



DESIGN OF A LANGUAGE PREPARATORY PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY

(DİL HAZIRLIK OKULU TASARIMI: BİR ÖRNEK ÇALIŞMA)

Enisa MEDE¹

Ayşe Semra AKYEL²

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to design a Language Preparatory Program for English language education students. The participant group consists of eighty-eight student teachers and ten course instructors at an English medium university, Faculty of Education, Department of English Language Education. Data of the study came from needs analysis questionnaires and semi-structured interviews related to the student teachers' perceived language needs. The findings of the study pointed at design of a skills-based syllabus in terms of the language needs, goals and objectives, materials and the language teaching approach dimensions.

Keywords: Program design, skills based syllabus, language needs

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce dil eğitimi öğrencileri için Dil Hazırlık Programı tasarlamaktır. Katılımcı grubu, İngilizce eğitim veren bir üniversitede, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı'nda seksen sekiz öğrenci öğretmen ve on kurs eğitmenleri oluşmaktadır. Çalışmanın verileri aday öğretmenlerin dil konusundaki ihtiyaçlarına yönelik algılarıyla ilgili bir ihtiyaç analizi anketi yöntemiyle ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın bulguları dil ihtiyaçlarına, amaç ve hedeflere, materyal ve dil öğretimi yaklaşımı boyutları açısından bir beceri tabanlı müfredat tasarımını işaret etti.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Program geliştirme, beceri tabanlı müfredat, dil ihtiyaçları

¹ Assist. Prof. Dr. Bahçeşehir University, Department of Foreign Language Teaching.
E-mail: enisa.mede@bahcesehir.edu.tr

² Prof. Dr. Yeditepe University, Department of Foreign Language Education.
E-mail: aakyel@yeditepe.edu.tr

INTRODUCTION

Program is an umbrella term that is generally defined as an organized and planned set of related activities directed towards a common purpose or goal (Küçük, 2008, p.17). By taking this point of view into consideration, Lynch (1996, p.2) describes a teaching program as a series of courses linked with a common goal or end product. The core of a good curriculum is a good teaching program. A good language teaching program should be consistent, efficient and effective to reach its aims and objectives. It should meet the needs of the learners and the teaching philosophy resulting in teaching methodologies changing accordingly as well as the changing definition of learning. There is a strict relationship between curriculum, syllabus and teaching program. They are all connected and integrated into each other.

One major source of problems observed in teaching programs is the mismatch between the properties of the given instruction and the characteristics, needs and wants of learners as well as the opinions of teachers. As any language program tries to achieve a certain level of proficiency, the weaknesses of the general instructional setting will be observed both in the outcomes (product) and in the implementation (process) of the instruction. The design of language teaching programs is concerned with the selection, grading, and presentation of the target needs and language needs via various teaching practices or techniques. To fill in this gap, recent research has emphasized the importance of identifying the learners' language and learning needs to design a Language Preparatory Program (Çelik, 2003; Ekici, 2003; Mutlu, 2004; Örs, 2006; Tavil, 2006; Yılmaz, 2009; Akyel and Özek, 2010).

Growing arguments for program design are based on various frameworks introduced by different scholars. For example, one of the widely known frameworks was proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who highlighted three main approaches to program design:

- Language-centered approach: It aims to draw a direct connection between the analysis of target situation and the content of the course.
- Skills-centered approach: This approach emphasizes the development of language skills and strategies which will help the learner continue to develop after the program itself.
- Learning-centered approach: It focuses on the learner at every stage during the dynamic process which does not move in a linear order. Needs and resources vary across time, and these changes are reflected in the program.

Another framework was offered by Dubin and Olshtain (1986, p.4) providing a specific list of parameters to take into account while drafting any educational program:

- Elements, items, units, or themes of language content to be selected for inclusion in the syllabus.
- The order of the elements to be sequenced in the syllabus.
- The criteria for deciding on the order of elements in the syllabus.

- The presentation of language to facilitate the acquisition process.
- The roles of teachers and learners in the learning process.
- The contribution of the materials to the process of language learning in the classroom.
- The knowledge the learner is expected to attain by the end of the course.
- Understandings based on analyses of structures and lexis learners will have as an outcome of the course.
- The specific language skills learners need in their immediate future or in their professional lives and the presentation of these skills in the syllabus.
- The techniques of evaluation or examination in the target language to be used to assess course outcomes.

Additionally, in his framework, Brown (1995) focused on six steps to be followed while designing a program:

- Analysis of the language needs of the learner: Needs analysis is the door opening to the whole program planning process as it is the first step to be taken in the design and development of any educational program. As the learner has come to be perceived in the core of the language teaching and learning process, the primary focus of any language program ought to be to identify the language needs of the learner.
- Specifying goals and objectives of the program: According to Brown (1995, p.21) goals are general statements about what must be accomplished in order to attain and specify students' needs whereas objectives are precise statements about what content or skills the students must master in order to achieve a particular goal.
- Development of tests on the basis of program's goals and objectives: Tests should be developed with the purpose to unify a curriculum and give it a sense of cohesion, purpose and control.
- Developing materials: Brown (1995, p. 139) defines materials as, "any systematic description of the techniques and exercises to be used in classroom teaching." Adopted, developed, or adapted materials for a program should be well defined in terms of needs analyses, objectives, tests and teaching.
- Language teaching: Teaching is the process that includes only those activities (techniques and exercises) rationally selected by the teacher to help students achieve learning. The objectives of a method are attained through the interaction among the teachers, learners and materials. Learners' contribution to the learning process is related to the types of activities, the degree of control learners have over the content of learning and the view of the learner as processor, performer, initiator or problem solver. As for the teacher's roles, they are closely related to methods applied and their realization. The role of the teacher

will reflect the objectives of the method and the learning theory applied in a program.

