







Old Wine in a New Bottle: Implementation of Intensive Language Program in the 5th Grade in Turkey

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Abstract

In search of ways to better the foreign language proficiency levels of their citizens, governments frequently announce macro foreign language policies. In Turkey, the latest education reform in 2013 lowered the onset of foreign language learning to the second grade. The piloting of the latest foreign language policy is in progress to transform the fifth grade to an English Language Preparation Program (ELPP). In line with the current changes, this study collects the secondary school English language teachers' opinions at the initial stage of the implementation. This qualitative case study questions the advantages, disadvantages, success and possible challenges of the implementation, and the necessary support mechanisms. The secondary school English language teachers reflect on their past experiences of intensive language programs and hold an overall positive approach to the new ELLP implementation. All in all, to achieve success, the findings highlight the need for teacher training on teaching English to young learners, for a sound integration of communicative language teaching with authentic materials.

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Keywords: English language policy; intensive language program; English language teachers' opinions; teaching English to young learners

1. Introduction

Language policy can be described as “an officially mandated set of rules for language use and form within a nation-state” (Spolsky, 2012, p.3). It encompasses actual language practices, values and beliefs- in other words ideologies of speakers,

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planning and management. Language policies are sometimes enforced as a result of parental pressure as in the Netherlands (de Bot, 2014) and in Indonesia (Zeid, 2017) and sometimes through a governmental decision as in Kenya (Okoth, 2016) and in Turkey (Kırkgöz, 2017). Language education policy and planning in Turkey (1997, 2005 and 2013 reforms) had linguistics, social, political and economic goals. Globalization, and the place and importance of English affected the government decisions on the choice of a foreign language and its instruction (Kırkgöz, 2017).

Policy changes require detailed planning, implementation and continuous assessment and monitoring. Language education policies in Turkey were evaluated, and their effectiveness was questioned by means of all agents in practice (Bayyurt, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2010). In this sense, teachers are at the core of the policy evaluation, and they should also have significant roles in language planning. Realizing the gap and the need to further involve and engage teachers more in language policy and planning, this study aims to collect teacher views during the initial stages of a national language policy reform. All in all, this study provides background to the new implementation with references to the previous reforms, consults teachers by asking their opinions, and then links past experiences and teacher views to provide a multifaceted picture of the new policy implementation.

1.1. Turkey's Primary English Language Teaching (PELT) policy and implementation

Turkey has a long history of English language (EL) teaching policies and policy reforms. After the 1997 education reform that extended basic compulsory education from 5 to 8 years, English Language Preparation Program (ELPP) was moved to the high school level. English courses became compulsory starting from the fourth grade of primary schools. Two hours of English instruction was offered in the 4th and 5th grades, and four hours were taught in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Intensive language education comprised of 24 hours, the 9th grade comprised of 8 hours, and 10th and 11th grades comprised of 10 hours of English (Genç, 2004). In 2006, ELPP was totally abolished in high schools. The most recent education reform, known as 4+4+4, extended the basic compulsory education to 12 years starting from 2012-2013 school year. Later, in 2016, Ministry of National Education (MoNE) revised the 4+4+4 program along with the primary and lower secondary school English programs. With this change, English courses started to be offered at the second grade. Compulsory English courses at the grades 2nd, 3rd and 4th were set as two hours, and at the grades 5th- 8th as four hours. The following table presents the distribution of English lesson hours in high schools.

Table 1. The distribution of English lesson hours in high schools (MoNE, 2017, a)

Type of school	9th grade	10th grade	11th grade	12th grade
General High Schools	3	2	2	2
Anatolian High Schools (AHS)	6	4	4	4
Science High Schools	7	3	3	3

The implementation of ELPP, which was once abolished in 2006, was again put into practice in 2017 considering the low English language proficiency levels of students, insufficient amount of exposure to English that is limited to school hours and the need to be socially, culturally and economically competitive in the global world. MoNE announced that all 5th grades in the public school system will follow an intensive English language program consisting of 15 hours of English. The program started in 2017 with 620 schools representing 81 cities and will gradually be implemented in all schools over three years. The schools were selected by MoNE in cooperation with the city governorships (MoNE, 2018, a).

While the new implementation aims to improve the English language proficiency levels of learners, it needs due attention; first, the English language teacher shortage in Turkey. The current number of English language teachers to be recruited is 15.043 (Mebpersonel, 2018). In addition, according to the latest statistics available, 14.155 primary schools do not have any English language teachers while the number of primary schools with lower secondary English language teachers is 10.000 (MoNE, 2018, b). In these cases, teachers of other subjects such as classroom teachers or subject teachers will have to instruct the English classes. Their language teaching certification and language teaching competences raise some concerns. Further, during the preservice teacher training, some additional courses and competences are required. Addition of undergraduate courses such as language program development and assessment, evaluation and assessment for children, and language learning with children of specific needs will help teacher deal with issues pertaining to teaching English to young learners and to diverse populations. Another option is providing in-service training on teaching English to young learners after conducting a needs analysis and developing a more comprehensive program (Bayyurt, 2012).

In this case, lower secondary school English language teachers will be the agents of change. Therefore, they need to be prepared for such a new implementation. Their readiness, attitudes, perceptions are quite important in addition to their teaching competences. For an effective implementation and dissemination of a new policy, it is vital to consider the opinions of the lower secondary school English language teachers (De Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015). Thereby, any feedback provided to policy makers and stakeholders, especially in the early stages of implementation, is both crucial and valuable.

1.2. Underlying motivations for change

Students' low English language proficiency in spite of many years of EL instruction is highly debated in Turkey. Turkey performs very low in EL proficiency. According to the English Proficiency Index (EPI), Turkey ranks 62nd out of 80 participating countries and 26th among 27 countries in Europe (Education First, 2018). The British Council and TEPAV's study (2014) concluded that Turkey is underperforming in the area of EL teaching as the result of inadequate teaching in primary and secondary schools.

