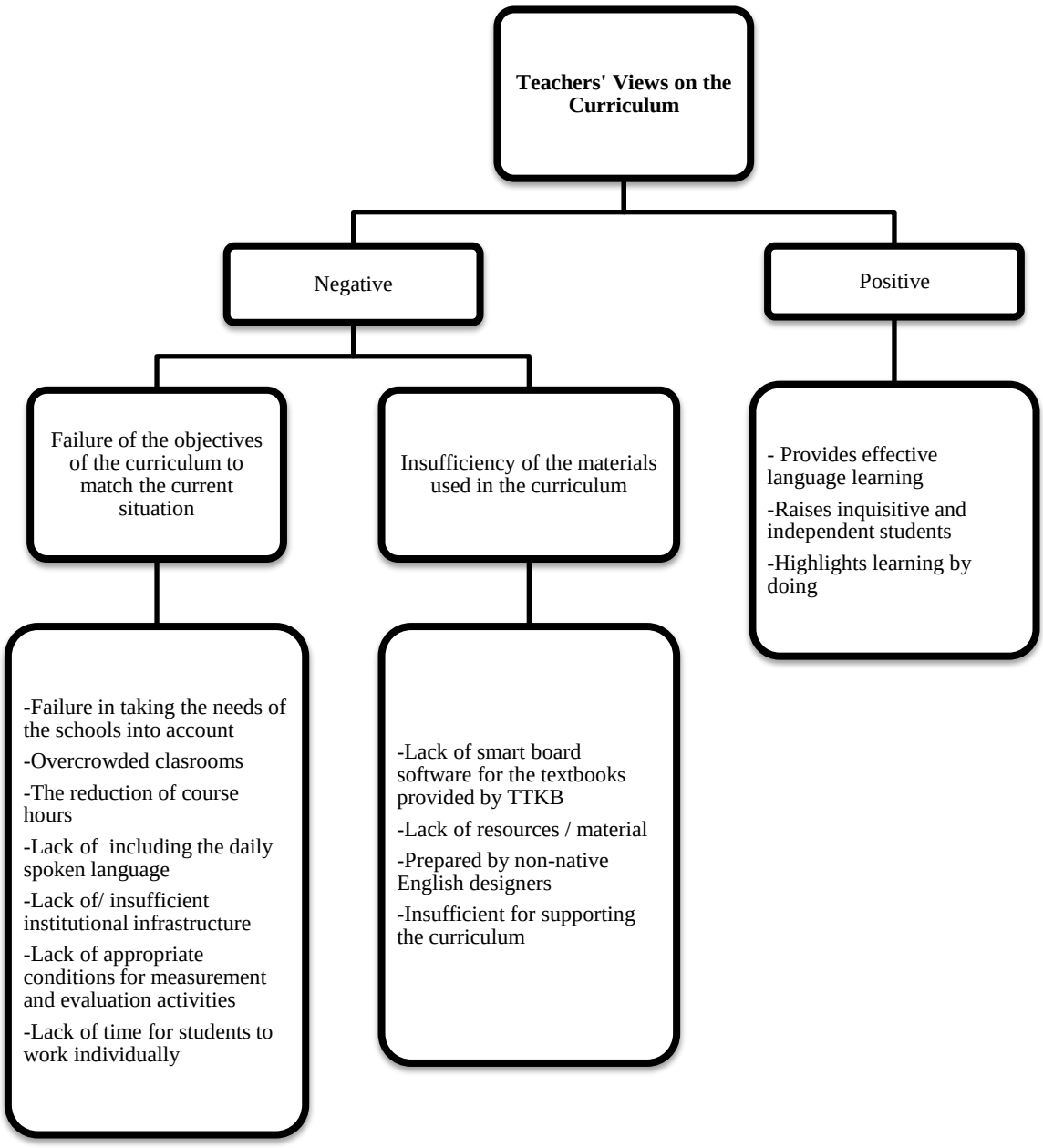

Figure 3. Teachers' views on the curriculum

The negative opinions of the teachers on the curriculum were grouped under two headings as "failure of the objectives of the curriculum to match the current situation", and "insufficiency of the materials used in the curriculum".

> *Emre: "The goals of the curriculum may be good, but the situation in my class is quite different from the one described by the curriculum"*
>
> *Mahmut: "I have a beautiful car, but I don't have a bridge to cross the river."*

Azize: "... in a classroom with thirty students, I don't know how one can get all of them talk in 40 minutes."

Ezgi: "... the textbook given by MONE is not accompanied by a software and the tapes for listening skills are released too late."

Knowledgeability of the teachers on the curriculum

Responses given under the theme 'Knowledgeability of the Teachers on the curriculum' are given in Figure 4 by the captions "efficient" and "inefficient".

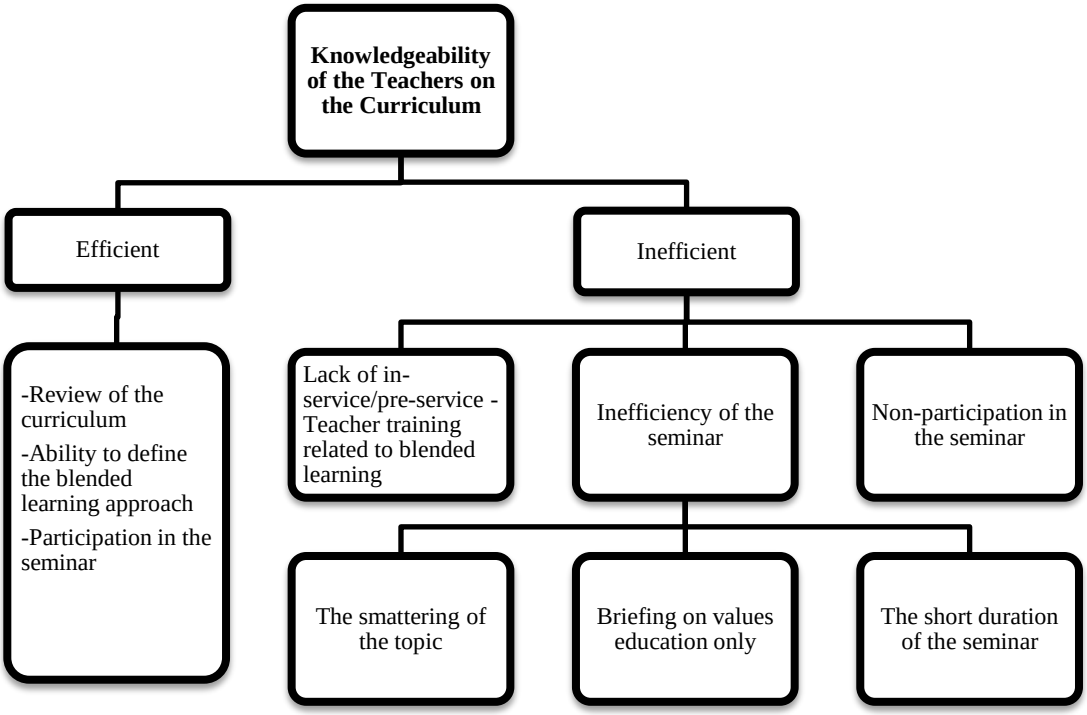

Figure 4. 'Knowledgeability of the teachers on the curriculum'

