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English Language Education in a Vocational School: A Qualitative Case Study

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The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of Vocational School students' experiences of learning English at a state university in Türkiye. After the application of a pre-survey which aimed to reveal the background of the students, four students took part in an interview about their English learning experiences in Vocational School. Interviews were also conducted with two instructors to obtain information about their perspectives of the Vocational School students' English language learning motivation and process. Observations were also carried out in the real language classrooms. In data analysis categorical aggregation is used in order to have patterns in the qualitative data. The study unearthed the challenges that the students experienced in language learning process which were insufficient English background of students, their lack of motivation to general education, disregard to English education, and feeling of inferiority accompanied with low self-esteem. Furthermore, physical problems (students who are full or part-time workers), discontinuity in curriculum and limited lesson hours were also among the problems. The study implicated that information transmission which is still prevalent in lessons should be supported with other methods of teaching, the students need consciousness raising in terms of the place of English in their work life and some improvements are needed in the English curriculum.

Introduction

Background to the study

Vocational Schools undertake the mission of training necessary workforce of the country and prepare students for work life. This workforce would be highly important in the face of globalization and worldwide competition. With the release of the 2023 Education Vision, some modifications were implemented in Vocational Schools to improve societal

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perception and educational quality. The curriculum was revised, and relationships with businesses and the industry improved. The students were provided with scholarship opportunities, on-the-job training and employment priority (Özer, 2020b). Nevertheless, until additional steps are made, including raising wages, these changes aren't considered as long-term solutions (Özer, 2020b). Vocational Schools are still perceived by the public as being inferior and serving students who are academically less successful (Özer, 2020a). They are associated with student misbehaviours more than academically oriented schools (Ling, 2015). The association of the Vocational Schools with low-quality education causes a decline in their desirability by the students. According to Turkish *Ministry of Education 2018 Vocational and Technical Education* report Vocational High Schools are becoming less-preferred educational institutions. There is a decrease in class size in these schools starting 2014-2015 educational years. During 2018-2019 educational years the size fell to its lowest level in five years. In 2015, the quotas of Vocational Schools in tertiary level were short of 20019 students.

Vocational Schools in Türkiye face many issues including entrance without examination. This practice changed student profile and diminished the reputability of Vocational Schools (Alkan et. al., 2014; Günay & Özer, 2016; Özer 2020a). Despite the improvements in recent years, Vocational Schools have infrastructure problems, low employment rates upon graduation and there is a misalignment between the supply of graduates with the demands of the business world (Alkan et. al., 2014; Günay & Özer, 2016; Özer 2020a). Most importantly due to the inadequacies in practice, students cannot acquire necessary occupational skills such as handicraft which mainly consists of tacit knowledge about the profession (Günay & Özer, 2016). Therefore, quality of education needs to be assured across vocational institutions throughout the country (Alkan et.al., 2014; Günay & Özer, 2016).

In Vocational Schools, education is affected by the school climate and the sense of futility and hopelessness shared by the students in these institutions. The students in Vocational School show more negative attitudes towards themselves compared to the ones in general education. This in turn, affects their study involvement and motivation (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). The interpretation of Vocational School as a school for low achievers starts a vicious cycle. The self-regulation and self-efficacy beliefs have a major effect on English language learning achievement. Zorlu and Ünver (2022) found that 542 Vocational High School students' self-regulatory learning strategies and English self-efficacy beliefs significantly predicted learning achievement in learning English. While this is the case, undesirable start and emotional distress of students affect the Vocational School students' academic performance negatively (Lovejoy, 1995; Wang, Chao, & Liao, 2011).

Statement of purpose

Present study intends to unearth the experiences of Vocational School students, who are an understudied group, in the language learning context in tertiary level, with a specific focus on their unique voices. We believe that this would allow for greater understanding of the context of Vocational Schools and how it affects students' experiences learning English. The strengths and weaknesses of the compulsory English education will also be explored to enhance the efficacy of English language education. We also acknowledge that the case description will be crucial in comprehending the current situation, reinforcing the positive aspects and possibly making improvements. Therefore, the research questions were formulated as the following:



- (1) What are Vocational College students' and their instructors' perceptions of English language education in a state university in Türkiye?
- (2) What challenges do Vocational School students experience in language learning in the Vocational Institute?

Theoretical framework

Self-System Model of Motivational Development (SSMMD) model is chosen to reflect English language experiences in this Vocational School environment. There are four types of motivational variables in this model. Context variables refer to the social environment of learners, including teachers. Self-variables refer to learners' attitudes, their beliefs toward their ability and self-perception of relatedness, action variable is related to goal-directed behaviours and engagement in a learning. The outcome is the last variable in the theory and it shows the attainment of students (Dincer et al., 2019).

Review of current literature

The Vocational Schools in Turkey undertake the task of educating students in a foreign language as well as preparing them to work life. Having proficiency in English helps individuals to have a better access to international research, a good quality of education and well-paid jobs.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there are considerable issues regarding English language education in Vocational Institutions. Lack of communication in English is one of the biggest problems (Bedük, Eşmen & Ay, 2016; Davras & Bulgan, 2015; Karakuş, 2013). Vocational School students' insufficient English proficiency causes difficulties and disappointment for them (Sun Spencer, 2008). Lower competence of the graduates in English communication still causes problems in industries today (Sincer, 2017; Nasihin, 2022). Rather than grammar oriented English courses which is commonly offered in Vocational Schools, students should be equipped with necessary language skills which will be of practical value to them in their future jobs.