Turkey's PELT policy planning reflects a determined and focused approach to better EL proficiency at all levels of education. The introduction of English as a compulsory subject and its onset at the 2nd grade, the case of Anatolian high schools, the increasing number of English medium of instruction in higher education institutions, plus the number of successful private schools indicate the attempts to widespread the EL education to all levels and all sections of the nation. Nevertheless, the amount of exposure to English in the state schools does not suffice to meet the global needs. Thus, the implementation of ELPP is planned to close the gap in terms of the amount and quality of exposure between the state and private schools and to provide language equity. EL learning has been necessary to keep contact with the global English-speaking world for business, social and most essentially, economic reasons. However, individual motivating factors are limited to instrumental reasons such as better educational and professional benefits (Kırkgöz, 2009).

1.3. Teaching English to young learners and the amount of instruction

The best age to start EL instruction has long been debated. Successful practices of teaching young language learners such as the Barcelona Age Factor project (Muñoz, 2006) and the Croatia project of early foreign language learning (Mihaljevic Djigunovic & Vilke, 2000) inspire the language policy makers. *The earlier the better* is seen as an advantage over morphosyntax (Birdsong & Molis, 2001) and pronunciation (Flege & MacKay, 2004; Scovel, 1988) with positive influence on academic achievement (Taylor & Lafayette, 2010) and the development of intercultural competence (Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2011; Shin & Crandall, 2014). Plus, young learners are at advantage in terms of motivation and attitude, and low language anxiety.

However, research (Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2011; Read, 2003; Rixon, 1999) prioritizes learning conditions over the age factor and closely links learner motivation to learning conditions. The conditions form an exclusive list that covers size of the classroom, duration of EL instruction, well-trained young learner teacher and activity-based instruction.

Qureshi (2016) concludes that an early age of onset may not exert a clear influence on language attainment in EFL settings. This is because of the fact that EFL learners are not immersed into the social language and culture as their ESL counterparts do,

and the number of hours in the EFL instructed settings can never catch up the duration of exposure in the natural settings (Muñoz, 2010). The age factor needs to be addressed with reference to input exposure and ample interaction opportunities (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2000). Such an exposure in EFL settings is generally limited to a few hours language instruction in a week; however, for a successful implementation and attainment, more extensive and intense exposure necessitates (Jaekel, Schurig, Florian & Ritter, 2017).

Studies conducted in Canadian context (Spada & Lightbrown, 1989) are known to provide positive evidence for the effectiveness of intensive English language programs. In contrast with short hours of weekly instruction, these programs offer 400 hours of language instruction in grade 5 or 6 and report significant results not only in terms of language proficiency but also language learning motivation and attitude (Collins & White, 2011).

Thus, the present study is also important to track EL teachers' perceptions/opinions on teaching English to young learners and the amount of exposure to intensive EL program at 5th grades.

1.4. Problems with PELT policy of Turkey

Recent educational changes in Turkey (1997, 2005, 2013) included lowering the onset of EL instruction to the 4th and then to the 2nd grade (Gursoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2017). Since 1997, EL instruction in Turkey has been practiced starting from the primary school level (Kırkgöz, 2017). This posed a challenge to EL teachers who were educated and trained to teach older age groups. Also, EL proficiency of teachers and their competence in age-appropriate methodology create problems in teaching young learners (Emery, 2012; Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2006).

In 1997, pre-service English language teaching curricula were updated by revising the course contents and increasing the duration of practicum and the number of methodology courses. Driven by the European Union foreign language policy alignment motive, 2005 teacher education curriculum revision balanced the degrees of subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge, and the culture. In 2013, in-service teacher education focused on fostering the teacher competencies on instructional methodology. Main considerations were Communicative Language Teaching, constructivist approach, changing teacher roles as facilitator and guide, student-centeredness and active learning with references to multiple intelligences theory and content and language integrated learning. However, EL policy evaluations revealed that these considerations could not be extensively practiced. In other words, policies at the macro level do not comply with the practices at the micro level (Kırkgöz, 2009). To better see the picture, a close look at the reality in EL classrooms in Turkey is necessary. Bayyurt (2012) adopts a critical approach to EL education at an early age in the 4+4+4 system. She points out the language teacher shortage, and reminds the law publicized in 2012 which states that EL lessons can be instructed by "classroom teachers who have received in-service training certificate in language education"

(Article 64 of the Regulation on the Amendment of Primary Education Institutions of Ministry of National Education). For this target group, the in-service training courses and certificate programs deserve particular attention in terms of their approach teaching English to young learners. Classroom teachers who will teach English to children should have the required EL proficiency, methodological competence and knowledge of age-appropriate assessment. Similarly, to close the teacher gap, the graduates of non-education faculties and non-English language teaching programs are given the job opportunities to teach English. They participate in a-year long intensive teacher training certificate program and become eligible to be appointed as language teachers.

By and large, EL policy encompasses constructs of “optimal start age, language choices, teacher quality, class size, curriculum and assessment design, equity of provision, continuity across school phases and resource needs” (Enever & Moon, 2009, p. 9). The current picture in Turkey reflects the need for teacher training, instructional modifications, policy and curriculum planning and revision, and update of materials (Arikan, 2015; Arslan, 2012; Gursoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2017). Micro level problems also include large class size and affordability of course materials (Arikan, 2015). Tucker (1999) lists the curriculum implementation challenges as proficiency in the mother tongue, parental and societal support, teacher competences and teacher training and program costs.

As a follow-up to the previous curriculum revision, Yıldırım and Tanrıseven (2015) investigated the opinions of EL teachers about the 2nd grade program prepared after the 2013 education reform that started to introduce English at the second grade. Their suggestions include but not limited to an increase of weekly lesson hours, and in-service training on the new program. They also want to be consulted and their opinions to be considered at the initial times of language planning. In another study on the opinions of teachers about the starting age of L2 instruction, EL teachers in Turkey were reported to believe that 4th grade onwards is the best time. They also rigorously supported the implementation of an intensive English program at the 5th grade (Gursoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2017).

