Evaluation of the primary 3rd grade English language teaching program through teachers' eyes

Pınar Çankaya[1]

Namık Kemal University, Tekirdağ-Turkey

Abstract

The present study attempts to find out active English teachers' opinions regarding the primary 3rd grade English Language Teaching Program (ELTP) which was launched in 2013 in terms of its general overview, content, goals, teaching-learning process and assessment dimensions in the city center of Tekirdağ including 20 primary schools with 38 teachers in the academic term 2014-2015 spring. In this evaluation study, quantitavive data were used in order to explore how teachers evaluate the primary 3rd grade ELTP through a Program Evaluation Scale (PES) which was designed by the researcher herself based on relevant research studies and literature. Statistical Package for Social Sciences 20 (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data including descriptive statistics, T-tests and one- way analysis of variance (ANOVA) analyses. The findings of the study showed that the program needs some modifications regarding its teaching and learning process and assessment in the light of teachers' opinions. Moreover, teachers emphasized that they need to have an in-service training on the program.

Keywords: English language teaching program, program evaluation, teaching programs

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[1] Instructor of English, Namık Kemal University, School of Foreign Languages. Email: pcankaya@nku.edu.tr

Introduction

Concerning the fast and huge developments in the world in terms of every aspect of life, education is inevitably to keep up with these changes. Accordingly, teaching programs in general, language teaching programs particularly are designed in accordance with the recent changes. In this respect; the countries which are aware of the issue have been trying to put in new regulations in order to improve the language education. Considering that program evaluation is a vital issue in education and is a must for ELT program developers but it is still one of the least succeeded area. Without evaluating both the process and the outcomes of a program, it is clear that the benefits and effectiveness cannot be identified. Evaluation is important for several additional reasons among which can be stated as a means to developing good practice, to make the best use of scarce resources, to provide feedback to staff and participants, and to shape policy development (Alderson & Beretta, 1992). It is also important to examine why a program succeeds or fails, considering unexpected positive or negative effects, and to examine whether the goals are appropriate for the learners (Worthen& Sanders& Fitzpatrick, 2004). In this respect, this study analyzes the primary 3rd grade English language teaching program launched in 2013 by MoNE (2013) in order to see its effectiveness in terms of its general characteristics, content, outcomes, teaching/learning process and assessment, additionally it expolores the teachers' opinions on this program.

It is clear that teachers are the masters of improvements for education (Sullivan & McDonough, 2002). In this regard; employing the opinions of language teachers provide various perspectives to problems and helps gaining different suggestions. Henceforth, the study will assist in identifying the ongoing effectiveness of the program together with the points to improve.

Theoretical review

In its broadest sense, a program is defined as "an organized and planned set of related activities directed toward a common purpose or goal" (Küçük, 2008, p.17). It can be regarded as "any set of replicable procedures, materials, professional development, or service configurations that educators could choose to implement to improve student outcomes" by Slavin (2008, p. 12), while Lynch defines a teaching program as "a series of courses linked with some common goal or end product (1996, p. 2).

As all definitions suggest, a teaching program should have a clear goal, a set of activities to achive the mentioned goal and an assessment way for the end-product. The basic elements of a teaching program are stated as aims/objectives, content, teaching/learning process and assessment/evaluation which are supposed to support each other.

Program evaluation, on the other hand is defined as "the systematic gathering of information for purposes of decision making" by Richards et al. (1985, p. 130). Similarly, evaluation is regarded as a non-stop and sophisticated process which is planned well in order to obtain, analyze information for making a final decision on the quality of a program by Karataş and Fer (2009). Moreover, this process serves to identify the strengths, weaknesses and efficiency of the program to decide the parts needed to be revised, modified or continued (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009; Karataş& Fer, 2009).

Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate the primary 3rd grade ELTP by exploring active teachers' opinions on each component of the program.

