

Learner perceptions on EFL teaching practices in Turkish higher education

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ABSTRACT Research on perceptions of effective language teaching and learning is crucial for providing EFL practitioners with a better understanding of professional improvement in language teaching practices. It is seen that most of the studies conducted on this issue specifically dealt with foreign/ second language teachers' or teacher candidates' perceptions about it ignoring those of learners. So, the present study aims to scrutinize learners' perceptions of EFL instruction delivered at higher education institutions. Accordingly, two groups of Turkish-speaking undergraduate students attending various programmes at a state university in Turkey were administered a scale composed both of Likert-type and open-ended items. It was primarily aimed to reveal whether students studying social sciences and those studying natural sciences significantly differ in their perceptions of foreign language education. The findings revealed that there is not such a difference between the two groups. The study reports findings obtained from the scale in detail, and implications for EFL instruction, and concludes with a couple of suggestions for further research.

Keywords Learner perception, English as a foreign language, higher education.

Türk yükseköğretim kurumlarındaki yabancı dil eğitimi uygulamalarına ilişkin öğrenci görüşleri

ÖZ Yabancı dilin etkili eğitim ve öğretimi konusunda yapılan araştırmalar, İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğretenlerin dil eğitim uygulamaları konusunda mesleki iyileşmeyi özümsemeleri açısından büyük önem arz etmektedir. Bu alanda yapılan çalışmaların çoğunun, dil öğrencilerinden ziyade yabancı dil öğretmen veya öğretmen adaylarının yabancı dil eğitimine dair görüşlerini konu aldığı görülmektedir. Bu nedenle çalışmamızda, yükseköğretim kurumlarında verilen yabancı dil eğitimine dair öğrenci görüşlerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde farklı programlarda öğrenim görmekte olan iki grup öğrenciye Likert türü ve açık uçlu sorulardan oluşan bir ölçek uygulanmıştır. Temelde, sosyal bilimler alanındaki programlarda öğrenim gören öğrenciler ile fen bilimleri alanında öğrenim görenlerin yabancı dil eğitimine ilişkin görüşleri açısından anlamlı bir biçimde farklılaşıp farklılaşmadıklarının ortaya çıkarılması hedeflenmiştir. Çalışmanın bulguları, iki grubun görüşleri arasında bu tür bir farkın olmadığını ortaya koymuştur. Çalışmanın bulguları ayrıntılı bir biçimde tartışılmış, İngilizce'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretimine ilişkin yansılar sunularak gelecekte yapılacak araştırmalara dair önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

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Öğrenci algısı, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, yükseköğretim.

