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**Cihat Atar
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Research Article

An evaluation of the English preparatory program at İstanbul Medeniyet University

Cihat Atar*  

Assistant Professor, Sakarya University, English Language Teaching Department, Sakarya, TURKEY

Elif Kir Cullen  

Assistant Professor, İstanbul Medeniyet University, English Language Teaching Department, İstanbul, TURKEY

Ferdane Denkci Akkaş  

Assistant Professor, İstanbul Medeniyet University, English Language Teaching Department, İstanbul, TURKEY

Abstract

At Turkish universities, schools of foreign languages provide compulsory and voluntary language education for college students before they start their programs. This study aims to evaluate the program implemented for the English preparatory classes at İstanbul Medeniyet University, School of Foreign Languages during 2016-2017 academic year. This study has a mixed approach. 131 students and four instructors evaluated the program in terms of aspects such as the course materials, course contents, testing methods, assignments and the instructors. The data were collected via a questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions. The analysis of the questionnaire data was conducted via descriptive statistics and a descriptive analysis was carried out with the data from the interviews. The findings revealed that the participant students were indecisive about the effectiveness of the language program in general. Moreover, it was seen that the mean scores of the female students, the intermediate level students and the ones attending the program voluntarily were higher when compared with the males, the elementary level students and the ones attending the program obligatorily.

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Note(s) from the author(s)

» *Corresponding author

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İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi İngilizce hazırlık programının değerlendirilmesi

Öz

Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde, hazırlık okulları öğrencilere lisans eğitimine başlamadan önce zorunlu ve isteğe bağlı dil eğitimini vermektedir. Bu çalışma İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu'nda 2016-2017 eğitim öğretim yılında verilen İngilizce hazırlık eğitimini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma karma desenedir. 131 öğrenci ve 4 öğretim görevlisi verilen eğitimi ders materyalleri, ders içerikleri, ölçme yöntemleri, ödevler ve öğretim görevlileri gibi açılardan değerlendirmiştir. Veri bir anket ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Anketin analizi betimsel istatistiklerle yapılmıştır ve görüşme verileri betimsel analiz ile incelenmiştir. Bulgular göstermektedir ki öğrenciler genel manada programın etkinliği konusunda kararsızdır. Ayrıca, kadın öğrencilerin, orta seviye (intermediate level) öğrencilerin ve isteğe bağlı olarak programa katılan öğrencilerin memnuniyetinin erkeklere, başlangıç seviyesi (elementary level) öğrencilere ve zorunlu olarak programa katılan öğrencilere göre daha yüksek olduğu görülmüştür.

Gönderim

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Introduction

Curriculum design and development not only in language teaching but also in other subject areas are regarded as critically important elements of education. Therefore, much research has been conducted in this field for different reasons, such as offering suggestions for practitioners to present a common base or to understand the effectiveness of the implemented curriculum. Quicke (1999, p.1) proposes that “a curriculum provides a framework for learning.” Since curriculum suggests what we have to teach by giving reference to the educational needs of the students, it includes the “how” and the “what” of learning, which takes place both formally and informally inside educational institutions.

The curriculum process is not effortless or straightforward because of its nature. According to Demirel (2004, p. 17-18), foreign language learning, which is a cumulative process, combines cognitive behaviors and new psychomotor skills. Students are expected to acquire a foreign language system by developing these cognitive behaviors and motor skills through a well-organized foreign language curriculum. However, it is not uncommon to observe mismatch among different components of the suggested curriculum like objectives, content, and teaching and learning process. Nunan (1988, p. 138-141), for instance, emphasizes the frequent mismatch between what the curriculum offers and what occurs in the language classroom. Tollefson (1991, p. 99-100) explains the inconsistency between theories and classroom practices through the ‘modernization theory.’ He claims that even though some educationists widely criticized traditional instruction and many classes shifted to ‘modern’ methods in which students are supposed to take more responsibility for their learning, many teaching practices still place students in paradoxical circumstances.

From a slightly different perspective, Brown (2009) makes recommendations based on his thirty-five years of experience in language curriculum development. He suggests that any language needs analysis must include both language and contextual needs and therefore program-based assessment must be directly connected to the students’ needs, the course objectives, the materials being used, and the activities that are going on in the classrooms (Brown, 2009, p. 87). Besides, he shares his experience in Turkey when he was invited to evaluate a new English curriculum prepared for 11 million students throughout the country. He did not only find materials covered in the curriculum confusing but also cultural content like the royal family, cricket, Benjamin Britten problematic. He adds, “that is when I began to realize that the materials development team had not done any needs analysis or consulted with any real live teachers and students” (Brown, 2009, p. 95). This first-hand experience proves the effectiveness of his curriculum development process theory, which starts with the identification of situation, context, students, or analyzing needs. In his model, the steps of formulating goals, determining course content, designing course units and modules, constructing lesson plans follow the very first step as well as teaching, assessment, and revision of curriculum steps as final ones (Brown, 2007, p. 151). Indeed, it is possible to study ‘the curriculum’ from several different perspectives as offered by Nunan (2002, p. 4). Accordingly, curriculum planning can be examined at a decision-making level concerning different aspects of it, starting from identifying learners’ needs and purposes. Another perspective can be in ‘action’ which takes the evaluators into the classroom itself. Apart from these, a perspective

relates to assessment and evaluation gives the program evaluators a chance to make recommendations for respondents to improve things in the future.