- Program evaluation: Evaluation has typically been recognized as a crucial area of second/foreign language education to measure whether the program is functioning as it was planned. Brown (1995, p. 218) describes program evaluation as “the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a program and evaluate its effectiveness within the context of the particular institutions involved.” He classifies evaluation into two categories: formal and summative evaluation. In other words, a continuous needs analysis lies under the concept of formative evaluation.

Parallel to Brown’s (1995) framework, Graves (1996, p.13) identified the following components and the related questions to be asked before designing a program:

- Needs Assessment: What are my students’ needs? How can I assess them so that I can address them?
- Determining goals and objectives: What are the purposes and intended outcomes of the course? What will my students need to do or learn to achieve these goals?
- Conceptualizing content: What will be the backbone of what I teach? What will I include in my syllabus?
- Selecting and developing materials and activities: How and with what will I teach the course? What is my role? What are my students’ roles?
- Organization of content and activities: How will I organize the content and activities? What systems will I develop?
- Evaluation: How will I assess what students have learned? How will I assess the effectiveness of the course?
- Consideration of resources and constraints: What are the givens of my situation?

Finally, Stein, Carnine and Dixon (1998, pp.229-231) emphasized the following five components of program design:

- Identify “big ideas” to organize content: It refers to students’ ability to use their background knowledge to solve different problems or build foundations for later learning. Organizing instruction using “big ideas” makes it possible for program designers to reduce the memory load for students and to promote more conceptual understanding.
- Teach explicit, generalizable strategies: According to this principle not all content can be introduced through the use of strategies that should be generalizable, and applied to a broad range of problem types.
- Scaffold instruction: As for this principle, while students are learning new strategies, both teachers and program designers provide support during the process.

- Integrate skills and concepts: This principle emphasize the importance of a careful integration of important skills. By integration of knowledge and skills students learn when to apply what they have learned, and also it provides them with a chance to examine the correlation between various concepts.
- Provide adequate review: Considering this principle, the value of the review depends on the quality of instruction. The review should be sufficient, cumulative and varied.

For the purposes of the present study, the first five steps identified by Brown's (1995) framework namely, analysis of the language needs of the learner, specifying goals and objectives of the program, development of tests on the basis of program's goals and objectives, developing materials and language teaching were adopted. The reason behind choosing this framework was the fact that it the steps were clearly defined and applicable for the context of this study.

Studies on Program Design in ESL/EFL Contexts

The analyses of literature on program design in ESL and EFL contexts revealed some significant findings, which can be taken for granted while identifying the needs of a target group of learners. To exemplify, the findings of a study conducted by Chia, Johnson, Chian and Olive (1999) revealed the importance of defining the perceptions of the medical students and the faculty members about English language needs to propose a course design. Furthermore, Chan's (2001) study demonstrated that specification of the language needs should be the primary concern to design an English program to help undergraduate students with their competence in academic and professional domains. In a similar fashion, Daylan (2001) investigated the language and learning needs of students to be enrolled in the Basic English Classes in the preparatory school. The results showed that, the most important purposes for learning English were "for future success in the career" and "to read materials related to the field of study." Continuity and consistency between the preparatory program and freshmen courses were considered necessary as well.

Besides, Örs (2006) designed a formal syllabus for the School of Foreign Languages by focusing on the importance given by the students to learning English, materials used during courses, their beliefs about language skills and strategies, and their views on testing and evaluation procedures applied in the current program. The results reported that the program was not sufficient to meet the students' future needs in terms of learning and teaching, and thus, should be redesigned accordingly. Finally, Akyel and Özek (2010) urged that the Language Preparatory Programs should be designed according to the students' needs associated with the four language skills and strategies.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, it has been aimed to design a Language Preparatory Program for students who will major in the Department of English Language Education

with a specific focus on their perceived language needs. In accordance with this purpose, answer to the question below has been sought:

1. What is the nature of the Language Preparatory Program in terms of:
 - 1a. the language needs of the student teachers
 - 1b. goals and objectives
 - 1c. materials
 - 1d. the language teaching approach

METHOD

Research Model

The study employs a case study as research design, which has been supported by many researchers as an effective research strategy to investigate a specific educational phenomenon such as a program, event, person, process or social group (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Brown and Rodgers, 2002; Yin, 2003). There are three types of case studies, categorized with respect to their main purposes: exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. An exploratory case study (whether based on single or multiple cases) aims to define the questions and hypotheses of a subsequent study (not necessarily a case study) or to determine the feasibility of the desired research procedures. As for descriptive case study, the focus is on complete description of a phenomenon within its context. Finally, an explanatory case study presents data based on cause-effect relationship explaining how events happened. Since the present study's main aim is to gather in-depth information to design language preparatory program within a particular setting, a descriptive case study was chosen as an appropriate research design.

Study Group

The study population included a total of forty-six undergraduate students (ten male and thirty-six female) and five instructors offering undergraduate courses at the ELT department.