EXTENDED SUMMARY

Bu çalışmada, sosyal bilimler programlarında öğrenim gören öğrenciler ile fen bilimleri programlarında öğrenim gören lisans düzeyi öğrencilerinin yükseköğretimde yabancı dil derslerinin işlenişine yönelik algıları arasında farklılık olup olmadığının araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye’de bir devlet üniversitesinin sosyal bilimler alanındaki beş farklı programına kayıtlı 134 ve aynı üniversitenin fen bilimleri alanındaki altı farklı programına kayıtlı 130 öğrenci olmak üzere toplamda 264 lisans öğrencisinden araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan anket sorularına cevap vermeleri istenmiştir. Açık ve kapalı uçlu toplam 14 sorudan oluşan ankette, öğrencilerin İngilizce öğretiminin gerekliliği, derslerde yer verilen öğrenme etkinlikleri, ölçme ve değerlendirme araçları, başarı düzeylerine ilişkin öz değerlendirme, sınıf dışında İngilizce eğitimine ayrılan zaman gibi konularda görüşlerinin alınması amaçlanmıştır. Söz konusu veri toplama aracı, ders saati içerisinde, derse giren öğretim elemanının gözetiminde ve katılımcılar için herhangi bir süre sınırı tanımlanmaksızın uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular; tüm programlara kayıtlı öğrencilerin önemli bir bölümünün İngilizce eğitiminin gerekli olduğuna inandığını, İngilizce derslerini sevdiğini, ders başarısını ölçme ve değerlendirmede kullanılan araçları güvenilir bulduğunu, yüksek öğrenimlerinin ardından da yabancı dil eğitimi sürdürmek istediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Öte yandan, sosyal bilimler programlarına kayıtlı öğrenciler, fen bilimleri programlarına kayıtlı öğrencilere kıyasla İngilizce derslerinde daha çeşitli öğrenme etkinliklerine yer verildiğini belirtmişlerdir. İkinci grupta yer alan öğrencilerin etkinlik çeşitliliğinin fazla olmadığını belirtmelerinin nedeninin, yine bu öğrencilerin bildirimleri doğrultusunda, sınıf mevcutları ile ilintili olduğu düşünülmektedir. Söz gelimi, sosyal bilimler programlarına kayıtlı öğrenciler, bu dersleri 20 ile 30 öğrenci arasında değişen gruplarda almakta iken fen bilimleri programlarına kayıtlı öğrenciler genelde 60 ile 150 kişi arasında değişen gruplarda söz konusu dersi almaktadır ve bu da dersi yürütmekle görevli öğretim elemanı tarafından sınıf içerisinde çeşitli etkinlikleri uygulanmasını zorlaştırmakta, çoğu zaman da engellemektedir. Ders başarılarını değerlendirmeleri istendiğinde, her iki grupta bulunan öğrencilerin %60’ı kendilerini bu derste başarılı bulduğunu belirtmiştir. Çalışmanın dikkat çeken bir bulgusu olarak, bu öğrencilerin önemli bir bölümünün başarılarını ‘işe yarayan öğrenme strateji ve teknikleri’ ve ‘sıkı çalışma’ gibi nedenlerden ziyade ‘dil öğrenmeye eğilimlerinin’ olmasına bağlamaları sunulabilir. Benzer şekilde, çalışmanın bir diğer dikkat çeken bulgusu kendisini derste başarısız olarak tanımlayan öğrencilerin yine önemli bir bölümünün başarısızlıklarının nedeni olarak, ‘dersin zor olması’, ‘dil öğrenmeye eğilimlerinin olmaması’ veya ‘işe yaramayan öğrenme strateji ve teknikleri’ yerine ‘derse yeterince çalışmamış olmalarını’ göstermeleridir. Diğer bir deyişle, yabancı dil dersinde başarısız olduğunu düşünen öğrenciler, nispeten çevresel olarak adlandırılacak etkenleri başarısızlıklarının nedeni olarak göstermek yerine söz konusu duruma dair kişisel sorumluluk üstlenmeyi tercih etmişlerdir. İngilizce dersinin –varsa- sevilmeyen yönlerinin belirtilmesinin istendiği soruya verilen yanıtlar, ‘dilbilgisi kurallarının öğretime ağırlık verilmesi’ ve ‘ilköğretimden yükseköğretime kadar işlenen konuların farklılık göstermemesinin’ öğrenciler tarafından dersin en sık dile getirilen sevilmeyen yönü olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Çalışmanın bir diğer bulgusu, haftalık ders saatlerine ilişkin öğrenci görüşlerini kapsamaktadır. Etkili bir yabancı dil eğitimi için haftalık iki (yalnızca bir programda üç) ders saatinin kesinlikle yetersiz olduğunu düşünen öğrencilerin çoğunlukta olduğu her iki grupta da haftalık ders saatinin en az altı olması gerektiği belirtilmiştir. Anketin bir başka maddesinde öğrencilere ders saatleri dışında yabancı dil eğitimine ne kadar vakit ayırdıkları sorulmuş, sosyal bilimler programlarına kayıtlı öğrencilerin %74’ü ile fen bilimleri programlarına kayıtlı öğrencilerin %72’sinin ders saatleri dışında dil öğretime kesinlikle vakit ayırmadıkları bulgusuna ulaşılmıştır. Vakit ayırdığını belirten öğrencilerin çoğu ise altyazılı yabancı sinema filmi ve televizyon programları izlediğini veya yabancı müzik dinlediğini, her iki grupta da birkaç öğrenci ise yabancı dilde hazırlanmış web sayfaları ile blogları ziyaret ettiğini belirtmiştir. Ders başarısını ölçmede kullanılan araçları güvenilir bulmayan az sayıdaki öğrenci, söz konusu araçların çoğunlukla dilbilgisi kurallarına dair bilgilerini ölçmeye yönelik hazırlandığını, diğer becerilerinin ölçümünün aksatıldığını veya sınavda kullanılan dinleme parçalarının ders saatlerinde kullanılanlardan çok daha zor olduğunu ve bunun da kaygı düzeylerini arttırdığını ileri sürmektedir. Son olarak, öğrencilerin, yabancı dil derslerinin öğrenilen yabancı dilde işlenip işlenmemesi gerektiğine dair görüşleri alınmıştır. Öğrencilerin ilgili maddeye verdikleri yanıtlar, her iki grupta bulunan öğrencilerin yaklaşık olarak yarısının bu konuda çekimser kaldığını göstermektedir. Buna, öğrencilerin, bütünüyle hedef dil kullanarak işlenmesi halinde dersi rahatlıkla takip edemeyeceklerini düşünüp endişelenmiş olmalarının sebep olmuş olabileceği