Methodology

The current study was a descriptive one, thus adopting a quantitative research type including a questionnaire in which the research questions written below were tried to be answered:

RQ1. What are the teachers' perspectives on the overall characteristics of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

RQ2. What are the teachers' perspectives on the content of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

RQ3. What are the teachers' perspectives on the objectives of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

RQ4. What are the teachers' perspectives on the teaching/learning process of the primary 3rd grade ELTP ?

RQ5. What are the teachers' perspectives on the assessment of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

Setting and participants

38 English teachers in the city center of Tekirdağ during 2014-15 academic year spring term were selected non-randomly. The distribution of active English teachers was explained in terms of gender, teaching experience, academic degree and seminar attendance in the following Table 1.

Table 1

The Distribution of Gender, Experience, Degree, Attendance of the Participants

		Number of the Participants
Gender	Female	30
	Male	8
Degree	Bachelor	38
	Master	-
	Doctorate	_
Experience	1-5 years	14
	6-10 years	14
	11-15 years	8
	16- over	2
Seminar	Yes	3
	No	35

As demonstrated in Table 1, of the 38 participants, 30 were female participants (n= 30) and male participants in the study were 8 (n= 8). Teaching experiences of the participants ranked from 1-5 years (n= 14) to 16 over (n=2). When they were asked whether they had any seminars on the recent program, a total of 35 participants indicated themselves that they did not have any seminars, however only 3 participants reported that they had. In terms of educational degree, all participants had bachelors degree. The schools were 18 state primary schools in the city center of Tekirdağ in addition to 2 private schools.

Instrument

The data were collected via two-part questionnaire. The first part included some demographical information such as gender, academic degree, teaching experience of the participants and whether they attended any seminars on the program. The second part questioned the issues related to objectives, content, teaching/learning process, assessment and overall characteristics of the primary 3rd grade ELTP implemented by the participants.

During the development of the instrument, a vast amount of literature about program evaluation and development was reviewed. With the help of similar research studies on program evaluation (Gömleksiz & Bulut 2007; Küçük, 2008; Erkan, 2009; Güneş, 2009; İnam, 2009; Seçkin, 2010; Orakçı, 2010; Alkan&Arslan, 2014; Adıgüzel & Özüdoğru, 2014), the instrument was tested and gone through a piloting process with 116 participants. The "Program Evaluation Scale" was found a well-established instrument with the the reliability value of $\alpha = .966$ which indicates that the questionnaire is highly reliable. It consists of 33 items in which there are 5 choices ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" for each item. Additionally, it includes 5 sub-dimensions, to name overall characteristics, objectives, content, teaching /learning process, assessment. For each dimension, the reliability values were computed and found as $\alpha = .841, \alpha = .921, \alpha = .840, \alpha = .843$ *and* $\alpha = .920$ respectively.

Procedures for data collection

To conduct this current research study, necessary official permission is compulsory as the study is implemented in the primary state schools. When the written permission was taken, 18 primary state schools in Tekirdağ were visited. With the help of the school headmaster's permission to implement the questionnaire, English teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire and it was stated that their participation was entirely voluntary; their answers would be used only for academic purposes and kept confidential as anonymous. Only two state schools which were in villages were sent the questionnaire via e-mail. Accordingly, 4 of the English teachers filled out an on-line version of the questionnaire.

Analysis of the data

The obtained data were analysed with the help of the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS, version 20). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations were used to explore the demographic data. Additionaly, independent samples t-tests and ANOVA statistics were used to explore any statistically significant differences between participants in terms of their gender, and attendance to a seminar and teaching experiences. In addition, the .05 level of statistical significance was set at all statistical tests.

Findings

In this section of the study, the research questions are answered one by one with the light of the findings.

RQ1. What are the teachers' perspectives on the overall characteristics of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

In order to answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the most favoured statements by participants regarding overall characteristics of the 3rd grade ELTP along with the mean values. Table 2 displays the mean scores of the opinions of the teachers.

