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## An Integrative Review on Evaluation of University-Level Language Programs in Turkish Context

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### Abstract

Program evaluation in language programs, just as with other programs, is regarded as a vital process to make sure a language teaching course or a specified supplementary program function in the desired nature. Especially, language programs in Turkish context are in need of constant check since countries similar to Turkey are required to follow language standards dictated by the western world to be able to compete with their education levels; in that, the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR) sets a guideline for language programs. However, it is evident that Turkish language teaching programs lack a standard within their regional context and often fail to meet the expectations of language teaching frameworks set by CEFR in terms of language proficiency. In relation, several evaluation studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of language programs run in Turkish universities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate program evaluation studies conducted on preparatory language programs offered by Turkish universities which use English Medium Instruction (EMI) and it attempts to analyze their methodologies in the evaluation of the programs. To gather data, this paper investigates five example articles to acquire an insight on the methodological issues revealed in the studies, and it attempts to examine the studies in a matrix by classifying them in categories as follows: authors, year of the study, research context, participants, methodology, and findings of the evaluative process. In conclusion, the data gathered from the studies will be interpreted in terms of their differences and similarities of models imposed by program evaluation theory, and the findings will be valuable for the understanding of how program evaluation is useful for the efficiency of running programs.

**Keywords:** integrative research, language program evaluation, preparatory language program

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## **Introduction**

With the constant advancements in methodologies and the integration of various elements such as new environments, technology, and new equipment for the teaching process, language teaching has always changed. With these changes, language teaching turns into a dynamic process in which various constituents are existent and function like cogs in a machine. However, a system that depends on many things to function in the desired way should naturally be kept under control on a regular, if not always, basis. Program evaluation, therefore, plays an important role in understanding and determining if the program at hand is functional and effective.

When the literature on program evaluation research is considered, it is evident that there are various methodologies and models to follow to evaluate a program. Concerning language programs, there are certain trends depending on the time periods such as the Cold War Era, Tylerian Period, and The Age of Expansion and Integration (Hogan, 2007). Moreover, recent studies on language learning program evaluation indicate that both formative and summative models of evaluation are benefited from, and the general tendency towards evaluating a language program is by means of focusing on students' general needs (Mede & Uygun, 2014). However, motivated by this, this paper aims to review the literature and analyze the findings to determine what types of perspectives are present in the process of evaluation of university-level and preparatory language programs. Thus, the related literature will be reviewed to reveal the models and methodologies used and a cross-reference of different views will be analyzed and criticized to make a statement about the elements of the evaluation of language programs.

## **Literature Review**

This section provides insight on two major themes regarding language program evaluation. First, it presents the literature on the nature of program evaluation and guiding steps to conduct a program evaluation. Second, it sheds light on the research regarding how the program evaluation processes focusing on the ways language programs in universities are handled.

Considering the literature focusing on steps to take to conduct a program evaluation, Norris (2009) reviewed five articles and attempted to draw conclusions regarding raising

language programs' effectiveness in accordance with program evaluation. As a result, Norris (2009) reached conclusions concerning some key characteristics of program evaluations:

- 1- the involvement of language teachers and other stakeholders to increase the comprehensive nature of evaluation;
- 2- the use of various methodologies to gather useful data;
- 3- the triangulation of data to put results into context;
- 4- the aim beyond the found results;
- 5- the interpretation of the data to make connections with items revealed in findings.

In addition, Beretta (1992) reached six trends for future evaluation studies. First, research designs should not be fixed upon experimental styles without question. Second, user-relevant information should be emphasized. Third, evaluation should be considered in the design process of a program. Fourth, a negotiation between stakeholders and the evaluator should be promoted beforehand. Fifth, the second stage of the evaluation should be design, data collection and analysis. Last, the third stage should be reserved to translatable findings for audience needs. With regards to the quality of a program evaluation, Lynch (1990) proposed that evaluation should not be limited to student needs or students' achievement in specific. To perform a more detailed evaluation, a broad perspective including a number of focal points in the study should be pursued. According to Lynch (1990), the evaluation should initially determine the audience and goals to develop a context inventory. Then, a preliminary thematic framework to determine the design for data collection is required. As the last steps, the data should be collected and analyzed accordingly to interpret and to report the findings. In addition, the program evaluation framework should be designed with procedural elements that provide a general perspective and adaptability for the evaluation process.