There are several obstacles which interfere with the English language education in Vocational Schools. The ones related to the school context include high emphasis on vocational courses but underestimating the English lessons, and the discontinuity between levels (Rao, 1995). Other obstacles include unqualified teachers, class density, workload of teachers, limited English lesson hours (Liu, 2020; Muliya & Aminatun, 2020; Sun Spencer, 2008). Context related problems also manifest themselves in certain discrepancies regarding learners' learning needs, teachers' teaching needs, and learning resources and facilities at school (Wen, 2010). English language education the students receive do not provide them with the knowledge and skill they need for their employment (Rao, 1995; Hue & Beverton, 2013; Çelik, 2013; Liu, 2009; Su, 2010). Hua and Su (2010) and Beverton (2013) reported that the students preferred job-oriented English instead of a general English course since their top priority was learning English for career development. The studies highlight the importance of English for specific purposes courses in Vocational Schools, however, in many Vocational Schools, the English language education is restricted to general compulsory English course.

Vocational High Schools are educational institutions where regularly students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and with lower levels of achievement are grouped (Suna, & Özer, 2021). The low performance continues in the tertiary education as well. The perception of Vocational Schools' being inferior both in public eye and in students' views affect their

academic expectations and goal-oriented behaviours in English education negatively. Because of the status of these schools, an anti-school culture emerges and the students withdraw themselves from hard work. Their self-esteem also declines (Van Houtte, 2005). Therefore, in student related factors (self-variable), especially motivational factors come to the fore for the low attainment of English proficiency. Liu (2020) revealed that 75.8% of respondents in her study had already been demotivated in English learning before Vocational School. The Vocational School students either lacked intrinsic motivation towards learning English or they feared failure (Wen, 2010; Liu, 2020; Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020; Sun Spencer, 2008). The students who came from higher tracks of education in high school showed more favourable attitudes toward English language education and they were better motivated than the students who came from lower tracks (Sarkmaz 2011; Gökçe 2008, Liu & Chen, 2015). Additionally, student beliefs related to the importance of English are critical student related factors. Several studies (Durucasu, Aydın & Er, 2020; Sun Spencer, 2008; Hua & Beverton, 2013) suggest that the Vocational School students are aware of the importance of English in their future careers. Still, there are students from several departments such as metal, construction, and motor technologies that think English will not be relevant to their future jobs (İlgör, 2019).

The studies reviewed above have shown that there is a discrepancy between the English language instruction in Vocational Schools and the occupational English needs of the students (Rao, 1995; Liu, 2009; Su, 2010; Wen, 2010; Celik, 2013; Hue & Beverton, 2013). Combined with the limited lesson hours, lack of learning methods and unqualified teachers, English language education in Vocational Schools has serious contextual problems that need immediate attention. Students' previous negative English learning experiences, lack of intrinsic motivation, lack of self-esteem, and limited background knowledge constitute some of the student related factors that inhibit successful outcomes in English education in Vocational Schools (Liu, 2020; Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020; Sun Spencer, 2008; Wen, 2010).

Methodology

Qualitative research approach and interpretative framework

The present study adopted a qualitative case study approach which is defined as an approach “in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems over timer time” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). This method was selected since it enabled us to provide an in-depth understanding of the case which can be clearly identifiable and has boundaries (Creswell, 2013). The case that was explored in the current study was the experiences and problems of Vocational College students with respect to English language learning.

The interpretive framework of the present study was rooted in pragmatism which focuses on ‘the outcomes of the research in terms of actions, situations and consequences of the inquiry’ (Creswell, 2013). In the present study, a real action was taken into consideration and what was significant was to unearth the perceptions, problems and challenges that the students experienced while learning English in Vocational College, as well as to discover some practical solutions to these problems. Themes arose during several in-depth interviews, pointing us toward the actual issues with the English language education program as well as some issues that were caused by the students themselves. Furthermore, the solutions were suggested by both the students and teachers. ‘Pragmatism opens a door to multiple methods, different worldviews and different assumptions as well as different data collection tools’ (Creswell, 2008, p. 11). Therefore; it is obvious that the researchers tried to open a door to



different views of both students and teachers. Student and teacher interviews, observing the classroom atmosphere and having some search on the place that Vocational Colleges have in history were the data collection tools to discover the views and challenges of the students and teachers in English education in a vocational college.

Research setting

The study was carried out at a Vocational School in a state university in Türkiye. The Vocational School offers twenty-two different programs and thirteen of the programs provide both the conventional daytime version of the same program and night-time degree classes. Each department has two hours of English language instruction per week. The English lessons are delivered by the instructors from the School of Foreign Languages.

The Vocational School is at the furthest east end of the campus. Four-year departments are at the opposite side. This location has some implications for the students' mental division of themselves from others at the university. Some students voice that in front of the university entrance door, everyone is equal. However, when they head towards the east, Vocational School, the attitudes of the other students slightly change towards them. Previous research also showed that the fact that Vocational Schools are generally outside the main campuses of universities causes students to stay away from many social/cultural interactions offered by campus life, and to interact less with other students studying in different departments. This situation may also cause a feeling of being less valued on students, and may negatively affect their ownership of their school and the development of their sense of belonging (Alkan et al., 2014).

Participants

The sampling strategy was purposeful criterion sampling. Among the volunteer students reported in the pre-survey, participants were selected based on their employment conditions, which were part-time working students, full-time working students, and unemployed students. The reason for selecting research subjects based on their working circumstances is that during the focus group interviews in the pilot study, students mentioned that they lacked the time to study English and they were too exhausted as they were working full- or part-time jobs. Additionally, in contrast to students in other departments, students in Vocational Schools typically work while they are still enrolled in school, which further distinguishes them from other students. As researchers, we thought that collecting information from students who had unique working circumstances may provide a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of their language learning challenges. The number of the student participants was restricted to four as we wanted to have a manageable data and deeper analyses of each unique case. We also thought that participant triangulation might contribute a bigger picture of the case. Therefore, two instructors who were teaching English to the participant students at the Vocational School were interviewed. More details regarding the participants can be examined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

	Age	Gender	Departments	Working condition
Student 1	20	Male	Machinery	Part-time
Student 2	19	Male	Machinery	Full-time
Student 3	19	Male	Machinery	Part time
Student 4	20	Male	Construction	Not working
	Age	Gender	Year of Experience	
Instructor 1	26	Female	4	
Instructor 2	24	Female	2	

Data collection methods and tools

Prior to the data collection process, approvals were received from the Human Subject Ethics Committee and a pilot study was conducted via focused group interviews as can be seen in Figure below.

