

AN EVALUATION OF A UNIVERSITY-BASED  
INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM:  
INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM:  
INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Yusuf Cengiz, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

### An Evaluation of a University-Based Intensive English Program: Insights of Students and Teachers

This study evaluates a preparatory program in a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. Program weaknesses, strengths and points for improvement were uncovered through student and teacher interviews and focus groups. The data was coded, and emergent themes were analyzed and interpreted. The study revealed that students and teachers hold different opinions about the implementation and pace of the program. As this issue affects the perspectives and the motivations of the program, an extensive outcome evaluation is needed to justify and validate the implementation of the program. The data revealed that the high teacher quality, foreign instructors, content classes and portfolio tasks are the strengths of the program, along with the program's contribution to students' general language skills. The data also showed that a mismatch between the curriculum and the proficiency exam create an important caveat for the program; this was identified as the most important weakness. Additional weaknesses included the textbooks, the program's unresponsiveness to plagiarized assignments, teachers' being non-proficient in content areas, and physical constraints that prevent the successful implementation of content classes. Finally, areas for improvement are suggested: introducing proficiency-related classes towards the end of the term, cooperating with academic departments to introduce students to the academic world and its language, and conducting a material evaluation to find the best textbooks for specific context.

## ÖZET

Üniversite Bazlı Yoğun İngilizce Programının Bir Değerlendirmesi:

Öğrencilerden ve Öğretmenlerden Görüşler

Bu çalışma, İstanbul, Türkiye’de bir vakıf üniversitesinde uygulanan İngilizce hazırlık programını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu değerlendirme çalışması, programın işlenişi, zayıflıkları, güçlü yanları ve geliştirilebilir yanlarını, öğrenci mülakatları, odak grup çalışmaları ve öğretim elemanı mülakatları üzerinden ortaya çıkarılması planlandı. Elde edilen nitel veriler kodlanmış, temalara ayrılmış ve incelenmiştir. Öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerin programın uygulanışı üzerine farklı fikirlere sahip olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu ikilem programın uygulanmasında ve algılanmasında önemli etkiler oluşturduğundan, bir sonuç analizi yapılarak, programın uygulanışının doğrulanması gerekmektedir. Öğretmenlerin kalitesi, yabancı öğretmenlerin varlığı, içerik odaklı dersler ve portfolyo çalışmaları programın güçlü yanlarını yansıtmaktadır. Analizler, aynı zamanda, programın içeriğinin ve dönem sonu yapılacak olan İngilizce yeterlilik sınavının gereklilikleri arasındaki farkların programın önemli bir zayıf noktası olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Programda kullanılan ders kitaplarının, programın intihal içeren ödevlere tepkisiz kalmasının, içerik odaklı derslerin her bölüm için sunulmasını engelleyen fiziksel eksikliklerin programın zayıf yanları arasında olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Son olarak da programda geliştirilebilir yanlar ortaya konmuştur. Bunlar arasında yeterlilik sınavı odaklı derslerin dönem sonuna doğru programa dahil edilmesi, öğrencilerin gelecekte dahil olacakları akademik programlar ile iş birliği yaparak, öğrencileri akademik dünyaya ve orada kullanılan dile hazırlanması ve materyal değerlendirme çalışmaları yapılarak bağlama en uygun ders kitaplarının belirlenmesi yer almaktadır.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Using English language as the medium of instruction has been hosting various debates and discussions for many years in Turkish higher education institutions. Around 20% of all the universities in Turkey offer a version of English medium instruction (EMI) (Arik & Arik, 2014). As EMI holds a significant share in higher education context, providing a satisfactory English education in the preparatory schools has attracted a lot of attention. Although these preparatory schools in EMI universities share a common goal of helping students gain a good command of English language, their methodologies and policies vary greatly. One of the latest methodologies is implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) into the program of these preparatory schools. These new implementations provide a fruitful area for program evaluation which assesses the effectiveness, and/or success of a program by using the evaluations of the students. It also allows policy makers to look at whether the program follows the desired path (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2004).

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Preparatory schools have always been placed into a point of attention by many stakeholders. Their aforementioned share in Turkey's higher education context has created an important area of study within the program evaluation conjecture.

Students are one of the most prominent stakeholders in this context. As Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005) suggest the perspectives of the students are “key drivers of policy and practice” (p. 161), which makes it crucial to understand the ways in which

their ideas are constructed. Thus, their perspectives have been utilized in order to provide an evaluation of a language program. While some of the studied focused on the analysis of the needs of the students in the program (Akyel & Ozek, 2010), some other studies focused on the evaluation of teachers through students' perspectives (Arıkan, Taşer & Saraç-Sürer, 2008). Although there are also other studies that focus on the perspectives of the students towards the preparatory year program (Karakaş, 2016), these studies mostly investigate the opinions of the students towards the discussion of ownership of the language and the native speaker fallacy.

There are studies, however, that focuses on the evaluation of the quality of the program through student evaluations. In an international frame, we can find various studies, in which the feedback from the students are collected for program evaluation (Rasmden, 1979; Marsh & Roche, 1997; Marsh & Dunkin, 1997; Kiely, 2000; Lizzia, Wilson & Simmons, 2002; Marsh, Rowe & Martin, 2002; Marsh, 2007; Ginns et al., 2009). Similar studies can be found in the recent English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literature in Turkey as well (Karakaş & Fer, 2009; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010). Coşkun (2013), for example states that the recent program evaluation studies in Turkey reveal that the programs fail to meet the expectations and needs of the students. These program evaluation studies approached the concept from the perspectives of students and provided insights about the quality of the program.

All of these studies firstly point out the importance of program evaluation. The data that can be obtained from such evaluation can be used to strengthen or re-construct the program at stake. In this sense, perspectives of the students provide valuable insight into the evaluated program. The program needs to be kept up to date by using the responses from its stakeholders. As Celen (2016) states, when a program

fails to accomplish that, it “might indeed be running the risk of maintaining the status quo” (p. 2).