Our study singles out since it is conducted during the introduction and piloting phase of a nation-wide implementation on teaching English. Consulting teachers and examining their perceptions before the new implementation is believed to provide the teachers to reconsider their past experiences and to reformulate their prospective perspectives.

1.5. Purpose of the study

This study aims to collect views of English language teachers regarding the implementation of ELPP that started in September 2017 in 620 lower secondary schools and has been planned to be disseminated to all lower secondary schools in Turkey. In line with this broad objective, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the views of lower secondary school English language teachers about the implementation of intensive language program in the 5th grade?
2. What are the suggestions of lower secondary school language teachers for PELT policy makers and program development specialists about the intensive language program in the 5th grade?

2. Method

The common feature of case studies conducted at various disciplines is that the topic of research is named as a case. The case can refer to an individual, classroom, school or program. A student with reading disability, students having a social science course at a school, a private school or a national education curriculum can be addressed as a case (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

This qualitative research in the form of a case study attempts to uncover the views of teachers and hence, guide PELT policy makers and curriculum developers about the first phase of ELPP implementation. Case study is conducted as it allows researchers an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon or situation that researchers cannot control with questions of "how and why" (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013).

Sample of the study was determined by the proper sampling method, collecting data from easily accessible samples (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). The method is considered an appropriate method to conduct case studies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). A two-stage approach was adopted to determine the sample. In the first stage, NUTS-1 (Nomenclature of Territorial Units of Statistics) was taken into account. With a random selection of provinces from the first tier of NUTS-1, one province representing each region was selected. The provinces selected in the first stage were İstanbul, Çanakkale, İzmir, Bursa, Ankara, Hatay, Kayseri, Kastamonu, Trabzon, Erzurum, Malatya and Gaziantep. In the second stage, the criterion was that teachers working at these provinces were to be English language teachers working at lower secondary school level. Participant teachers had the necessary knowledge about the policy change since researchers provided detailed background information about the new implementation and the rationale for the study at the beginning of the survey. At this point, although the aim was not to draw generalizations from the results, all accessible voluntary participants were necessary to make comparisons among different regions. At this stage, it was aimed to reach ten English language teachers from each sample city and this was successfully achieved with an exception of Gaziantep (n=9). In addition, data collected from more number of teachers working at bigger cities like İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir.

The distribution of participants according to their province, gender and experience is as follows:

Table 2. Demographic Qualities of Participants

Province	Number	Seniority	Number	Gender	Number
İstanbul	25	1-5 years	50	Female	129

Çanakkale	12	6-10 years	48	Male	41
Malatya	13	11-15 years	32		
İzmir	17	16 years and more	40		
Kayseri	12				
Bursa	13				
Erzurum	14				
Trabzon	13				
Kastamonu	11				
Ankara	19				
Hatay	12				
Gaziantep	9				
Total:	170				

Table 2 shows that the number of participant teachers is higher in big provinces like İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. The number of female teachers triples that of male teachers. Lastly, there seems to be a balanced distribution among years of teaching experience.

2.1. Data collection and analysis

Data for this study were collected through an open-ended form developed by the researchers. These questions were comparatively analyzed so that the number of questions in the form was reduced considering the similarities and differences in each question. Then, opinions of two English language professors, an expert of curriculum development and an expert of measurement and evaluation were gathered about the suitability of the questions. The instrument was finalized based on the feedback received. The final form consisted of five open-ended questions:

- 1) What might be the strengths (advantages) of implementation of the intensive language program in the 5th grade?
- 2) What might be the weaknesses (disadvantages) of implementation of the intensive language program in the 5th grade?
- 3) Do you think the practice will increase the success in EL teaching?
- 4) What kind of difficulties can be foreseen in the implementation process of the intensive language program in the 5th grade?
- 5) What kind of support mechanisms will be needed for a successful implementation?

Firstly, principals of the schools were informed about the purpose, content and the voluntary participation process of research. Upon their agreement to cooperate and participate, the survey was sent to the related school directorates either online or in print. Consent for research was obtained from the Ministry of National Education. Data was collected between March 2017 and June 2017. Teachers' answers to open-ended questions were analyzed with a qualitative data analysis program (MAXQDA 2.0). In this process, since the questions asked in the survey constituted the themes, appropriate codes were ranked under the themes, so pattern coding method was

employed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There are no ethical concerns or conflicts about the process as neither the questions are manipulative, nor do circumstances exist in which other teachers or students at schools can be negatively affected.

2.2. Validity and reliability

The quality of quantitative research is described through internal/external validity and reliability; in qualitative studies it is through persuasiveness, transferability, consistency, and verifiability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). To Miles and Huberman (1994), to provide internal and external validity, the findings need to be meaningful in the context of data collection, and that data need to be confirmed by using various data sources, data gathering methods and analysis strategies. In addition, sampling need to be detailed so as to enable comparison with other samples, that the sampling need to be verified to provide generalizability and that raw data need to be kept for later analysis.

As suggested by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) findings were given with a descriptive approach, analysis were carried out by incorporating another researcher into the process, compromise was achieved to reach results, and results were verified during data analysis (as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this respect, although data were not gathered from various sources, the following procedures were followed during the study to meet validity and reliability. During data analysis, forms selected randomly were initially analyzed independently and then together by researchers. Issues teachers put forward, the coding process and the details of reporting process were discussed. Frequency analysis of teacher opinions was conducted by one researcher and verified by another researcher by the appropriateness of coding. Finally, data was analyzed by an expert researcher experienced in MAXQDA qualitative analysis program, and results were discussed together with all researchers. The coded data were analyzed based on frequencies of each code under main themes.