Table 2

The Mean Scores of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Overall Characteristics of the Program

Overall Characteristics	Mean	SD
In-service training is essential to understand and implement the program (item5)	3.95	.783
It is possible to make learners develop positive attitudes to English by implementing the program (item3)	3.90	.841
It is possible to make learners enjoy English by implementing the program (item2)	3.85	.893
The program is student-centered (item1)	3.75	.954
The program guides teachers well (item4)	3.37	1.17

As demonstrated in Table 2, the participants were found as moderately positive about the overall features of the program in general terms with the mean value of 3.76 (*SD*= .605). When the mean values are concerned item by item, it can be observed that the most reported item is "In-service training is essential to understand and implement the program (item5)" which implies that teachers strongly need an in-service training on the program to reach a better understanding *(M*= 3.95, *SD*= .783*)*. Secondly teachers believe in the possibility of developing positive attitudes towards English and enjoying it by implementing the program with the mean values of 3.90 and 3.85 respectively showing that learners have fun while learning English. The least favoured item by teachers was "The program guides teachers well (item4)" which reveals the fact that teachers do not find useful enough the guidance the program provides.

RQ2. What are the teachers' perspectives on the content of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

Considering the second research question related to the content of the program, the results were demonstrated in the following Table 3.

Table 3

The Mean Scores of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Content of the Program

Content of the Program	Mean	SD
The content provides learners with an enjoyable, stress-free learning environment (item13)	3.80	1.04
The content attracts the students' attention and curiosity (item14)	3.60	1.00
Listening skill is adequately covered in the content (item17)	3.47	1.10
The topics in units support each other (item15)	3.40	1.15
The content is suitable for learners' readiness level (item19)	3.23	.974
The content of the program allows to use different methods and techniques (item20)	3.08	1.22
Speaking skill is adequately covered in the content (item16)	2.95	1.06
The number of words suggested to be taught in each unit is inadequate (item18)	2.65	.975

As Table 3 reveals that the teachers regarded themselves as slightly positive about the content of the program with a mean value of $M = 3.27$ $(SD = .708)$. When investigated item by item, it was seen that, the participant teachers mostly reported that "The content provides learners with an enjoyable, stress-free learning environment" showing that game-based learning and the content itself make learners feel comfortable and motivated $(M = 3.80, SD = 1.04)$. Similarly, "The content attracts the students' attention and curiosity" was favoured by the most of the teachers with a mean value of 3.60 $(SD = 1.00)$ which reveals that teachers find the content attractive enough for young learners.

On the other hand, teachers have some negative concerns related to the content of the program. Item 16 "Speaking skill is adequately covered in the content" was not supported by the teachers revealing that speaking activities are not performed in their classrooms on the contrary to the claim of MoNE which strictly emphasizes the speaking and listening activities $(M = 2.95, SD = 1.06)$.

RQ3. What are the teachers' perspectives on the objectives of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

The third research question aims to explore the opinions of the participants on the objectives of the program.

Table 4

The Mean Scores of Teachers' Opinions Regarding the Goals of the Program

Goals of the Program	Mean	SD
The goals of the program are in accordance with the content (item12)	3.95	.783
The goals are suitable for learners' age (item8)	3.90	.841
The goals support and complete each other (item7)	3.85	.893
The goals are clearly and explicitly stated (item6)	3.75	.954
The goals of the program are attainable by learners (item11)	3.37	1.17
The goals are suitable for learners' emotional development (item10)	3.52	1.01
The goals are suitable for learners' cognitive development (item9)	3.48	1.06

As it can be observed in Table 4, the participant teachers have a positive tendency towards the goals of the program with a mean value of $M = 3.60$, $SD = .754$. Regarding each item, the participants generally find the goals of the program concordant to the content ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .783$). Accordingly, the goals were found suitable for the learners' age by the participant teachers ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .841$).

RQ4. What are the teachers' perspectives on the teaching/learning process of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

To demonstrate the results of the opinions of teachers regarding the teaching/learning process of the primary 3rd grade ELTP, mean values were calculated.