The preparatory school program that is evaluated in this study is in its “starting point”. It is accepting students for the first time, which makes its evaluation crucial. Students’ ideas and feedback are needed to be taken into account in order to support the strengths of the program, as well as to identify the weaknesses. In this way, the stakeholders and policymakers can find the adequate time to implement the changes to the program.

On the other hand, as Seferoğlu (2006) suggests, the program cannot be evaluated only from the perspectives of the students, thus other stakeholders should also be included in the evaluation process in order to get a “fuller picture” (p.378). Consequently, it is necessary to triangulate the data that is obtained from the student evaluations through other data collection methods; such as teacher interviews, classroom observations or material evaluations. There is also a need for a qualitative approach to gain a deeper insight into the student experiences for the program evaluation.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

This study aims to evaluate the English preparatory school program offered in a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. This program evaluation is carried out via focusing on the experiences and evaluations of the students enrolled in the program and triangulating these data through necessary interviews with the teachers, classroom observations and document analysis. The study intends to provide a program evaluation to identify:

- the effectiveness of the program through student experiences and evaluations
- the strengths and weaknesses of the program
- possible improvements and solutions to the problems

### 1.3 Significance of the study

The preparatory school is a vital phase in an EMI education context. It is the last step in which the student receives a comprehensive English instruction before proceeding towards the academic studies in English. Generally, these schools are expected to develop students all academic-related English skills, such as reading and writing. Meeting these demands becomes more challenging when the majority of the students enrolled in the program have a low proficiency of English language. The preparatory school is faced with the task of preparing a program that would meet those demands in two academic semesters.

This important responsibility makes it necessary to evaluate the programs of these preparatory schools. Sullivan (2006) states that program evaluation is an “Achille’s Heel” in foreign language education context, as the issues and the problems that are experiences in a program are usually unnoticed and overlooked. He proposes that there is even resistance towards exploring these kinds of problems and issues. Thus, this study aims to focus on the experiences in this particular preparatory school, so that while the strong sides of the program are identified, the weaknesses of the program are also revealed in order to improve the program. This proposition is parallel with Kiely’s (2009) definition of “program evaluation”, which is:

... a form of enquiry which describes the achievements of a given programme, provides explanations for these, and sets out ways in which further development might be realized. (p. 664)

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Program evaluation: its definition, purposes and uses

In order to provide a definition for the term “program evaluation”, we first need to define the concept that is evaluated; “the program”. An early definition of a “program” has been proposed by Cronbach et al. (1980), who described a program as a “standing arrangement that provides for... a service” (p. 14). Rutman and Mowbray (1983) proposes that a program is a group of activities or an intervention that is designed to meet certain external objectives. Later on, a program has been defined as a planned process that is offered within a specifically allocated time by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). The latest definition of “program” by the Joint Committee (2010) provides a wider perspective, by describes a program is “as the systematic application of resources guided by logic, beliefs, and assumptions identifying human needs and factors related to them” (p. xxiv). In a more complete definition, a program is

- a set of planned systematic activities
- using managed resources
- to achieve specified goals
- related to specific needs
- of specific, identified, participating human individuals or groups
- in specific contexts
- resulting in documentable outputs, outcomes, and impacts

- following assumed (explicit or implicit) systems of beliefs (diagnostic, causal, intervention, and implementation theories about how the program works)
- with specific, investigable costs and benefits (Joint Committee, 2010, p. xxiv).

A quick summary of this definition has been proposed by Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) who states that a program is:

... an ongoing, planned intervention that seeks to achieve some particular outcome(s), in response to some perceived educational, social, or commercial problem. It typically includes a complex of people, organization, management, and resources to deliver the intervention or services. (p.8)

This definition provides a solid understanding of what a program is. Programs are implemented to fulfill certain objectives in a specific area, which is language education in this specific study. Programs are composed of people and/or organizations. These individuals or groups are called “stakeholders”. Weiss (1986) puts forward two classes of stakeholders. The first one includes the group that is affected by the program, which can be instructors or students. The second group comprises of people who are decision-makers and policymakers. Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005) also propose similar categories. They propose two groups of stakeholders; “immediate stakeholders”, who are directly involved in the program, such as teachers or students and “remote stakeholders”, who make decisions about the program or supervise its implementation, such as administrators. Stakeholders are the key components of program and its evaluation. Stakeholders are routinely involved in evaluation, as they play a role in the future direction of the program, “even though they are sometimes unaware of their stake” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004, p.

9). Professional evaluation standards put forward that in order to make sure that the results of an evaluation will be used, these stakeholders must be included within the study. (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015)

Programs are subject to evaluation inquiry when they are put into action. At its core, the purpose of these evaluations is to make judgements about the program that is being evaluated. We can find a similar definition in the earliest times of formal evaluation, when Scriven (1967) claimed that the sole purpose of an evaluation is to find out the value and the quality of the concept that is being evaluated. Later, he moved on to claim that judging the merit and the worth of an object is the main purpose behind evaluation (Scriven, 1996).

There are also other purposes of program evaluation that are emphasized throughout the literature. These purposes demonstrate the many facets and uses that program evaluation can bring. Talmage (1982) argues that a vital purpose of evaluation is to help policymakers during their decision making and policy making processes. These decisions can help stakeholders decide whether to start a new program or change the structures of programs. As well as helping these remote stakeholders, evaluations are also aimed to help immediate stakeholders, such as teachers, students and parents to make decisions.

When it comes to today, the purpose of evaluation has shifted towards “program improvement”. Patton (2005) perceives evaluation as a tool to help organizations with their current progress and its adaptation. Others also argued that the purpose of evaluation is to improve general performance of the program via introducing new ways of thinking (Preskill, 2008; Preskill & Torres, 2000; Baker & Bruner, 2006). Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey (2015) argue that the participants of an



evaluation can greatly make use of the principles governing the program evaluation and use those principles in solving future problems.