tahmin edilmektedir. Tüm bu bulgular doğrultusunda, yabancı dil eğitimi plan ve programından sorumlu olan kişilere yabancı dil eğitimi ile alan derslerinin öğretimi arasındaki farklılıkların anlatılarak sınıf mevcutlarını mümkün olduğunca azaltmaları (25 kişiyi geçmeyecek şekilde yeniden düzenlemeleri) önerilebilir. Derse giren öğretim elemanlarına yönelik öneriler ise, mümkün olduğunca çeşitli öğrenme etkinliklerine yer vermeleri, Ghrib (2004) tarafından da önerildiği üzere öğrencilere dili kullanmaları konusunda daha fazla fırsat tanımaları, uygulanacak ölçme-değerlendirme araçlarını sınıf içerisinde öğretilen tüm dil becerilerini ölçmeye yönelik hazırlamaları ve özellikle sınavda kullanılacak dinleme parçalarını öğrencilerinin dil düzeylerine uygun olarak seçmeleri şeklinde olabilir. Söz konusu öğretim elemanlarına ayrıca, öğretimi yapılan yabancı dilin ders saatleri süresinde araç olarak mümkün olduğunca sık kullanılması, bunu yaparken öğrencilerin anadillerinden kaçınılması, öğrencilere ders dışında da yabancı dil eğitime vakit ayırmaları gerektiği aksi takdirde dili etkili bir şekilde öğrenemeyeceklerinin öğütlenmesi tavsiye edilebilir. Burada raporlanan bulgular ve onların doğrultusunda geliştirilen öneriler; çalışmanın katılımcı sayısı, niteliği, katılımcıların kayıtlı olduğu program sayısı gibi değişkenler açısından sınırlı olması sebebiyle genellenemez. Dolayısıyla, daha fazla sayıda katılımcı ile daha farklı öğrenme ortamlarında farklı veri toplama araçları ile gerçekleştirilecek olan çalışmaların daha geçerli, güvenilir ve genellenebilir bulgulara ulaşmak açısından önem arz ettiğine inanılmaktadır.

INTRODUCTION

Learner views and beliefs on learning are indispensable and necessary especially regarding English as foreign language (EFL, henceforth) learning. As advocated by Kouriedos and Evripidou (2013: 1), language teachers need to make informed decisions on how to implement, cultivate and maintain motivation throughout the academic year to enhance learning; in order to do that, they really need to look into how their students perceive effective language teaching. Theoretically, perception refers to a method or way of thinking while belief is the root of way of thinking. Students' beliefs about language learning may have an impact on their performance. Namely, a student is unlikely to learn a foreign language unless s/he believes that s/he has a good aptitude for that particular language. In other words, beliefs can become unfortunate self-fulfilling prophecies. In a similar vein, Riley (1996) claims that beliefs about language learning influence a learner's attitude, motivation or behavior during the learning process. Hence, Nunan (1993: 4) states that teachers should find out what their students think and feel about what they want to learn and how they want to learn. Accordingly, if all the variables in L2 acquisition could be identified and the many intricate patterns of interaction between learner and learning context described, ultimate success in learning to use a second language most likely would be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner (Savignon, 1997, in Savignon & Wang, 2003: 225).

In Turkey, EFL learning has been problematic for decades, although many attempts were made to develop the effectiveness of EFL courses delivered in Turkish state schools. In Turkey, EFL learning has been problematic for several decades, although many attempts were made to develop the effectiveness of EFL lessons delivered in Turkish schools. Solak and Bayar (2015: 106) noted that so far, lots of decisions have been made, new methods and approaches have been implemented, many course books and curriculum revised through trial and error in teaching and learning English language in Turkey, but it has not been possible to reach the desired objectives in this field. English is offered as a foreign language course within the curricula of different educational levels in Turkish education system. It is electively offered in institutions of pre-school education, and encouraged by the government, and introduced four class hours a week in the second year of primary education. It is also offered as a compulsory and elective part of curricula in secondary education, and as a compulsory part of higher education. Table 1 illustrates the weekly class hours of English as a foreign language courses offered as a compulsory and elective part of the curricula in different levels of education in Turkey.