Consequently, if we summarize the role of evaluation with Rea-Dickins and Germanie (2003, p. 20), “evaluation makes teachers aware of parameters in which they are working. Raising awareness in this way helps them to analyse the context for possible openings for innovation or for constraints”. We expect that the study conducted at Istanbul Medeniyet University, School of Foreign Languages, does not only help to raise awareness for the curriculum evaluation process within this specific institution but also makes contributions to other foreign language schools.

This paper aims to answer the following questions in order to evaluate the program implemented for the English preparatory classes at İstanbul Medeniyet University, School of Foreign Languages during the 2016-2017 academic year:

1. How efficiently do the students at İstanbul Medeniyet University (İMÜ) School of Foreign Languages find the English preparatory program implemented during 2016-2017 academic year in terms of the courses, the course materials, assignments, the testing and evaluation processes, the academic staff, perceived learner engagement, other aspects of the instruction and the system?
2. Do the students' opinions about the English preparatory program vary significantly in terms of their gender, preparatory program status (compulsory or voluntary), language level?
3. What do the instructors think about the English preparatory program implemented during the 2016-2017 academic year considering the course books, curriculum, physical and technical conditions, and students' performance?

Literature Review

The main aim of this paper is to evaluate the implemented program of English as a Foreign Language at a state university. For this purpose, we will report related literature and studies focusing on teaching English as a foreign language. We can say that inherent in the term of curriculum evaluation is the concept of perspective. Thus, it is clear that a considerable amount of research has been conducted in this field in light of different perspectives to make an accurate evaluation, and they have proposed some suggestions despite its complexity. Sullivan (2006, p. 591) states that “when we evaluate, we are saying that the process will yield information regarding worthiness, appropriateness, goodness, or validity”. Moreover, because the curriculum implementation process requires a severe evaluation, including opinions gathered from different groups such as students, teachers, material developers, it causes the content of related studies to be widespread. For instance, the study conducted by Coşkun (2013) aimed to evaluate the modular intensive general English language teaching program applied at a university in Turkey. In his research, he collected the qualitative data through interviews with 22 instructors working in the preparatory school, and the quantitative data from 381 preparatory school students through a questionnaire adapted from Tunç's (2010) study. The research question of “What are students' and instructors' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English preparatory program concerning three program dimensions: course materials, the teaching, learning process, and the assessment?” was tried to be answered. The results showed that the materials prepared for different skills and sub-skills were positively

evaluated, whereas many students expressed concerns about the materials for speaking. In addition to this, some instructors claimed that grammar, reading, and writing materials do not help students for their further education. It was also found that instructors mainly used lecturing instead of role-plays, discussions, and presentations. As the study tried to investigate the effectiveness of a modular system, the instructors emphasized the low motivation level of the students and discipline problems.

Similarly, Koçyiğit and Erdem (2018) undertook a study to review English preparation classes in higher education considering the graduate research. Their study found that these studies usually employed a quantitative research design and they generally focused on students' perspective. Accordingly, there is a gap in qualitative studies and there is also a lack of studies on instructors' views. The current study satisfies both gaps by having a mixed-method design and focusing on instructors' views as well. Furthermore, some instructors suggested more academic English in the program. Similarly, Tekin (2015) adopted Tunç's (2010) data collection instrument for evaluation of prep school to evaluate the English Language Teaching and English Language and Literature preparatory classes of a state university in Turkey by interpreting triangulated data with qualitative and quantitative means gathered from 106 students and two lecturers. The study revealed that even though the majority of participants were satisfied with the present language program, there is still a need for change. For example, students stated that the program provides opportunities to improve their grammar, writing, and reading skills but not speaking and listening skills and vocabulary knowledge. Another major issue raised by the participants was the selection of materials, especially for speaking and listening courses and the need for a separate vocabulary course. The findings related to teaching methods in the study revealed that traditional teaching methods such as "lecturing" and "question and answer" dominated the lessons. Therefore, communicative activities such as role-plays, students' presentations did not find many places in the lessons (Tekin, 2015, p. 730-732). An extensive evaluation held both quantitatively and qualitatively by Ünal et. al. (2017, p. 616-617) to evaluate another public university's English Language program reported that the current curriculum was successful, and the school was equipped with sufficient materials and facilities. However, both the instructors and students who participated in the study made some suggestions for a more effective curriculum. Technology integration into the classroom and teaching practice, revision of assessment, teaming instructors as material developers, testers, fewer class hours, and more English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses instead of general English courses were the most suggested items. Lee (2016), likewise, found that the students felt more interested in ESP instruction, and they considered ESP courses could be more useful for their future needs in a study which investigated the perspectives and perceptions of students studying at a technological university in Taiwan.

From a different viewpoint, aiming a kind of internal validity, Çetinavcı and Zehir-Topkaya (2012) evaluated two different regimes of grammar teaching, one that followed its language content and another that followed the language content of the main course in a year-long preparatory English class at a Turkish state university. They interviewed the administrator, five instructors, and 36 students one-on-one and as groups. Also, they observed six classrooms and compared relevant exam results and attendance records. The analysis made

it clear that the program following the language content of the main course was favored much more strongly as a positive step in the course of producing the desired learning outcomes.