Some recent discussions also pointed out that through program evaluation, certain groups of people who are not given a voice in policy making process can gain a power. This more democratic purpose argues that through program evaluation, less powerful stakeholders can have a chance to initiate a dialogue with more powerful stakeholders. One of the reasons why this study aims to hear the voices of students during the evaluation process is to make sure that they are given a voice, which would allow them to participate in the program that they have been subject to.

Lastly, we can say that an important function of evaluation is extending the knowledge we have (Donaldson, 2007; Mark, et al., 2000). Program evaluations create a space to examine whether the premises of certain principles and theories can be hold accurate in new settings with new groups of stakeholders. As we have stated earlier, programs are based upon certain scientific theories and principles. Through program evaluation, we can have a chance to test these theories and principles (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015).

All in all, program evaluation can serve various functions. The key purpose is to decide on the worth and the merit of a program. However, program evaluation still offers many other functions; such as improving the existing program, helping stakeholders make decisions, giving voice to many other participants and adding to the existing body of knowledge by creating a chance to see whether a theory works in a certain setting. Thus, it can be claimed that a program inclusively carries a need for an evaluation. In order to start a useful process, an evaluator must identify the objectives of the program and the ways that the program tries to achieve these

objectives (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). To this end, logic model has been utilized in program evaluation studies, details of which are discussed below.

## 2.2 Using logic model

Planning program evaluations start with identifying the components of the program. An effective way of identifying those components and the processes within a program is using logic models (Royse et al., 2009). Generally represented in a diagram, logic models help evaluators identify the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of a program. A sample logic model is given in Figure 1.

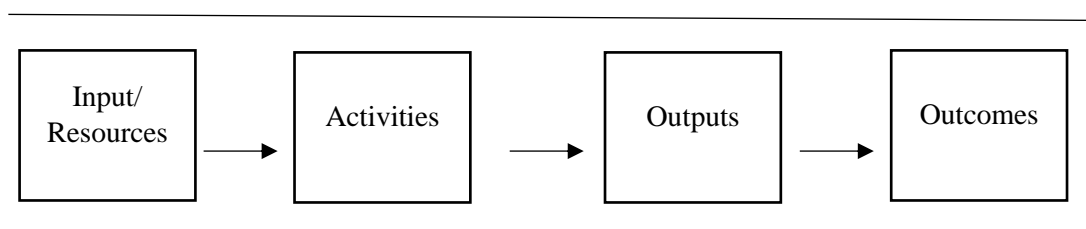


Fig. 1 Logic Model

Source: Royse et al., 2009, p. 109

Newcomer et al. (2015) defines input as resources that are channeled into a program. These can include budgets, staffs, equipment and material. They are incorporated within the program and essential for program to function properly (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) define activities as “essential action steps necessary to produce program outputs” (p. 57). They include classes, curricular and other educational activities that the participants are engaged in throughout the program. Outputs include “countable products that result from the activities” (Royse et al., 2009, p. 109). Reports or works that are generated by the

participants could be taken as outputs. Lastly, outcomes are benefits, changes and accomplishments that the program expects stakeholders to have after being exposed to the program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Royse et al. 2009; Newcomer et al., 2015). Based on the model proposed by the relevant literature, the logic model of the program that is evaluated in this paper is shown in Figure 2:

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Curriculum of the program, language teachers, teaching materials, coursebooks	Weekly classes, in-class activities, book reading sessions, content and language integrated learning classes, use of books and other teaching materials within the classroom	Portfolios of the student works, real-life assignments, book reports written after finishing a book, grades taken after quizzes and exams, bulletins prepared by the students	Academic English language proficiency, improving academic writing and reading skills, improving real-life language skills

Fig. 2 Logic model of the evaluated program

Logic models have been widely utilized by the evaluators today. The models can provide a description of the way the stakeholders believe the program functions. The stakeholders and the evaluators can demonstrate how the program might attain its objectives and which fundamental points are important to evaluate (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). As well as helping conceptualize the main components of a program, logic models also allow evaluators to understand how these components are linked to each other by providing an order of procedures and processes that contribute to the program performance. They provide a framework for analyzing substitute policies and strategies to attain desired outcomes (Royse et al. 2009).

Royse et al. (2009) propose that there is not a single graphical way of constructing a logic model. The model can capture the components of a program by using different shapes and connections. Once it is constructed, however, it succeeds to capture the components of the program as well as the connections between these components. The model that is shown in Figure 1 can be used as a basis in this program evaluation as it captures the logic of the program in a detailed manner. It gives details about the inputs of the program and the ways that these inputs are put into use to produce the desired outcomes.

Cooksy, Gill, and Kelly (2001) suggest that creating a logic model is the first step in developing evaluation questions and data collection strategies, as well as organizing data analysis and guiding the data interpretation process. Completing this first step helps researchers and evaluators start building up the processes and procedures of the evaluation (Frechtling, 2007). Logic models also help the researcher to make a choice between using either a summative or a formative approach for the study. Summative evaluations try to answer general questions, such as “Did the students get better grades?”, “Did the program achieve its goals?”, “Is the instruction getting better?” (Royse et al. 2009). Through summative evaluations, researchers try to measure the outcomes of the program, focusing mostly on quantitative data to do so (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). They are used to prove a program’s worthiness. On the other hand, formative evaluations focus on program development and improvement. Royse et al. (2009) point out that formative evaluations try to understand the ongoing process of the program and whether the program has been implemented as planned. The data can be obtained from the participants of the program through interviews, group discussions or observations. As the aim of this study is to understand the experiences of the students, investigate

the strong and weak side of the program and suggest improvements through these experiences, formative approach will be utilized.

The logic model above will be used as a basis to determine the type of evaluation that is going to be implemented in this study. The study focuses on the experience of the students and attempts to uncover the effectiveness of the program through these experiences. The evaluation tries to uncover the progress of the evaluation as well as the effectiveness of the delivery and proposes certain areas of improvement. Thus, it can be said that this evaluation form follows the “interactive evaluation” form, which is one of the five different evaluation forms, suggested by Owen (2007). Owen states that interactive evaluations place great emphasis on the process of the program by indulging immediate stakeholders. Owen proposes that interactive evaluations try to answer certain questions, such as:

- How is the service progressing?
- Is the delivery working?
- Is it consistent with the program plan?
- How could the delivery be changed so as to make it more effective?
- How could the organization be changed so as to make it more effective?