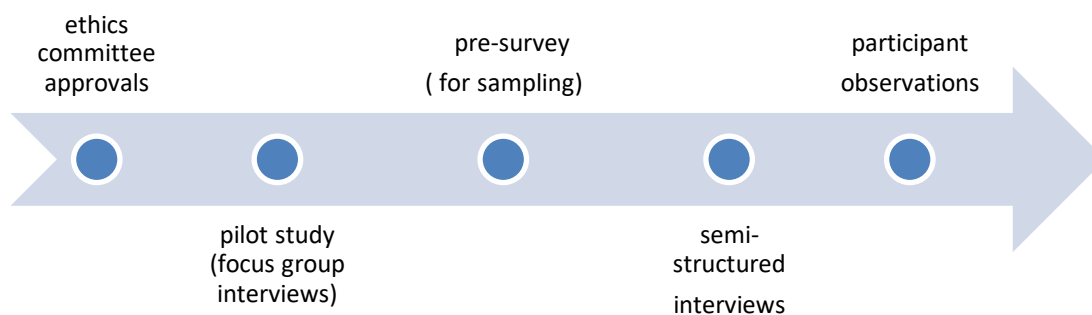


Figure 1. Data collection procedure

The main data collection method was an interview accompanied by participant observation in the field. First of all, a pre-survey was conducted with the students in order to obtain necessary information about the background of the students. Based on the results of the pre-survey, six participants (four students and two instructors) were recruited on a voluntary basis. The student interviews aimed to reveal the nature of English lessons, students’ perspectives towards language courses and the mismatches if any between the English education in High School and Vocational College. In the interviews with the instructors, the instructors were asked to provide information about students’ English language learning process, and the participation and motivation of those students to the language courses. All the interviews were carried out face-to-face. Each interview lasted about half an hour as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Details regarding the interviews

	Mode	Duration
Student 1	Face-to-face	31 minutes
Student 2	Face-to-face	35 minutes
Student 3	Face-to-face	25 minutes
Student 4	Face-to-face	26 minutes
Instructor 1	Face-to-face	40 minutes
Instructor 2	Face-to-face	23 minutes

In order to provide a fuller picture of the students' experiences and to detect any (mis)matches



between students' perceptions and their real behaviours in language classrooms, the participants were also observed during class time for two hours of classroom instruction. The specific student behaviours were identified using an observation checklist that the second researcher took notes on. It could be examined in Appendix A.

To summarize, in order to obtain a complete picture of the problem, the data were triangulated during the data collection phase through interviews with both the teachers and the students in the institution, extended engagement and persistent observations by the teacher-researcher in the field (first author) and a participant observer (second author) during two hours of instruction.

Data analysis procedures

For the data analysis of the present case study, the denaturalized transcriptions of the interviews were done verbatim by the two authors and an external coder. The steps we took at each level of our investigation, along with the justification for our choices and the actions we took, were mapped out using operational memos. Memos also allowed for a thorough and in-depth investigation of the procedures involved in data coding and categorization (Birks et al., 2008).

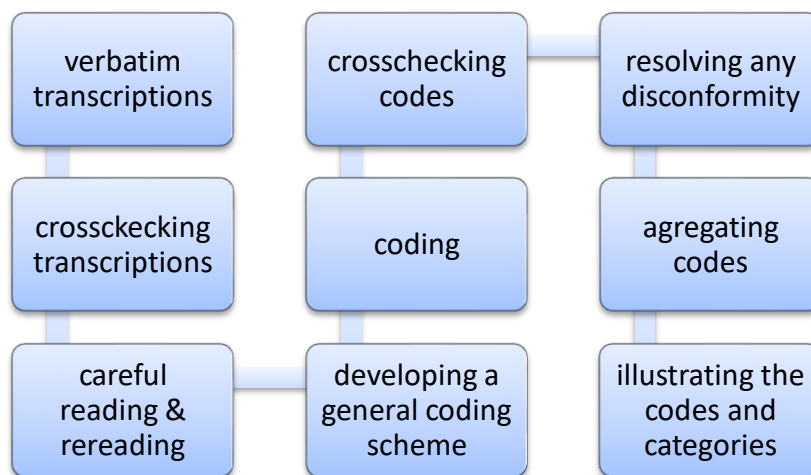


Figure 2. Data analysis procedure

After careful reading and crosscheck of transcriptions, we agreed on certain categories that were exposed in the data, therefore, a code scheme was created to ease the coding process, which could be examined in Appendix B. After the researchers and the external coder coded two interviews each, the codes were cross-checked by the other researchers to increase inter-rater reliability. For any disconformity, the authors discussed the relevant codes and agreed upon the codes. Following this, categories were aggregated to have patterns in the text and natural generalizations were established (Creswell, 2013). Having multiple coders, cross-checking and memoing procedures contributed to the credibility of the study.

Results

The key findings that emerged from interviews and observations included problems in Vocational Schools, needs of Vocational Schools, solutions to problems and strengths of Vocational Schools as demonstrated in Figure 2.