Table 1. EFL weekly class hours in state educational institutions in Turkey

Level of Education	Type of Institution	Grade	Class hour (C: Compulsory; E: Elective)
Primary	Primary School	2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th	2 (C)
		5 th , 6 th , 7 th , 8 th	4 (C); 2 (E)
Secondary	Anatolian High School	9 th	6 (C)
		10 th , 12 th	4 (C)
		11 th	4 (C); 2 (E)
	Science School	9 th	7 (C)
		10 th , 12 th	3 (C)
		11 th	3 (C); 2 (E)
	Social Sciences High School	Prep	20 (C)
		9 th	6 (C)
		10 th , 11 th , 12 th	3 (C); 2 (E)
	Vocational High School	9 th	3 (C)
10 th , 11 th , 12 th		2 (C)	
Vocational School	1 st , 2 nd	2 (C)	
Higher	University*	Prep	24 (C)
		1 st , 2 nd	2/ 3 (C)
		3 rd , 4 th	3 (C)

C: Compulsory; E: Elective

Considering the conclusions proposed by Solak and Bayar (Ibid), this study aims to scrutinize learners' perceptions of EFL instruction delivered at higher education institutions. Accordingly, a comprehensive research question was addressed.

RQ: Do EFL learners' perceptions of EFL instruction offered at institutions of higher education in Turkey significantly differ in terms of the programmes they are enrolled in?

The following section outlines findings obtained from the research previously conducted on learners' perceptions about foreign/ second language teaching and practices.

Previous Studies

A great deal of research has been carried out with the aim of eliciting learners' perceptions on foreign language instruction at schools for the last few decades, and provided invaluable findings and insights to be utilized by various educational parties ranging from ministries of education in countries to curriculum designers, and teachers who are assigned with foreign language courses at different levels of educational institutions. Namely, Ryan and Harrison (1995) and Cashin and Downey (1992, 1999) found that students' perceptions of learning were highly correlated with their overall ratings of teaching effectiveness. Ghrib (2004) investigated Tunisian secondary school students' perceptions of the difficulties they encounter in learning English as a foreign language, the reasons underlying these difficulties, and the strategies they use in accomplishing their linguistic tasks. She revealed that the students had difficulties that were essentially due to their lack of knowledge of the English linguistic rules (e.g. lexical, semantic, grammatical and phonetic difficulties), and that they made use of such strategies as social and affective strategies to overcome them.

Graham (2004) explored English students' perceptions of learning French and how they view the reasons behind their level of achievement. She reported that the students who attributed success to effort, high ability, and effective learning strategies had higher levels of achievement and that those intending to continue French after age 16 were more likely than non-continuers to attribute success to these factors. Her findings also indicated that low ability and task difficulty were the main reasons cited for lack of achievement in French, whereas the possible role of learning strategies tended to be overlooked by students. In a similar study, Williams et al. (2004) analysed learners' perceptions of their successes and failures in foreign language learning. They elicited perceptions of students aged between 11-16 studying French, German and Spanish in secondary schools in the UK. They reported significant differences between male and female students, year groups and perceived success and language being studied. Namely, they found that perceptions of success and failure are inevitably context-specific, that secondary level students in England were more motivated to learn German than French. Specifically, their findings showed that success-oriented students were considerably more internal in their attributions for their success than failure-oriented students. A couple of years later, Hawkey (2006) found significant differences between the perceptions of learners and teachers on some of the activities in their foreign language classes in Italy. Namely, he reported that both sides agreed in general on the virtues of communicative approaches but largely differed in their perceptions on the prominence of grammar and pair work during classes. The author suggests that the differences in question might indicate potential problem areas of lesson planning and implementation which could usefully be given attention on teacher support programmes. Brooks-Lewis (2009) conducted a study on adult learners' perceptions of the incorporation of their L1 in foreign language teaching and learning. Her findings revealed that Spanish-speaking adult learners of English in Mexico believe that inclusion of their L1 is beneficial to their foreign language learning experience. As for pedagogical implication, she suggests that the practice would be applicable in EFL teaching situations with learners of different backgrounds and/or with different L1s, and in the teaching of other target languages. Psaltou-Joycey and Sougari (2010) probed perceptions of Greek young learners who attended English lessons as part of their compulsory schooling about foreign language learning and teaching. Their findings indicated that the students hold definite views about the roles adopted by the teacher who is regarded as a central figure in the learning situation, that errors are regarded as signs of learning, and that feedback is considered essential in the process of learning. The students in concern also believe that successful learning outcomes are inextricably linked with autonomous learning procedures.