Even though there is a high demand for preparatory school evaluation, a deep analysis of foreign language teaching and learning policy has to be invested. Thus, this necessity has taken the attention of some researchers in the field like Dinçer et. al. (2010), who explored viewpoints of university preparatory school students on the English Language Education process in Turkey. They aimed to advise teachers by taking into consideration students' readiness levels and their experiences during their prior education periods. For this aim, 38 preparatory class students from Tourism Vocational College Preparatory Program were asked to write a composition in order to learn their high school years' language experience. Analyzed compositions of the students clearly showed that some frequently experienced problems that they transferred to the undergraduate level negatively affected their foreign language learning experience. The component named "foreign language teachers' teaching capabilities," including sub-components of being unaware of the current methods in language education, use of old-fashioned methods, their disregard towards the course was the most mentioned one. Curriculum and course materials component followed the teacher factor in students' writings. The results showed that students were unpleasant with curriculum, English hours at the high school, and course books. However, students commented that they did not participate in the class effectively, revise what they were taught, and did not give much importance to English (Dinçer et al., 2010, p. 239-241).

Methodology

In this study, the English module at İstanbul Medeniyet University School of Foreign Languages preparatory classes was examined from the following aspects: courses, course materials, assignments, testing and evaluation processes, academic staff, learner engagement, and some other aspects of the instruction and the system. The study followed a mixed method consisting of an interview and a questionnaire as data collection tools. A mixed methods research refers to the design that "focuses on collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study" (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 26; Creswell, 2009, p. 204). This study also adopts the concurrent triangulation approach which aims to reveal any convergence, differences or combination by comparing the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2009, p. 213-214). For the quantitative data of this study, the students were given a questionnaire that included items for the evaluation of the aspects mentioned above. For the qualitative part, four instructors were interviewed via a semi-structured interview form that covered questions about the same aspects of the language program.

Context

This study aims to evaluate the program implemented for the English preparatory classes at Istanbul Medeniyet University, School of Foreign Languages during the 2016-2017 academic year. The program lasted 32 weeks in total, and this was divided into four periods each of which was 7 or 8 weeks. The students were given a placement test before the classes started and placed to an A level (elementary) or B level (pre-intermediate) class accordingly. The classes were reorganized after each period considering the grades of the students. That is, the students were grouped according to their language levels as well as their achievement in

the tests. The program did not follow a modular system where learners moved to the next level, like from A1 to A2 or from A2 to B1. They were instructed within the same level group throughout the year, and the terms of A and B referred to the groups rather than the language levels at the end of the year. In the last period, when the data for this study were collected, there were 9 language classes at school, and 7 were for A level students while only 2 were for B level ones. The English preparatory year was compulsory for the students admitted to programs in which the medium of instruction was English. The students who volunteered were also accepted to the preparatory school, although they would be entirely instructed in Turkish in their future programs. However, these two groups were instructed in separate classes. The students from the compulsory language program would be expelled from the school if they failed, whereas the ones from the voluntary language program could start their department even if they failed in the language class.

Table 1. The courses and the instructional materials

Courses	Compulsory Classes (Hours)	Voluntary Classes (Hours)	Instructional Materials
Main Course	16	18	New Language Leader by Pearson Education
Writing	4	4-6	Ready to Write by Pearson Education Writing Pack
Pre-faculty	2	2	Course Pack from Reading Passages
Listening and Speaking	4	x	Real Listening and Speaking by Cambridge University Press
Reading	4	x	Real Reading and Reading Explorer by Cambridge University Press
Terminology	2	x	Materials created by the departments
Total	32	24-26	

The program involves several components that will be briefly described below. First, the courses covered in the language program and the instructional materials for each course are shown in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, the language instruction was delivered in six different courses for the students from the compulsory program. They received general English instruction in Main Course classes, and they were instructed separately for reading and writing skills, whereas listening and speaking were presented in an integrated way in the same course. They also followed courses like Pre-faculty and Terminology in which they were provided English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The language instructors gave the Pre-faculty while for Terminology courses, academics from their departments were invited to make the students get familiar with the terminology they would need in their future programs. Listening and Speaking, Reading and Terminology courses were not provided for the students from the

voluntary program. The students followed the materials published by private companies like Cambridge and Pearson as well as some packs prepared by the Material and Curriculum Office in the school. The compulsory groups received 32 hours of instruction per week, and this decreased to 24-26 hours for the voluntary groups due to the different syllabus implemented for them. When it comes to the testing and evaluation processes, Table 2 presents a brief summary.

Table 2. The testing and evaluation processes

Evaluation process in each period	Periods	Proficiency Test
Quiz: 20%	1 st period: 15%	B2 Level 70+
Mid-term: 40%	2 nd period: 20%	
Pop quiz: 5%	3 rd period: 25%	
Assignments: 20%	4 th period: 40%	
Writing portfolio: 15%	↓ 60+	

As can be understood from Table 2, the students were evaluated based on quizzes (20%), a mid-term exam (40%), pop quizzes (5%), assignments (20%), and a writing portfolio (15%) for each period. However, the contribution of the average grade for each period to the final grade was not equal. Considering the difficulty of the instruction throughout the year, the students raised their grades from the 1st to the 4th period (15% for the 1st period, 20% for the 2nd period, 25% for the 3rd period and 40% for the 4th period). The average grade calculated according to these ratios should be 60 or above so that the students were allowed to take the B2 level proficiency test given at the end of the year. The students were required to take 70 or above to be considered as successful in the proficiency test.