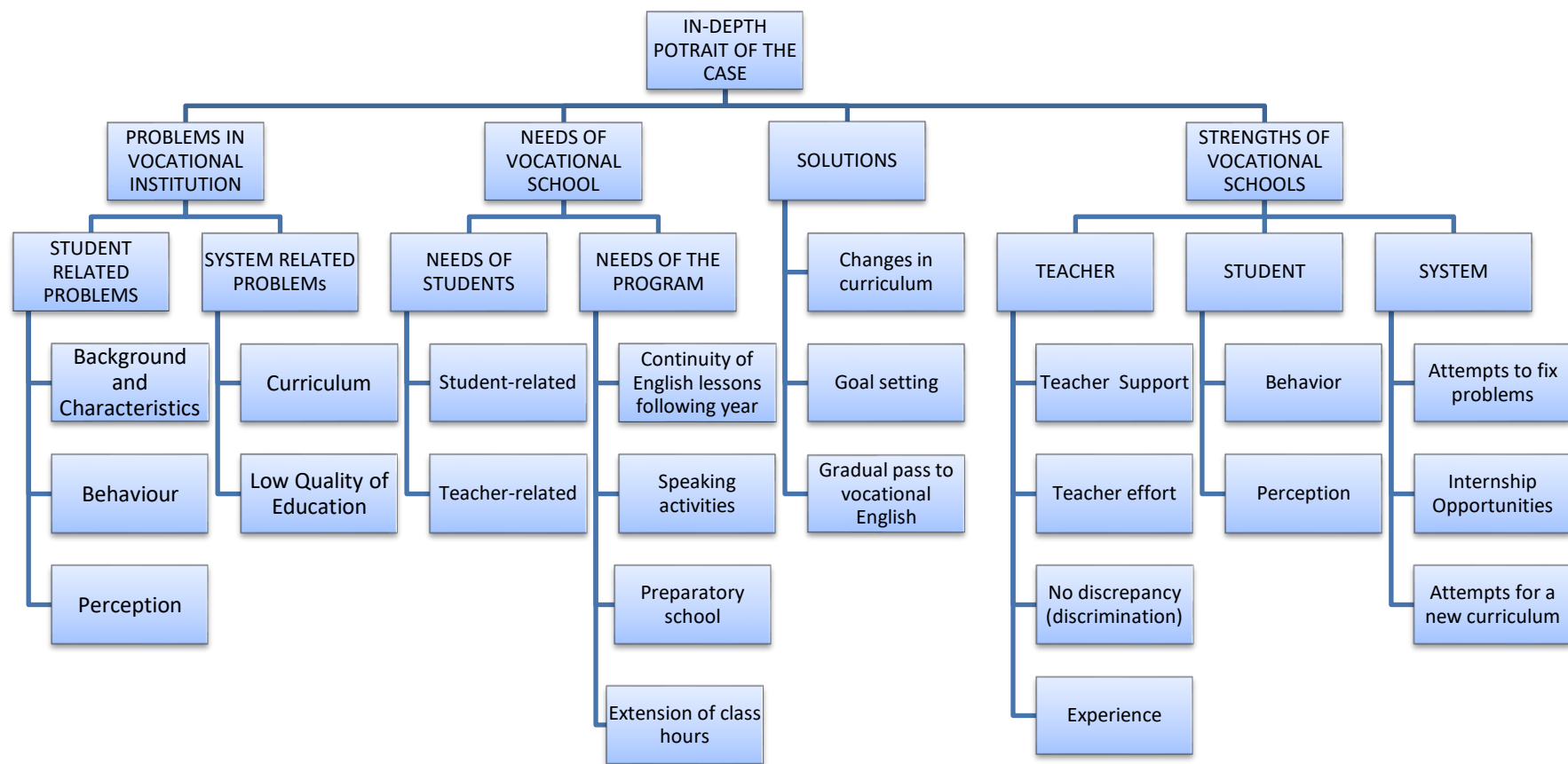


Figure 2. A thematic representation of perceptions of Vocational College students about English language education

Student related problems

Students' backgrounds and characteristics

The students in the Vocational Institution are the graduates of Vocational High Schools. These schools focused on equipping the students with directly industry related subjects, and general lessons such as Math, Literature or English were neglected. Thus, the majority of the participants had problems related to their former English lessons. Instructor 2 stated that:

These students almost have no English background. They don't even know the basic vocabulary items which primary school students are supposed to know. They have problems in reading, grammar and comprehension, and not only English but also Turkish, too (Instructor 2).

Instructor 1 also stated that the students were not ready for the curriculum in the vocational institution. Student 3 also stated that the high school English lessons were inadequate in terms of content. The situation was not quite different in the school of Student 4 who graduated from a vocational Anatolian High School. Since their school was a technical high school, the English lessons were not considered as crucial or relevant to their jobs by their teachers. He asserted that they were not doing ten hours of English lessons as indicated in the curriculum. The teachers perceived Vocational Schools as places to raise technical workers and the level of the English lessons were quite low, as the participant voiced it, "primary school level". This not only affected their level of knowledge, but also the students were emotionally pre-conditioned that English lessons could be overlooked for their education.

Instructor 1 also expressed that she observed low motivation in the students who graduated from Vocational High Schools when compared to vocational Anatolian High Schools which offered more hours of English and she attributed this Anatolian graduates' having a stronger background in English.

Instructors also made some comparisons between the characteristics of the students in the Vocational School and that of other departments like the Engineering Department. They pointed out the differences between two groups in terms of background, life conditions and future expectations. Instructor 1 stated that the students in Vocational School had lack of knowledge in English regarding their background and they did not have comfortable life conditions in terms of both economical finances and family as far as she was concerned. Considering the attitudes of the students regarding English language learning, she signified their lack of motivation to learn English since the students were not able to foresee any advantages of learning English for their career.

Some of the students also emphasized the lack of motivation and attention to the class as a result of working part-time or full-time in a company. Long hours of working and the obligation to travel from another city to Vocational School for evening classes of English were also mentioned by one of the participants as a shortcoming.