(Owen, 2007, p.45)

As these questions parallel with the research questions of this study, it can be claimed that the study follows interactive evaluation form. The evaluation tries to answer these questions through investigating the experiences of the students in the program. Another aspect of interactive evaluations is that they are mostly carried out by program implementers. As the evaluator of this study is also responsible for implementing the program, carrying out an interactive evaluation is suitable for this

study. Among the approaches that go in line with interactive evaluation form, *responsive evaluation* and *empowerment evaluation* approaches are going to be utilized to determine evaluative questions, data collection methods and target population for data collection. The former focuses the delivery of the program. It takes the perspectives and the values of the stakeholders to evaluate the delivery process of the program. The latter approach allows participants and providers to evaluate their own programs. This allows those parties to have more control and awareness on their program by giving them “more control over their own lives and their destiny” (Owen, 2007, p.45).

### 2.3 English preparatory programs

Seidlhofer (2005) asserts that English has settled its place as a lingua franca among the speakers of different first languages. This aspect has also found its place within higher education systems around the world (Brumfit, 2004). More and more universities started to use English as the medium of instruction as a result of this global change. Graddol (2006) points out that universities that use English as the medium instruction have successfully attracted a great deal of international students in the recent years.

When it comes to Turkey, the concept of English medium instruction (EMI) is not something new for the country’s higher education context, as the trend has been present in Turkey’s higher education since 1950s. The country has hosted many foreign schools for a long time, and languages such as German, English or French has been used as the medium of instruction in such schools. The trend also continued in high schools, with “special Anatolian lycees” (Bayyurt & Alptekin, 2000, p. 312),

which offered one year of intensive English program before the students started their high school education.

As of 2018, with 129 state owned universities and 77 private universities all around Turkey, EMI has become more and more popular. Although the recent statistics are not available to the public, Arik and Arik (2014) mention that almost 20% of these institutions offer their programs in English. Moreover, Karakaş, (2016) states that private universities are leading this trend of using English as the medium of instruction.

As the movement towards EMI continues, the universities that are offering English medium instruction have started offering English preparatory schools. The students who want to study at English medium universities are enrolled at the preparatory school. They receive around 25 hours of English classes, mainly to master English that will be necessary within the academic sphere. In order to achieve this goal, the program planners in these preparatory schools are applying new approaches and methods; such as including content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or task-based education.

These programs are one of the key factors in implementing EMI effectively. Success of these preparatory schools depends greatly on their programs; thus, the program planners and implementers try different ways to improve the program. Program evaluation can yield useful findings for such an endeavor. One effective way of evaluating the program is using the perspectives and the experiences of students (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). Examples of such studies can be found in the next section.

## 2.4 Program evaluation studies in foreign language education

Program evaluation can establish a complementary function in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The reason why program evaluation is essential in the field of language learning can be attributed to the fact that it provides an opportunity to have an insight into the quality, validity and possible development of the program (Royse et al., 2009). Patton (2008) also asserts that evaluation of language programs enables teachers and other educators to comprehend, advance and safeguard the quality of the delivery of the program. It is also pointed out that such evaluations would provide monitoring for any undesirable and/or detrimental consequences that the stakeholders can face in the program (Norris, Davis, & Timpe-Laughlin, 2017). Evaluations of language programs can be used as a means to ensure the efficacy of educational practices, as well. In this chapter, several of examples of such evaluations will be provided to demonstrate their results and the diverse possible contributions of evaluations to the language programs.

Program evaluation in foreign language education programs has undergone important changes within the last five decades. First studies mostly placed a great emphasis on summative data which comprised of the evaluation of learning outcomes that are demonstrated through scores on standardized language tests (Tyler, 1949). Other researchers conducted evaluation studies through comparing different language teaching methods (Genesee, 1985; Scherer & Wertheimer, 1964; Smith, 1970). These evaluation studies mainly aimed to create an understanding and comparison of the different language teaching theories and the applications, instead of focusing on the other perks of program evaluation; namely improvement of the program or teacher training. This tide was greatly criticized by Beretta (1986) who proposed that these types of evaluation studies, which merely prioritized the



effectiveness of teaching theories by only taking into account the scores on standardized tests, provided a problem for the program as it led to an evaluation through trial/error studies. Beretta also claims that these studies failed to conceptualize the way and how the program functions.

Thus, the concept of program evaluation in foreign language programs started to change. Watanabe, Norris & González-Lloret (2009) claims that during 1980s and 90s, external evaluators started to evaluate the language programs and they mostly focused on providing an expert opinion to suggest improvements and recommendations to language programs. Certain studies were carried out in British colonies to evaluate the language programs, which mostly emphasized the accountability of the language programs (Beretta & Davies, 1985; Coleman, 1992). Studies conducted by Brown (1995) and Mackay et al (1995) stand out in this era as they identified the components of the language programs and conducted an evaluation by incorporating various stakeholders during the process. They used these evaluation studies to help the program staff improve the program after identifying the factors that can affect the language program.

Mackay, Wellesley and Bazergan (1995)'s study provides a profound example of how language program evaluations can be used to improve the program with the help of different stakeholders. They undertook a project in Indonesia in order to raise awareness of the teachers and the administrators of a foreign language program. The evaluation study aimed to provide useful results about (1) the effectiveness of the delivery of the program and (2) areas that can be improved. The study also tried to provide a solid monitoring purpose for the program quality. The crucial point in this evaluation was the involvement of the stakeholders within the evaluation design process as hundreds of teachers and administrators from 25 schools

worked together in various seminars and workshops to create a list of indicators of effective English language delivery. Various factors, ranging from the existing physical space, to available funds of the schools, from classroom activities to the student recruitment methods were brought up to be the indicators of successful language delivery within the programs. The stakeholders also provided a set of performance indicators that provided a basis for scoring of each identified factor. This participation-based model helped researchers create a program model and a rubric to evaluate the identified factors. The foreign language programs within this study were evaluated based on this provided model and the rubric and their effectiveness were justified via the evaluation. Several improvement areas were then suggested by the researchers for each individual program. The study allowed administrators and teachers to get involved in the improvement of the program and provided a ground for them to raise their awareness about the way that a language program was supposed to work, as well as empowering them as decision makers.