Sampling

For the quantitative part of the study, a total population sampling technique was adapted. For this technique, the entire population is included in the research, so it is more commonly used when the number is relatively small (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, the questionnaire was delivered to all the 154 preparatory class students studying at İMU in the academic year of 2016-2017. Out of these 154 students, 131 were included in the analysis, which makes up 85% of the population, since some were absent on the data collection date and some others did not fill in the questionnaire properly. The detailed information about the participant students is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The participant students

Variables	Groups	N
Language level	A	103
	B	28
Language preparation status	Compulsory	76
	Voluntary	55
Gender	Female	80

	Male	51
Total		131

It is understood from Table 3 that out of 131 participants, 103 were from A level, and 28 were from B level classes. 76 of them received the preparatory language program since it was compulsory, and 55 of them volunteered for it since they were willing to learn English before they started their departments. Finally, 80 of these students were females, whereas 51 of them were males.

For the qualitative part, purposive sampling technique was implemented. In this technique, participants are chosen for a specific purpose that is relevant to the research needs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005, p. 103). Based on this technique, only 4 of the 20 English instructors were included in the interview. Some of the instructors had been dismissed and the school had recently employed some of them. The four participant instructors were picked for the interviews since they were the ones who had experienced teaching the program under study.

An official document was taken from the institution to get their permission for the data collection. The questionnaire was implemented when the classes were available during the 4th period. As for the interviews, an appointment was made with each participant instructor when they were available and they were visited in their offices.

Data collection instruments

In order to get the quantitative data, the participant students were asked to fill in the Preparatory Language Education Program Evaluation Questionnaire developed by the researchers. The items in the questionnaire were written based on the related literature, the program evaluation tools used by different schools of foreign languages in Turkey and the main features of the implemented program. The draft of the questionnaire was examined by different experts (two faculty members from ELT and Educational Sciences departments and one English instructor) and the items were revised according to their feedback. The final questionnaire consisted of 52 items with which the students expressed their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale: 1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neither agree nor disagree, 4: Agree and 5: Strongly agree. The items included statements about courses, course materials, assignments, testing and evaluation processes, academic staff, learner engagement, and some other aspects of the instruction and the system. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as .907 for the questionnaire and this value indicates a high level of reliability for the tool since a coefficient between 0.65 and 0.8 is considered acceptable in social sciences (Singh, 2017; Vaske, Beaman & Sponarski, 2016).

As for the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview form was used by the researchers to interview the instructors. The form included seven questions that referred to the same aspects of the language program. The questions were directed to the sample group, and the biodata was also obtained. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for the analysis. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the data collection tools, and thus this study, the data collection tools were prepared by first checking the preparatory class evaluation procedures of several other state universities. Then, the questionnaire and interview

questions were prepared by the three authors together, and several meetings were held to consider potential problems and ensure consistency. Finally, the interview questions were sent to an expert specialized in testing. The items of the questionnaire and the interview questions were adapted in accordance with the suggestions.

Data analysis procedures

For the analysis of the quantitative part, the data gathered via the questionnaire were transferred to SPSS 22 software, and Independent Samples T-test and Mann Whitney U test were conducted in addition to the calculations for means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviation. The results were considered significant at the level of $p < .05$.

As for the qualitative part, the descriptive analysis method was used to analyse the interview data. In descriptive analysis, the data are interpreted according to the pre-defined themes or may be grouped and reported according to the research questions. Direct quotations from the respondents are frequently utilized while reporting the findings. The point is to interpret and present the data in an organized way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data were categorized according to the interview questions and sub-themes were assigned. Then, as a content, the interview data in this study were analyzed using descriptive analysis in order to understand the preparatory English teaching in İMU through the four aspects: the course books, curriculum, physical and technical conditions, and students' performance.

Results

In this section, the findings from the analysis are presented following the research questions. First, the findings from the quantitative analysis that reflect the students' opinions and then the instructors' views from the descriptive analysis are given.

The questionnaire

The first research question was stated as "How efficient do the students at İMÜ School of Foreign Languages find the English preparatory program implemented during 2016-2017 academic year in terms of the courses, the course materials, assignments, the testing and evaluation processes, the academic staff, learner engagement, other aspects of the instruction and the system?".

The participant students' opinions about the overall efficiency of the preparatory language education program are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' mean satisfaction levels for the preparatory language education program

Questionnaire	n	x	sd
preparatory language education program evaluation questionnaire	131	3.27	.4931

Table 4 shows that the mean for the Preparatory Language Education Program Evaluation Questionnaire is 3.27 out of 5. That is, the students were reasonably pleased with the English Preparatory Program implemented during the 2016-17 academic year. They did not

consider the program as inefficient in general, but they also believed that it needed to be improved. Means for the courses covered in the program are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Means for the courses in the program

Courses	n	x	sd
Main Course	130	3.45	1.1687
Writing	130	4.18	.9627
Pre-faculty	131	2.67	1.2355
Listening and Speaking	122	2.59	1.2574
Reading	118	2.64	1.2977
Terminology	114	2.39	1.3333

As can be seen in Table 5, the students found Main Course classes quite efficient ($x=3.45$) whereas they were not satisfied with Pre-faculty ($x=2.67$), Terminology ($x=2.39$), Listening & Speaking ($x=2.59$), and Reading classes ($x=2.64$). Writing was considered as the most effective and beneficial course in the program ($x=4.18$). Means for the course materials used for the language instruction are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Means for the course materials