It's difficult to work in a private institution. I have to work for 10 hours in a day and sometimes this may be extended to 12 or 13 hours. Therefore, it is difficult for me to allocate time for studying English or any other lessons. I could only study during the finals' week (Student 1).

One of the participants made a comparison between the employed and unemployed students by signifying the superior advantage that unemployed students have since they could allocate time for studying and it was their only focus unlike the employed ones who needed to deal with a variety of issues.

The instructors also pointed out the unfortunate nature of the different characteristics of students in their classrooms in terms of background, age, job and interest.

There is an immense age difference in the Vocational School because we had a lot of old and working students as well as young ones who just finished high school and started to university. Age difference is huge and the backgrounds of the students are different. That's why it was very difficult to maintain a common ground (Instructor 1).

The teachers stated that it was very difficult to design a new curriculum or adjust the existing one regarding the needs of the students since it was impossible to establish a common ground due to variety of learner profiles. One of the students also mentioned his personal characteristics that he was shy and hesitant to participate in class activities in English due to the fear of being humiliated.

I am a bit shy. That's why I have never participated in any of the class activities in English lessons because I was afraid of making mistakes and being humiliated in the end (Student 2).

Students' perceptions

Although the majority of the participants agreed on the importance of English in their social and work life and clearly expressed the necessity of learning English for better occupational prospects, the answers of some participants showed that the students displayed disregard for English education. According to the explanations of Students 1, 3 and 4 English lessons were not taken seriously by the majority of the classroom. Student 4 voiced this as:

I don't understand why nobody likes English. Only a few students and I are listening to the lessons. And since these few students know English, they sometimes say we already know so there is no need to listen (Student 4).

Furthermore, Student 3 stated that they did not care about the lesson several times in the interview. Student 2 also defined himself as an unsuccessful student. The students' English perceptions were clearly shaped by their future expectations, perceptions of the school in general and their formed identities. Student 2 was a first-year student in the department of Machinery and Metal Technologies. He did not want to go on higher education. He wanted to be a model. However, with the advice from his parents, he took a chance and enrolled to the Vocational School. As they were graduates of Vocational High School, they were given a chance to pass directly to a 2-year Vocational Institution. This student lacked the motivation to study for his lessons. He stated that he never attended some of the courses from the beginning of the year. This student gave up studying, when he encountered problems in understanding. Instructor 1 also supported this conclusion by stating that "The students don't have clear life goals related to their academic departments. Some want to work in family business, some want to do the military service." Therefore, some students find English, irrelevant for their future lives.

The students' perception of themselves also had detrimental effects on their academic

achievement. The dominant feeling of inferiority was observed among the students of Vocational Institution. The majority of the participants saw Vocational High School students as academically unsuccessful students. They expressed that their education in Vocational High Schools was of lower quality when compared to general high schools. Moreover, when giving information about their former English language experiences, one of the most cited phrases for their low background was “since we graduated from Vocational high school...” This feeling which was coming from their high school was reinforced in the Vocational Institution by the behaviours of students from other departments. Students 2, 4 and 6 expressed that they were alienated by the other university students in the school. The vocational students were out casted and described as rude ignorant and vulgar by other students. The participants ‘current situation can be described as being minorities in a university campus. These behaviours also shaped the students own identity formation. In the interviews the students sometimes opposed to these behaviours calling them as prejudices but sometimes they accepted that some of the conceptions had true points. When participants were asked what they thought about the general apprehension of vocational students, Student 3 expressed that he saw himself and other Vocational School students as being lower level than the other students in the university, too. When we look at the effects of this conception of inferiority, we can easily relate it to the low expectations of students from themselves. Student 4 reported that general behaviours of Vocational School students were passing the courses without much effort.

As the last words for student perceptions which caused problems in English learning, we should mention disappointment and frustration in the English learning experience. Student 4 mentioned that due to the unavoidable cheating incidents in the exams, the students who did not know or speak any English got the highest grades while the people who had better knowledge but did not cheat fell behind them. He added:

When these happen, your pride is hurt and you don’t want to study but cheat instead. You don’t have enough time to study English because of the other difficult lessons (Student 4).

Students’ behaviours

Students’ lack of attention to the course in general, almost no participation in lessons, disinterest in lesson materials, having no revision and no practice after the course and giving up studying easily were some crucial problems that were mentioned by the participants.

During the participant observation the students were not really attentive to the course and they were talking with their friends and having some jokes among themselves and laughing loud even though it was a crucial revision lesson before the exam. No one had the books or notebooks whereas there were just two people who had one piece of paper and a pen. As Student 1 and Instructor 1 stated in the interviews, this case was a routine and almost nobody had the course book or even pencil in the class most of the time. Student 3 also summarized that in the excerpt below.

Maybe, we are deceiving ourselves and we do not want to understand. We cover the book in class and go home throwing it away and doing nothing on it (Student 3).

As it is obvious from the excerpts given, most of the interviewees accepted that it was necessary, yet they disregarded English courses and they did not practice and have a revision after school. However, there were also some statements that they showed some effort, yet

they failed. Their reasons for the failure consisted of disregard for English courses and difficulty in understanding English.

We are studying and realizing that I do not understand anything then I leave the book aside. I feel that there is no need to struggle for English since I cannot do it and I cannot understand it (Student 2).

However, for a few students who wanted to study and practice English, there were also some in-class problems. These problems involved students' disrupting other students and the teacher in class. All of these classroom management problems were indicated by both instructors and the students in class during the interviews. Even in the observation, the observer felt the difficulty of managing such a class. All students were male and from time to time, they were talking among themselves. There were attempts to behave properly for the sake of new visitor (observer); however, even the presence of the observer couldn't prevent their disruptive behaviours fully. It was obvious that they just came for the attendance sheet. As to the classroom management, Student expressed that the management problem was related to the students' loudness and the gender of the teacher claiming that the female teachers' voice could not dominate the class.