When the literature that deals with studies conducting research on evaluation of preparatory language programs are presented, the main motivation behind why evaluation studies are focusing on language programs can be revealed. Regarding this, initially, the study proposed by Mede and Uygun (2014) suggested that evaluative studies focusing on language programs running at universities tend to reveal whether the outcomes of the programs have reached desired goals considering overall student needs. However, the higher numbers of studies focusing on language programs in this direction have failed to address the language and learning needs of the

students. In addition, Özkanal and Hakan (2010) stated that universities running language preparatory programs or language programs ignore the evaluation process, assuming that programs function without any problems. In different perspectives, to further this problem, it was proposed that universities often attempt to detect problems by using other means that were superficial and informal. Mirici and Saka (2004) asserted that the advancements in technology and methodological perspectives, different types of language teaching programs had been introduced to technical departments such as Engineering and Architecture. In the case of Black Sea Region countries, the need for individuals equipped with technical knowledge in their fields was quite high; therefore, these countries offered courses in which English was the medium of instruction. However, a standard necessary for the preparatory language programs was hard to reach. On a related note, Coskun (2013) highlighted that preparatory language programs had been acknowledged by many scholars as necessary and useful for higher education since English as the medium of instruction had gained great importance among universities. However, recent studies indicated that Turkish universities fell behind European standards and levels in terms of English language proficiency. Therefore, preparatory programs in Turkey should experience thorough program evaluation processes to improve. Furthermore, Karatas and Fer (2009) suggested that foreign language education is full of hardships when it comes to managing the programs and reaching the goals. In most cases, outcomes of the English language programs failed to reach anticipated levels. It was indicated that the main reason for this discrepancy between expectations and outcomes was that language teaching programs were not evaluated on a regular basis. Finally, in an evaluative study, Matthews and Hansen (2004) stated that lower level foreign language learners were administered an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) every year to help flourish the process of language instruction by taking part in deciding on the language items used in the program. After the sessions, faculty members reflected on the performance of learners with the help of portfolios on their preferred language items that they needed to learn the language. As the next step, program language outcomes were compared and contrasted in the sense of what language activities were involved in the classroom. With this regard, the program aimed at analyzing what was required to facilitate learning in accordance with national standards. Another purpose of the evaluative study was to observe the program's efficiency, the performance of the learners and success rates. Therefore, the study provided a guideline for evaluative studies with

respect to determining the ideal ways to keep language programs in check and up-to-date for the benefit of students.

Regarding the information provided by the studies reviewed, this integrative research aims at investigating language program evaluation research in the light of three research questions.

### **Research Questions**

Considering the aim of the study, three research questions will lead the study:

- 1- What aspects do the researchers focus on while evaluating university-level language programs?
- 2- What are the methodologies and models used in language program evaluation?
- 3- What are the similarities and differences between program evaluation studies conducted in the area in terms of methodology and models used?

### **Methodology**

In this integrative research, studies related to the evaluation of preparatory language programs running at universities were focused on. The integrative research focusing on the methodologies of language program evaluation studies consisted of five papers on the area. These studies were analyzed in terms of their research problems, methodologies, instruments used to collect data, and the way they handle the program evaluation. The data were collected through an electronic database search and presented with tabulations of the contents of the articles in a way that the name of the author(s), research context, setting and participants, methodology, and findings of the articles were combined and reported in a table format. In addition, the data were collected by selecting the most related studies that can shed light onto the subject of language program evaluation at the university level. Moreover, the studies selected were the most to-the-point ones among the research appeared after the search. Considering the aforementioned themes, within each item, simplified and specific information was placed in the table. However, a detailed examination for each item will be fulfilled in the following sections. Regarding context, the purpose of the study and research questions asked were reported and discussed. Similarly, for methodology, the research design and data collection procedures were presented. Lastly, the

findings of the study were reported and discussed in the light of contributions, limitations, and recommendations. After presenting the data, an analysis of the literature was made so as to make some interpretations and to generate an understanding concerning the research gaps in the area, or the directions necessary to take in the future. The data were analyzed by using qualitative research design on the grounds that they were being compared to and contrasted with each other in a way that interpretations and connections with program evaluation models in terms of their effectiveness were made.

## Findings

The research articles on evaluating preparatory language programs that were present at universities were analyzed in terms of their context, participants/setting, the methodology used in evaluation, and the results of the evaluation studies. An overall outlook for the studies in the sense of their evaluation counterparts is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Studies on the Evaluation of Preparatory Language Program.*

<i>No</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Participants/Setting</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Tools</i>	<i>Findings</i>
1	The investigation of students' language and learning needs. The aim is to determine if the program has met students' needs and if there is a significant difference between them in terms of proficiency levels and their departments.	64 English Literature and Translation students who have finished preparatory language program participated in the study.	The descriptive-analytical research design was used.	Needs analysis questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions.	All four skills have developed through the program; however, speaking and listening skills were not sufficient in terms of both time and amount. In terms of importance on skills and performance levels, no significant difference was found. However, concerning the difficulty experienced, there was a significant difference ( $p=.03$ ).