Gökdemir (2010) conducted a research on the problems in foreign language teaching with the participation of 460 English preparatory class students from various universities in Turkey. He found that the main challenges stem from the fact that English lessons were mostly theory-based rather than

practice-based at higher education level, and generally teacher centred rather than learner-centred. As for the learning environment, he reported that it is not convenient for learning a foreign language and that the students attending preparatory classrooms and schools at universities did not have enough supplementary materials in English. In a contemporary study conducted in Turkey, Besimoğlu et al. (2010) analysed Turkish university students' attributions of their perceived successes and failures in English language learning, and revealed that participating students' attributions for both success and failure in foreign language learning were mainly internal, implying that they had a strong belief in their capability in controlling their success and failure in language learning. Another finding of their study was that the students in concern tended to accept personal responsibility for their successes and failure in language learning. In a more recent study, Shrestha (2013) examined Bangladeshi primary school learners' experience of English language classroom practices in which technology-enhanced communicative language teaching activities were promoted. Gathering data through a semi-structured group interview conducted with 600 3rd grade primary school students in Bangladesh, the researcher reported that the learners found communicative language learning activities such as dialogue and role play more effective than translation and memorizing grammar rules for learning English although they enjoyed reciting and drills. His study also showed that the language teachers assigned with these groups of students tended to employ both traditional and communicative approaches in their teaching. The following section offers information about the research design adopted in the present study for the purpose of providing response(s) to the research question identified in the previous section.

METHOD

Participants

Two groups of students studying social sciences and natural sciences at a state university in Turkey were the participants of the present study. A total number of 264 EFL learners attending various undergraduate programmes ranging from Medicine and Engineering to Economics and Administrative Sciences voluntarily took part in it (Social Sciences: 134; Natural Sciences: 130). Their mean age was 20 in each group, and reportedly, that they received an average of 10 years of EFL education previously. Approximately 70% of the students studying social sciences were female and slightly over 30% of them were male. There is a relatively more balanced distribution among the students studying natural sciences in terms of gender; namely, 55% of them were comprised of male and 45% were female students. More than 70% of the former group reported that they did not attend any English preparatory programme. 37 out of 39 students received this education at university. A similar percentage of students attending undergraduate programmes in natural sciences attended such a programme. It is important to note that most of these students in both groups took this education at a compulsory part of their education. More specifically, they received a foreign language education of not less than 700 class hours during an academic year.

Data Collection Tool

A questionnaire comprised of open-ended and closed-ended items developed by the researchers were administered to the participants in order to elicit their perceptions on various aspects of EFL instruction offered as a part of their higher education. It was specifically designed to elicit their opinions about the necessity of learning English, aspects of English instruction they don't like –if any, activities used in language classroom, assessment procedure, weekly class hours of the course, themselves as foreign language learners, amount of time allocated for learning English after school, and furthering EFL education upon graduation from university. It is worth noting that the questionnaire was completed in the classroom under the supervision of the researchers, and no time limit was set for the participants. The following section is intended to cover findings obtained from the questionnaire in concern and related discussion on them.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The first question of the survey investigated the students' perceptions on the necessity of learning English as a foreign language. It has been revealed that an overwhelming majority in both groups responded it positively (Social Sciences: 93%; Natural Sciences: 96%). As a follow-up question, they

were asked to whether they liked learning it. A similar percentages of students in both groups informed that they like learning EFL (64% of Social Sciences, and 64% of Natural Sciences) while 19% and 15% of them, respectively remained neutral about it. 17% and 21% of the students studying social sciences and natural sciences, respectively stated that they do not like learning English; however, most of these students attributed this to the fact that they have difficulty in understanding the course due to their poor background knowledge in it, confirming the finding reported by Ghrib (2004). With the aim of clarification, they were also asked what aspects of English instruction they don't like –if any. Excessive grammar instruction revealed the most complained about English instruction, confirming the finding previously reported by Gökdemir (2010). This particular case might be attributed to the preference of programme developers and curriculum designers rather than those of the instructors who are assigned with the course in question. They also complained that almost the same topics are taught from primary to higher education. Accordingly, the decision making bodies might be suggested that grammar instruction be reduced, and more communicative activities should be involved in the curriculum. Some students from both groups, on the other hand, reported that they hesitate to read aloud a sentence or passage produced in English, or to speak English since they find pronunciation is difficult attributing it to that the ways it is spelled and pronounced are different. Terminologically, it might be attributed to the orthographic differences between L1 and L2; namely, Turkish is a language which is spelled as it is pronounced while English is not. As a result, instructors assigned with these courses might be recommended to pay more attention to the instruction of pronunciation of the language through carefully designed speaking activities, particularly raising their consciousness of the phonological and orthographic differences between their L1 and L2. Some students stated that the instruction offered in the classroom is not appropriate for their proficiency level of English due to their poor background knowledge in it. In this concern, the instructors might be suggested to take into consideration the students' level of readiness to learn the subject matters they are planning to teach. Finally, a slight number of students attending programmes in natural sciences stated that they are not satisfied with the variety of activities used in the classroom, that they do not like the language itself, and that the classes are crowded which makes it hard to follow the courses efficiently.