Student 2 explained the classroom management problem in a more detailed way given in the quotation below:

Two or more students in class tease each other in the middle of the lesson and they are talking to each other very loudly. If none of them were in class, students could listen to the teacher without being distracted, even if they do not understand (Student 2).

Along with these in-class problems, occurrence of cheating in exams was also one of the behaviour-related problems. Only one of the interviewees gave some details on it. He stated that many students cheated in exams. He also stated that there ought to be justice and teachers should not tolerate cheating.

While Instructor 1 was mentioning some classroom management problems, she explained how the students' behaviours deviated from an expected student behaviour.

They have differences in terms of their behaviour. They have a group culture created by themselves. I have difficulty in understanding them... I expect an apology from the students when they are late, yet I face some students coming late and greeting their friends with a bullying mode and sitting without apology (Instructor 1).

As we can understand from the excerpt above, students had a different sense of respect and their group identity sometimes caused more problems in class. As it was stated by the same instructor, students did not get permission before they spoke and they just interfered in the lesson, which was also one of the utmost problems in management.

System related problems

Curriculum, instruction and communication

One of these shortcomings was that since the students had a limited background in English in vocational high schools, the curriculum did not match the needs of students.



Moreover, the teachers had difficulty in adapting the lesson planning since the students' backgrounds and characteristics were really different as it was stated by Instructor 1.

English is a one-year course and it has some negative effects on students. As Student 2 stated, they did not care about the English course since there would not be another English lesson the following year. Furthermore, Instructor 1 also advocated that if the students continued English courses in the second year, it would benefit students more since they would learn more things about English which would contribute to their own branches.

In the Vocational Institution, one of the most important problems related to instruction was the limited lesson hours which were allocated for English. English lessons were two hours per week and they were conducted consecutively. Both teachers in the study expressed the difficulties of conveying the necessary knowledge to students and to make progress in a two-hour per week program. As the teachers stressed, in the current situation it was not possible for students to get the skills which are crucial to master a language.

In the lessons, partly due to time limitations and partly because of other difficulties (crowded classrooms, lack of materials, lack of motivation etc...), speaking and listening skills weren't taught effectively. Instructor 2 expressed the difficulty of expecting to teach the students the productive skill of speaking due to students' limited backgrounds and attitudes of the students accompanied by time limitations. Instructor 1 also supported this notion by stating that the general expectation was to convey the grammatical aspects of the language in traditional passive lecture style lessons. Students 1 and 4 touched upon these difficulties in their interviews. The speaking problems included not only communication difficulties of the students but also problems in articulating, pronouncing and even reading written materials. Moreover, Instructor 1 asserted that the students should be taught work life technical English which is not possible currently. This teacher was also not satisfied with the content as she found it inadequate to prepare students to real life.

Apparently, English language instruction in the Vocational Institution also suffered from the inadequate learning materials. In the lessons, the main material was a textbook which failed to get the students' attention to the lessons (Students 3 and 4). Moreover, the students failed to bring their lesson materials to the classroom, and this impeded learning severely. Some students directly came to school from work; therefore, they could not bring their books with them.

The problems related to materials forced teachers mainly to lecture and use the board or the projector. Occasionally, teachers brought photocopies for reading and other exercises, but the lack of materials diminished the quality of lessons, note taking and motivation of teachers.

In Vocational School, there were also some problems regarding the communication among the teachers and administrators and also the approach to the students' needs. In present, Vocational School need analysis was not done, which resulted in using the same curriculum for each and every department. Moreover, they used the same program even for two-hour classes and four-hour classes as it was mentioned by Instructor 1.

Finally, she also suggested that there could be some projects with foreign students yet these projects could be realized with the commands of the administrators and the administrators of the Vocational Institution first should be aware of the need for that.

Low-quality of education in high school and university

Low-quality of education regarding their background education was one of the common concerns of the participants that emerged in the study. Most of the participants complained about the problems of the vocational high school system with respect to English course schedule. One of the issues appeared during the interviews was that there was a distinction between vocational High Schools and Anatolian Vocational High Schools in a way that only the latter involves English course in the curriculum. Therefore, the students who attended to Anatolian Vocational High Schools had a four-hour of weekly instruction whereas the students who attended to vocational high schools did not have any. The lessons were insufficient in terms of design and implementation. The students declared that they were not properly instructed in English in spite of the compulsory nature of English courses in Anatolian Vocational High Schools as well.

We had English courses weekly and I was really enthusiastic about learning; however, we did not study English in the class since they looked down on us and perceived us as not worthy of making any effort to teach (Student 4).

Student 4 mentioned that most of the teachers of English course in high school were not the actual graduates of the departments of English language teaching.

In addition to the problems that the students experience in high school regarding the quality of education they received, there were some issues to consider with respect to their current education status. The concerns were assembled around three main categories in terms of teacher, classroom management and discrepancy between Vocational Schools and other departments.

First of all, the issue of teacher quality and guidance were criticized by the participants in the university setting, too.

There is no one to support or guide us in the school. If you guide a student in one direction, s/he follows your path. If there were someone [teacher] to support us in the class, we would be more motivated to learn. (Student 1).

Secondly, the difficulty in classroom management was brought up by both teachers and learners as a barrier for language learning. Both of the groups complained about the overpopulation in the classrooms since it prevented them from having an appropriate learning environment. While the teachers complained about not being able to implement their lesson as they planned, the students also condemned that they were not able to follow the lesson even if they wanted due to the overpopulation of the classrooms and provided some solutions which they thought would be helpful.

The teachers also emphasized the unfortunate design of the system in terms of penal sanction. They reported that the students came into the classrooms with no materials such as books, pencils, etc. and there was nothing to do on the side of the teachers to prevent those actions from happening because they did not have the authority to dismiss to the student from the class or to perform any other action in those cases. When the student did not have any material, s/he was most likely to have lack of attention to the lesson and distract others. As the teachers suggested, it would be beneficial to design some rules to prevent such behaviour that pose a risk for the effectiveness of the learning environment.