Positive responses regarding the teachers' knowledgeability on the curriculum are principally categorized under three items: Review of the curriculum, participation in the seminar related to introduction of the curriculum, and their ability to define the blended learning approach on which the curriculum is based. However, teachers who responded positively stated that they had reviewed the curriculum superficially. Secondly, the definitions of blended learning by the teachers are conjectural or notional.

Filiz: "Blended learning is the combination of methods and techniques appropriate to the situation, stemming from the terms."

When the responses under the caption "ineffective" are examined, it is seen that none of the participants have participated in any in-service training on blended learning. In the responses under the caption "ineffective", it was observed that seven teachers did not participate in the seminar on curriculum presentation and the teachers, who stated that they attended the seminar, found it inefficient. The short period allocated for the seminar and the briefing on values education are seen as the most pronounced answers.

Seher: "... the hall was very small, and the speaker was working as a teacher in a school, just like us. He was given a ready-made presentation and he talked about values education only."

Information technology (IT) literacy of teachers

Teacher responses to IT literacy are coded as pre-service training and in-service training.

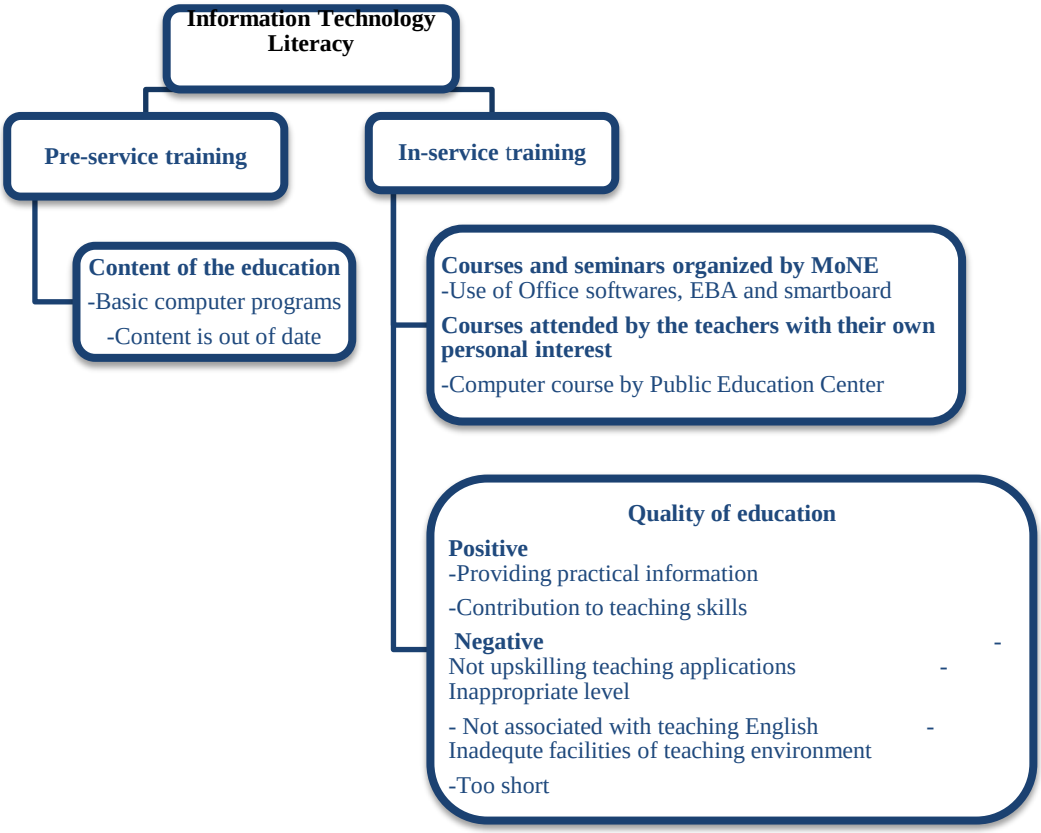

Figure 5. IT literacy of teachers

In the responses concerning pre-service training, it was stated by six teachers that they took basic computer programs during their university education. Almost half of the teachers stated that they did not receive any training on technology during their university education. The answers reveal that the information they got on computer programs is not updated enough to catch up with the rapid progress in technology.

Azize: "It is not possible to talk about the use of technology in my university years in the sense it is used now."

Under the caption "in-service training", all participants stated that they participated in at least one in-service training on IT. Most of these trainings were courses and seminars organized by MoNE. However, most answers point mainly to the shortage of the duration of the trainings.

Burak: "I'm having a hard time remembering how long it was, it was too short."

The positive opinions under the caption "The quality of education" focus on getting practical information and the contribution to teaching skills, during the training.

> *Zekiye: "I have attended a training course abroad within the scope of European Union funds. I went to a course center in Ireland. I really got useful information."*

The negative responses focus on two points: the inability to implement the training received and the incompatibility of the educational content with the level of IT knowledge of teachers.

> *Ezgi: "Office programs were taught, but the practical use of them in English lessons were not shown."*

Material development with IT

The responses relating to 'material development through IT', which is the fourth category under the theme "teacher readiness", are placed in Figure 6.