Another item in the survey scrutinized the types of activities used during classes. Figure 1 is intended to outline the comparison of groups based on their responses.

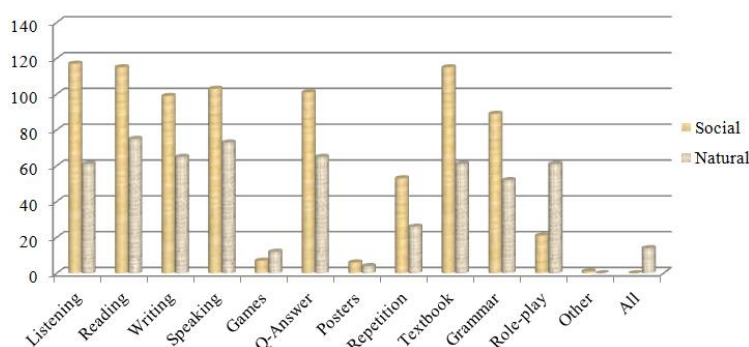


Figure 1. Activities used during language classes

In accordance with responses of the students studying social sciences, it seems that all types of activities excluding games and using posters are extensively used during the classes. The two activities in concern were also reported by the other group of students as the least employed ones. What is interesting is that the other activities were reported by less than half of the second group of students. This might be accounted for large class sizes; to be precise, most of the instructors assigned with compulsory foreign language courses offered in the natural sciences programmes are supposed to teach EFL in groups of approximately a hundred students. So, it obviously becomes much more challenging to teach it by organizing various activities as opposed to their colleagues assigned with the same courses offered in the social sciences programmes who are supposed to work with groups comprising as many as 25 or 30 students. So, the decision makers might be recommended to reduce the class sizes underlining the difference between teaching field-specific courses and foreign language instruction.

Subsequently, the students were asked what types of activities they find useful in language classrooms. One of the most significant findings of the study is that a great similarity was found between the groups in terms of their responses to the item in concern, as illustrated in Figure 2.

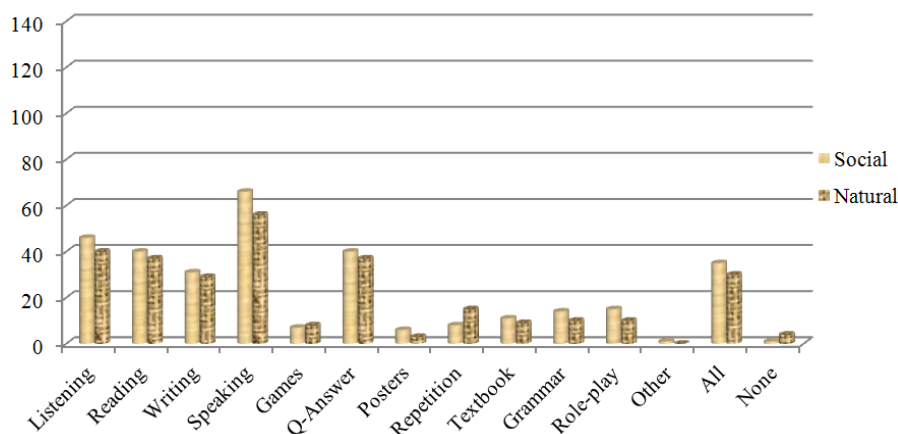


Figure 2. Activities found useful by the students

As can be seen in Figure 2, speaking is the activity described useful most frequently followed by listening, reading, question and answer drills, and writing, respectively. Another significant finding is that 26% and 23% of the students studying social sciences and natural sciences, respectively informed that all the activities are useful in language education. It is also noteworthy that just a few students described grammar instruction and using textbook as useful activities coinciding with the finding that excessive grammar instruction was the mostly complained aspect of foreign language classes. The instructors assigned with these courses might be recommended to employ as various activities as possible in their teaching. In addition, as suggested by Ghib (2004), students should be given more opportunities to practice English; i.e., they should be given more opportunities to listen to, read, write, and speak the foreign language.