The trend in program evaluation studies of foreign language program has shifted towards a more constructivist, pragmatist and utilitarian perspective in recent years. (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). This viewpoint mainly argues that the evaluation studies must ensure that the results will be used by the policymakers in decision making processes (Alderson, 1992). This perspective was also brought into the spotlight by Beretta (1992), who claimed that the findings of an evaluation must be prioritized to justify and improve the language program. To create a “leverage over the language policy” (p. 20), evaluation studies must ensure that the results will be utilized by the stakeholders.

This utilitarian perspective has led to the emergence of “constructivist approach” that aims to “... understand the success (or other outcomes) of innovations

or programs in terms of subjective experience rather than the objective outcomes” (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005, p.40). This approach has its roots in the postmodernist viewpoint, which suggests a distribution of power among the participants of a program. The approach also consists of a qualitative and interpretive paradigm. Kiely & Rea-Dickins (2005) put forward that “the ontological contribution of constructivism is relativism” (p.40). This approach suggests that each individual within the program goes through unique experiences and holds a unique understanding and interpretation of these experiences. According to this approach, the main duty of an evaluation study is to place a focus on these experiences and understand them. Constructivist approach places a great focus on diversity and understanding the various stakeholders, who are directly invested within a program (Greene, 1994).

Constructivist approach, which is also called “Fourth Generation Evaluation” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), is composed of two stages: discovery and assimilation. In the former, experiences of the stakeholders and program attendants are taken into consideration. In the assimilation phase, the researcher tries to relate experiences together to form constructs. The constructs that are drawn at the end of this process are utilized to propose suggestions, improvements and modifications to the program. Constructivist approach can contribute to the evaluation process in two different ways. It can bring narrative accounts and biographies into the spotlight (Bell, 2002; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), as well as placing a great emphasis on understanding how the program is implemented and the factors that shape the implementation of the program (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005).

Studies by Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005), Norris (2006, 2008) build upon this perspective. These studies concluded that program evaluation in language programs

is not a “tool or test that is imposed from outside of the language education context nor that is adopted from another language education context” (Norris, 2009, p.9)

These studies paved a way for the idea that evaluation must be situated within the specific language education context of the program to maximize the usability of the results that are obtained from the studies. Many context specific studies have been conducted to provide localized improvements to language education programs.

Various types of evidence have been used; such as interviews, open-ended surveys, classroom observations and more, to ensure that the evaluation study succeeds to consider more than the outcomes or the products of a language program in its evaluative process (Norris, 2009). To this end, such data collection methods have been utilized in order to obtain the perspectives, opinions and the experiences of the stakeholders. This study tries to place an emphasis on the students in order to evaluate the components of the program, thus focusing on their experiences can yield profound results in this endeavor.

Evaluation of the students’ experiences has a chief ground in higher education. Among its various aims, getting analytic feedback to improve the efficiency of the program, and providing data to reach an administrative verdict on the program are the most prominent reasons behind the evaluation of students’ perspectives (Marsh, 1987). It can reveal (a) the quality of the implementation of the program, (b) the students’ feedback on the suitability of the program for their needs, (c) the students’ perspectives on what skill they need to learn based on their experiences and lastly (d) the level of encouragement of students to learn the language outside of the classroom (Kiely, 2000). Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005, p.161) also argue that investigating the views of the students as “service users or clients” are the main components of today’s constantly developing educational

contexts. Altbach et al. (2009) suggest that students constitute the most fundamental stakeholder group within the context of higher education. They propose that significant changes have come about within the sphere of student population in the world, namely within the scope of demographics, needs, wants and the expectations of the students. Many institutions around the world have been affected by these shifts, that “have changed-and continue to change-the size, shape, and very nature of higher education” (p.97). As a result, many evaluation studies have been conducted in order to understand the experiences of the students within the program and evaluate the components of the program through their experiences.

In one such study, Kiely (2000) made use of interviews and group discussion techniques to evaluate an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program in the United Kingdom. Kiely looked into the experiences of the students. By conducting several interviews and one focus group study, Kiely tries to understand the experiences of the students and teachers and uses these experiences to validate the accountability of the program, as well as suggesting points that can be used to improve the program. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, involved more than 20 students, and integrated teachers and stakeholders as well. Firstly, the students attended a small group discussion for the mid-course evaluation, then they were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the course. During this process, students were expected to discuss and list the things that helped them and the things that did not work via group discussions. Data obtained from 20 students who participated to the evaluation process shows that the students were in conflict with the teaching strategies used by the teachers in certain topics; such as vocabulary teaching. The students defended their stakes on the components of a good program, rejecting certain justifications for the strategies of

the teachers. However, the students also provided positive comments regarding the efforts of the teachers in helping them attain to certain linguistic abilities; such as pronunciation. Kiely also reports that the evaluation process provided the students with a chance to articulate their expectations and their feedback about the program. The study yielded a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between evaluation and teaching, learning and curriculum in that quality management could be assessed in an objective way. Also, students were integrated into decision-making processes with the help of their reflections and suggestions, which indicates that both accountability and development purposes of the study were achieved. Another substantial aspect of the study was that it resulted in some instructional changes in the way the teachers instruct vocabulary and integrate the students to the lessons.

Another example of consulting to student's and teacher's experiences can be found in Williams' (2007) study. The researcher evaluated the efficiency of an extensive English reading program in Malawi public schools. The program was an innovative one and the need for a formative evaluation arose when the assessments of the reading scores, which had been planned to be improved with the extensive reading program, showed no beneficial effect of the program. Williams collected additional data from the stakeholders; such as teachers and students to understand the real implementation of the program. The data included several interviews, classroom observations and feedback from the students and the teachers. The results revealed a set of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that prevented a successful implementation of the program. The former included factors, such as low teacher morale and the decrease in the students' academic levels compared to previous years. The latter included inadequacy in providing teacher training for the program. Williams' evaluation of the

program presents a good showcase of exploring the reasons behind the failure of the program through the experiences and opinions of the stakeholders.

