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**Evaluation of the Preparatory Program at Çukurova University: Focus on the Content, the Teaching-Learning Process and the Assessment System**

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**ABSTRACT**

English preparatory programs have been designed to develop English language competence of students to the level sufficient to pursue successfully in their academic life. At this point, evaluating existing program is essential because program evaluation leads to more effective programs. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing English preparatory program based on the first year students' opinions at Çukurova University. The participants of the study consist of all the first year students studying at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, whose medium of instruction is English. The data are obtained through a questionnaire which is composed of Likert Scale items. In this study we focus on the three dimensions of the English preparatory program at Çukurova University. These are: the content of the program, the teaching-learning process and the assessment system. The results of the study show that generally the preparatory program at YADYO was effective in terms of the three program evaluation dimensions mentioned above. However, the students suggested making some changes to the existing program to make it more effective and better adjusted to the students' needs and expectations.

**Key Words:** Preparatory program, evaluation, content, process, assessment.

## 1. Introduction

English is increasingly recognized as a lingua franca in today's globalized world. People use English to communicate with each other and keep up with advances in science, technology and education. On account of the current status of English, the need for English as a foreign language has placed a remarkable change in the requirements of many educational systems. In universities around the world, for example, teaching academic subjects through the medium of English is seen as the means by which internationalization can be achieved. Similarly, the medium of instruction at many universities in Turkey is English and there is an increase in demand for the universities whose language of instruction is English (Kırkgöz, 2006). Universities which provide English medium instruction (EMI) are legally required to establish a foreign language center which offers foreign language preparatory programs for the students whose English proficiency is insufficient to pursue their English medium classes at their departments. This preparatory program lasts for an academic year. After the students successfully complete these programs, they continue their education in departments they have been qualified to study at.

It can be observed that language preparatory programs are seen as one of the most important issues in our country, Turkey. Nevertheless, some recent studies have stated that the results gained from those

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programs are not noteworthy. Oxford University Department of Education and Oxford University Press collaborated on a research project on EMI in Turkey over the academic year 2014-2015. This study looked in particular at the challenges faced in implementing EMI at universities and focused on the transition between the language preparatory program and study of majors with English as the medium of instruction. The findings of the study revealed all of the participating EMI teachers believed that although the students had completed the language preparatory program and passed the language tests, most students' language skills were not at a satisfactory level to start their academic studies through English. A similar study was conducted by Karataş and Fer (2009). They evaluated the English preparatory program at Yıldız Technical University and found that students' academic needs related to their fields are missing in the program.

Examining the effectiveness of the English preparatory program at Eskişehir Osmangazi University from the students' perspective, Özkanal and Hakan (2010) revealed that the students were generally content with the program although they thought their academic English needs should also have been considered and implemented in the program. Kırkgöz (2009) carried out a study at Çukurova University using questionnaires and interviews with fifteen lecturers and 220 first year undergraduate students who had completed the one-year compulsory preparatory program and were continuing their studies in their departments where EMI was offered. The findings showed that there was a gap between the requirements of department courses and what they were taught at the center of foreign language. The English preparatory program at Anadolu University was evaluated by Gerede (2005). In this study, Gerede collected data by means of interviews and questionnaires to compare what students think about the old and the current program. The results indicated that students' language needs related to their subject area in their departments were not met in the program. Moreover, according to a recent survey conducted on the internet by Education First (EF), a trusted private education company, the English Proficiency Index (EPI) ranks Turkey 43rd among 44 countries.