<p>2</p> <p>The investigation of functionality and effectiveness of the language preparatory program depending on students' expectations from the program and aftermath of the language learning.</p>	<p>129 Faculties of Engineering and Architecture, Arts and Science, and Economic and Administrative Sciences students who completed the preparatory program participated in the study.</p>	<p>A descriptive research design was used in understanding the students' perceptions.</p>	<p>Questionnaires were used.</p>	<p>Students (68.9%) stated that the reason for their attendance at the university is due to English being the medium of instruction. In terms of importance put on skills, listening skill (66.6%) was the most important. Lastly, reading (61%) and writing (57%) skills were what the program developed most in them.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>The investigation of the way the language teaching system works; the difference between proficiency levels before and after the program; and the types of ESP and EFL materials used to increase the program's effectiveness.</p>	<p>32 randomly selected students from Engineering Faculty. 32-week-long academic year.</p>	<p>Longitudinal experimental design.</p>	<p>t-test after the intervention was used to determine the proficiency-related difference with pre- and post-tests. (p&lt;0.05)</p>	<p>Proficiency levels increased thanks to devised language program. Recommended for other Black Sea Region universities.</p>
<p>4</p> <p>The investigation of the preparatory program based on CEFR-oriented modular foundations by dealing with materials, teaching process, and assessment.</p>	<p>400 prep-class students participated in the study, yet 381 of them returned the responses. In addition, 22 teachers taught</p>	<p>A descriptive-analytical research design was used.</p>	<p>Questionnaires, interviews, and focus group study were used.</p>	<p>Frequency levels of skills distributed through the teaching process, materials, and assessment was indicated. Grammar and vocabulary skills were the most dominant.</p>

5	Questioning the teacher-student perceptions of the program.  Investigation of the gap created by the lack of program evaluation, the issue of language program evaluation, and the difference between students' and teachers' opinions on CIPP stages of the running program.	during the academic year.  415 students and thirty-five teachers were included in the study. The study was conducted during the spring term of the 2005-2006 academic year.	The descriptive research design was used.	CIPP questionnaire covering four evaluation sub-stages was administered to participants in 5-point Likert scale.	Teacher and student perceptions differed in terms of effectiveness.  Four factors were run after Varimax method, which matched 4-level CIPP model categories. In terms of context, input, process and product stages, there were significant differences between students and teachers.
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Considering the context, the study by Mede and Uygun (2014) aimed to determine students' specific language and learning needs in terms of the program they participated. Similarly, Özkanal and Hakan (2010) focused on students' expectations from the preparatory program held by the university, and it attempted to determine if the program has met their expectations. However, studies conducted by Coşkun (2013) and Karataş and Fer (2009) focused on the difference between students' and teachers' perceptions of the program in accordance with standards imposed by models. Therefore, it can be claimed that latter group is more coordinated in evaluating programs since Coşkun (2013) attempts to observe standards dictated by CEFR modular standards while Karataş and Fer (2009) evaluates the program in the light of CIPP model steps. As the final note, Mirici and Saka (2004) similarly attempt to develop a sample program by accumulating ideal program constituents and to evaluate the performance of students in the light of the model developed as a language teaching program.

Regarding participants and settings of the literature gathered, all studies except Mirici and Saka (2004) and Mede and Uygun (2014) work with a large number of participants which would generate more reliable data and provide generalizability. Mirici and Saka (2004) gathered data



from 32 Engineering and Architecture students while Mede and Uygun (2014) included 64 preparatory students.

In terms of methodological concerns, use of instruments/models and research designs were presented in Table 2 in a way that a comparison of data collection preferences and an interpretation can be made.

**Table 2.**

*Distribution of Research Design and Models Used in Evaluation*

Studies	Research Design	Model/Instrument
Mede &Uygun (2014)	mixed-method	Needs Analysis questionnaire and semi-structured interview
Özkanal&Hakan (2010)	descriptive-quantitative	5-point Likert Scale questionnaire
Mirici& Saka (2004)	inferential-quantitative	Self-devised model and achievement scores
Coşkun (2013)	mixed-method	Skill frequency scales Focus group study
Karataş& Fer (2009)	descriptive-quantitative	CIPP model-oriented questionnaire

As can be seen in Table 2, two of the studies (Coşkun, 2013; Mede & Uygun, 2014) showed an inclination towards using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis while others (Karataş& Fer, 2009; Mirici & Saka, 2004; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010) preferred conducting their research by means of quantitative data analysis.