Program evaluations have also been used to make specific improvements to the programs. In such a study, Yang (2009) investigates the teachers' perception towards their own English program and their teaching practices. The factor that kickstarted the process of this program evaluation study was when the teachers' faced problems as they started to teach in the program. The teachers perceived their induction processes into the culture of the context as insufficient and complained about a lack of understanding about the expectations of the program. As a result, the teachers indicated a sense of unpreparedness for many tasks that are related to the teaching in the classroom. In order to understand the problems in a clearer way and to offer possible solutions, Yang, who was also one of the teachers in the program, conducted a formative evaluation study by indulging various stakeholders. Yang worked with the administrators during the design and implementation processes of the program evaluation. This allowed the study to have a prominent and a quick impact over the program. The program planners and Yang first came up with a list of expected outcomes of the inductions stage. Later, interviews with the new teachers and experienced teachers were conducted to communicate the expectations of the program and understand whether the program's activities met those expectations for those teachers. During the interviews, the teachers also proposed certain ways of improving the preparedness of the teachers for classroom practices. The findings of the evaluation study were reported to the administrators and imminent precautions were taken to solve the problems. The administrators and the teachers also suggested that the whole evaluation process raised their awareness towards the essence of the program. Yang's internal evaluation study presents a profound case of how teacher-

led evaluations can create immediate effects on the design and delivery of the program.

Such internal evaluations can also yield beneficial results when the policy makers aim to introduce a new, innovative program. An example of this can be found in McDonough and Chaikitmongkol's (2007) study. They evaluated a newly introduced English language education program that included task-based instruction and focus-on-form pedagogy by using a formative evaluation. Student and teacher interviews, classroom observations and field notes were included to understand how the innovative program was being implemented and delivered. The learners pointed out that the new program contributed to their language learning process in many ways. They pointed out that, with the help of the new program, they were better at developing their integrated language skills. The students also stated that they were able to develop their own language learning strategies, as the program created a space for them to take responsibilities for their own learning processes. The findings also indicated that, with the help of the program, the students got rid of their "fixation" on the grammar rules and they started to give value to the real-life environment that the program has been trying to create. Teachers and students also provided their opinions about the downsides of the program, by stating that the program had been designed to be too ambitious, as both the teachers and the students indicated that the amount of time that is provided to complete certain tasks were not enough. The students also demanded teachers to offer more help while they were carrying out a task. The policy makers later used these results to make adjustments to the program, as well as conducting workshop studies to provide additional guide for the teachers in the program. This important study shows us how effective students' feedback can be used to evaluate a certain program, and ultimately improve it for a



better implementation. Through this study, the researchers were able to obtain profound data on (1) how the program was delivered to the students, (2) what the strong and weak sides of the program were and (3) what can be done to provide possible improvements.

As mentioned in the studies above, making use of the perspective and the experiences of the students to evaluate the on-going program can yield useful results in program improvement. Timing of such evaluations could be spread along the program. In order to diagnose the problems regarding the delivery of the program, evaluation studies are conducted during the implementation of the program. In such a study, McGowan (2009) evaluated an English education program in a higher education setting by using the experiences of students. The study was carried out during the implementation of the program and the students pointed out the weaknesses of the program from the perspective of the instructions of the teachers. The results of the study were then used to improve the instructional quality within the program. The survey that was conducted at the end of the program revealed an improvement of the teachers' instructional quality from the perspective of the students. The evaluation also helped students to reflect on their own language learning process and at the end of the program, the students reported an increase in their own learning strategies and performances. Wickramasinghe and Timpson (2006) identified the ineffective components based on the students' feedback in a foreign language education program. The study was carried out during the implementation of the program and they were utilized to make certain improvements. The interviews that were conducted later with the students revealed that the students' perception of their language learning program turned towards a positive end, as the program was evaluated and re-designed with their feedback. Such evaluations are

also found to be increasing students' awareness towards their programs and teachers, as according to them, it shows that the teachers are committed to their teaching profession and the program is enthusiastic about improvement (Diamond, 2004; Brown, 2008)

There have been many studies that aim to evaluate the preparatory schools in Turkish higher education contexts. Most of these studies have been dominated by a summative evaluation approach, meaning the end results or the effectiveness of the program have been evaluated through questionnaires with many participants (Tekin, 2015). These studies also incorporated certain observations or semi-structured interviews to enhance the comprehensiveness of findings (Arkın, 2010; Yılmaz, 2009; Gurkan & Yuksel, 2012; Yavuz & Topkaya, 2013). These evaluation studies that are carried out within the Turkish context have focused on the programs from different angles. Çetinavcı and Topkaya's (2012) study compared the two different language teaching programs that were implemented within two years interval at a higher education institution. In this two-years long study, the researchers conducted interviews with the students and the instructors within the program. The interviews focused on the participants comparison of the two programs that were implemented sequentially in two years. The researchers also looked at the exam results and the attendance records of the students to justify the comments and feedback provided by the participants. They point out that the students and the teachers favored the program that was implemented in the second year over the program in the first year as the second program offered much more learning opportunities and better outcomes. Akpur, Alcı and Karakaş (2016) made use of questionnaires with over 700 students and 50 teachers to reveal the students' and the teachers' opinions towards their English preparatory program. The study revealed that the students and the

teachers have worries towards their program, as they pointed out that the program conceived to be non-effective in improving their language skills. The participants also identified certain areas where the program was failing to address; such as providing students with a chance to be familiar with the terminology and language of their future academic programs.