Considering the review of literature above showing the inadequacy of the English preparatory programs, it is crucial to analyze the reasons behind this inadequacy and eliminate the factors which cause failure. It is from this standpoint that arises the importance of evaluation. In order to gain a full understanding of the evaluation process, the term 'evaluation' needs to be defined clearly. Evaluation has a great number of definitions in the field. Richards (2001), for example, defines evaluation as a systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the program. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) suggest that evaluation is a process that we carry out to obtain data to determine whether to make changes, to make modifications, eliminations and/or accept something in the curriculum. Likewise, Brown (1989) points out the importance of evaluation and states that

...the ongoing program evaluation is the glue that connects and holds all of the elements together. Without evaluation, there is no cohesion among the elements and if left in isolation, any of them may become pointless. In short, the heart of the systematic approach to language curriculum design is evaluation-the part of the model that includes, connects and gives meaning to all of the other elements. (p. 235)

Scheerens, Glas and Thomas (2005) define educational evaluation as judging the value of educational objects on the basis of systematic information gathering in order to support decision making and learning. In parallel with the definitions, Alkin (2011) also states that evaluation conducted during the implementation is utilized to provide information to see how things are going. It might also provide the information whether the goals of the program are achievable or not. Moreover, as Kalfazade, Oran, Sekban and Tınaz (1987) advocate, in order to maintain a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the process of learning English within a preparatory school, it is essential to evaluate the opinions of both the students and the teachers.

### **1.1. Preparatory School and Çukurova University**

Preparatory schools enable students to have a proficient knowledge of English so that they can pursue their English-medium classes at their departments effectively. Due to this crucial mission attributed to preparatory schools, it is essential that the preparatory school curriculum be evaluated so as to see its strengths and weaknesses. Çukurova University offers EMI in some faculties. For instance, in the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences at least 40% of the courses are delivered in English and the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture offer all their courses in English. The responsible department in the institution which deals with English is School of Foreign Languages (YADYO). The curriculum at YADYO offers integrated skills practice, using a series of commercially available course-books supported by additional teaching materials. Since the program was established, only one research (Kırkgöz, 2006) has been carried out to see how effective the implemented program is. Thus, it is essential to reevaluate the dimensions of the preparatory program so as to answer the questions such as how much the instructors and students are satisfied with the content and the learning and teaching process, whether the assessment procedures are parallel to the instruction. This study is originated from the need to determine the effectiveness of YADYO at Çukurova University.

### **1.2. Purpose**

The main purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of English preparatory program at Çukurova University through the perspectives of students by focusing on content, the teaching-learning process, and assessment, which are described by Brown (1995) as key elements of a language curriculum. Considering the aim and the context of this study, the following research question was formulated: What are students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English preparatory program in relation to three program dimensions: the content of the program, the teaching-learning process and the assessment system.

By means of this study, the researcher's ultimate aim is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program and suggest relevant adaptations and contribute to the improvement of the preparatory school curriculum. It is hoped that this study providing a thorough picture of the present preparatory program will be used as a framework for curriculum improvement studies at Çukurova University. Another significant aspect of this study is that it will contribute to the scant body of literature on preparatory school program evaluation in Turkey. In other words, the results of the study may be considered as a clue for other universities in understanding the deficiencies in their programs.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The target population that the researcher aimed to gather data for the questionnaire consisted of first-year undergraduate students (N=67) who had completed the one-year English preparatory program at YADYO and were going on their studies at the time of the research at Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences offering EMI.

### 2.2. Data Collection

A questionnaire form designed by the researcher was utilized in the research as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was composed of three parts. The first part had fourteen 4-point Likert scale questions to measure students' perceptions of the content. The second part had ten 4-point Likert scale questions about their perceptions of the teaching-learning process. The last part had eleven 4-point Likert scale questions about the assessment. The 4-point Likert scale in the questionnaire ranged from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree". The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed by using descriptive statistics from SPSS 15.0 by presenting the frequency counts of the responses for each item in the four parts of the questionnaire. Before the questionnaire was delivered, the students were provided with information about the study and how to fill in the instrument. There appeared no problem during the administration of the study. The students were told that there was no time limit for filling out the questionnaire.

## 3. Results

The data obtained from the questionnaire were presented in the sequence according to the three components of the preparatory program: 1) content 2) the teaching-learning process 3) assessment. The questionnaire results in the tables were displayed in terms of means, percentages and frequencies.