Table 5

The Mean Scores of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Teaching/Learning Process of the Program

Teaching/Learning Process	Mean	SD
The classroom activities are suitable to learners' physical development (item24)	3.60	1.12
The teaching techniques suggested in the program are suitable for the level of classroom (item22)	3.43	1.05
The teaching and learning process is suitable for using an eclectic mix of instructional techniques simultaneously in classroom (item21)	3.00	1.19
The classroom activities are designed by taking learner differences into account (item23)	2.87	1.15

As demonstrated in Table 5, the participants were found as moderately positive about the teaching and learning process of the program with the mean value of 3.22 (*SD*= .909).

Considering each item related to the teaching and learning process**,** teachers find classroom activities suitable to learners' physical development ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.12$) showing that the activities they employ in the classrooms are in accordance with learners' physical conditions. Additionally, they believe that "The teaching techniques suggested in the program are suitable for the level of classroom (item22)" with the mean value of 3.43 which reveals that the level of classroom is taken into account while practising the teaching techniques.

On the contrary, teachers do not think that learner differences are taken into account during the teaching / learning process with the least mean value of $M = 2.87$ ($SD = 1.15$). It can be concluded that different learning styles and strategies as well as intelligence types are not taken into consideration in classroom activities.

RQ5. What the teachers' perspectives on the assessment of the primary 3rd grade ELTP?

The fifth RQ investigates the opinions of the participants on the assessment of the program. For this aim, the mean values item by item were calculated as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The Mean Scores of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Assessment of the Program

Assessment	Mean	SD
Portfolio evaluation is useful (item31)	3.70	1.01
Assessment types are in accordance with the goals of the program (item30)	3.23	.920
Assessment is in accordance with the content (item29)	3.20	1.04
Evaluation is able to show whether the goals are achieved by learners (item28)	3.18	1.05
Not only in-class but also out-of class assessment types are used (item25)	3.13	1.01
Evaluation fosters learners to self-evaluate themselves (item26)	3.03	1.09
Evaluation and assessment is explained in detail in the program (item 27)	3.00	1.10
It is possible to evaluate listening skills in the program (item32)	2.53	.877
It is possible to evaluate speaking skills in the program (item 33)	2.45	1.06

As Table 6 reveals that the teachers regarded themselves as slightly positive about the assessment of the program with a mean value of $M= 3.04$ ($SD= .707$). When item by item analysis is concerned, it was seen that the participant teachers mostly reported that "Portfolio evaluation is useful" which shows that portfolios provide learners with a chance to produce language by keeping dossiers and portfolios in which they put their projects during the whole term ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.01$). Similarly, teachers think that "Assessment types are in accordance with the goals of the program (item30)" with a mean value of 3.23 ($SD = .920$) which reveals that teachers find the assessment types such as portfolio evaluation, observation concurrent with the goals of the program.

On the other hand, teachers have some negative concerns related to the assessment of the program. Item 33 "It is possible to evaluate speaking skills in the program (item 33)" was not supported by the teachers which implies that speaking ability of learners is not evaluated adequately ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.06$). In addition to the speaking skill, listening skill of each learner was also found imposssible to evaluate by participants with a mean value of 2.53 ($SD = .877$) showing the fact that participants do not evaluate their students in terms of their listening abilities.

Discussion and conclusion

In general, some of the results revealed significant points about participants' opinions concerning the primary 3rd grade ELTP. The most surprising result can be stated as teachers' positive attitude towards the program in spite of several deficiencies reported. In terms of general characteristics, they reported that the guidance the program provides is not sufficient similar to Küçük (2008) and Büyükduman's (2001) studies. As a result, they insist on the need for an urgent familiarization seminar on the 3rd grade primary ELTP where they can share thier experiences and develop reflective thinking skills as well. Moreover, the study has similar findings with Gürsoy et al. (2013) and Meral and Semerci (2013)'s studies in that they strongly suggest in-service trainings on the recent program to help teachers reach a full understanding of it. This shows that not only 1997, 2006 but also the recent program (2013) were criticized in terms of its lack of guidance and familiarization to teachers revealing that the program developers should explain the leading procedures for teachers in detail along with the sample implementation cases. Accordingly, item analysis of the study supports the previous findings of Küçük's study on the Key stage 1 ELTP evaluation (2008) in which participants reported students' enjoying English through the program.