The participating students' age range was between 18-22 and they were graduates of language departments of their high schools. The average teaching experience of the course instructors was six years.

As for the course instructors, they were all females with an age range of 28-39. Every instructor had an average of six years of English teaching experience.

MEASURES

Data Collection Tools

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

In accordance with the aims of the study, a needs analysis questionnaire was administered both to the student teachers and course instructors before and during the implementation of the program have been used as the data collection

tools. The questionnaire was adopted from a study conducted by Akyel and Özek (2010) which aimed to determine the language needs of the students enrolled in a Language Preparatory Program at a state university in Turkey. The purpose for choosing this questionnaire was that it was based on identifying the language needs of the preparatory students before they start the undergraduate program which was parallel to the aim of this study.

The questionnaire comprised two parts. The first part (Part 1) was designed to gather demographic information about the students and course instructors. As for the second part (Part 2), the aim was to collect data on the importance of the improvement of the language skills namely, reading, writing, speaking and listening (2a), the performance in the tasks related to the four language skills (2b), and the difficulties the students experienced with the application of the strategies in tasks considering the four language skills (2c). Each item in the scale was accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'very important' (a) through 'unimportant' (d) in Part 2 and 2a and 'always' (a) through 'never' (d) in 2b and 2c. In short, the questionnaire aimed to tap both the students' and teachers' perceptions towards language and learning needs included in the items.

The theoretical approach underlying the questionnaire was Social Constructivism. Specifically, the items tapped the perceptions of the students and teachers about effective strategy use in tasks related to the four language skills. One basic aim of the Social Constructivist Approach to learning is empowering students by helping and guiding them during the process of learning to become scaffolders in one aspect of helping students to acquire effective learning strategies such as reading (i.e. scanning), writing (i.e. expressing major and minor ideas), listening (i.e. predicting the content of a lecture) and speaking (i.e. participating in discussions/debates)

Before the questionnaire was given to the participants, it was piloted with fourteen undergraduate students to measure the reliability and validity. Since there were only six course instructors in the department, the questionnaire was not piloted with the course instructors. The results of the reliability test for subscales were .781 (Cronbach α) for Part 1, .858 (Cronbach α) for 2a, .796 (Cronbach α) for 2b and .976 (Cronbach α) for 2c and .961 (Cronbach α) for the whole needs analysis questionnaire which indicates a high internal consistency of the items in the scale (Gliem and Gliem, 2003).

Semi-structured Interviews

In an attempt to support the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the student teachers and course instructors enrolled in the preparatory program. There were 22 questions in total which were related to: the opinions of the student teachers and course instructors about the aim of the program, the importance of the development of the four language skills for the students' further studies in the department, and the strategies and tasks that should be included in the syllabus regarding the four language skills.

The interviews were carried out with six student teachers: two high achievers who received scores higher than 85 out of 120, two average students with ranging scores from 60 to 84, and two low achievers with scores lower than 60. The same interview yet, with a different wording was carried out with three instructors who offered courses both in the preparatory and undergraduate programs.

Data Analyses

For the present study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques was used for data analysis to ensure internal validity. The needs analysis questionnaire was tabulated and analyzed statistically by using SPSS 17.0 version. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and percentages were estimated to identify the nature of the Language Preparatory Program with respect to the following components: goals and objectives, materials and the language teaching approach.

As for the semi-structured, they were transcribed and coded according to Bogdan and Biklen’s (1998) framework. Specifically, the interviews were first transcribed, and then by reading each participant’s transcripts, the conceptual themes were identified by the researcher according to the recurring words and ideas. These conceptual categories were used to create a matrix of major themes which were sorted under specific headings. Finally, the supporting quotes from each participant were listed and discussed under each heading.

FINDINGS

The Findings of the Questionnaire related to the Language Needs

Based on the results gathered from the needs analysis questionnaire, the perceptions of the student teachers and course instructors related to the student teachers’ needs about the four language skills are reported below.

Table 1. The Perceptions of Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Four Language Skills

	Very Important/Important		Slightly Important		Not Very Important/Unimportant	
	STs	CIs	STs	CIs	STs	CIs
	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
Reading	88.8	100	6.9	-	4.3	-
Writing	87	100	4.3	-	8.7	-
Listening	87	100	6.3	-	6.7	-
Speaking	84.8	100	6.5	-	8.7	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

The findings of the questionnaires indicated that both groups of participants perceived the development of the four language skills namely,

reading (STs 95.7%, CIs 100%), writing (STs 91.3%, CIs 100%), listening (STs 93.3%, CIs 100%), and speaking (STs 91.3%, CIs 100%) to be equally important for the students' academic and professional achievement (Table 1).