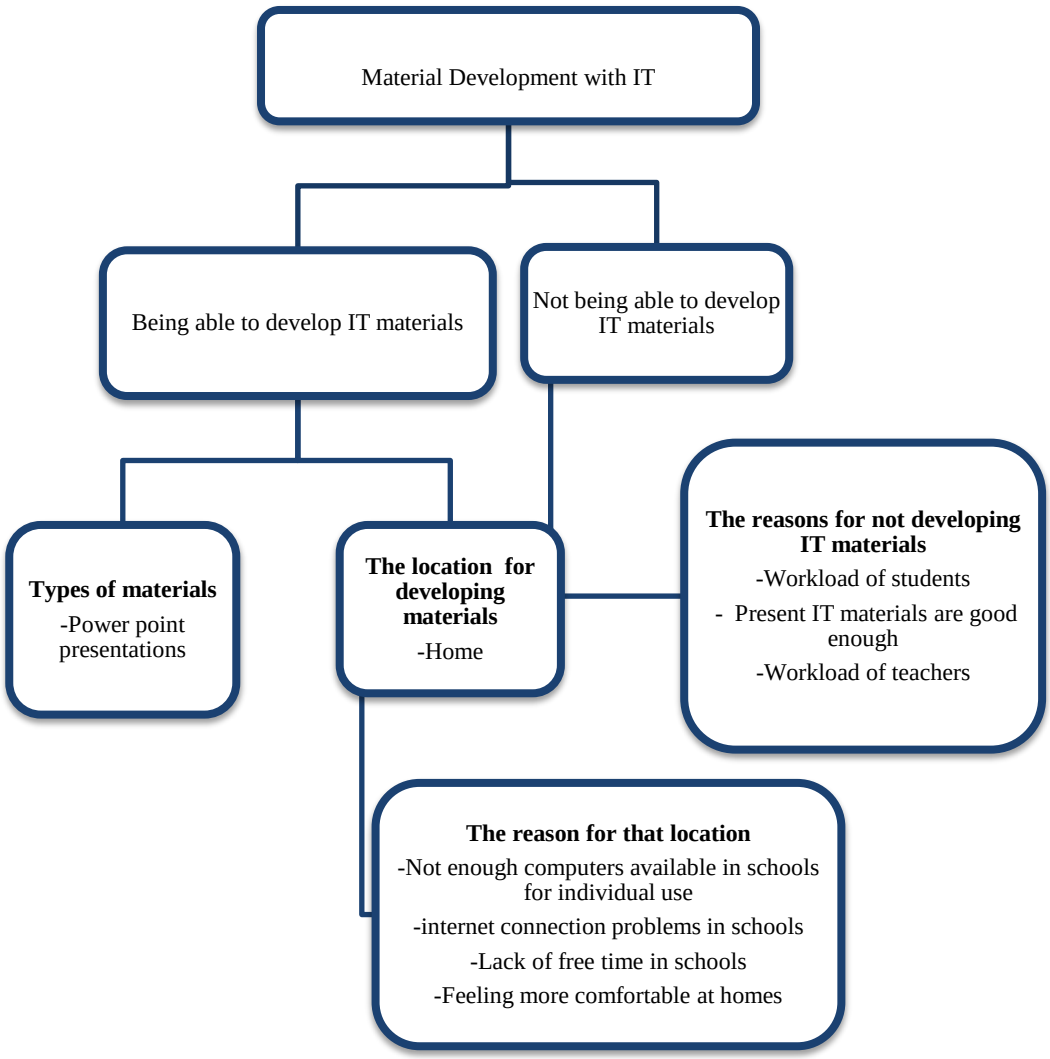

Figure 6. Material development with IT

When the answers are examined, seven teachers are seen to have preferred to prepare their own material. The PowerPoint presentation is the most widely used medium in their responses. The responses to the question inquring the environment in which the material was developed are principally "home" due to the fact that there are internet connection problems in schools and there is not enough computers available in schools for individual use.

Emre: "There are almost 50 teachers at school, but there are only 2 computers for them all."

Most of the participants stated that they did not develop materials. Among the most frequently given answers as to why they didn't do it are that the materials prepared by the experts are more qualified and that the students' course load is heavy.

Findings on Materials Used in Course Applications

The findings were grouped under three categories as "materials used within the classrooms", "materials used without the classroom" and "materials used both within and without the classroom".

Materials used within classrooms

The responses relating to the category of materials used within classrooms are in Figure 7 under concrete materials and IT materials.

The most commonly used concrete material is poster. In the responses to the reasons for using concrete material, the fact that concrete materials are entertaining and appealing is prominent.

Seher: "I'm trying to use a lot of posters. Since students are involved in preparing poster what they learn becomes permanent."

The main reasons why the teachers do not use concrete materials are that these materials are boring and time consuming.

Aylin: "The visual and auditory spectrum of materials offered by the smart board is so wide that students are not interested in concrete material at all."

All of the participants stated that they used IT materials in the classroom, and at the top of these materials were smart board and smart board software. The answers to the reasons for using IT materials are to be multisensory, to be practical in use, to save time, to be interesting and to provide content and sample diversity, respectively.

Ezgi: "Thanks to smart board, we can both listen and watch the video acitivities. Apart from listening to the authentic pronunciation, it is possible to see the gestures and mimics that are part of the culture."

The difficulties in using IT materials are related mainly to the lack of internet in schools and the need to prepare in advance due to the lack of internet in schools.

Berna: "We can only use the internet connection provided by MONE in our classes, which doesn't allow opening interactive sites that can be useful for teaching English."