3. Results

Teachers' opinions were categorized under five main themes, and the number of comments under each theme was counted. The diagram related to advantages, disadvantages, implementation success, possible implementation challenges, and required support mechanisms based on teacher opinions is presented in Figure 1. Values given in parentheses represent the frequencies of opinions. Similarly, the thickness of arrows represents the relative density of opinions. It is observed that the maximum number of opinions is related to the required support mechanisms; while the minimum number of opinions is related to the disadvantages.

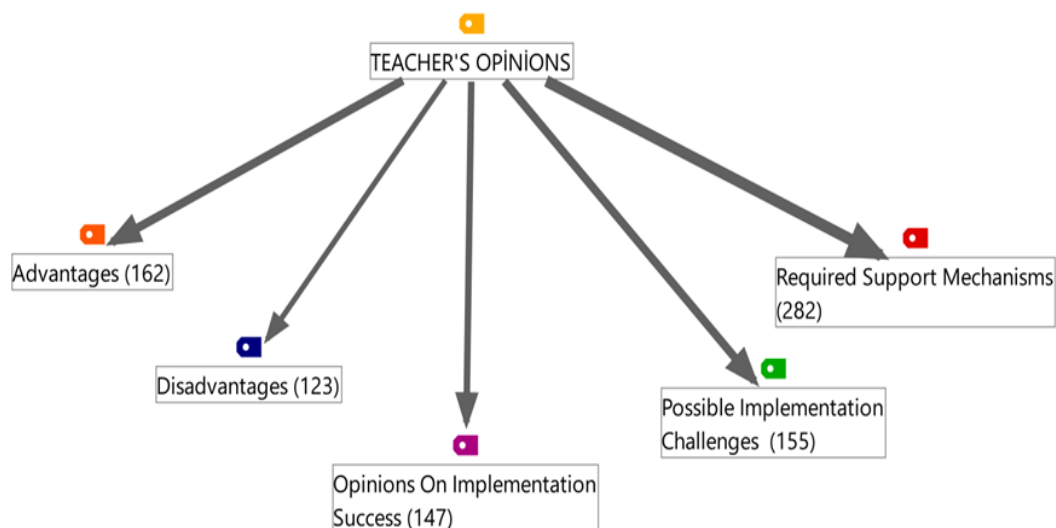


Figure 1. Overall Analysis of Teachers' Opinions Regarding the Implementation

3.1. Advantages of the ELPP implementation

The opinions of teachers regarding the advantages of the implementation of ELPP show that teachers stressed six fundamental advantages. These are presented in Figure 2.

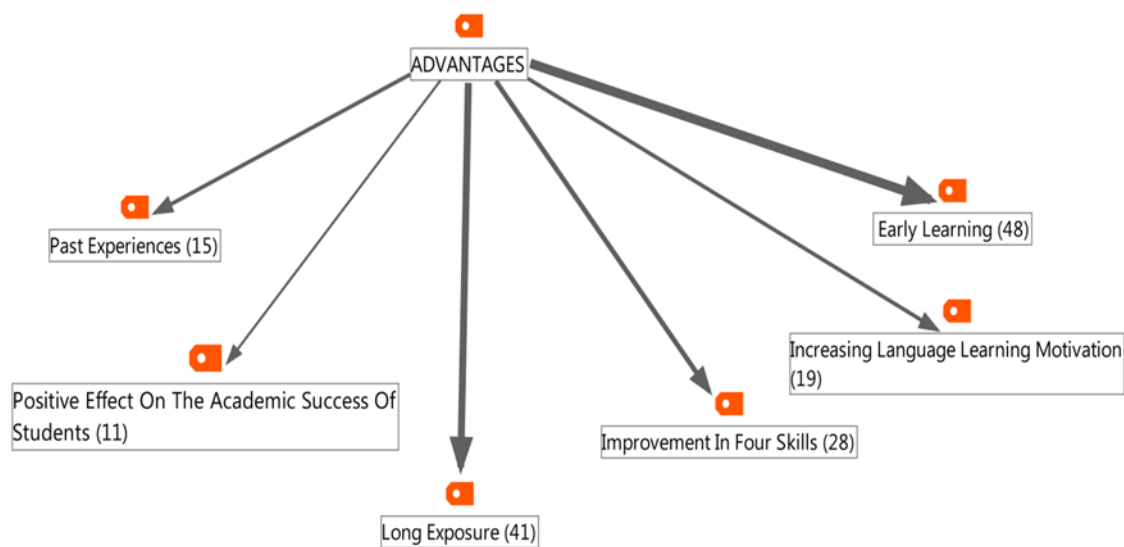


Figure 2. Perceived Advantages of Implementation

Figure 2 shows the most frequently stressed advantage as early intensive learning of a foreign language. Answers like long exposure to learning, improvement in four language skills and increased language learning motivation are also recorded. Teachers seem to have considered their past experiences of intensive language programs either at the 5th or 8th grade. Lastly, teachers emphasized the positive effect

of ELPP on the academic success of students. Considering the intensity of each category, salient expressions and opinions of various teachers are presented as follows:

Early learning:

“When the child reaches 12, language learning mechanism slows down, and the individual can never reach native speaker-like mastery. For that reason, an intensive foreign language program is necessary to learn and speak English fluently before language learning mechanism slows down.”

Long exposure:

“Long time exposure to English with increased hours will certainly change the view of children to learning a FL, and even will make them enjoy learning.”

Improvement in four skills:

“This implementation can offer teachers the chance to teach English in a real life context rather than concentrating on lecturing for tests.”

Increasing language learning motivation:

“More focus on English can make students better concentrate on English and thus can increase their motivation to learn it.”

Past experiences:

“I am a graduate of an Anatolian high school and I pretty much take advantage of it.”

The positive effect on the academic success of students:

“Students coming from lower secondary schools which carried out this implementation are more successful in high school English lessons.”

Teachers stated advantages believing that early intensive learning of a foreign language corresponds to a critical period, and implementation will be effective with increased weekly lesson hours. In addition, such an increase in lesson hours will affect the development of fundamental language skills. Teachers who are graduates of AHSs see themselves as more successful language learners and value the implementation. Some EL teachers also stated that the implementation will make positive contributions to students' future education, including graduate education as well as their career.