Furthermore, the results of the questionnaires provided insight about the importance of the tasks that should be included in the syllabus regarding the development of the four language skills as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The Perceptions of Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Students' Reading Skills in Performing the Related Tasks

	Very Important/Important		Slightly Important		Not Very Important/Unimportant	
	STs	CIs	STs	CIs	STs	CIs
	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
textbooks	56.6	100	34.8	-	8.6	-
articles in journals	74	80	17.3	20	8.7	-
reference tools (e.g. dictionaries)	60.9	80	21.7	20	17.4	-
course handouts	74	100	17.3	-	8.7	-
texts on the Internet	54.4	100	26	-	19.6	-
computer-presented texts	58.7	100	19.6	-	21.7	-
instructions for projects	71.8	60	17.4	20	10.8	20
newspapers/magazines	58.7	80	19.6	-	21.7	20
lecture notes	71.7	100	10.9	-	17.4	-
works of literature	69.3	60	28.6	40	2.1	-
graphs/ charts/ diagrams/ tables	-	-	37.3	20	62.7	80

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

To begin with, both groups of participants agreed that engaging student teachers in tasks such as reading textbooks (STs 91.4%, CIs 100%), articles in journals (STs 91.3%, CIs 100%), and reference tools (e.g. dictionaries) (STs 82.6%, CIs 100%) is highly important for their development of the reading ability. The two groups stated more tasks to be important for the progress in reading.

The only item rated lower by the participants was '*reading charts/diagrams/tables*'. One possible explanation behind this finding might be the fact that in the undergraduate the student teachers' were assigned based on reading articles, literary texts, lecture notes etc. Therefore, this item can be just simply introduced at the beginning of the preparatory program.

Regarding the writing skill, the participants pointed out that the performance in the tasks listed in Table 3 is crucial for students to make progress in their writing.

Table 3. The Perceptions of Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Students' Writing Skills in Performing the Related Tasks

	Very Important/Important		Not Sure		Not Very Important/Unimportant	
	STs	CIIs	STs	CIIs	STs	CIIs
	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
a resume (CV)	84.7	-	15.3	20	-	80
essays in reactions to readings	69.6	100	26.1	-	4.3	-
references for a report or project	68,2	80	19,8	20	12	-
book reports	69.6	100	23.9	-	6.5	-
workbook exercises	69.6	100	15.2	-	15.2	-
essay-type questions	62.4	100	28.9	-	8.7	-
term papers	63	100	26	-	11	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIIs=Course instructors.

The only task that was perceived differently by the participants was 'writing a resume (CV)' which was perceived more important by the student teachers (STs 100%) than the course instructors (CIIs 20%). One possible explanation behind this finding might be the fact that the course instructors felt that the student teachers should be engaged in more academic tasks such as writing essays in reaction to readings or writing term papers that would help them follow their courses in the undergraduate program effectively. Therefore, writing a resume (CV) can be emphasized in the undergraduate program rather than the preparatory program.

As for the listening ability, the student teachers' performances in tasks included in Table 4 were perceived to be important.

Table 4. The Perceptions of the Student Teachers and Course Instructors about Students' Listening Skills in Performing the Related Tasks

	Very Important/Important		Not Sure		Not Very Important/Unimportant	
	STs	CIs	STs	STs	CIs	STs
	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
lectures	76.1	100	15.2	-	8.7	-
question/answer sessions	71.7	100	19.6	-	8.7	-
class presentations	82.6	100	13	-	4.4	-
dialogues	23.9	100	18.3	-	57.8	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

As illustrated in the table above, '*Listening to dialogues*' was the only task considered less important by the students (STs 42.2%). In the undergraduate program, the students are generally asked to listen to a lecture followed by question/answer sessions. Besides, they are asked to prepare a presentation in most of their courses. They are rarely engaged in tasks based on listening to dialogues. Thus, the students ranked this item lower than the others. On the other hand, the course instructors perceived this task to be as important as the others (CIs 100%), and indicated that it should be included in the program to give student teachers an opportunity to analyze role relationships between speakers and other sociolinguistics dimensions of the language such as turn taking and appropriacy of language.

Finally, as shown in Table 5, the performances in given tasks were important for development of the student teachers' speaking ability.

Table 5. The Perceptions of the Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Students' Speaking Skills in Performing the Related Tasks

	Very Important/Important		Not Sure		Not Very Important/Unimportant	
	STs	CIs	STs	STs	CIs	STs
	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
oral presentations	82.6	80	13	20	4.4	-
oral presentations using multimedia tools	84.8	80	13	20	2.2	-
state opinions on different topics (discussions/debates)	70	100	10.9	-	19.1	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

As reported in Table 5, the performance in tasks namely, giving oral presentations (ST: M=1.60, SD=1.02 / CI: M=1.20, SD=0.44), giving oral presentations using multimedia tools (ST: M=1.65, SD=0.79 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.89) and stating opinions on different topics (discussions/debates) (ST: M=2.26, SD=1.21 / CI: M=1.80, SD=0.83) were considered crucial for the student teachers' progress in speaking.

Apart from the perceptions of the student teachers' performance related to the four language skills, the results gathered from the needs analysis questionnaire were also used to report the difficulties they had while using the language strategies in related tasks.

To begin with, Table 6 displays the perceptions of the student teachers and the course instructors in terms of the difficulty experienced with the application of the reading strategies in the course requirements.

As can be seen from Table 6, both groups agreed that the student teachers had problems while using the following reading strategies: recognizing words automatically (ST: M=2.12, SD=0.86 / CI: M=2.20, SD=0.44), distinguishing the main idea from supporting details (ST: M=1.94, SD=0.70 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.00), predicting the content of a text (ST: M=1.95, SD=0.81 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54), reading and responding critically (ST: M=2.00, SD=0.71 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), asking questions about a text (ST: M=2.02, SD=0.66 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), going through a text quickly to get a general idea (ST: M=1.60, SD=0.54 / CI: M=1.80, SD=0.44), searching for simple information (ST: M=2.03, SD=0.67 / CI: M=1.80, SD=0.44), and identifying key information (ST: M=2.02, SD=0.71 / CI: M=1.80, SD=0.83).