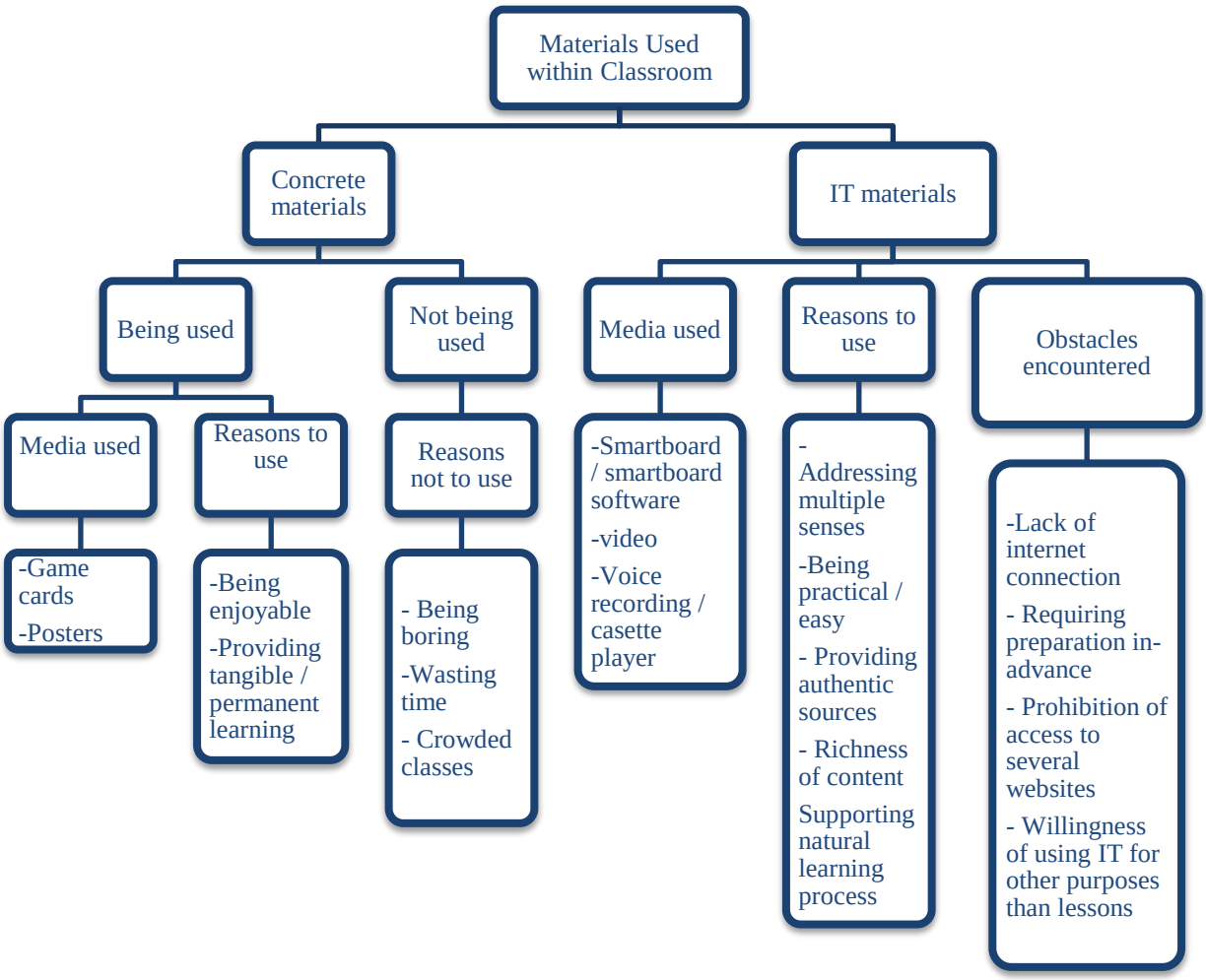

Figure 7. Materials used in classroom

Media used without classrooms

The answers analyzed under " Materials used without classroom" are placed in Figure 8, as social networks, and online sites.

Almost all participants stated that they used social networks to communicate with the students outside the classroom. The answers under "Using Social Networks" especially focus on compensating for the reduced English language course hours, enabling the students to use English out of the classroom. The answers collected under the caption "Tools used" point principally to WhatsApp, Facebook Instagram. The reasons for choosing these tools are fast communication, keeping communication under the control of teachers, ease of file transmission, visuality and practicality.

Berna: "The classroom time is hardly enough to cover the subject to be taught. The student gets his questions from WhatsApp at any time."

Mahmut:" Concerning the students, they are always in need of a reminder! I just use WhatsApp, Facebook or whatever medium to remind them something."

The answers under the caption "Reasons not using social networks" focus on the students' lack of knowledge on the rules of use of internet and their unwillingness to spend their free time on activities related to the course.

Ayşe "There are certain ethical rules of using student information and photographs. I don't want to be in groups that fail to follow these rules."

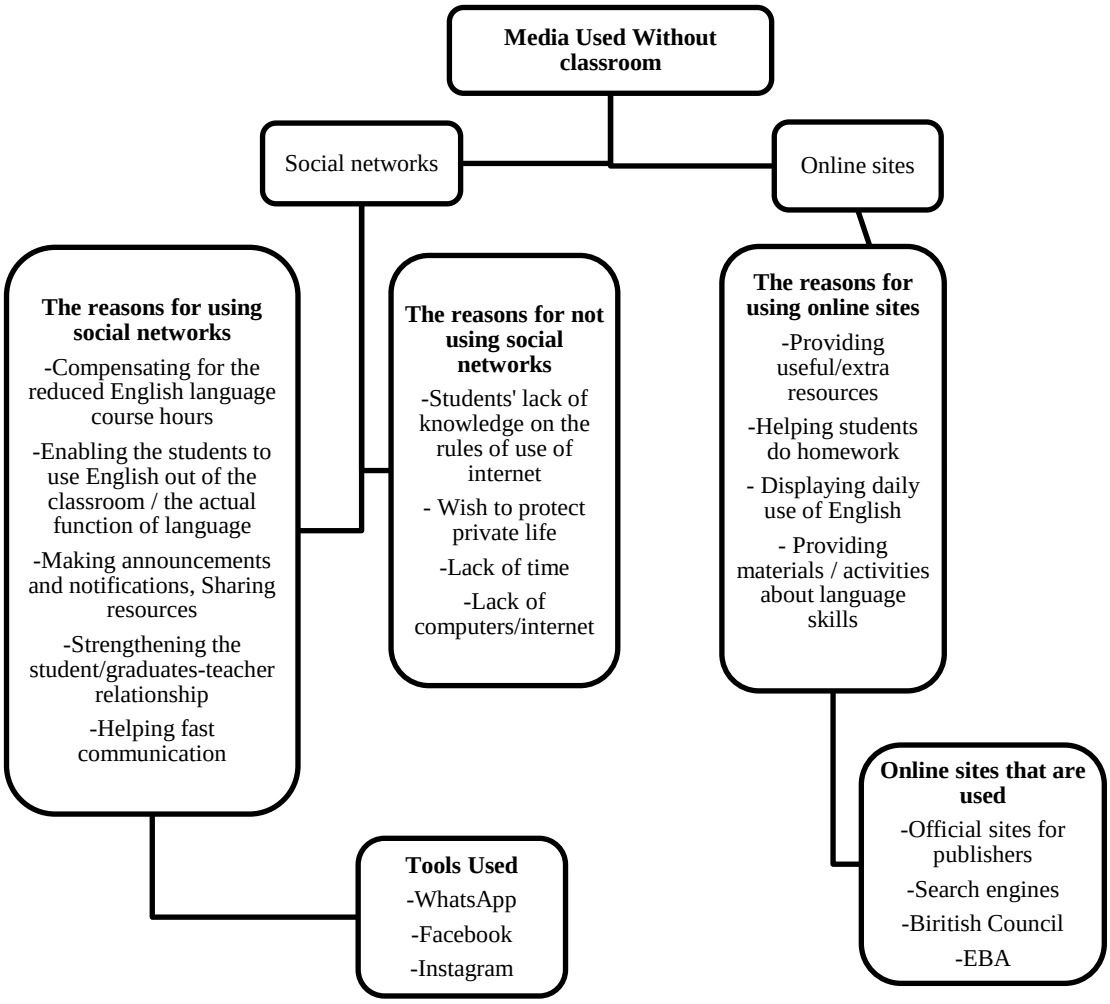

Figure 8. Media used outside classrooms

Out of the 20 teachers, 18 stated that they used online sites for the purpose of continuation of the course outside the classroom and they used the sites to get extra / useful resource.