The findings of the present study overlap with the findings of a number of significant studies such as Cihan and Gürlen (2013), Büyükduman (2005), Er (2006) in that they all found the objectives of the program were in accordance with the content and suitable for learners' age. On the contrary what mentioned studies suggested, Arı (2014) reported in his study that the goals were not found attainable by the participants. Regardingly, this current study demonstrated that the goals regarding speaking and listening abilities are not attainable by learners. Learning to learn and use the language effectively are among the main goals of the program, however teachers think that these goals can not be reached by learners due to crowded classrooms, insufficient equipment at schools etc. Most of the participants complain about lack of materials and equipments during the teaching process which makes impossible to apply the procedures and activities effectively. Therefore, it is urgent to modify and reshape the teaching / learning process of the program with the help of extra materials and documents for teachers.

One another conclusion drawn from the study is concerned with the content of the 3rd grade ELTP according to which teachers were found moderately positive. The main purpose of MoNE is to provide learners an enjoyable and stres-free learning environment in addition to developing positive attitudes towards English. Considering teachers' opinions, they stated their satisfaction with the enjoyable, stress-free learning environment in which young learners enjoy English via game-based learning. Similarly, in a study carried out by Alkan & Arslan

(2014) on the 2nd grade ELTP evaluation, it was found that learners had an enjoying learning environment. Moreover, the content was found attractive enough appealing to young learners' interests both in Alkan & Arslan (2014)'s study and Erbilen-Sak's study (2008). However, it was found that speaking activities were not adequately covered in the content.

Concerning assessment aspect of the program, the study reports several significant issues. Firstly, self- evaluation assessment tools such as self and peer-evaluation or out of class assessment such as project evaluation are not effectively employed even though portfolio and other alternative assessment ways are favoured by the teachers like in Cihan and Gürlen (2013) and Alkan and Arslan (2014)' studies. They supported that teachers agree on the project-based learning through which learners can monitor and self-evaluate their own learning process. Additionally, teachers strictly criticized evaluation of speaking and listening skills as it was found impossible to evaluate them in their classrooms because of various reasons including lack of equipment, crowded classrooms and unclear evaluation criteria. Likewise, Cihan and Gürlen (2013) reported that listening skill was not adequately evaluated by teachers.

Suggestions for Further Research

Concurrent with the findings of the present study, relevant literature and discussions afterwards, the following suggestions for further research studies could be stated.

1. The present study focused on the evaluation of the primary 3rd grade ELTP with participants in Tekirdağ. Hence, further evaluative research studies should be conducted on 2nd or 4th grade ELTP with different participants all over the country.
2. The current study asked only primary teachers' opinions regarding the 3rd grade ELTP. Therefore, further studies should be carried out to explore teacher educators, students, parents and administrators' ideas as well.
3. During the planning process, a large scale needs analysis which helps to set clear and attainable objectives can be done, defining the deficiencies of the previous program, necessary changes on the current program, the philosopy to be followed. Employing systematic and continuous evaluations are crucially invaluable with an aim to provide necessary information on weaknesses, strengths, and outcomes of the program.
4. Teachers' beliefs about the reasons and theoretical considerations underlying the changes are prominently important as they apply it according to their beliefs. For this reason, it would be fair to collect more detailed data via semi-structured interviews, observations, diaries and field notes from teachers and students as well through triangulation as it is necessary to explore or identify any concerns or potential problems within the current program.
5. For an effective teaching-learning process in the program, it is strongly suggested to develop suitable materials to meet the language needs of the learners. Thus, classroom-based research studies can be carried out on the applications of the program considering the materials and activites in particular.

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