The participants also shared the viewpoint that the student teachers found it difficult to read quickly and selectively to find important information (ST: 1.95, SD=0.68 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), guess the meaning of an unknown word from context (ST: M=1.94, SD=0.70 / CI: M=2.20, SD=0.44), recognize the organization of ideas to see their relationships (ST: M=1.89, SD=0.75 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54), identify cause-effect relationships (ST: M=1.96, SD=0.70 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), understand writer's aim/attitude (ST: M=1.85, SD=0.99 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54), understand information when not openly stated (ST: M=2.13, SD=0.77 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54) and distinguish fact from opinion (ST: M=1.90, SD=0.70 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54).

On the contrary, both groups indicated that the student teachers did not experience much difficulty with '*reading carefully and understanding the details of a text*' (ST= M=3.96, SD=0.87 / CI: M=4.20, SD=0.83). Since the students are usually expected to read a text carefully, understand the details and then answer the related questions, this particular strategy was perceived easier than the others.

Table 6. The Perceptions of the Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Difficulty Experienced with the Reading Strategies in Performing the Related Tasks

	Always/Frequently		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
	STs f%	CIs f%	STs f%	STs f%	CIs f%	STs f%
recognize words automatically	67	80	30.8	20	2.2	-
guess the meaning of an unknown word from context	78	80	22	20	-	-
recognize the organization of ideas to see their relationships	79.2	100	19.7	-	1.1	-
identify key information	73.7	80	26.3	20	-	-
predict the content of a text	69.3	100	30.7	-	-	-
understand information in a text when not openly stated	77	100	23	-	-	-
read and respond critically	74.8	100	25.2	-	-	-
distinguish fact from opinion	80.2	100	19.8	-	-	-
ask questions about a text	76.9	100	23.1	-	-	-
read carefully and understand the details of a text	3.3	-	26.4	20	70.3	80
go through a text quickly to get the general idea	75.8	100	24.2	-	-	-
read quickly and selectively to find important information	79.1	100	20.9	-	-	-
search for simple information	79.1	100	20.9	-	-	-
distinguish the main idea from the supporting details	78	100	22	-	-	-
identify cause-effect relationships	76.9	100	23.1	-	-	-
understand writer's aim/attitude	74.8	100	25.2	-	-	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

Additionally, according to the findings gathered from the questionnaire, the student teachers and the course instructors perceived the application of the writing strategies in related tasks to be problematic as well (See Table 7).

Table 7. The Perceptions of the Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Difficulty Experienced with the Writing Strategies in Performing the Related Tasks

	Always/Frequently		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
	STs f%	CIs f%	STs f%	STs f%	CIs f%	STs f%
summarize information in your own words	67	80	30.8	20	2.2	-
combine information from multiple texts to prepare an assignment	80.3	80	18.7	20	1	-
organize writing to express major and minor ideas	79.2	80	19.8	20	1	-
organize ideas for compare and contrast purposes	74.8	80	33	20	2.2	-
organize ideas to show cause and effect relationships	77	100	22	-	2	-
organize ideas for argumentative purposes	79.2	80	20.8	20	-	-
organize ideas to describe events	67	80	30.8	20	2.2	-
write references and quotations	79.2	80	19.8	20	1	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

As Table 7 shows, both groups pointed out that the student teachers could not apply the writing strategies such as, summarizing information in their own words (ST: M=2.04, SD=0.88/ M=1.80, SD=0.83), combining information from multiple texts to prepare an assignment (ST: M=1.86, SD=0.79 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.70), organizing writing to express major and minor ideas (ST: M=1.85, SD=0.81 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.70), organizing ideas for compare and contrast purposes (ST: M=1.90, SD=0.81 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.70), organizing ideas to show cause and effect relationships (ST: M=1.92, SD=0.87 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54) and organizing ideas for argumentative purposes (ST: M=1.94, SD=0.84 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.70).

Organizing ideas to describe events (ST: M=2.04, SD=0.88 / CI: M=1.80, SD=0.83) and writing references and quotations (ST: M=1.85, SD=0.81 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.70) were also among the writing strategies where the student teachers faced difficulty in the given requirements as well.

Furthermore, when asked about the perceptions of the student teachers' application of the listening strategies, both groups asked for some training. The percentages are shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8. The Perceptions of the Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Difficulty Experienced with the Listening Strategies in Performing the Related Tasks

	Always/Frequently		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
	STs f%	CIs f%	STs f%	STs f%	CIs f%	STs f%
understand information when not openly stated in a lecture	62.7	100	37.3	-	-	-
predict the content of a lecture	1.1	100	25.3	-	73.6	-
understand the subject matter of a lecture	82.4	100	17.6	-	40	-
listen for specific information	80.2	100	19.8	-	-	-
distinguish fact from opinion	80.2	100	19.8	-	47.8	-
listen to a lecture to take effective notes	73.7	100	25.2	-	1.1	-
follow question/answer sessions	75.9	100	24.1	-	-	-
understand spoken instructions	75.9	100	24.1	-	-	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

Looking at the table above, it can be stated that the use of listening strategies in the given tasks was also problematic among the student teachers. Specifically, they experienced problems while: listening for specific information (ST: M=1.92, SD=0.68 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), distinguishing fact from opinion (ST: M=1.92, SD=0.68 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), understanding spoken instructions (ST: M=1.97, SD=0.71 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), understanding the subject matter of a lecture (ST: M=1.89, SD=0.67 / CI: M=1.80, SD=0.54), understanding information when not openly stated in a lecture (ST: M=2.13,

SD=0.77 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), listening to a lecture to take effective notes (ST: M=2.02, SD=0.74 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.00), and following question/answer sessions (ST: M=1.97, SD=0.71 / CI: M=2.00, SD=0.00).