Azize: "The games on online sites teach students by amusing them. I want them to do their works at extra times. They don't feel like they are doing homework as well."

For the preferred online sites, the teachers have pointed to the websites of the publishing houses for additional resources as well as the search engines, British Council and EBA.

Materials used within and without the classroom

The findings discussed in the category of materials used both within and without the classroom were placed in Table 9 under two headings: EBA and DynEd.

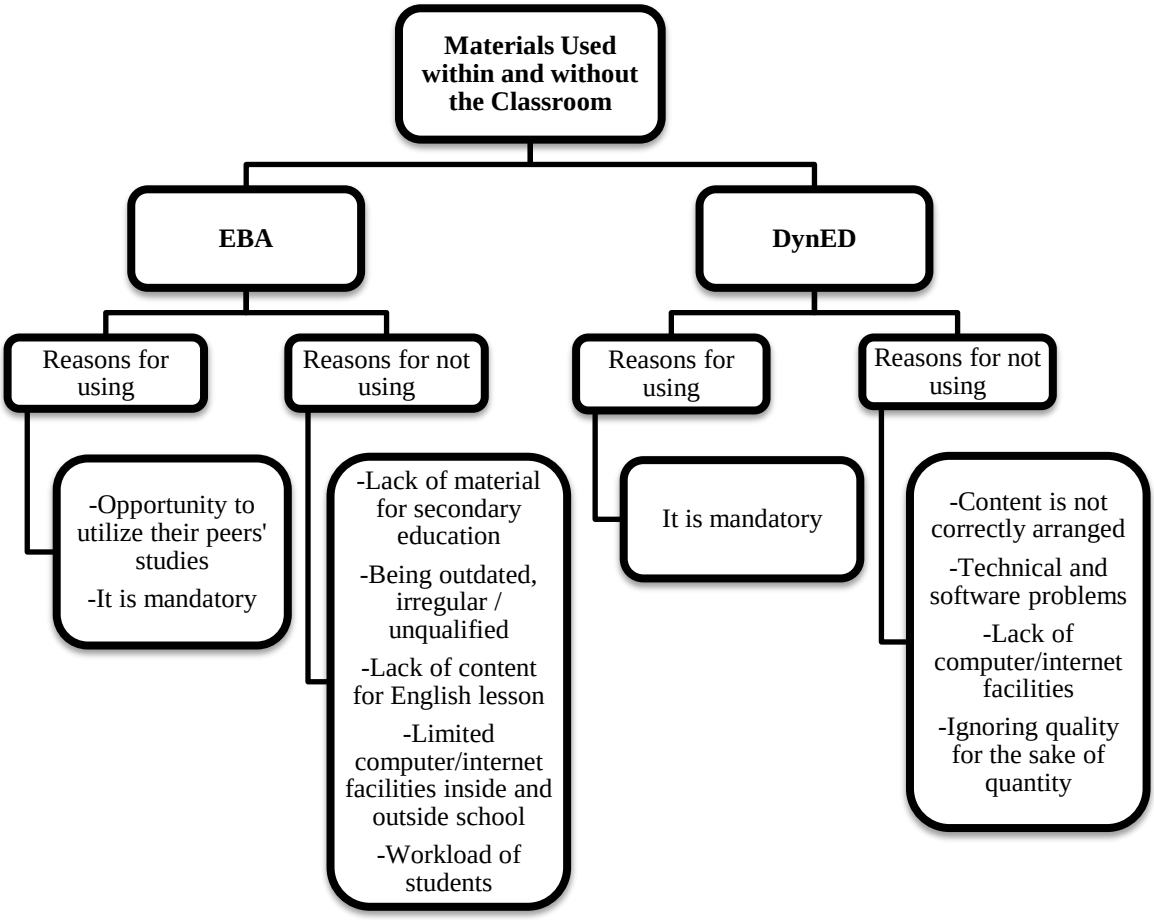

Figure 9. Materials used within and outside the classroom

Of the four teachers who used the teaching management system by EBA, two expressed the opportunity to utilize their peers' studies as an advantage and almost all of the 16 teachers who stated that they do not use EBA frowned upon it due to its being outdated, irregular / unqualified. Nearly half of them posited that EBA didn't contain material for Secondary Education.

> *Serpil "The content in EBA is random, not classified by topic. In fact, there is not much for secondary school English."*

Three of the 20 teachers stated that they used DynEd because it was mandatory. One of the reasons why 17 teachers did not use it was the pressure on them to use it. The second was that its content wasn't correctly arranged. Also, it had technical and software problems.

> *Mahmut: "DynEd has a slow-moving system that tires the student out. They say it is mandatory, but there are always technical failures."*

Findings About Student Readiness and Status of Having Technology

The findings were collected under the captions "interest and motivation", "IT literacy" and "having technology", and they were shown in Figure 10.