### 3.1. Content

This part of the questionnaire was designed in order to gather data about the content dimension of the program. It consisted of 14 items which required four alternative responses: 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree. Table 1 below shows students' opinions about the content of the existing preparatory program.

Table 1. Items related to the students' perceptions of content

Item No	Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	Mean X
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	Course content is up to date.	14	20.6	43	63.2	9	13.2	2	2.9	68	3.01
2	Course content is stimulating	6	8.8	26	38.2	31	45.6	5	7.4	68	2.48
3	Course content is motivating	6	8.8	20	29.4	35	51.5	7	10.3	68	2.36
4	Course content is enjoyable	6	8.8	24	35.3	29	42.6	9	13.2	68	2.39
5	Course content is beneficial for the students to understand the lessons at their departments	6	8.8	24	35.3	16	23.5	22	32.4	68	2.20
6	Grammar is emphasized throughout the lessons	24	35.3	29	42.6	14	20.6	1	1.5	68	3.11
7	Speaking is emphasized throughout the lessons	8	11.8	24	35.3	27	39.7	9	13.2	68	2.45
8	Listening is emphasized throughout the lessons	8	11.8	34	50.0	18	26.5	7	10.3	68	2.67
9	Vocabulary is emphasized throughout the lessons	10	14.7	38	55.9	13	19.1	6	8.8	67	2.77
10	Reading is emphasized throughout the lessons	11	16.2	38	55.9	15	22.1	3	4.4	67	2.85
11	Writing is emphasized throughout the lessons	8	11.8	42	61.8	12	17.6	6	8.8	68	2.76
12	Subjects in course content are correlated to each other	7	10.3	44	64.7	10	14.7	6	8.8	67	2.77
13	Course content motivates students to study and do research outside the class	4	5.9	12	17.6	30	44.1	21	30.9	67	1.98
14	Course content is easy to understand	9	13.2	47	69.1	9	13.2	3	4.4	68	2.91

Overall arithmetic mean=2.62

As presented in Table 1, students' responses in this part of the questionnaire showed that students generally had positive perceptions on the items. Of 14 items consisting the content part of the questionnaire, eight items (items: 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14) were mostly agreed by the students. Therefore, it could be suggested that these content statements were achieved at an "adequate" level since they had an arithmetic mean which is greater than the mean value of the scale (2.50). On the other hand, of the faculty students who provided negative opinions concerning the content criterion,

45.6% of the students disagreed that course content is stimulating (item 2), 51.5% of the students disagreed that course content at the preparatory program is motivating (item 3), and 42.6% of the students disagreed that course content is enjoyable (item 4). According to the findings shown in Table 1, item 5 (mean=2.20) had an arithmetic mean less than the mean value of the scale (2.50). As a result, it can be stated that this statement was achieved at an "inadequate" level. That is, 55.9% of the students strongly disagreed or disagreed on this statement. Another item which had an arithmetic mean less than the mean value of the scale is item 7 (mean=2.45). Students' responses for item 7 displayed that almost half of the students (48.7%) strongly disagreed or agreed that speaking is emphasized throughout the lessons. Lastly, as shown in Table 1, of 14 items, item 13 had the least arithmetic mean (1.98), indicating that a great majority of the students (75%) disagreed that course content motivates students to study and do research outside the class.

### 3.2. The Teaching-Learning Process

This part of the questionnaire aimed to reveal the students' perceptions on the teaching-learning process. It consisted of ten items which required four alternative responses: 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree. Table 2 shows numerical and percentage distribution and the arithmetic averages related to the realization levels of the ten items in this part of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Items related to the students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process