The only disagreement between the two groups was in terms of '*predicting the content of a lecture*'. While the student teachers stated that they could use this strategy in their assignments (ST: M=4.03 / SD=0.78, the course instructors believed that they needed some training (CI: M=1.80, SD=0.54). A possible explanation of this finding might be that the student teachers perceived this strategy as predicting the content of a lecture by simply looking at the visual aids and giving one word answers, whereas the course instructors wanted the student teachers to be able to talk about the content of the lecture by expressing their ideas in more details during peer led discussions.

Finally, according to the perceptions of the participants, the student teachers had difficulty in using speaking strategies as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. The Perceptions of the Student Teachers and Course Instructors about the Difficulty Experienced with the Speaking Strategies in Performing the Related Tasks

	Always/Frequently		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
	STs f%	CI f%	STs f%	STs f%	CI f%	STs f%
ask relevant questions in class	74.8	100	23	-	2.2	-
participate in discussions/debates	67.1	100	31.7	-	1.2	-
give oral presentations	77	100	17.6	-	5.4	-
react to speech and lecture	75.9	100	24.1	-	-	-
produce correct pronunciation	73.7	100	25.2	-	1.1	-
provide solutions to given problems	62.7	100	37.3	-	-	-
summarize information in your own words	65.3	100	17.4	-	17.3	-
express your ideas in your own words	63	100	28.3	-	8.7	-

Note: STs=Student teachers; CIs=Course instructors.

As illustrated above, the student teachers could not use the following strategies in the speaking tasks effectively: reacting to speech and lectures (ST: M=1.97, SD=0.71 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54), expressing their ideas in their own words (ST: M=2.02, SD=1.04 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), producing correct

pronunciation (ST: M=2.02, SD=0.74 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), providing solutions to given problems (ST: M=2.13, SD=0.77 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54) and giving oral presentations (ST: M=2.28, SD=1.06 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54).

They could not summarize information in their own words (ST: M=2.26, SD=1.16 / CI: M=1.60, SD=0.54), participate in discussions/debates (ST: M=2.28, SD=1.34 / CI: M=1.20, SD=0.44) and ask relevant questions in class (ST: M=2.34, SD=1.26 / CI: M=1.40, SD=0.54) either. Similar to the previous findings related to the application of the reading, listening and writing strategies in given tasks, the student teachers also needed training on the effective use of the speaking strategies.

The Findings of the Semi-Structured Interviews related to the Language Needs

The findings obtained from the questionnaires were supported by the semi-structured interviews carried out with the student teachers and course instructors to design the language preparatory program.

To begin with, when asked about what the primary goal of the program should be, both groups of participants agreed that the program should provide training related to the effective use of strategies in reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks. One of the course instructors made the following comment:

“Strategy training should be one of the most important parts of the program. If the students are trained how to use strategies related to the language skills effectively, they can be good models for their own students in the future” (Course instructor, Interview).

Again, in line with the perceptions of the participating groups about the development of the four language skills, both parties pointed out that equal importance should be given to each skill as shown in the excerpt below:

“Since our students are going to be English teachers in the future, equal weight should be given to the four language skills” (Course instructor, Interview).

As for the strategies and tasks that should be included in the syllabus regarding the four language skills, the two groups stated that the students should be engaged in a variety of tasks that would help them learn how to use the language strategies effectively. Some of the participants commented on this issue as follows:

“I believe that if we are engaged in a variety of reading tasks gathered from different sources such as articles or academic books and we are trained how to use the relevant strategies effectively, reading can be more enjoyable” (Student teacher, Interview).

“Writing is one of the most important skills to be developed. Thereby, the students should be involved in various writing tasks such as, book reports, reaction papers and term papers and guided on how to use the necessary strategies effectively” (Course instructor, Interview).

“Listening to lectures and taking notes are essential components of the listening course. However, the students have difficulties with identifying the key information. To overcome this problem, they should be given various tasks to synthesize what has been said. They also need to get some strategy training such as understanding information when not openly stated in a lecture or predicting the content of a lecture” (Course instructor, Interview).

“I am afraid of making grammar and pronunciation mistakes. While speaking I hesitate although I want to participate. In my opinion, I need guidance to become a fluent speaker. For example, I need to learn the techniques to keep the conversation going” (Student teacher, Interview).

Findings of the interviews also indicated that careful reading, critical reading, synthesizing information from different resources and extensive reading play a crucial role to improve the student teachers’ reading ability and thus, should be included in the program. One of the course instructors said:

“Reading is not just moving down the lines but it is actually reading between lines. Reading carefully and critically and being able to synthesize information is what the students need to become effective readers” (Course instructor, Interview).