3.2. Disadvantages of the ELPP implementation

Teachers expressed seven fundamental disadvantages of the ELPP implementation. These are presented in Figure 3 with their intensity of frequency.

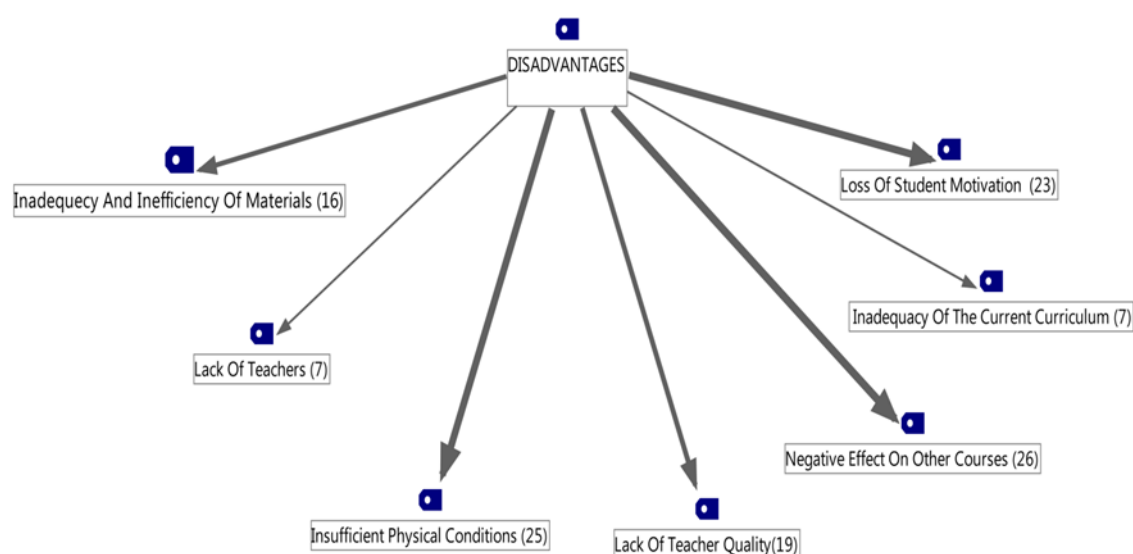


Figure 3. Perceived Disadvantages of Implementation

Figure 3 illustrates that the most frequently stated disadvantage is the negative effect of ELPP implementation on the other courses. Teachers believe that the implementation of ELPP at 5th grades will bring about negative consequences for other courses such as maths or science and keep students away from these courses at least for one year. Other disadvantages as stated are insufficient physical conditions, loss of student motivation, and lack of teacher quality, inadequacy and inefficiency of materials, lack of teachers and inadequacy of the current curriculum. Considering the intensity of each category, salient expressions and opinions of various teachers are presented as follows.

The negative effect on other courses:

“Students can forget necessary information about other 5th grade courses. Interest in these courses could be hindered, and overall success could diminish in the 6th grade.”

Insufficient physical conditions:

“The number of students in each lower secondary school exceeds 35. Thus, this creates a negative impact for classroom management, limits classroom area and hinders fair time allocation to each student. The maximum number of students in each class should be limited to maximum 25.”

Loss of student motivation:

“Not every student has to learn English. If someone said that the physics course would be compulsory for one year, I would probably hate physics and the school. If preparatory class is compulsory, then, reluctant students will not be successful and even try to sabotage the class because they will get bored, will be unsuccessful and will not bring any materials.”

Lack of teacher quality:

“I think a language course should be given by a language teacher but in Turkey, this is not possible. They let hourly-paid teachers go into classes, so there are a lot of “teachers who are insufficient.”

“As there are a lot of teachers who do not like their jobs, I do not know how we can make children like to learn English. If the teacher does not feel free and comfortable, his performance weakens, and he turns into a robot that follows the course book and yearly plan. I started to experience this as a just 3 year experienced teacher. The system forces us to be a part of it.”

Inadequacy and inefficiency of materials:

“The materials used are not adequate for this age group.”

Lack of teachers:

“There is a lack of number of English language teachers especially in rural areas and at the primary school level. This creates an important disadvantage especially when students become fifth graders.”

Inadequacy of the current curriculum:

“I do not think that the curriculum is good enough.”

The negative effect on other courses is seen as the most dominant statement. When the number of English courses increases, content courses such as maths and science will either not be offered or be limited to 1-2 hours a week. In this case, students may forget the content of these courses, and when they start the 6th grade, they will experience difficulty. This was followed by insufficient physical conditions, loss of student motivation, and lack of teacher quality. Moreover, many teachers consider their colleagues as insufficient in English to teach at ELPP. The inadequacy and inefficiency of materials, lack of teachers and inadequacy of the current curriculum to meet the needs of the new implementation are also listed as disadvantages.

3.3. Possible effects of the ELPP implementation

Teachers stressed three main aspects about the effects of the ELPP implementation. These are presented in Figure 4.