The students in both groups excluding those attending the programme of classroom teaching are required to take EFL two hours a week as a compulsory part of the related curricula. The exception group is supposed to take it three hours a week but it would not be wise to claim this might decrease the reliability of the data since they constituted the minority in the group of students studying social sciences. Regardless of the programmes they are enrolled in, all students in these groups are to take a midterm and a final test in the middle and at the end of each semester, respectively. Accordingly, they were asked whether they describe assessment tools are effective in measuring their progress in English. The findings have revealed that students studying social sciences are more satisfied with the assessment tools than the other students. Namely 30% of those who study natural sciences, and 22% of those who study social sciences believe that their success is not thoroughly assessed through the assessment tools used by their instructors. They largely attributed it to that they feel anxious during the tests which are mostly grammar-based, which includes listening parts hard to understand, and whereby their speaking skills are not evaluated. They also claim that they are not realistic and practical due to being comprised of a limited number of questions. The following are the excerpts from responses of two students studying social sciences and natural sciences, respectively.

'I believe the tests are memorization-based. I mean, the better I memorize the rules and vocabulary, the better I perform on the tests. A few days or a week after a test, I do not remember most of them.'

'I do pretty well on the tests but I can't express myself in English. So, I don't think that I am a successful language learner.'

So, the instructors might be suggested to prepare tests designed to measure all the skills taught in the classroom, and listening parts might be selected taking into consideration the proficiency level of students. Alternatively, they might be recommended, in the classroom, to use parts identical to those they are planning to use in the exams regarding level of difficulty.

As for weekly class hours, 55% of the students studying social sciences, and 45% of those studying natural sciences do not believe that they are satisfactory for learning a foreign language effectively. Students in the first and second group stated that it should be offered 6 and 8 hours a week, respectively to learn it more efficiently. Posing a follow up item, it was aimed to elicit their opinions about using

English as the medium of instruction. 28% of the students studying social sciences, and 32% of those studying natural sciences disagree with the idea that the target language should be used as the medium of instruction in learning it, confirming what was previously revealed by Brooks-Lewis (2009). This probably stems from their fear of not being able to follow the courses effectively. Most of the students in both groups partially agree with the idea in concern. Hence, the instructors might be suggested to use the target language in their teaching as much as possible, and not to avoid using the students' L1 when they have difficulty in understanding the subject matters.

In order to find out their opinion about EFL courses, the students were asked whether they find it more interesting and enjoyable as opposed to their field-specific courses. Most of them, regardless of their area of study, agree or partially agree with the statement. This might be attributed to that the instructors assigned with these courses perform their job well attracting their attention to the course subjects and having them enjoy it.

Another item of the survey required the participants to make self-evaluation as language learners. Slightly over than half of the students studying social sciences believe that they are successful learners while the reverse is the case for those studying natural sciences. Subsequently, they were asked to state reason(s) for their self-evaluation. Figure 3 displays the distribution of reasons stated by those who described themselves as successful language learners.

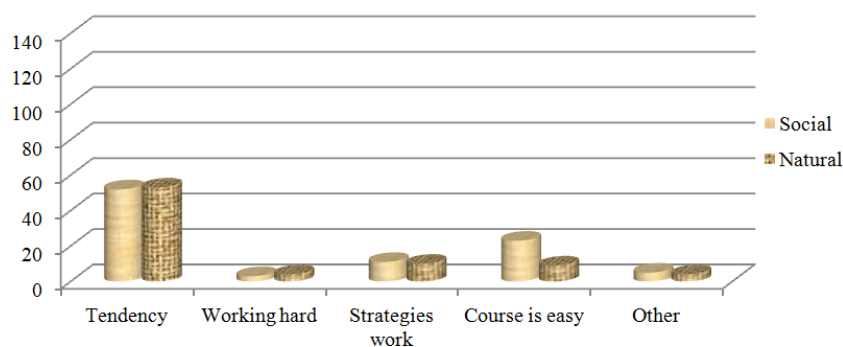


Figure 3. Reasons for success in FL learning

It is interesting to see that, in both groups, most of the students who describe themselves successful attribute this to their tendency to learn the language. In return, most of those who do not describe themselves successful attribute this mainly to the fact that they do not work hard enough. Both findings approve the findings of the studies previously conducted by Graham (2004), Williams et al. (2004), Besimoğlu et al. (2010), and Psaltou-Joycey and Sougari (2010). Accordingly, Graham (2004) argues that learners' self-concept and motivation might be enhanced through approaches that encourage learners to explore the causal links between the strategies they employ and their academic performance, thereby changing the attributions they make for success or failure.

In relation to this item, they were asked how much time they allocate for learning English after school –if any. Unfortunately, the findings have indicated that 74% of the students studying social sciences, and 72% those studying natural sciences devote no time for learning English outside the classroom. Most of the students responded this item positively specified that they mostly watch movies (probably with subtitles), watch TV or listen to the radio, and visit websites or blogs prepared in the target language. Interestingly, less than two out of ten students in each group reported that they read books or magazines in English, and that slightly over and less than two out of ten students studying social sciences and natural sciences, respectively revise their courses after school. The instructors might be recommended to advise their students that their learning is unlikely to be successful unless they just rely on the knowledge offered to them in the classroom, and to spend at least some time on the activities like revision to reinforce the language they newly learnt after classes.