“Extensive reading is crucial for the students” development of their reading ability. The teachers should emphasize the importance of extensive reading and help the students gain a reading habit outside the classroom” (Course instructor, Interview).

Finally, the two groups also drew attention to the importance of synthesizing information from different sources for a writing task. Searching for different topics and synthesizing information were identified as the two fundamental components to help the students become better writers as stated below:

“Students should be taught how to search for different topics and be able to synthesize what they read. I believe, this will help them develop their critical thinking skills” (Course instructor, Interview).

The Findings related to the Goals, Objectives, Materials and the Language Teaching Approach of the Language Preparatory Program

In an attempt to specify the goals, objectives, materials and the language teaching approach of the Language Preparatory Program were identified according to the findings obtained through the needs analysis questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. In other words, the nature of the program was based upon the perceptions of the student teachers' language needs.

According to the obtained results, the major goal of the program was to introduce the student teachers to the strategies related to the four language skills. Specifically, the program comprised twenty-eight hours of instruction weekly: six hours for each of the four skills (24) and four hours of grammar (4). By the end of the program, the student teachers were expected to reach the competence to use English in oral and written form both accurately and fluently.

The program was based on Social Constructivist Approach which was taken as an approach to teaching and learning upon the decision of the Ministry of Education in 2006 to be adopted in schools. Since most of the student teachers work in these schools after graduation it was decided that the program should be designed within this framework to familiarize the student teachers with this approach. Therefore, the theoretical underpinning of the instructional approach was Social Constructivism which emphasizes the dynamic nature of the interplay between teachers, learners and tasks. Learning takes place in the process of interactions with others. The learners are actively involved in the learning process whereas the teachers are scaffolders who guide them during their learning. Language is learned through meaningful interaction between the learner(s), the teacher, the task and the context (Vygotsky, 1978).

Based on the discussions above, the present study employed an integrated syllabus design to meet the perceived language needs of the student teachers and help them reach the expected level of proficiency in English. To fulfill these goals, a skills-based and a structural syllabi were developed which aimed to promote both receptive and productive skills by mastering and internalizing the grammatical rules, stimulating interactive language use and encouraging personal involvement during the learning process. The syllabi were designed for three different proficiency levels namely, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced.

To begin with, the reading syllabus aimed to introduce the student teachers' to the reading strategies such as, identifying the main idea, recognizing the patterns of organization, searching for simple information, guessing the meaning of an unknown word from context and predicting the content of a text and give them the opportunity to use them in tasks suitable for their proficiency level. For instance, while the student teachers at the intermediate level were asked to identify the main idea or predict the content of a short paragraph or a conversation, the upper-intermediate and the advanced student teachers were asked to use these two strategies in longer and more complex reading passages.

Besides, the student teachers at all three proficiency levels were given some course handouts, computer-presented texts and articles related to the key concepts of English Language Teaching (ELT) which provided them with some background knowledge related to teaching. Finally, the student teachers were expected to do extensive reading followed by the assignment of writing a book report based on specific guidelines which aided them to develop their reading ability and vocabulary knowledge, and also help them gain a reading habit outside the class.

Parallel to the reading syllabus, the major goal of the writing syllabus was to raise the awareness of the student teachers on using the writing strategies as, expressing and organizing ideas in a paragraphs or an essay effectively. After being familiarized with the basic structures in paragraphs and essays namely, the topic sentence, supporting sentences and the concluding sentence, the student teachers received guidance on strategy use according to their level of proficiency. First, the previewing techniques namely, brainstorming, clustering and free writing were introduced to the three groups of student teachers. Then, they were introduced to the essay structure comprising the introductory, body and concluding paragraphs emphasizing the use of linking words to provide transitions among paragraphs. This training was based on the student teachers' level of proficiency. For example, while the intermediate and the upper-intermediate student teachers learned how to express and organize their ideas in compare/contrast and process essays, the student teachers at the advanced level were engaged in more academic essay types as, argumentative or cause/effect. Writing a reaction paper on articles related to the key concepts in ELT such as fluency, accuracy, peer feedback was another component included in the syllabus. The aim was to increase the student teachers' background knowledge on the key concepts in teaching and also, help them develop their critical thinking skills.

Moreover, the listening syllabus was designed to familiarize the student teachers with the strategies they could use in three sections namely, pre-, while and post-listening. As in the previous two syllabi, the student teachers were engaged in tasks suitable for their proficiency level. To begin with, before listening to the lecture, all three groups tried to predict the content of the lecture by looking at the title or pictures. As for the while listening section, the intermediate student teachers were asked to listen for specific information (e.g. main idea) and circle the correct answer whereas the upper-intermediate and the advanced student teachers had to identify the details of a lecture by answering open-ended questions. Finally, after listening to the lecture, the lowest group briefly summarized the lecture, the middle group thought critically on the given topic by exchanging ideas with other peers, and the highest group discussed the information provided in the lecture by comparing it from other resources such as, magazines or the internet. In addition, the student teachers had to prepare a class presentation on a given topic. This was thought to provide them with some

background knowledge on various topics, and also helped them to become effective listeners as well as speakers.