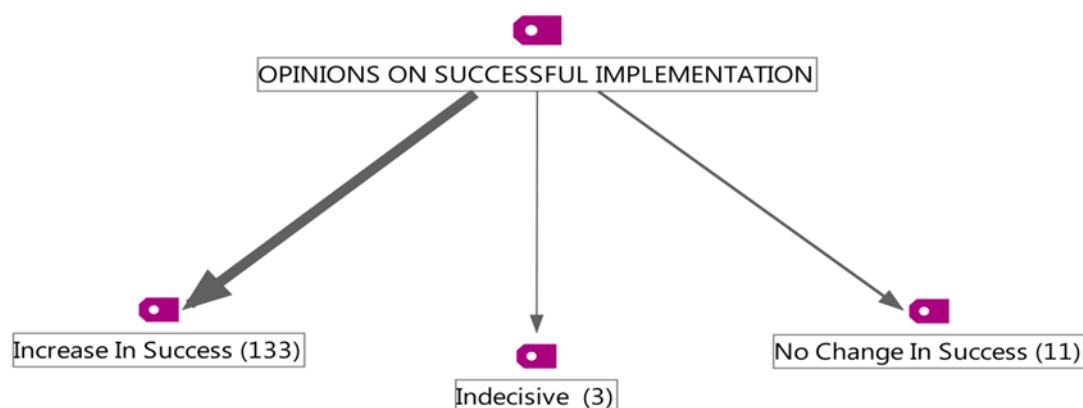


Figure 4. Perceived Effect of Implementation

Figure 4 shows that opinions regarding an increase in success are dominant. However, a limited number of teachers stated that either success will decrease or there will be no change in success. Considering the intensity of each category, opinions of teachers are selectively presented as follows.

Success will increase:

“I am pretty sure that students will be more successful. As a teacher who served in intensive English language schools for many years, I know that this process will be more beneficial at fifth grade level.”

“I absolutely think that students will be more successful. For a successful language education to take place, we need at least 20 hours of English instruction. However, today we only have 3 hours at fifth grade level. It is impossible to cover four skills within only three hours.”

Success will not increase:

“It may be beneficial to detect certain skills in earlier periods, but I do not think that there will be great changes without meeting fundamental needs.”

Indecisive:

“I am indecisive. What is success? To succeed what?”

Teachers seem to hold a strong belief that early learning of a foreign language will affect language learning positively and make more successful learners. An increase in the number of English lesson hours was stated as important to successfully implement the language activities. Crowded classrooms were stated as a distractor and a fundamental step was stated as to evaluate and develop the curriculum. On the other hand, no teacher expressed concern about a decrease in success.

3.4. Possible challenges of the ELPP implementation

When the opinions of teachers on the possible challenges are analyzed, it could be observed that they expressed six fundamental aspects. These are presented in Figure 5.

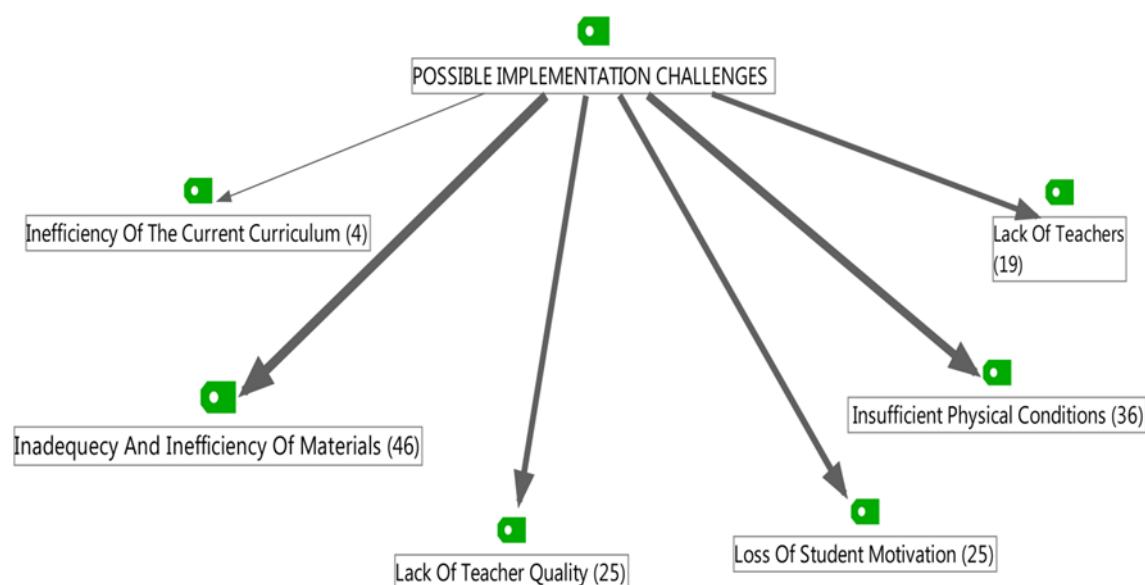


Figure 5. Possible Implementation Challenges

Figure 5 displays the most important challenge as inadequacy and inefficiency of materials. Other important challenges were insufficient physical conditions, lack of teacher quality, and loss of student motivation. Less frequently stated challenges were lack of teachers, and inefficiency of the current curriculum. Some of the opinions are as follows.

Inadequacy and inefficiency of materials:

“I am worried that materials will not be supplied for the teachers in need. I think that selected materials will be of poor quality. Besides, these books may be expensive for most families to afford.”

Insufficient physical conditions:

“Crowded classes may hinder productivity. Not every school has the same facilities and infrastructure.”

Lack of teacher quality:

“If teachers go on using classical methods of teaching, and if necessary payments are not allocated for infrastructure, this may create negative consequences.”

Loss of student motivation:

“It will be boring for students who do not like English as there will be a lot of lesson hours.”

Lack of teachers:

“There may not be enough number of English teachers. As a result, hourly-paid teachers or incompetent people may take the class, and this will make the prep class project unsuccessful.”

Inefficiency of the current curriculum:

“The present curriculum is inefficient and needs to be developed.”

Teachers see lack of quality and quantity of materials as the major possible implementation challenges. In addition, insufficient physical schools conditions were stated as an important challenge to tackle. To increase teacher and student interaction and to teach four skills effectively, teachers suggest that the number of students in each class should be limited to a maximum number of 20. Learning English at a very young age- an advantage, was stated to make unmotivated students get bored due to increased lesson hours. Finally, frequent and ineffective curriculum changes were expressed as an obstacle.

3.5. Support mechanisms required for ELPP implementation

Teachers’ opinions on support mechanisms required for the implementation of ELPP centre around eight fundamental aspects. These are listed in Figure 6.