As for the findings of the studies, three of the papers (Coşkun, 2013; Mede & Uygun, 2014; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010) emphasized the perceptions of students or teachers concerning language skills by presenting frequency tabulations, importance put on skills, and the difference between groups regarding their perceptions of skills. On the other hand, Mirici and Saka (2004) revealed proficiency levels and mean changes between before and after the implementation of the program developed by the researchers. As a noteworthy point, Karataş and Fer (2009) analyzed students' and teachers' perceptions regarding functioning elements of the program in the light of the CIPP model. As a consequence, both teachers and students played an active role in the

evaluation of the program by responding to the context, input, process, and product stages of the language preparatory program.

As the final note, a detailed and organized presentation of studies was provided in a way that studies were categorized and divided into their constituent parts as being language program evaluation studies. However, it is necessary to interpret their insights by using associations with program evaluation logic in a general way to reach useful conclusions. As for their similarities, it can be deduced that language program evaluation studies reviewed made use of quantitative data analysis to reveal the programs' effectiveness levels with the help of questionnaires. However, only two of the studies included the qualitative dimension of a program evaluation. When compared, studies analyzing data qualitatively revealed more detailed information about the program than the studies handling only the descriptive features of the program. On a related note, Lynch (1990) explains that to conduct a sound program evaluation, studies should cover as many aspects of the program as possible by using a mixed methodology. Regarding this proposal, studies using descriptive-quantitative designs lacked in presenting a detailed layout for the programs under scrutiny even though they provided valuable and context-specific information on the program.

## **Conclusions**

Regarding the analysis of the articles in terms of their contexts, participants, data collection methodologies, and presenting their findings, some conclusions can be reached. Firstly, contextual counterparts of the studies revealed that all studies attempted to understand how language preparatory programs function in Turkish tertiary education context. It can be claimed that as Mede and Uygun (2014) stated, program evaluation studies in Turkish language programs tend to focus on general needs of the students, or they attempt to gain an overall outlook of programs in terms of language skills and proficiency levels of students. Instead, as a recommendation, it is possible to infer that studies should focus on programs in the light of other constituents such as institutional policies, instruments, teaching process, physical conditions, etc. Secondly, participants included in the studies were limited in number in the sense of some studies involving 30-50 students. In addition, it can be stated that other stakeholders playing a role in the program can be included to obtain a more detailed look of the program. Last, regarding the use of data collection tools and methodological issues, it can be seen that contemporary studies tend to

use mixed-methodology in their studies. This inclination coincides with the program evaluation trends recommended by Beretta (1992) and Norris (2009), both suggesting that a mixed methodology to evaluate a program can generate more reliable data and offer a sounder interpretation ground to understand the functional or non-functional units residing in a program.

In conclusion, the analysis of the articles on program evaluation in Turkish preparatory program context reveals that future research focusing on program evaluation should attempt to conduct evaluation studies by using program evaluation models and a mixed-methodology research design in which various data collection instruments are used. This way, more detailed and trustworthy data about programs' functionality and effectiveness can be reached (Lynch, 1990). In addition, studies evaluating a language program should include a wide variety of stakeholders to gather relevant and specific data on a program. When the studies investigating university-level language programs are taken into consideration, it is evident that studies did not involve other crucial stakeholders such as alumni, administrators, faculty academics of various departments, people working at specific sectors, and program developers. The inclusion of stakeholders other than language instructors and students can be useful to deduce further information about the functionality of the language program in various ways. First, alumni and people in a sector can contribute to the evaluation study in a way that they can reflect upon the strong and weak sides of the program. In addition, sectoral language needs of a certain department can be revealed based on what types of language skills are used and needed in a specific field of profession. Second, administrators' views about the program can be useful to comprehend the administrative motivation behind developing such language programs in a faculty. Third, academics working in the specific field of a faculty such as engineering, tourism, molecular biology can reveal insight on the language demand of the field. Furthermore, they can provide useful feedback for program evaluators on the ground that whether the preparatory language programs before the students start their field instruction in the faculties have met fields' language demands. Last, people who have contributed directly or indirectly to the development of language programs can offer valuable information about the intentions of designing such programs. This information can be valuable to determine if the target needs have matched the learner and language needs of the program.

## **Limitations and Recommendations**

In the study, five articles related to the field of preparatory language programs in universities were made use of. The gathered studies were analyzed in terms of their research counterparts such as context, participants/settings, methodology, and findings. Moreover, articles selected for the study only focused on the evaluation of preparatory language programs. Therefore, future similar studies should include more articles to grasp a more generalized understanding of the program evaluation regarding the area. Additionally, future research should focus on other language programs in terms of evaluation.

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