Materials	n	x	sd
Language Leader (Main Course)	131	2.90	.7958
Ready to Write & Writing Pack	130	3.38	1.2721
Real Listening and Speaking	123	2.30	1.1157
Real Reading & Reading Explorer	123	2.47	1.2369
Supplementary Materials and Packs	131	3.07	.9866

According to Table 6, the students were pleased mostly with the materials of writing classes ($x=3.38$) and the other supplementary materials and packs ($x=3.07$) that were prepared by the instructors of the related office. However, the mean scores show that they were not satisfied with the commercial materials chosen for Main Course ($x=2.90$), Listening and Speaking ($x=2.30$) and Reading ($x=2.47$) courses. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the students were more pleased with the packs and supplementary materials prepared by the Material and Curriculum Development Office compared with the commercial products. Means for the assignments given to the students to support their language learning are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Means for the assignments

Assignments	n	x	sd
Writing assignments	131	3.09	.9152
Online assignments	129	2.31	1.3083
Assignments in general	131	3.01	.8000

Table 7 shows that the students were satisfied with the assignments they did for their writing course ($x=3.09$), but they did not find the online assignments efficient ($x=2.31$) for their learning. It is also seen that they were content with the assignments they were required to do throughout the year ($x=3.01$). Means for the testing and evaluation processes are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Means for testing and evaluation processes

Testing and evaluation processes	n	x	sd
Use of English	129	3.53	.9846
Speaking	131	3.67	1.0323
Listening	129	3.13	1.1345
Writing	131	3.83	1.0138
Evaluation	131	3.24	.8707
Testing and evaluation in general	131	3.35	.6792

The students were tested on different aspects of language throughout the year, and Table 8 shows that they found the testing and evaluation processes efficient in general ($x=3.35$). It is also evident that they were satisfied in each component of the tests (use of English= 3.53 , listening= 3.13 , evaluation= 3.24), but the highest scores were for the testing of productive skills (speaking= 3.67 , writing= 3.83). Taking the items under this category into account, it is possible to conclude that the students considered the testing and evaluation processes appropriate for their level and coherent with the curriculum and also thought that the evaluation procedures were just. Means for the other aspects of language instruction at the School of Foreign Languages are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Means for the other aspects of language instruction

Different aspects of language instruction	n	x	sd
Use of ITC in class	130	3.48	1.0942
Pair and group work activities	130	3.49	1.1959

Re-grouping students for every period	117	3.55	1.3610
Putting theoretical info into practice	131	3.55	.8740
Contribution of prep program to academic and professional life	131	3.81	.9733

When the means presented in Table 9 are considered, it is possible to argue that the students were satisfied with the integration of ITC in language teaching ($x=3.48$). They found the pair and group work activities conducted in the lessons efficient and helpful for their language learning ($x=3.49$). It is also clear that they were pleased with the way they were re-grouped according to their test scores for each period ($x=3.55$). Finally, it is understood that they believed they could put the theoretical info into practice ($x=3.55$) and this one-year language program would contribute to their academic and professional life ($x=3.81$). Finally, means for learner engagement and the academic staff are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Means for learner engagement and the academic staff

Learner engagement and academic staff	n	x	sd
Learner engagement	131	3.10	1.0506
Academic staff	131	3.76	.7611

As can be seen in Table 10, the students were content with both their effort and the instructors' contribution to the program throughout the year. However, it is seen that they were more pleased with the instructors ($x=3.76$) than their performance ($x=3.10$).

The second research question was formulated as "Do the students' opinions about the English preparatory program vary significantly in terms of their gender, preparatory program status (compulsory or voluntary), language level?". The t-test results that show a significant difference between the students' opinions in terms of their gender are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. The t-test results for the students' opinions in terms of their gender

Variables	Groups	n	x	sd	t test		
					t	df	p
Preparatory language education program	Female	80	3.34	.484	2.01	129	.046*
	Male	51	3.16	.492			
Writing	Female	80	4.35	.747	2.28	128	.025*
	Male	50	3.92	1.192			

* $p < .05$

Table 11 shows that the students' opinions about the preparatory language education program in general ($p=.046$) and writing classes in particular ($p=.025$) differ statistically significantly in terms of their gender. When the means for the groups are checked, it is understood that the female students were more satisfied with both aspects (PLEP=3.34 and writing=4.35) than the males (PLEP=3.16 and writing=3.92). The t-test results that show

significant difference between the students' opinions in terms of their preparatory program status are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. The t-test results for the students' opinions in terms of their preparatory program status

Variables	Groups	n	x	sd	t test		
					t	df	p
Terminology	Compulsory	75	2.66	1.338	3.33	112	.001*
	Voluntary	39	1.85	1.163			

*p<.05

As can be seen in Table 12, there is statistically significant difference between the students' opinion about the Terminology course in terms of their preparatory program status (p=.001). When the means are compared, it is seen that the learners from the voluntary program found this course a lot more inefficient than the ones from the compulsory program. This finding can be explained by the fact that the voluntary students were not offered this Terminology course as well as the possibility that they thought they would not need any terminology in English since the medium of instruction was Turkish in their department. Finally, the Mann Whitney-U test results that show a significant difference between the students' opinions in terms of their language levels are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. The Mann Whitney-U test results for the students' opinions in terms of their language levels