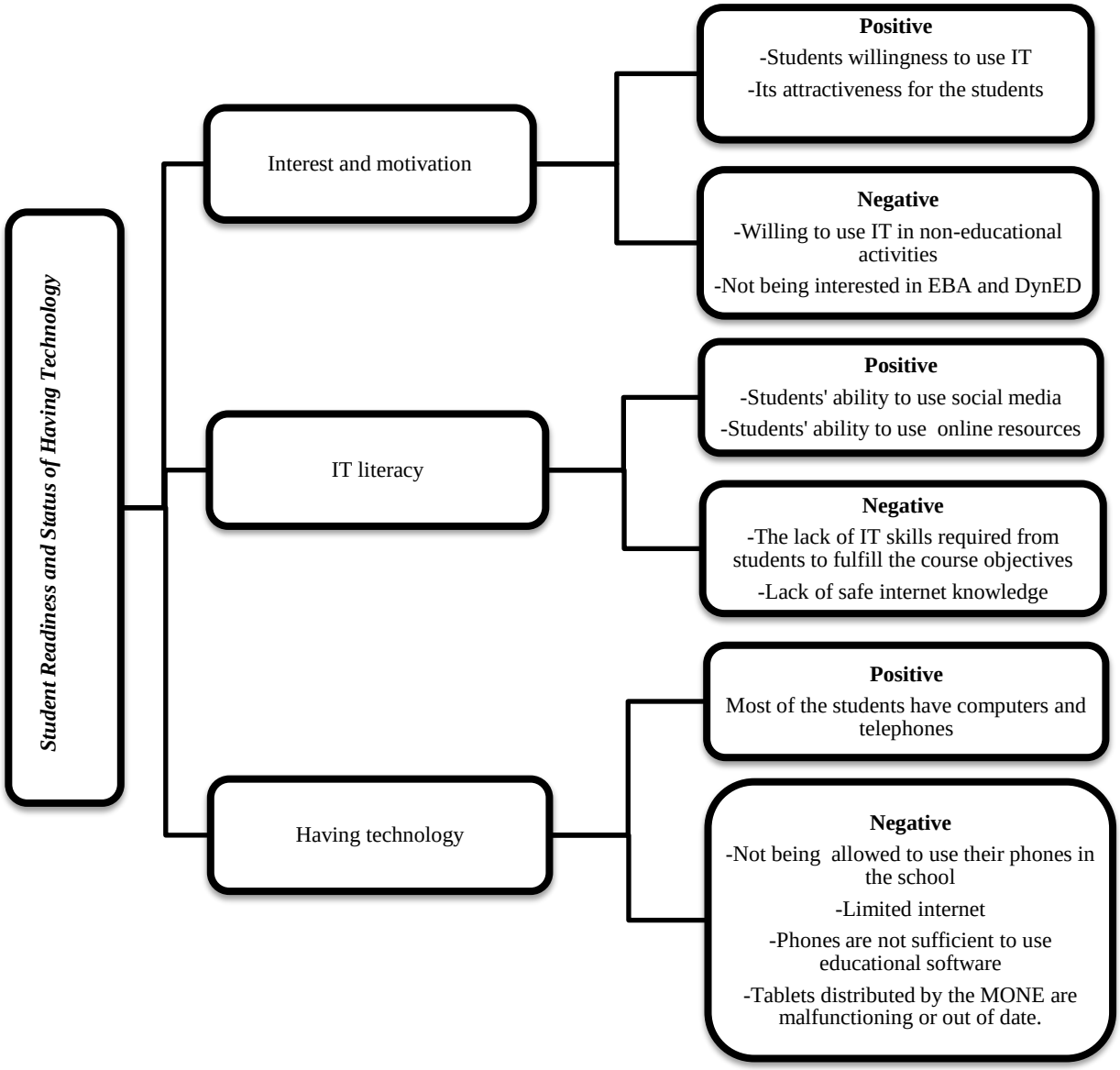

Figure 10. Student readiness and status of having technology

Interest and motivation

Positive responses under the caption "interest and motivation" focus on students willingness to use IT and its attractiveness for the students.

> *Fırat: "When we are to watch something on the smart board, the students are rushing to help. They are willing to do anything if computer or internet is involved."*

The responses of most of the teachers participating in the interview under the caption negative focused on the fact that students were willing to use IT in non-educational activities, or that they were only interested in social networks.

> *Burak: "They are interested in, yes, but in only social networks and thus they don't fit into the definition of computer age kids."*

Technology literacy

Positive responses relating to technology literacy focus on students' ability to use social media and online resources.

> *Serpil: "Students are very talented in technology. They can use any software. I assign some performance tasks such as preparing a video. I find their products very successful."*

The negative responses focus on the lack of IT skills required from students to fulfill the course objectives.

> *Aylin: "When a student is asked to research, he or she is copying it from the first site on the search engine without even checking the reliability of the source."*

Having technology

Most of the positive responses under "having technology" focus on the fact that all or most of the students have computers and telephones.

> *Aylin: "All students have the latest smartphone, internet and computer. I don't know how they can afford it but they do."*

The negative responses focus on the fact that students are not allowed to use their phones in the school, that they have limited internet, that their phones are not sufficient to use educational software and the tablets distributed by the MONE are malfunctioning or out of date.

> *Suzan: "I sometimes want to get the students to play word game on online sites but the school administration collects them in the morning and delivers them after the classes end."*

> *Ebru: "Within the scope of Fatih Project, tablets were given to secondary school students but students in our school never received any."*

Findings on Institutional infrastructure and support

Infrastructure and facilities of the institutions were grouped under the captions: "Equipment and Services", "Expert and Technical Support", and "Classrooms Conditions" in Figure 11.