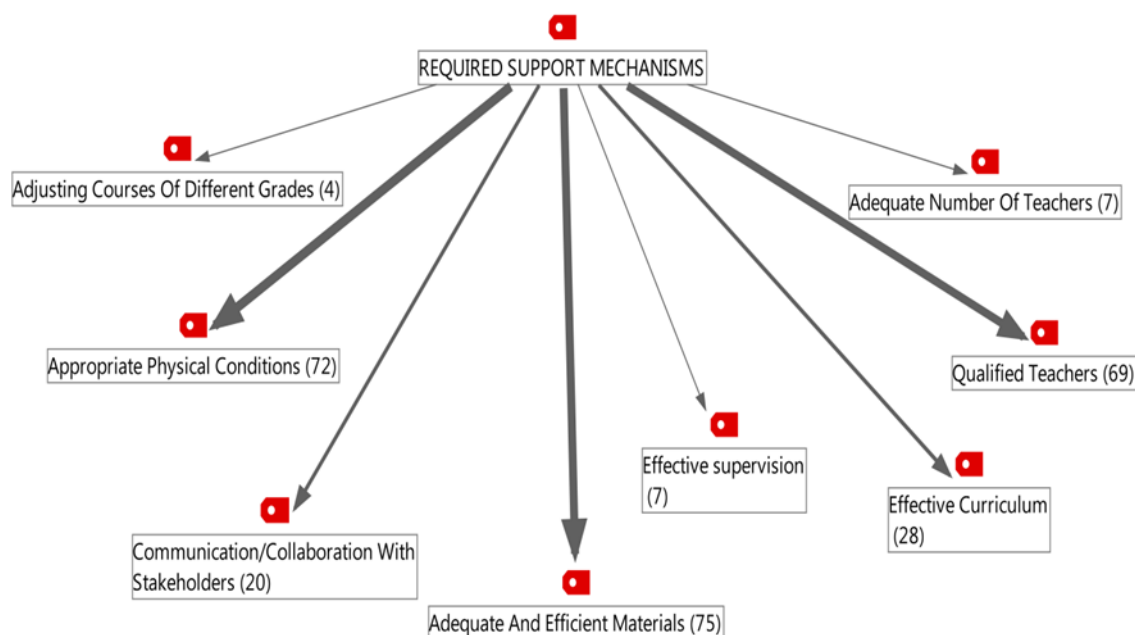


Figure 6. Support mechanisms required for a successful implementation

In Figure 6, it is seen that the most important need is adequate and efficient materials. Other needs were listed as appropriate physical conditions, and qualified teachers. In addition, the need for an effective curriculum was highly emphasized. Besides, communication/collaboration with other stakeholders such as teachers, students, families, and administrative staff of Ministry of National Education was

considered important. Furthermore, the need for more number of native speakers of English as teachers, an effective supervision to track program implementation, and adjusting courses of different grades such as balancing English lesson hours in the following grades were also emphasized. Teachers expressed their opinions as follows:

Adequate and efficient materials:

“Good course books, pictures, videos, and other necessary materials and games need to be prepared and given to teachers to teach four skills.”

Appropriate physical conditions:

“There should be language labs to support English language learning in every school. There also has to be libraries to offer speaking and listening materials to students.”

Qualified teachers:

“At this moment, proficient and qualified English teachers are required for these students.”

Effective curriculum:

“The curriculum should include learning experiences based on learning by doing.”

Communication/collaboration with stakeholders:

“Classroom teachers, English teachers and school administrators should work in cooperation. In addition, families need to be informed about the necessity of this implementation.”

Adequate number of teachers:

“There should be more native speaker English language teachers.”

Effective supervision:

“There certainly needs to be an effective supervision. This should act as a guide for the teachers rather than putting a pressure on them. Implementation should be supervised and shared monthly.”

Adjusting courses of different grades:

“Education is a process. If too much emphasis is given to English in one year, and more emphasis is given to other courses in the following years, then, students will easily forget what they learned in the prep class. Thus, a number of English courses (such as 8 hours a week) need to be provided in grades six, seven, and eight.”

Adequate and effective materials were stated as the most important support mechanism needed by English teachers. Next, appropriate physical conditions including language labs to enrich learning experiences of children, efficient buildings, equipment for U-shaped classroom designs, technological infrastructure etc. are listed. In addition, qualified teachers were stated as a salient support mechanism in need. Teachers of ELPP need to be qualified and supported with regular in-service trainings. An effective curriculum to be developed taking into account students' needs

and expectations as well as integration of alternative assessment methods are other mechanisms. Teachers expressed that family and administration collaboration is vital. For effective supervision, Ministry of National Education and academics should work together and constructively follow and give feedback on the implementation. Finally, teachers stressed that English should not be limited to a 2-3 hour instruction a week in high school; rather, it should be extended to 8-9 hours weekly for grades six, seven and eight.

4. Discussion and suggestions

When the opinions of teachers about the implementation of ELPP program are analyzed, it is observed that EL teachers are welcoming this change, and they are also offering required support mechanisms to make the implementation even better. The high density on required support mechanisms is important to shed light on PELT policy makers to take the necessary precautions for a more effective dissemination. Thus, the overall picture shows a positive approach to the implementation: increase in the instruction hours which means more exposure to input and more opportunities to practice language skills, and increase in language learning motivation and success. Teachers could foresee such results based on the nation's past and their own teaching experiences in preparatory programs. Teachers' positive opinions can also be linked to the number of points raised about the required support mechanisms and advantages of the implementation respectively. In comparison, the number of stated disadvantages seems a lot lower than that of advantages.