Variable	Language Level	N	Mean of Ranks	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
Preparatory language education program	B Level	28	83.95	2350.50	939.50	-2.822	.005*
	A Level	103	61.12	6295.50			
	Total	131					
Main course	B Level	28	77.45	2168.50	1093.50	-1.969	.049*
	A Level	102	62.22	6346.50			
	Total	130					
Reading	B Level	24	72.21	1733.00	823.00	-2.096	.036*
	A Level	94	56.26	5288.00			
	Total	118					
Terminology	B Level	24	70.88	1701.00	759.00	-2.302	.021*
	A Level	90	53.93	4854.00			
	Total	114					
Language leader	B Level	28	89.05	2493.50	796.50	-3.638	.000*
	A Level	103	59.73	6152.50			
	Total	131					
Real reading & Reading explorer	B Level	25	85.88	2147.00	628.00	-3.887	.000*
	A Level	98	55.91	5479.00			
	Total	123					
Supplementary materials	B Level	28	84.25	2359.00	931.00	-2.914	.004*
	A Level	103	61.04	6287.00			

	Total	131					
Online assignments	B Level	28	82.84	2319.50			
	A Level	101	60.05	6065.50	914.50	-2.948	.003*
	Total	129					
Tests for use of English	B Level	28	79.36	2222.00			
	A Level	101	61.02	6163.00	1012.00	-2.433	.015*
	Total	129					
Listening tests	B Level	28	80.52	2254.50			
	A Level	101	60.71	6130.50	979.50	-2.567	.010*
	Total	129					
Pair and group work activities	B Level	28	81.48	2281.50			
	A Level	102	61.11	6233.50	980.50	-2.629	.000*
	Total	130					
Re-grouping students for every period	B Level	28	78.98	2211.50			
	A Level	103	62.47	6434.50	1078.50	-2.087	.037*
	Total	131					

*p<.05

As can be seen in Table 13, there is statistically significant difference between the A level and B level students' opinions about the preparatory language education program (p=.005), Main Course (p=.049), Reading course (p=.036), Terminology course (p=.021), the instructional materials used for the Main Course classes (p=.000), Reading classes (p=.000), the other supplementary materials (p=.004), online assignments (p=.003), the tests for Use of English (p=.015) and Listening (p=.010), pair and group work activities (p=.000) and re-grouping students for every period (p=.037). When the means are considered, it is seen that the B level students were more satisfied with the mentioned aspects than the A level learners.

Results of the interviews

This section summarizes the findings obtained through Descriptive Analysis from the interviews. In the first question, the aim is to learn about the instructors' overall idea about the program. The participants think that the program is generally fine. They think that the strengths of the program are as follows: the lecturers are passionate and hardworking, and the program offers a variety of teaching which is useful for the students. As P3 states, "*There is more variety of lessons. When I ask my colleagues in other universities, I think that we are one step ahead of them*". So, the instructors, in general, think that the program is better than other public universities. The participants also mention some of the problematic parts. They say that the program is not settled yet as it is a new university. Another problem mentioned is that the program is usually based on the book, not a needs analysis. Students also have a problem with motivation. As P3 explains, "*I believe that students are really demotivated. In the beginning they come very motivated but after a few weeks they start to lose their motivation*".

The second question of the interview is on the books used in the program (See Table 1 for the books used). The analysis demonstrates that the English instructors are all happy with the books in a general sense. However, some issues are commonly mentioned by the interviewees. One significant finding is that they find the New Language Leader to be a successful book. However, they think that it causes some problems in their program mainly

because most of the students start with an A1 level. New Language Leader, on the other hand, is focused on academic skills, and in this sense, it is sometimes too hard for the students. As P1 argues, “*The level of New Language Leader is a little bit demanding for our students as they come as true beginners.*” As for the book selection process, the analysis shows that they are asked to mention their views, but their ideas are not taken into consideration most of the time, which is possibly due to the problems in formalities or practical issues such as lack of a sufficient number of instructors. For instance, P4 says “*The way the process was applied was good but I guess there were formal problems. The books we suggested were not chosen. The process was good but the outcomes were not applied.*”

The next focus of the interview is the curriculum. The analysis suggests that the instructors are often happy with the curriculum. However, two main issues are mentioned. The first one is that the curriculum is overloaded and in turn pacing is fast. P3 explains that this is because “*We have zero beginners.*” The participants suggest that as some of the students have a really weak command of English, too many things are included in the curriculum. This may be a rational choice however, it puts too much stress on the students. P3 argues “*They (the true beginners) are doomed to fail as the program is one year.*”. She suggests that true beginners should study more than one year as it is usually not enough for attaining proficiency at B2 level. The other problem mentioned is that the curriculum does not have obvious objectives and the focus of the books mainly leads it. As P2 argues “*We only follow the book and each week we do a chapter or one and a half chapter. We have no goals.*” So, it seems that following the structure of a book replaces an independent curriculum plan. Regarding this problem, P2 thinks that the main reason is lack of instructors and a regular curriculum office. As the university suffers from lack of English instructors, the instructors in the curriculum office also teach a lot and accordingly, they cannot focus on curriculum development.

The next issue in the interviews is the exams. The responses of the participants show that they find the exams useful and to the point. P1 expresses this as follows: “*Regarding assessments the exams aim to test everything covered in the lessons and also we take sub-skills such as skimming, scanning and listening for details into consideration.*” P1 goes on by saying “*The frequency may be a little bit too many as far as I hear from the students. However, I think frequent exams force students to work harder, which is useful.*”. This is a problem mentioned by the other participants as well. There are mid-terms, quizzes and pop-quizzes. The other instructors tend to think that this is a little bit too much but P1, as seen in her quotation, thinks personally that this is useful. The others say the number should be decreased as students are under constant stress due to having exams all the time.