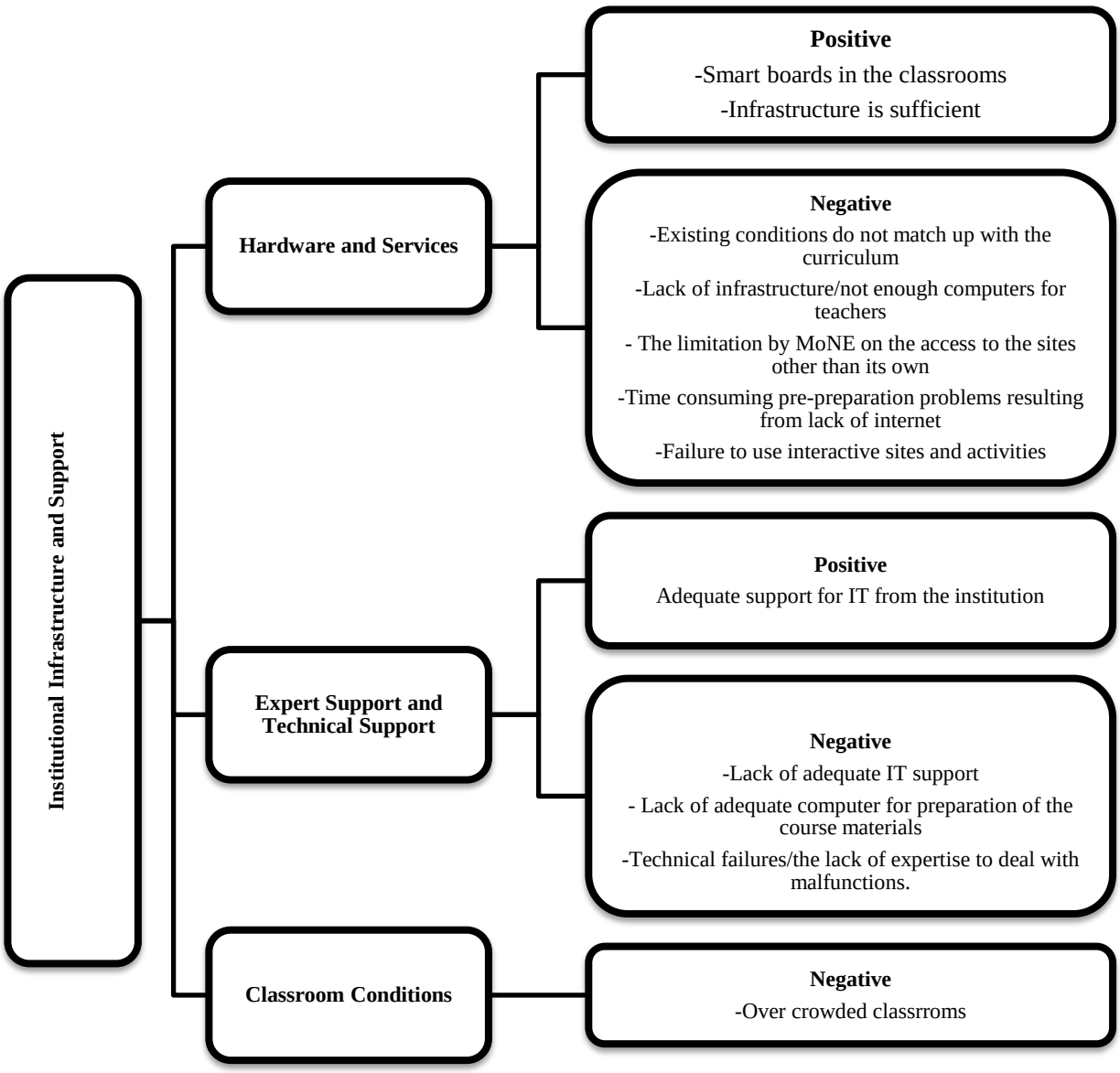

Figure 11. Institutional ınfrastructure and support

Hardware and services

In positive views, all participants emphasize that there are smart boards in their classrooms and half of them say that infrastructure is sufficient.

> *Fırat: "My school is the pilot school for the Fatih project. We have all the facilities that can be used in school such as smart board, printer, scanner, internet."*

In negative responses, it is stated that the existing conditions do not match up with the curriculum, there is a lack of infrastructure and there are not enough computers for teachers. According to all participants, the internet related negativities include the absence of the internet, the limitation by MoNE on the access to the sites other than its own, the necessity to cope with the time consuming pre-preparation problems resulting from lack of internet and failure to use interactive sites and activities.

> *Mahmut: "We cannot do a skill-based lesson because the (MoNE) book does not have smart board software. We have to get additional resources."*

> *Aylin: "The curriculum speaks of raising students who can communicate in English using four skills by using IT but the environment speaks of something else! Classes are too crowded for teaching English. Smart boards do not have internet. EBA and DynEd are insufficient. The MONE website doesn't let us enter the websites I want."*

Expert support and technical support

Positive responses focus on providing adequate support for IT from the institution.

> *Aylin: "Since we have an expert teacher in our school, we are able to receive continuous support not only in cases of breakdown, but also for regular maintenance and formatting, etc."*

Adverse responses point to the lack of adequate IT support and of adequate computer for preparation of the course materials before classes, to the technical failures and to the lack of expertise to deal with malfunctions.

> *Pınar: "The solution takes time when we have problems. I am always struggling to find out who can solve them and when."*

Classroom conditions

It was observed that solely negative opinions about class conditions were stated and the negative responses by almost all teachers point to overcrowded classrooms.

> *Mahmut: "When I am to ask them perform an individual activity, I cannot allocate ample time for each one of them. I can't do a group work because the arrangement of seats is not suitable for that."*

Conclusion and Discussion

Firstly, this study reveals that teachers have positive opinions towards the underlying instructional approach in the curriculum. However, the teachers think that the curriculum is not compatible with the current situation and the difficulties they encounter in implementation of the curriculum due to the fact that the existing classroom and school conditions are not in compliance with the assessment and evalutation methods included in the curriculum. Another reason why they think the curriculum is not applicable is that the resources and materials provided by the MoNE are not compatible with the blended learning approach and they are of low quality. When we look at the results of the studies conducted in recent years about the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum, a similar situation is encountered. In a study conducted by Şavran (2017) on the effectiveness of the curriculum in vocational and technical Anatolian high schools, teachers' perceptions were revealed to be negative. In his study based on the opinions of teachers, Karcı (2012) stated that it is not possible to fulfill the skill-based learning and evaluation activities proposed by the curriculum since it is not compatible with the conditions in schools and classrooms and that the textbooks should be developed and supported by technological tools. Kefeli (2008) posits that the course materials provided by the MoNE were insufficient referring to his study on the interviews with the teachers, students and parents. In the light of the results obtained from these two researches, it can be said that the course materials provided by MoNE have always been insufficient until today.

Another problem with the implementation of the curriculum is that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the blended learning. The reason for this is that the curriculum presentation seminar they attended was inefficient due to organizational problems and problems like the qualification of the trainer and another reason for the same is the failure of MoNE in providing an in-service training on blended learning approach. In addition, it is stated by MoNE, in 2014 -2019 Strategic Plan, that in-service trainings are inefficient, and they need improvement. Segovia and Hardison's (2009) studies on the communicative approach in foreign language teaching indicate that the low quality and inadequacy of the in-service trainings negatively affect teachers' understanding and realization of the principles of a newly introduced curriculum. As a matter of fact, one of the results of this study is that teachers cannot use IT effectively because of their inadequacy resulting from lack of in-service and pre-service trainings despite they are willing to use it as they find it useful and supportive. The online catalogue of in-service training courses organised by MoNE in 2017 confirmed the results of this study. In 2017, only three courses out of 590 in-service training courses organized by MoNE address English teachers. Two of these courses aim at upgrading the skills of the trainers who already work as a trainer or who want to be a trainer in FATIH Project; and the other one is about DynEd English Language Teaching System for English teachers who work in middle schools. There was no training course on blended learning or on 2017 English Secondary Education Curriculum.

The fact that teachers find IT materials effective because they are multi-sensory, practical, time saving and resourceful concur with the views shared by (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Üstün, 2011; Vaughan, 2007). Using IT in education has a positive impact on the time spent on education. It provides quick and easy access to various and numerous sources, and it is practical to use. Yet, despite their positive opinions, it is seen that teachers cannot use IT materials effectively. The reasons for this adversity seem to originate firstly from overcrowded classes and the limitation on material selection due to the decrease in course hours. Another problem experienced by teachers is the lack of internet connection in the classrooms, which necessitates

pre-course preparation and extra works. This result is consistent with the studies of Karcı (2012), who posits that the course hours are insufficient for the transfer of the curriculum content with the proposed approaches and materials. This study also indicates that teachers prefer social media especially WhatsApp and Facebook in order to strengthen communication with students, to communicate fast and to share resources easily. From this perspective, it supports the results of the research conducted by Gedik (2010) on the benefits of using social media and the study by Erdem and Kibar (2014), positing that students find the applications such as Facebook useful for rapid communication and extracurricular interaction.