Lastly, the students were asked whether they would like to further their EFL education after completing higher education. 60% of the students of social sciences and 65% of the students of natural sciences informed that they are planning to further their foreign language education mostly for professional reasons (e.g. requirement of the job, following developments in the field and etc.) and for such personal reasons as living or doing career abroad, or improving their communicative skills in English. Thus, it seems that over half of the students have either extrinsic or intrinsic motivation to improve their foreign

language regardless of their area of study. Hence, the instructors might be suggested to take the advantage of these factors in their teaching.

CONCLUSION

Pedagogical Implications of the Study

The study has indicated that most of the students studying social sciences and natural sciences believe that learning English is necessary for them, and they like it. Excessive grammar instruction revealed the mostly stated aspect of English classes they do not favour. It is followed by that EFL curricula for primary, secondary and higher education are designed to teach almost the same subject matters, which makes the educational process vicious and boring. Accordingly, the decision making bodies might be suggested to redesign curricula in which communication skills are not deemphasized at the expense of teaching grammar for different levels of education in a complementary manner. The study also indicated that some students hesitate to read aloud a sentence or passage written in the target language, or to answer the questions aloud due to the orthographic differences between their L1 and L2. As a result, instructors assigned with these courses might be recommended to pay more attention to the instruction of pronunciation of the language through carefully designed speaking activities, particularly raising their consciousness of the phonological and orthographic differences between their L1 and L2. As for the students having difficulty in keeping up the pace of the lesson due to poor background knowledge in English, the instructors might be suggested to take into consideration the students' level of readiness to learn the subject matters they are planning to teach.

Crowded classrooms seem to be the reason why learning activities implemented in classes of natural sciences are not as various as the ones employed in those of social sciences. In this concern, the decision makers might be recommended to reduce the class sizes underlining the difference between teaching field-specific courses and foreign language instruction.

Speaking and listening are the activities mostly reported useful in EFL classes whereas using textbook and grammar instruction are not found so useful by the students in both groups. The instructors assigned with these courses might be recommended to employ as various activities as possible in their teaching. In addition, as suggested by Ghrib (2004), students should be given more opportunities to practice English; i.e., they should be given more opportunities to listen to, read, write, and speak the foreign language.

Assessment tools were not described as reliable by some students in both groups claiming that they feel anxious during the tests which are mostly grammar-based, and which includes listening parts hard to understand. So, the instructors might be suggested to prepare tests designed to measure all the skills taught in the classroom, and listening parts might be selected taking into consideration the proficiency level of students. Alternatively, they might be recommended, in the classroom, to use parts identical to those they are planning to use in the exams regarding level of difficulty.

A considerable amount of students in both groups do not totally agree with the idea that English should be the medium of instruction in the classroom. This might probably result from their fear of failure to follow the courses effectively; hence, the instructors might be suggested to use the target language in their teaching as much as possible, and not to avoid using the students' L1 when they have difficulty in understanding the subject matters. A similar number of students reported that they find English classes more interesting and enjoyable than their field-specific courses.

Having a tendency to learn foreign languages was the attribution for success mostly reported by the students who describe themselves successful language learners, and not working hard enough was the one for failure mostly reported by those who describe themselves unsuccessful language learners. In view of this result, Graham (2004) argues that learners' self-concept and motivation might be enhanced through approaches that encourage learners to explore the causal links between the strategies they employ and their academic performance, thereby changing the attributions they make for success or failure. Another significant but not surprising finding of the study is that the great majority of the students devote no time for learning English, and very limited number of students revise their courses after school. The instructors might be recommended to advise their students that their learning is unlikely to be successful unless they just rely on the knowledge offered to them in the classroom, and to spend at least some time on the activities like revision to reinforce the language they newly learnt after classes.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study is limited to investigating perceptions of EFL learners studying social and natural sciences at a state university in Turkey on EFL teaching practices in higher education. It might be furthered to investigate EFL learners attending different levels of educational institutions in Turkey or some other countries where it is offered as a compulsory part of school curriculum. Alternatively, a similar study might be conducted to elicit perceptions of learners of foreign/ second languages other than English on implementations in their classroom.

It is also confined to certain number of EFL learners studying at a state institution of higher education in Turkey. It might be extended to include larger number of learners studying at these institutions or private institutions in a given country. Likewise, a further study might be conducted with the participation of EFL instructors working at these institutions to elicit their perceptions on their practices.

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