Mutlu (2018) conducted a mixed method study to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in a higher education institution. The study used Bellon and Handler's (1982) evaluation model. Through interviews, questionnaires and observations, Mutlu concluded that the program was an effective one. She also pointed out certain discrepancies between the expected program and the applied program, as well as irregularity between the teachers' perception of the features of the courses and the students. Certain suggestions were made in terms of improving classroom activities and assessment type. Using the same model as Mutlu (2018), Erozan (2005) carried out an evaluative study with students and teachers to identify the weaknesses and strengths of a preparatory program. These stakeholders revealed that the program was effective in developing language skills; however, there were still areas of improvement in program implementation.

In her study, in which she investigated the efficacy of a preparatory program at a state university in Turkey, Coşaner (2013) used a large-scale questionnaire, along with interviews with the students and two academic personnel. The researcher aimed to reveal students' needs and the extent to which the program was successful in meeting those needs. The program met those needs only to some extent, as there was a mismatch between the needs of the students and the program. Coşaner also suggested certain improvements and changes to the preparatory school in order to enhance the program. Mede and Uygun (2014) followed a similar pattern to

investigate the needs of the students and whether the program meets those needs. Their questionnaires and interviews revealed that although the program achieved to meet the needs of the students, the students demanded certain improvements and changes to the program in order to get familiar with the language and the conventions of their future academic fields. As the participants were from various proficiency levels, they identified certain teaching strategies that would suit their level. While students with higher language proficiency opted for activities to improve their writing skills, the students with lower levels of language proficiency wanted the program to provide them guidance in vocabulary usage.

Various studies that are mentioned above show that program evaluation has a profound place in foreign language education contexts. These studies have been carried out in unique settings and many different methods and approaches have been utilized to evaluate the program. Weaknesses and strengths of the programs show certain similarities as well as numerous differences. Several suggestions were put forward by the researchers to improve the program in order to make them more effective in implementation. In order to do this, many researchers have worked with students and investigated their experiences and feedback. These experiences and feedback paved a way for these studies to place a focus on the actual implementation of a program and allowed researcher to empower these important stakeholders in decision-making processes. To this end, the current program evaluation study aims to collect the experiences of the students enrolled in a preparatory program and analyze these experiences and perspectives to understand the weaknesses and the strengths of the preparatory program, as well as suggesting certain improvements to it. In the next chapter, the methodology of this study will be presented.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study to evaluate the debuting English preparatory school program offered in a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. This program evaluation is conducted by placing a focus on the experiences and evaluations of the students within the program. The data was collected through a series of interviews and a focus group study with the students. In order to enhance the evaluative data; interviews with the teachers, classroom observations and document analysis were carried out. The study intends to provide a program evaluation via answering the following research questions:

1. How is the implementation of the preparatory program processing according to the experiences of the students?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the preparatory program according to the students?
3. Based on the evaluations and experiences of the students, how can the preparatory program be improved?

#### 3.1 Research context

The preparatory program that is evaluated in this study is implemented at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. The university was established in 2015, and the year in which this study is conducted is when the university board decided to change their medium of instruction from Turkish to English. Although a document analysis of the university's language policy does not reveal the main motives behind this particular

change, the latest literature on language policy and planning suggests that such changes were made in Turkey in the early 2000s, considering the contribution of English language in preparing students to a global market, and helping the modernization of the country (Karakaş, 2017). Various other factors, such as “marketization and internationalization of higher education” (p. 2) are also suggested as main motives behind such language policy changes in Turkey.

Changing the medium of instruction to Turkish required the university to introduce an English Preparatory Program in Spring 2018 term. The preparatory program aims to help students attain a certain language proficiency level and gain language skills to understand and make use of the academic language, as well as allowing the students to utilize the English language in their daily lives at a good extent.

At the beginning of the academic year, the students take an English placement test. Based on the results of the placement test, the students are grouped according to their English levels. The program has five proficiency levels, and these are “beginner level”, “elementary level”, “pre-intermediate level”, “intermediate level”, and lastly “advanced level” groups. The groups consist of the students with the same level of English proficiency, and each group uses different materials from the same printing press throughout the program. Students receive 25 hours of English instruction per week, except for students in the “advanced level” group, who receive 17 hours of instruction due to inadequate number of available classrooms. Within this time, the students use certain materials to improve their English grammar, academic writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. The students also receive content and language integrated classes to improve their familiarity with their future academic fields. These classes are held on Fridays, and the students use specific materials prepared by

the instructors in their content classes. These classes aim to bring together students who are aiming to study the same academic program together and familiarize them with the language of their future academic fields. For example, students who are planning to study in the Pharmacy Department after the preparatory program use content materials that have “Duties of Pharmacists”, “Ethics of Pharmacy” as their themes. One important aspect that should be noted here is that due to the limited number of the classrooms, in some cases, the program sometimes combines students from relevant academic fields together for these content classes. For example, students from the architecture department and civil engineering department are placed within the same classroom, in which they cover content materials that are relevant to each field. Due to the same physical constraints, students with elementary and pre-intermediate levels are placed into a separate classroom than their intermediate and advanced peers. The program aims to combine students with the same levels together to abstain from any difficulties that may arise due to wide differences between the proficiency levels of the students.

On a weekly schedule, the students use the textbook called *Interchange* by Cambridge University Press on every Monday and Thursday. These classes aim to help students focus on and practice certain grammar structures, as well as certain reading and speaking abilities. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the students use another textbook named *Unlock* by Cambridge University Press. These books specifically stress upon reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

Throughout the program, the students are asked to keep a portfolio of the assignments that they have completed. These assignments include some reading or writing activities, and certain tasks given in content classes. The students are also asked to read books in English and turn in book reports within this portfolio. In these

book reports, the students briefly summarize the book and comment on characters and specific events from the storyline. The last component of the portfolio is the weekly checklists. In these checklists, the students indicate the out-of-class activities that they have completed during the week. For example, the students specify extra grammar activities that they have completed throughout the week, or the books that they have read in English.

In order not to fail from their studies due to absenteeism, the students are required to participate in least 80% of all the class hours. Also, two quizzes are given at random times in every six weeks.