Another point raised in the interviews is homework. The analysis shows that all of the instructors are unhappy with the online homework system. Online system fails due to several issues such as internet connection problems in the university, students’ difficulty in accessing the internet and software problems in the online system of the books. P2 underlines a severe problem saying “*For instance, a student responds correctly but the system says wrong. Why? Just because s/he did not leave space (between words) or s/he forgot a point or a question mark. It evaluates these kinds of issues as errors.*”. The instructors were also asked about the contribution of homework. They think that the homework in the program is in generally helpful. One issue mentioned is that as the hour of teaching is very high in the program, students cannot find enough time to do the homework. P2 explains this problem as “*Weekly*

hours should be less, because students this year have 22-28 hours of teaching and they cannot find time to do the homework.” One final issue about the homework is whether sufficient feedback is given. This is related to the previous issue. The reason is as there is too much homework and as there are a lot of lessons, instructors also do not have enough time to give feedback. However, students prefer to get corrective feedback for their work and they even “feel cheated” when they cannot get feedback from their teachers (Harmandaoğlu Baz, Balçıkanlı & Cephe, 2016, p. 63). The instructors acknowledge that they can give satisfactory feedback only occasionally. To exemplify, P4 says “*Feedback is not given most of the time. For example, I gave them a worksheet and they only know their mark. We provide the answer key. ... We were all in the office and we had to do some duties. The test office or curriculum office thinks whether to give feedback or do the duties in the office... Consequently, feedback is one step behind.*” However, P4 also suggests that feedback works well in only essay writing as it is taught as a process.

Another issue is the physical conditions of the university and the classrooms. The answers demonstrate that the classrooms have some equipment such as projectors and smartboards and they are in general fine. However, the biggest problems are the frequent relocations between campuses and the physical conditions of the campus. P4 summarizes this as follows: “*There was no canteen for a really long time. The students could not buy water or tea.*”.

The final issue discussed in the interviews is students’ performance. The responses demonstrate that the students usually suffered from lack of motivation. Most of the participants agree that this is worse for the students who attend the preparation class optionally (although it is not compulsory). Furthermore, the participants claim that students lose motivation more and more as the classes get harder in the advanced stages. For instance, P2 says “*Towards the middle of the semester, when they start to be unsuccessful in the exams, they start to cause problems when they start to think that they will already fail.*” The participants also agree that it is often the external factors that result in low motivation among participants. As argued above, lack of a proper campus and frequent relocations among campuses decrease students’ motivation profoundly.

At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked if there was anything else, they wanted to add. Two of them added further ideas. P3 shortly suggested that academic English should definitely be included. P1 on the other hand responded longer and made some suggestions. She argued that main course plus four-skills is too demanding. She explains it as follows: “*When we have four skills, the main course and the English for academic purposes, this is too tiring for the students. The program should move with the main course book and only the needed skills should be added.*” She further suggests that “*Too many hours were tiring for the students. More hours may not necessarily contribute to Ss’ learning.*” So, it may be a good idea to focus on quality rather than quantity. This is also true for the number of lessons as discussed above. There are around 22-28 hours of teaching to ensure the students learn English. However, this may counter react and overwhelm the students.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate the program implemented for the English preparatory classes at Istanbul Medeniyet University, School of Foreign Languages during the 2016-2017 academic year. The results of the analysis conducted with the qualitative and quantitative data can be summarized in the light of the related literature as follows:

The students were reasonably pleased with the English Preparatory Program implemented during the 2016-17 academic year. In the same vein, the instructors also think that the program is overall successful. This finding is consistent with the other studies exploring the curriculum evaluation of different language programs, which have revealed considerable satisfaction with the overall instruction (e.g., Unal et al., 2017; Tekin, 2015; Coşkun, 2013). The study conducted by Demirtaş and Sert (2010) with 1200 learners, for example, reports that most of the learners had no significant complaints about the program, and the English Language Preparatory Education met their needs.

The students found Main Course classes quite efficient, whereas they were not satisfied with Pre-faculty, Terminology, Listening & Speaking, and Reading classes. According to the findings, the 'Writing Course' was the most effective and beneficial in the program. Tekin (2015) and Coşkun (2013) focused on a desire for an improvement in listening and speaking courses, and Öztürk's study (2014) at a state university similarly emphasizes the "speaking" skill as the learners in the study indicated that "speaking skill is the least developed one during the program" (p. 122). Although the participants of our study found the Terminology course overwhelming, Unal et al. (2017) and Lee (2016) highlighted the importance of EAP and ESP courses based on the results they found. Considering the EAP needs of the first-year undergraduate students at a state university in Turkey, Kırkgöz (2006) developed a reading course based on the specialized corpus from academic texts that students are required to read at the first year of their studies. The interviews with the students revealed that a corpus-based reading course helped them to become familiar with essential lexical items of their field. Another very detailed study conducted by Kırkgöz (2009) shows that most students (93.5%) perceived a gap between the requirements of disciplinary courses and what they learned at the Foreign Language Center (p. 88). As a result, the findings of our study are not compatible with Kırkgöz's study in this sense. Based on the results, it can be suggested that to explain the importance of learning the discipline-specific language and providing a suitable environment for the learners to experience EAP during the preparatory language program can help learners internalize it as a part of language learning.