Item No	Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	Mean X
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	The lecturers are always well-prepared for the lessons	20	29.4	36	52.9	9	13.2	2	2.9	67	3.10
2	The lecturers have sufficient content knowledge	20	29.4	33	48.4	11	16.2	3	4.4	67	3.04
3	The lecturers use audio-visual aids (CD-player, projector, board etc.) effectively in class	22	32.4	29	42.6	12	17.6	3	4.4	67	3.08
4	The lecturers effectively motivate the students	13	19.1	24	35.3	20	29.4	9	13.2	66	2.62
5	The lecturers use different methods and techniques in class	10	14.7	25	36.8	28	41.2	4	5.9	67	2.61
6	The students actively participate in class	4	5.9	13	19.1	42	61.8	7	10.3	67	2.25
7	Only English is used in class	8	11.8	27	39.7	24	35.3	8	11.8	67	2.52
8	The students are motivated sufficiently to speak English in class	7	10.3	24	35.3	20	29.4	16	23.5	67	2.32

9	The students are motivated to write in English in class	10	14.7	39	57.4	11	16.2	7	10.3	67	2.77
10	The students are motivated to give presentations in class	6	8.8	19	27.9	31	45.6	11	16.2	67	2.29

Overall arithmetic mean=2.66

As indicated in Table 2, the arithmetic means indicating whether or not the teaching-learning process is sufficient for the English preparatory program vary between 3.10 and 2.25. From these findings, it could be suggested that the teaching-learning process statements were achieved at an “adequate” level since 7 out of 10 statements in this part had an arithmetic mean which is greater than the mean value of the scale (2.50). However, item 6 (mean=2.25), item 8 (mean=2.32) and item 10 (mean=2.29) had arithmetic means less than the mean value of the scale (2.50). As a result, it can be stated that these statements were achieved at an “inadequate” level. That is, the students strongly disagreed or disagreed on these statements.

The overall data obtained from this part of the questionnaire reveal that the overall arithmetic mean of the teaching-learning process statements is 2.66. Since the mean is greater than the mean value of the scale (2.50), it could be stated that the statements in this part were achieved at an “adequate” level.

### 3.3. Assessment

This part of the questionnaire aimed to reveal the students’ perceptions on assessment criterion. It consisted of eleven items which required four alternative responses: 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree. Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages for students’ perceptions on assessment.

Table 3. Items related to the students’ perceptions of assessment

Item No	Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	Mean X
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	Quizzes reflect the content of the lessons	14	20.6	37	54.4	11	16.2	4	5.9	66	2.92
2	Number of quizzes is enough	13	19.1	41	60.3	10	14.7	2	2.9	66	2.98
3	Time allowed for quizzes is enough	14	20.6	37	54.4	13	19.1	2	2.9	66	2.95
4	Midterm exams effectively measure the knowledge level and skill improvement	9	13.2	29	42.6	20	29.4	8	11.8	66	2.59
5	Number of midterm exams is enough	16	23.5	39	57.4	9	13.2	2	2.9	66	3.04
6	Time allowed for the										

7	midterm exams is enough	14	20.6	38	55.9	9	13.2	5	7.4	66	2.92
7	Final exam effectively measures the knowledge level and skill improvement	14	20.6	28	41.2	17	25.0	6	8.8	65	2.76
8	Time allowed for the final exam is enough	11	16.2	36	52.9	16	23.5	3	4.4	66	2.83
9	In the assessment and evaluation process, it is appropriate to calculate 60% of the midterm exams marks and 40% of the end of year exam marks	12	17.6	29	42.6	15	22.1	10	14.7	66	2.65
10	Portfolio helps me learn better	14	20.6	36	52.9	11	16.2	5	7.4	66	2.89
11	It is appropriate that the minimum passing score for the preparatory program is 70.	5	7.4	10	14.7	30	44.1	21	30.9	66	1.98

Overall arithmetic mean=2.77

From the findings in Table 3, it can be stated that about half of the students (54.4%) agreed that the quizzes were in line with what were taught in the class. The percentages of students who agreed that number of quizzes and midterm exams is enough were higher than those students who disagreed. Regarding item 3 (54.4%), item 6 (55.9%) and item 8 (52.9%), most of the students participated in the study agreed that time allowed for the quizzes, midterm exams and final exam is enough. When item 4 (42.6%) and item 7 (41.2%) are taken into account, it can be recognized that students mostly agreed that midterm exams and final exam effectively measures the knowledge level and skill improvement. Responses to item 9 show that 42.6% of the students agreed on the formula used for calculating the passing score. Lastly, more than half of the students (52.9%) agreed on the benefit of portfolio in language learning.