Considering the content dimension, EBA and DynEd teaching management systems stand out as the only source for the materials that teachers can use within and without the classroom. It is seen that most of the teachers use neither of them on the grounds that they do not contain appropriate content for secondary school English lessons and that the existing content they have is not leveled and that these systems are mandatory despite their inefficiency. This result is consistent with Ucur's (2010) study showing that there are problems with the effectiveness of the DynED software and that the system needs significant improvements. The lack of smart board software of the MoNE textbook and the quality of EBA and DynEd systems lead teachers to procure additional resources compatible with smart board software. This situation seems to be contrary to lowering the cost of education presented by Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) as one of the basic principles of blended learning.

As for the student dimension, Vaughan (2007) states that it is a necessity to acquire skills related to IT materials in order to ensure that blended learning can be effectively implemented. However, according to the participants in the present study, the students use IT rather in social media and they do not know how to process and transfer information, let alone knowing the correct and reliable internet usage. It is also seen that they have mobile phone and limited internet facilities which are insufficient to be used with the teaching software. As a matter of fact, this result of the study is consistent with Balcı's (2017) research which shows that students are willing to use IT but their skills need to be improved.

Considering infrastructure, which is the fourth dimension, it is observed that all the classrooms have smart boards and thus it is possible to make IT based activities. However, that there is no internet connection in classes and that the mandatory use of MoNE internet line, which limits access to other sites with a variety of content, real life examples and effective material in developing language skills, are among the findings obtained in this study. It is also seen that the problems related to internet in the classes cause the teachers to spend extra time to prepare alternative lessons and increase their course load, thus they tend to avoid using the internet in blended learning practices. In addition, although teachers and students have tablets, these tablets are either malfunctioning or outdated according to the teachers. The results of this present study support the findings of the research conducted by Ince (2015) who states that the shortcomings of blended learning result from lack of adequate technological equipment and of strong internet connection in some schools. That the students' phones are collected during the school hours, the lack of computers for the personal use of teachers and that the students are not provided with computers or running tablets in the school are handicaps of the technological infrastructure which plays an important role in the blended learning approach. Nevertheless, Masie (2006) in his study states that time free accessibility to materials delivered to students via IT is an important means to make them independent learners in blended learning.

Khan (2005) states that the presence and competence of technical experts in a blended learning environment is an important issue. However, no sufficient technical support was seen to have been provided for teachers in solving the problems experienced with IT and there were no experts to deal with technical problems, according to the teachers. It was concluded that the problems expressed by the teachers reduced the efficiency of the courses and even prevented their continuation from time to time, which contradicts with the principle of saving time specified in the goals of blended learning by Osguthorpe and Graham (2003). Ustun (2011), in his study evaluating the views of the instructors of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT) on the courses given in blended learning environments, relates the failure of blended learning approach to technical problems and to the lack of institutional support in provision of equipment, and the research results of this study match with those of Üstün.

Singh and Reed (2001) posit that the number of students should be determined in accordance with the necessities of the blended learning approach by analyzing the technological system and infrastructure. However, it can be seen that teachers reported only negative opinions about classrooms. It has been concluded that overcrowding of classrooms prevents skill-based language teaching and active student participation. In addition, it was observed that the absence of space and computer facilities to prepare course material by teachers led them to prefer pre-designed materials instead of designing materials that could meet the specific needs of their classes. In his study, which includes views of students, teachers and parents on the courses organized online, Yalavaç (2015) posited that the number of students in the classrooms should be reduced. In addition, in the MoNE 2015 -2019 Strategic Plan, the weaknesses section indicates that the number of students per class changes from region to the region and this leads to problems in educational practices. In this context, it can be said that the findings of the studies support each other.

As a last word, Sarıtepeci, Durak and Seferoğlu (2016) stated that the problems faced by teachers about the use of technology result from the inadequate, incompatible and low quality e-contents, the low level of technology literacy of teachers, and from the crowded classes and lack of internet connection. When the results of this study are taken as a whole, it is seen that they are parallel to the results of the above co-authored study. That is, the problems in the 2014 educational curriculum are continuing in the 2017 curriculum.

Suggestions

Due to the inadequate in-service training of teachers on the technology and education curriculum, the quality and quantity of the central in-service training curriculum run by the MoNE General Directorate of Teacher Training and Development should be increased. In the in-service trainings, theoretical information can be accompanied with practical studies. In addition, MoNE can encourage teachers to benefit also from in-service training services abroad.

Although the teachers who are graduates of Faculties of Education have taken courses related to technology, they have hazy ideas on blended learning. For this reason, prospective teachers in the faculties of education and pres-service teachers can be given training on the use of IT in foreign language teaching, on designing materials using IT, and on selecting and using online tools. Higher education courses can be updated to cover current approaches. The teachers graduated from the faculties other than the faculty of education stated that they did not take a

course related to educational technology; therefore, arrangements can be made in pedagogical formation trainings, and such teachers can participate in courses on IT courses in the candidate training process.

Another important result of the study is that information systems such as EBA and DynEd are outdated and unappealing. Therefore, the course materials used in teaching English can be developed in line with the principles of the blended learning approach and supported by IT. Course materials can be prepared by material design experts who are native speakers of English. EBA and DynEd systems can be functionalized by eliminating technical problems. The EBA system can be used to develop materials for teaching English.

There appears to be a great need to support face-to-face environments as parts of blended learning. So, carrying out studies to support the development and use of concrete materials for use in face-to-face training in blended learning would be seen as a positive development. On the other hand, one of the biggest obstacles to blended learning for 2017 secondary school English curriculum is the reduction made on foreign language teaching hours. Since it would be difficult to develop communication skills in a foreign language course with limited number of weekly hours, it is necessary to increase the course hours and to reduce the class sizes.

Another finding of the study is the inadequacy of the tablets distributed to students. Continuity can be provided by the maintenance and repair of the tablets. In addition, courses or seminars can be provided as a remedy for students' incompetency in correct and secure internet use and for their insufficient research skills. In order to provide continuity in the maintenance and repair of the smart boards acquired by the Fatih Project, the national education directorates in the provinces can provide support to schools and problems related to the internet connection in the classrooms can be solved, and the MoNE internet service line can be developed to allow access to sites with better educational content. Providing students and teachers with a space where they can work individually, along with computer and internet connection will ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum. In Provincial National Education Directorates, units can be established to provide feedback on infrastructure facilities and probable disruptions and to provide technical support, when necessary.

This research is limited with the views of teachers. Further studies can be developed to include different secondary schools, students and courses. In order to collect data related to the course practices, observations can be made on the practices used in classrooms and the interview technique used in this research can be used by other researchers. The findings of this study reveal the difficulties in application of the 2017 Curriculum using Blended Learning Approach from the perspective of its practitioners. A review of this study and the findings of other similar studies should be taken into consideration by the relevant authorities as soon as possible to eliminate the barriers preventing the applicability of the 2017 Secondary Education English Course Curriculum.

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