Our findings provide support to previous studies. Although it is evident that the participants viewed the implementation at the 5th grade as satisfying and rewarding, a few hours of weekly language instruction does not yield to high proficiency levels in the short and long run. Hence, the distribution of language instruction deserves attention as the intensity of instruction makes positive changes on language attainment, language learning attitude and motivation (Collins & White, 2011; Spada & Lightbrown, 1989). Some studies show positive benefits of more exposure at earlier ages (Artieda, Roquet & Nicolás-Conesa, 2017; Munoz, 2012). However, if instructional hours are not used effectively, it is unlikely that successful results are obtained (Djigunovic, 2012; Collins & Munoz, 2016).

Referring to the European Union's action plan released in 2004, Edelenbos, Johnston and Kubanek (2006) highlight that putting language policies into practice cannot succeed without well-qualified teachers and effective learning environment and methods. Similar concerns arose about the ELPP implementation. A need for qualified teachers preferably with good speaking skills is listed as a must. The increase in the number of English instruction hours means a considerable increase in the input teachers provide. To meet the prioritized program objectives of developing listening and speaking skills for young learners, an ample amount of listening exposure both by authentic texts, and the teacher gain more importance. Moreover, it

needs to be considered that the intensive language instruction contributes to oral fluency to a great extent (Collins & White, 2012).

Some of the problems can be related to the limited experience on early language teaching in the Turkish context. Research on the effectiveness of the newest reform of teaching English at the second grade and its impact on factors like academic success, motivation and intercultural understanding is yet to be announced. For instance, as Kirkgöz puts forth (2007), integration of communicative language teaching and teacher training to achieve such a goal has yet to be achieved. Similarly, Butler (2005) states that integration of communicative language teaching just by bringing the communicative activities into classes leaves teachers clueless about its rationale. Haznedar (2012) investigated language teacher competencies, their level of knowledge and skills on teaching English to young learners and announced low levels for the 49% of the participating teachers. In the present study, similarly, half of the teachers had limited knowledge and skills on second language acquisition, assessment and evaluation of young learners, child development, and teacher self-assessment on their professional and personal development. Thus, as it was stated by EL teachers in the present study, it is important to provide up-to-date communicative materials as well as appropriate physical conditions in which these activities can be carried out. As EL teachers stated both as a challenge and a disadvantage, better physical conditions equipped with high tech classes and software as well as current and up-to-date in-service trainings are required for a better implementation.

Some of the findings of salient studies in literature on ELPP implementation support the findings of our study. For instance, teachers' opinions collected after the 2013 education reform by Yıldırım and Tanrıseven (2015), and Gürsoy, Korkmaz and Damar (2017) present an explicit support for the new implementation.

The need for a new language program as expressed by the teachers calls curriculum writers and material developers to pay more attention to meaningful and authentic tasks. Program design considerations of context-reduced and cognitively demanding tasks in line with the developmental stages of 10-12 year olds (Bayyurt & Alptekin, 2000) affect the rate of success in L2 proficiency. Not only language courses for young learners but also courses on program development for primary education, literacy building, and learning problems in children, assessment and evaluation for primary education are essentials of a program with a holistic approach.

On the other hand, the continuity of language instruction can be retained with persistent language exposure in meaningful contexts. As was experienced in the AHSs, selected content courses can be delivered in the foreign language. Or else, theme-based language instruction as the language-focused end of the content based instruction continuum can be practiced. Echoing Bayyurt and Alptekin (2000), it is worth noting that language teachers' competency areas are not limited to language but also the content. In search of better ways of early lower secondary FL education in Germany, research calls for an "immersive or content based approach" (Jaekel et al., 2017, p. 25) after the onset of increased exposure. Hence, the new language

curriculum for the ELPP is advised to offer communicative and theme-based units of learning around meaningful tasks appropriate for young learners.

The decision for the top-down process of PELT policy can be the governmental choice; however, it is crucial to conduct a nation-wide needs analysis and also to determine such policies in relation to the realities of the current schools and classes for a more effective dissemination. As Kırkgöz (2009) puts the gap between policy and its implementation, the failure to bring communicative language teaching into classrooms, and Bayyurt (2012) details the alternative ways to close the English teacher shortage and the professional development need of English for teaching early ages, the gap between these realities, and the new implementation should be lessened. Thus, it is at this point urgent that existing problems such as strengthening the technological infrastructure, developing and nationwide expanding the quality materials and providing efficient and frequent in-service trainings on teaching English to young learners need to be addressed. The policy makers need to confront and resolve these already researched and stated problems in teaching English to young learners (Arikan, 2015; Arslan, 2012; Bayyurt, 2012; Gursoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2017; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015) to achieve an effective new implementation. The intensity of the new implementation will require even a sounder infrastructure to be based on, because the intense time distribution will require a more detailed weekly preparation and planning for longer hours of instruction, input, feedback and assessment. It is obvious that the new implementation with all schools offering 15 hours of English courses at the 5th grades will put a demand for a higher number of English language teachers. In order to meet the possible shortage of EL teachers, policy makers need to be careful not to increase the quotas of alternative certification programs but rather could be advised to better the quality of EL teaching programs at education faculties.

It also needs to be pointed out that this study does not ensure that the participant teachers piloted the new policy implementation. Though it is a limitation, in the long run, when the new implementation is widely practiced all over Turkey, they will be a part of the new language teaching reform.

It could be advised that language experts together with policy makers start to construct a comprehensive foreign language policy of Turkey at the macro level by incorporating participants from the micro level.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, teacher training for teachers of the intensive language program in the 5th grade must equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills: age and developmentally appropriate approach to teaching English to young learners, components of a program for basic education, material selection and adaptation, assessment and evaluation procedures for young learners. What's more, training must address a holistic approach to child development and communicative approach to language teaching.

Mainstreaming the intensive language instruction all over the country is a wide step to boost the language education in Turkey. The implementation is believed to conform the educational unity and equity principle by delimiting it to selected or private schools. In response to Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe's (2005, p. 253) statement on English "...divide between the wealthier, educated urban populations and those belonging to other socioeconomic and geographic groups." the intensive language education reform is believed to lessen the gap and provide equal opportunities for language learning.

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