The students were more pleased with the packs and supplementary materials prepared by the Material and Curriculum Development Office compared with the commercial products. This comment is quite understandable since the related office had the opportunity to meet the needs of the local group directly, whereas the commercial products address a larger audience. Additionally, the instructors also accept that the commercial products could be overwhelming for low level learners although they are pleased with using them in their teaching.

Although the students believed that the assignments were beneficial and appropriate for them in general, they found the online assignments insufficient due to the technical issues they had to cope with throughout the academic year. The instructors shared the same issue as well, and they suggest not to integrate online assignments to the program anymore. Ünal et al. (2017) stated that more technology should be integrated into the curriculum, but it is essential

to remember that too many technical problems may frustrate learners and instructors, resulting in negative attitudes.

The students considered the testing and evaluation processes appropriate for their level and coherent with the curriculum and also thought that the evaluation procedures were just. The Testing Office prepared all the tests within the school, considering the implemented program and the characteristics of the target group. Öz and Atay's study with lecturers teaching at the preparatory program (2017) revealed that there is a mismatch between Turkish EFL instructors' in-class assessment literacy and its reflection in practice. Therefore, the assessment process at Istanbul Medeniyet University, School of Foreign Languages, can be regarded as one of the strongest aspects of the implemented program.

Although the students were content with both their effort and the instructors' contribution to the program throughout the year, it is seen that they were more pleased with the instructors than their performance. The female students were significantly more content with the English preparatory program and the Writing Course than the males. Tekin (2015) and Coşkun (2013) revealed that the participants were dissatisfied with the instructors' teaching styles and demanded more communicative activities. However, this study revealed that the students were more critic of themselves than their teachers.

The students who attended the program voluntarily were more content with it than the ones for whom it was a requirement to start their undergraduate program. However, they were less pleased with the Terminology course, which is quite understandable since the course was not offered to them and the medium of instruction would be Turkish in the following years, so they might have considered this course unnecessary. The students from B level classes were more content with the overall program as well as the following components than the ones from A level classes: Main Course, Reading and Terminology courses, Language Leader, Reading Explorer and supplementary materials, online assignments, use of English and listening tests, pair and group work activities, re-grouping students for every period. It is also understandable since A level students found it tougher to cope with the language learning process in many aspects due to their lower language competency.

Harrison (1996) emphasizes the difficulty of curriculum renewal in terms of evaluation based on his external study in the country of Omani in which there was an extensive renewal including the development of books, materials, examination system, orientation programs for all teachers and even development programs for inspectors. This is also the case in Turkey and pre-service English teacher programs have changed considerably due to the changing position of English globally (Köksal & Ulum, 2018). Harrison (1996) suggested in the longitudinal data which were drawn upon four types of the collection that teachers and inspectors can contribute to material development and more importantly classroom interactions must be monitored not only by external visitors but by getting teachers and learners to reflect upon their teaching and learning, in a systematic and structured way. His suggestion of an approach for professional development involving both self and peer observation can also be a logical way for our recent study of program evaluation to provide a vehicle for the formative curriculum evaluation process (Harrison, 1996, p. 302). Since "Communicative Language Teaching" has been the widely used, sometimes, namely used, approach all over the world, the goals and aims of curriculum and language teaching programs have been shifted from more grammar-based

accuracy to fluency. Besides, the latest developments in “approaches and methods in foreign language teaching” umbrella term such as the post-method era, task-based teaching, and few others affect curriculum designers to cover different aspects of language. As discussed by Widdowson (1984) long ago, a learner’s task involves communicative competence in the language, whether the emphasis is on productive or receptive behavior. As a result, the aim of language learning should be to develop the underlying interpreting ability, and an integrated approach should be adopted to achieve this aim. Widdowson continues the discussion by stating that on the contrary to what this aim requires, language teaching courses commonly consist of units which are separate like language practice books and criticizes the language teaching materials. Students and instructors who participated in this study shared similar concerns with Widdowson (1984) in their own words. Thus, we can conclude that preparatory language programs and materials used in language preparatory programs must primarily focus on including language functions and how to help learners to transfer the functions accordingly in their studies.

The following suggestions can be made to improve the English preparatory program following the findings summarized above: First of all, Terminology and Pre-faculty courses should be removed from the program since these courses are perceived as an extra burden, especially for the low level learners. Second, there is no need to have a separate Listening & Speaking course since Main Course is a skills-based class. The sections for these skills within the Main Course can be focused more efficiently. Third, Reading can be integrated with the Writing classes to reduce the boredom and to make it more meaningful for the learners. Fourth, students should be supported by supplementary materials that are designed considering their specific needs. Moreover, commercial coursebooks should be updated or changed to pick the more appropriate ones for the target group. Also, online assignments should be removed from the program since the technical issues do not seem likely to be fixed. In addition to these, students should be motivated to ensure successful learning as it is one of the most significant issues mentioned by the participant teachers. The interview data demonstrate that students lose motivation, especially towards the end of the program. Accordingly, this should be taken into consideration, and via further studies, the reasons for this problem can be unearthed which, then, may be used to increase their motivation. Finally, the program should be revised based on a needs analysis to set clear objectives rather than following a coursebook-based syllabus which is a similar problem revealed by some studies (e.g. Erdem & Atar, 2018) in the context of compulsory English courses at a higher education level.

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