As can be realized from Table 3, students were found to be generally satisfied with the way the preparatory school assesses their ability. However, regarding the last item 75% of the students disagreed (strongly disagree and disagree) on the minimum passing score for the preparatory school.

According to the findings, the overall arithmetic mean indicating whether or not the statements in the assessment part are efficiently achieved is 2.77. As the mean is greater than the mean value of the scale (2.50), it can be concluded that the statements related to the assessment criterion were achieved at an "adequate" level.

#### 4. Conclusion and Implications

The In this study, it was aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Çukurova University Preparatory School Program through the perspectives of students using three dimensions of the program: content, the teaching-learning process, and assessment.

Based on the data obtained through the questionnaire, the students agreed that course content at the preparatory program was neither stimulating nor motivating. Moreover, students indicated that content of the program was not enjoyable. More than half of the students (55.9%) disagreed that course content is beneficial for them to understand the lessons at their departments. In other words, most students perceived a gap between the requirements of disciplinary courses and what they were taught at the preparatory program. From the students' handwritten comments regarding this item, it was clear that the preparatory program had been beneficial in language skills development; however, there was a big difference between the academic English at their departments and the daily English at the preparatory program. Clearly, from the results regarding the course content it can be concluded that students underlined the need for more academic content in the program. According to them, academic tasks are not included in the current program but required when they start taking departmental course. Therefore, they considered themselves inexperienced in the conventions of their academic discourse community. In order to overcome this problem, the curriculum at YADYO should be revised and as recommended by Lea and Street (1998) students should be encouraged to work with genuine pieces of work 'in context' related to their subjects of study. For instance, developing reading texts and designing tasks similar to those in disciplinary communities would help students in building up frames of reference related to their disciplinary knowledge.

Another issue that students disagreed was related to speaking skill. 48.7% of the participants disagreed that speaking was emphasized throughout the lessons. The gathered results showed that insufficient practice in speaking and lack of confidence in their speaking abilities disabled students to participate in the class. 18 of the students suggested that a separate speaking course would help them speak more fluently. As a result, it is clear that more importance should be given to speaking in the program. Thus, in order to increase the competencies in speaking skill, a more communicative approach could be implemented. As it is stated by Schulz (1999), communicative language teaching often uses language functions or speech acts (e.g. asking questions, reporting, making requests), rather than pure teaching of grammatical structures.

As far as the results concerning the teaching-learning process are concerned, the most striking finding was that the majority of the students disagreed they actively participated in class. According to Abdullah at all (2012), a conducive classroom environment involves two-way interaction between students and instructors. This type of classroom environment will "stimulate learning and makes both the instructor and students feel satisfied, which effectively leads to effective learning process" (p. 516). In addition, Wade (1994) suggests that most students can obtain benefits such as the enjoyment of sharing ideas with others and learn more if they are active to contribute in class discussion. With this understanding, while redesigning the program, the proper strategies and techniques should be taken into account to create a conducive learning environment which will stimulate the students to be actively involved in the classroom. It is always believed that classrooms are richest when all voices are heard.

The last dimension of the program we analyzed in the current study was the assessment. The findings reveal that students were generally satisfied with the way the preparatory school assesses their ability. However, the minimum passing score (70) was not appreciated by the great majority of the students as a good criterion to evaluate their performance. The minimum passing score was considered to be high by the 75% of the participating students. Grading is a powerful part of the motivational structure of university courses. Educators can use this to their advantage by employing grades as “academic carrots”. However, is it true that a test is better if it has a higher passing score? The answer is no, what matters is that the test is valid and reliable. Therefore, while redesigning the current program, we need to ask how the passing score was determined.

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