Difference between Vocational School and other departments in terms of physical settings of the faculties were emphasized by the students regarding the quality and the comfort of the faculties. Student 2 pointed out the better conditions of the other departments in terms of faculty buildings and the facilities by feeling a little bit upset and inferior about the lack of quality in furniture in their canteens compared to comfortable and quality ones in the other departments like engineering.

Strengths of vocational institution

Teachers

Students and instructors reported several strengths for their general education as well as experience in the vocational field. Instructor 1 expressed that she had no mental difference in mind between other departments and Vocational Institution and she tried to do things in Vocational Institution exactly as she did in other departments. After graduating from an ELT department, she tried to apply the instructional methods that she had learned and tried to use the communicative approaches for the students' English education. Although she admitted the extra difficulties in vocational institution, she never thought to alter or lower her expectations from the Vocational School students and she tried to act accordingly. Student 1 stated that he had guidance for the importance of English in terms of seeing conferences or video materials or extra vocabulary activities. Instructor 2 expressed that even if they could change the attitudes of students towards English, she considered it a gain and she approached the lesson activities positively.

Students

In the study, the participants were attentive students. Students 1 and 4 showed that they understood the importance of self-study and individual effort to learn a second language. They were autonomous learners and especially Student 4 was actively trying to do extra activities for the English individually. Students 1, 3 and 4 were self-confident and they had some background in English to which they could count on. Students 2 and 4 reported having peer support and family support respectively while learning English.

System

Instructor 1 informed us that the Vocational School was currently working upon some improvements in the English language curriculum and assessment. They were attempting to fix the problems related to English education. This should be classified as a system strengthening activity. Generally speaking, although there were inherent problems related to the system, within its restrictions, the Vocational School offered a good quality of education according to Student 3 and field experience according to Student 1. Since the school offered vocational training and internship experiences, as well as general quality education, Students 1 and 4 thought that it was advantageous to have education in the vocational Institution.

Needs of the students

One of the most crucial requirements from students is to give their attention to the English lesson. They did not give attention to the lesson and materials, and their participation to the course was limited. Since the students were aware of the situation, they verbalized that they had to be more attentive to the courses.

Secondly, need for studying was mentioned by quite a few students. They needed to practice and have revision at home and ask the teacher afterwards, yet they also stated that they had limited time to do so. Finally, students expressed that they needed peace in class. All interviewees mentioned the classroom management problems due to the crowded classes, the disruption and interference of some mischievous students.

Student 2 believed that there was a need for the new methods to be used in class by the instructors. Especially, Students 3 and 4 gave some recommendations for the new methods that could be utilized in lessons.

The lesson may be over a movie. We can revise the lesson by means of it and we can take some notes. We can cover the course. Then, we can go on by giving some examples from the daily life (Student 3).

Student 4 also mentioned some suggestions as to the new methods:

There may be something based on practical things such as trips, videos or movies which are more interesting. If there are always written things, people can get bored (Student 4).

Instructor 1 also stated that there should be some encouragement for the students to see what they can do with English. She believed that students should be heartened to learn English. To summarize, there were some requirements of both the students and the teachers to meet the needs of the Vocational School students while learning English.

Needs of the program

Both students and also teachers compromised on the fact that not having an English lesson following year was problematic since the students disregard English. Giving a general English course in the first year and then continuing with an ESP course might be a solution to that problem according to Instructor 1.

Students and instructors advocated that there was a need for more hours for instruction. Student 1 needed more English instruction as he was working part-time. Instructors also stated that they had difficulty in catching up with the syllabus and Instructor 2 claimed she could not even have time to check the things that she instructed.

Furthermore, there were some practical needs of students like speaking lessons or at least speaking activities in class. Even though Instructor 2 stated that she did not expect a Vocational School student to speak, Instructor 1 believed that there could be some speaking lessons. Student 3 also suggested more practical activities from real life and some activities for conversational skills.

The last need of the program in the light of the students' interviews was the need for preparatory school (Student 1). He believed that there should be more class hours for English, besides prep school should be obligatory to practice English more.

Solutions

The participants suggested that the English should be an elective course rather than compulsory. Instructor 2 emphasized the difficulty of teaching in the classrooms due to the overpopulation of the students. Students also thought that it was a good idea to have English



lessons elective so that only the students who would like to attend to the course would take the course.

I think English should be elective in our school...so that the majority of the students will decide not to take the lesson and the teacher will implement the lesson better. We're having some problems since our classes are so crowded (Student 1).

Eliminating compulsory attendance from the program was another solution suggested by Students 3, if the students did not have to concern about the absenteeism, only the ones who were willing to participate to the lesson would come to class.

One of the participants suggested the abolition of the exams from the curriculum as a solution for overcoming barriers to learning English. In his view, the grading system should be based on student's participation and contributions in the class time in order to facilitate learning.

Instructor 1 mentioned that the teacher could act as facilitators and raise students' consciousness about the importance of English by designing some workshops and career fairs in the faculty or inviting some people from their prospective companies. In this way, the students would be able to set their goals beforehand and widen their perspectives and expectations.

Furthermore, both of the groups pointed out the importance of ESP as well as general English. The students complained about not having opportunity to learn some terms and phrases related to their department. Instructor 1 also said:

Instead of implementing the lessons based on grammar such as tenses, modals, etc., we should provide some opportunities the students to learn some language functions that will be useful for them in their jobs (Instructor 1).

Discussion

In the study, the background of the Vocational School students, their perceptions of language learning experiences, and their instructors' views on students' language learning process were investigated. The study exposed many issues regarding language education of Vocational School students. Not only the problems and strengths of the programme but also needs of the system and programme were detected and certain solutions were suggested by the research participants.