Finally, in the speaking syllabus, the fundamental stages of speech preparation and delivery including the integration and development of audio and visual aids were emphasized. At the beginning of the course, the student teachers were engaged in warm up activities like, listening to a short lecture or video and then, were asked to exchange their ideas briefly with the other peers. The student teachers were also provided with tasks according to their level of proficiency. Specifically, the intermediate group was asked to prepare a short talk on the given subject (e.g. at the supermarket) after being introduced to the features of opening and closing a conversation. As for the upper-intermediate student teachers, they were provided with a model discussion (e.g. a short conversation or video) stressing the importance on the organization of ideas. Then, they had to think of possible solutions to the given problem like, AIDS or obesity, and discuss it in the class. Finally, the advanced group was involved in more academic tasks like, debates or role plays after being introduced to the three stages of preparing, modeling and eliciting, and practicing and reviewing (Richards, 2001). In this way, they were provided with the opportunity to use the language in authentic and meaningful contexts.

Apart from the skills-based syllabus, a structural syllabus was designed for the Language Preparatory Program to enhance the student teachers' grammatical knowledge and give them the opportunity to practice the grammatical structures in different contexts. Since these student teachers graduated from language sections of high schools, it was assumed that they already had grammatical knowledge. Based on this assumption, only four hours were dedicated to grammar teaching during which the student teachers were involved in controlled activities appropriate for the three proficiency levels.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings considering this the study are in accord with the previous research which shed light on the fact that identifying the language needs of the students is the primary step to be taken before designing a preparatory program (Daylan, 2001; Örs, 2006; Tavi, 2006, Yılmaz, 2009; Akyel and Özek, 2010). All these studies provided evidence for the importance of identifying the students' language needs, specifying the goals and objectives, deciding on the language teaching approach, and adopting, developing and adapting materials of a program. However, while the focus of the previous studies was generally on the end of the program evaluation, the present study integrated process evaluation during the implementation of the program through continuous semi-structured interviews to investigate the ongoing needs of the instructors and students. The end of the product evaluation which was conducted at the end of the program will be discussed elsewhere for the effectiveness for learning and teaching context.

The present study has both practical and empirical implications for program design. According to the data obtained through the needs analysis questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the nature of the Language Preparatory Program should be based upon the student teachers' perceived language needs which served as a main guide to identify the goals and objectives, to adopt, develop and adapt materials, and to decide on the language teaching approach. To fulfill this aim, training programs should be included for preservice teachers to raise their awareness about the important steps of program design and evaluation. Full collaboration is needed between the program developers, the course instructors and the student teachers throughout this process in order to attain success in the program. In this sense, the results of this study can be taken for granted while designing language preparatory programs in different EFL/ESL contexts.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several suggestions for further research.

- The perceptions of student teachers' language needs might vary across tasks and contexts. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the present study in different preparatory programs to see the differences between the perceptions of the student teachers' language needs across Turkey and other countries.
- Student teachers' different types of needs such as, communicative, situation, objective and subjective needs which would provide insights into the design and evaluation of a program for different groups of learners should be investigated.

REFERENCES

- Akyel, A., & Özek, Y. (2010). A language needs analysis research at an English medium university in Turkey, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 969-975.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Ally & Bacon: Needham Heights, MA.
- Brown, J. D.(1995). *The elements of language curriculum*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
- Brown, J. D., & Rodgers, T. S. (2002). *Doing second language research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chan, V. (2001). Determining students' language needs in a tertiary setting. *English Teaching Forum July*, 16-27.
- Chia, H., Johnson, R., Chian, H., & Olive, F. (1999). English for college students in Taiwan: A study of perceptions of English needs in a medical context.

- English for Specific Purposes*, 18(2), 107-119.
- Çelik, S. (2003). *An investigation into students' academic and occupational English needs at Office Management and Secretarial Studies Departments of Nigde University's Vocational Colleges*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Bilkent University.
- Daylan, S. (2001). *A syllabus design for the basic English classes in the preparatory program at Abant İzzet Baysal University*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Abant İzzet Baysal University.
- Dubin, F., & Olshtain, E. (1986). *Course design: Developing programs and materials for language learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ekici, N. (2003). *A needs assessment study on English language needs of the tour guidance students of Faculty of Applied Sciences at Başkent University: A Case Study*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Middle East Technical University.
- Gliem, J. A. & Gliem, R. R. (2003). *Calculating, Interpreting, and Reporting Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Likert-Type Scales*. Presented at the Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education, The Ohio State University.
- Graves, K. (1996). A framework of course development processes. In K. Graves (Ed.), *Teachers as course developers* (pp. 12-38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Küçük, O. (2008). *An evaluation of English language teaching program at key stage I and the opinions of teachers regarding the program*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University.
- Lynch, B. K. (1996). *Language program evaluation. Theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mutlu, Ö. (2004). *A needs analysis study for the English-Turkish translation course offered to management students of the faculty of economic and administrative sciences at Başkent University: A case study*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Middle East Technical University.
- Örs, M. (2006). *An analysis of the preparatory students' attitudes towards the appropriateness of the preparatory school program at the University of Gaziantep*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Gaziantep.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stein, M., Carnine, D., & Dixon, R. (1998). Direct instruction: integrating curriculum design and effective teaching practice. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 33(4), 227-233.
- Tavil, Z. M. (2006). The reading needs of the students' at Hacettepe University English Preparatory School. *Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 26(3), 207-211.

- Yılmaz, F. (2009). English language needs analysis of university students at a voluntary program. *Sosyal Bilimler Araştırma Dergisi, 1*, 148-166.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Application of case study research*. Sage Publication.