In the Vocational School a major proportion of the problems stem from student self-variables. There are insufficiencies in students' backgrounds (Liu, 2020; Muliya & Aminatun, 2020; Sun Spencer, 2008; Wen, 2010), they have negative attitudes toward English instruction (Liu, 2020; Muliya & Aminatun, 2020; Sun Spencer, 2008), and feel themselves inefficient (Zorlu & Ünver, 2022; Lovejoy, 1995, Wang, Chao, & Liao, 2011). The framework of the Self System Model of Motivational Development (SSMMD) permits us to understand the success of education in relation to students' motivational processes and interactions with their social context. The students' perceived competence, autonomy and relatedness levels determine their engagement to the education. Learning context could facilitate or inhibit the psychological needs of the students. In that way, it affects the success of education (Nouwen, et al., 2022). The students' negative perceptions related to their competence and autonomy undermined their engagement with English education. Their relatedness to the school context was also problematic. They felt status loss for being a student in Vocational School and their

self-esteem was affected negatively. In turn, disruptive behaviours increased.

The fact that Vocational School students had to work part time or full time also had ramifications for their education. Having to work and not being able to find time to focus on their studies affected students' English language education negatively. The rate of such students compared to other academically oriented departments needs to be studied more comprehensively. Whether or not Vocational Schools create some sort of social stratification should be researched and some steps are needed to be taken for equality in educational opportunity (Brunello, 2004). For shorter term solutions, physical incapacities of the school (such as crowded classes) should be improved. Additionally, some optimizations could be devised related to student factors (such as arranging lesson hours to get the maximum benefit without getting affected from factors i.e., jobs of the students).

Furthermore, English education in the Vocational School was in peril due to the curriculum. There was a discrepancy between the English needs of the students in the industry and the English language education they got (Rao, 1995; Liu, 2009; Su, 2010; Wen, 2010; Celik, 2013; Hue & Beverton, 2013). The discontinuity of the curriculum across levels was also one of the underlying reasons for the not getting the desired outcomes out of English language education. In order to promote English language instruction, extensive reforms must be made in the area of curriculum.

The results of our study have also implied that a comprehensive needs analysis needs to be implemented to take needs of the students and the job industry into consideration while designing the curriculum. More deep scaled improvements such as initiating programs which include strategic partnership with industries could be needed to prepare the learners to industry and eradicate the discrepancy problems in the curriculum (Valles, 2012). Work integrated learning which is combining classroom education and training with workplace learning may also improve the employability of the graduates (Arslan et. al., 2013).

In terms of the quantity of the lessons, our findings revealed that students find the number of English classes quite low; therefore, more lesson hours should be allocated for English language instruction. Some parts of the lessons could be online to solve some insufficient practical teaching resource problems (Heping, 2012). Additionally, integration of internet and other technological advancements may have transformative effects on students to change the nature of traditional passive learning experience of English and to accommodate the needs of students with various learning styles (Young, 2003; Bildik, & Gürol, 2019). Adding alternative assessment to the existing assessment system should also be considered for positive effects such as increase in self-awareness and efficiency (Bidav, 2021) and to resolve problems which stem from execution of exams in Vocational School.

This case study also revealed some strengths of the Vocational School on the basis of instructors and students who personally contributed to the good operation of the English language lessons. The motivation and the practices of individuals could be studied in detail to find ways to make such positive operations and practices more prevalent. Positive experiences of the students related to general quality education and internship opportunities should be extended to English education as well. Lastly, the improvements which are being taken in the curriculum and assessment of English language teaching in the Vocational School constitutes the positive sides of the English Language instruction.



Conclusion

This case study aimed to provide deeper understanding of English language education in a Vocational Institution. Interviews were carried out with both instructors and students. Observations were also conducted to expose the real classroom context and support the interview data. The results revealed such themes as problems, needs, solutions and strengths of English education in Vocational Schools. As a theoretical framework, Self-System Model of Motivational Development contributed to the interpretation of the findings and offered insights regarding the present case.

Overall, the study provides significant implications for the stakeholders working at Vocational High Schools, Vocational Institutions and specifically School of Foreign Languages at universities. Firstly, the problems related to the quality of general education and language courses should be improved in Vocational High Schools in the first place. Secondly, Vocational Schools should also offer conscious-raising activities to increase the motivation of their students for both their career and language learning. Furthermore, School of Foreign Languages might design a preparatory programme besides a series of language courses with more practical aspects like developing conversational skills rather than teaching and testing language content only. In addition, ESP courses should also be considered specifically for Vocational School students. Finally, the number of English lessons and the continuity of these courses should also be prioritized while designing the curriculum.

On the other hand, present research study is limited as it only focused on a single case. Further research could be conducted with more participants in other vocational institutions. Moreover, the perspectives of school managers, curriculum designers, ESP instructors, and prospective employers could also be consulted through interviews.

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Appendix A. Observation Checklist

Sample	Description of the context	Observed behaviours
<p>Observed Student: Participant 4</p>	<p><i>e.g. The students are not really attentive to the course and they are talking to their friends and having some jokes among themselves and laughing loud even though it is a crucial revision lesson before the exam.</i></p> <p><i>No one has the course books or notebooks whereas there are just two people who have one piece of paper and a pen.</i></p>	<p><i>e.g. He is talking to his friends and he is trying to respond to the questions raised by the teacher.</i></p> <p><i>His responses are generally wrong or incomplete but he is putting an effort to impress the teacher.</i></p>

Appendix B. Coding Scheme Sample

Problems	Needs	Solutions	Strengths
<p><u>Sample codes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum issues Students' misbehaviours 	<p><u>Sample codes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for preparatory program More hours of English language instruction 	<p><u>Sample codes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal setting Changes in curriculum 	<p><u>Sample codes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internship opportunities