The program is designed to last for 28 weeks in one academic year. Every 7<sup>th</sup> week is the exam week. The assessment of the students is a meticulous process. There are many factors involved in this assessment process and all of these factors have different weights in deciding whether the student can successfully complete a level and go on to the next one. These factors and their weights are:

- Attendance and participation (10%)
- Quizzes (10%)
- Portfolios (40%)
- Quarter Exam (20%)
- Content Exam (20%)

Provided that the students have not failed due to absenteeism, the students are admitted to three different exams. In the first exam, which is called “Quarter Exam”, the students are tested on the subjects that they have covered in the past six weeks. The second exam, which is named “Content Exam”, is based on the content subjects that the students have covered in the past six weeks on Fridays. Given the weights



above, if the students' absenteeism, participation, portfolio notes, quiz and exam results are at or above 60%, the students are accepted to the third exam, "Level Achievement Test". This exam aims to assess whether the students have successfully completed their levels. The exam includes reading questions and questions on grammar subjects related to the test-takers level, as well as a writing part where the students are expected to produce a well written essay on the given topic. The students who score 75% or more from the last exam proceed to the next level. At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> weeks, students who have completed at least intermediate level are accepted into the proficiency exam, which determines whether a student can advance into their English medium programs or not. The students who fail the exam on the 14<sup>th</sup> week continue their intensive English program until the exam on the 28<sup>th</sup> week. The program specifies that each student can take the exam up to 6 times. Failing to pass the proficiency exam for the 6<sup>th</sup> time results in the students' dismissal from the program.

The proficiency exam has 3 components; academic writing, reading and listening. The writing component asks the students to compose two well-written essays about the given topics in 80 minutes. In these essays, the students are expected to show that they have a good command of academic writing strategies, academic vocabulary and critical thinking abilities. The second component of the proficiency exam is academic reading, in which the students try to answer questions about the two given texts. The questions are mostly asked in "fill-in-the-blanks" fashion. This assessment component tries to measure the students' academic reading skills, such as skimming, scanning, guessing the meaning from the context or synthesizing the given information. The students are given 40 minutes for each text. The last component of the proficiency exam is academic listening. In this part, the

students listen to two audio recordings. These recordings are about 15 minutes long and the themes revolve around fundamental academic subjects such as “stress management”, “history of printing press” or “climate change”. In the first listening test the students try to answer the given questions during listening. In the second one the students first take notes while listening to the audio and then they are given the questions. The students try to answer the questions by making use of their notes. There is no speaking component of the proficiency exam. The listening and the reading components are allocated 30 points respectively, while the writing component is allocated 40 points. In order to pass the proficiency exam, the student needs to get at least 60 from the exam.

### 3.2 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of students registered to the program and the instructors in the program.

#### 3.2.1 Students

In order to collect data, 15 students were randomly selected among a pool of volunteer students. These students participated in interviews and a focus group study. They were enrolled to the university’s preparatory program. The students aged between 18 and 20. To collect data from all the proficiency levels within the program, three students from each proficiency level were invited to the evaluation study (see Table 1).

Table 1. Proficiency Level that the Students are Enrolled in

Proficiency level	n	%
Beginner	3	20
Elementary	3	20
Pre-intermediate	3	20
Intermediate	3	20
Advanced	3	20

10 of the students were females and five of them were males. Table 2 provides the gender information of the students.

Table 2. Student Gender Information

Gender Information	n	%
Female	10	67
Male	5	33

The students who were enrolled the program came from different educational backgrounds. While 11 of the students were graduates of private K-12 institutions, the remaining four of them were graduates of public K-12 institutions (see Table 3).

Table 3. K-12 Institutions that the Students Graduated from

Institution	n	%
Private	11	73
Public	4	36

Table 4 shows the academic fields that the students would be enrolling to once they have completed the program successfully. As in this English preparatory program the students receive department-related content instruction on Fridays, having a range of various academic fields contributed in collecting a more representative data about this component of the program.

Table 4. Students' Future Academic Programs

Academic Program	n	%
Architecture	2	13,3
Civil Engineering	2	13,3
English Language and Literature	1	6,7
Management Information Systems	2	13,3
Medicine	1	6,7
Molecular Biology and Genetics	2	13,3
New Media	1	6,7
Pharmacy	2	13,3
Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation	1	6,7
Radio, TV, Cinema	1	6,7

### 3.2.2 Teachers

In order to find out whether the data obtained from the students' evaluation of the program are consistent, interviews were carried out with the English instructors within the program. Three instructors were interviewed. The teachers were aged between 25 and 40. They were all graduates of foreign language education departments of various universities. These teachers have been teaching to students of

different proficiency levels, evaluating portfolios and were all required to produce and use the department-related content materials in their language instruction.

### 3.3 Data collection instruments

Program evaluation studies require the researcher to adopt a longitudinal approach to obtain valid and reliable data (Weir & Roberts, 1994; Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Royse et al., 2009). Collecting data via a prolonged process can help the researcher identify more prominent and significant features. In order to achieve this goal, the data was collected at different times. Three interviews were arranged with the students. The first interview was carried out within the first week of the program, while the second one was conducted in the 5<sup>th</sup> week. Another interview was conducted in the 10<sup>th</sup> week of the program. A focus group study with the students was conducted in the 17<sup>th</sup> week, which is three weeks after the students had taken a proficiency exam. Through such a time schedule, the researcher was able to obtain the on-site experiences of the students about the implementation of the program. It was also helpful for the researcher to capture changes of the perspective of the students along the time. Collecting data throughout the program revealed a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the students about the weaknesses and strengths of the program.

A key issue in such a formative evaluation is the issue of threats to objectivity and validity. In order to improve the validity of an evaluation study, the researcher can make use of “triangulation”, which means involving other data sources and data collection methods to the study. If the results from other sources are parallel and consistent with each other, then the researcher “can be more confident that they have validly captured the construct” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004, p.422). Royse et al. (2009)

also emphasize the importance of using multiple methods in data collection to improve the validity of findings. To this end, this study included multiple qualitative data collection methods, interviews and focus group studies with the students, as well as a semi-structured interview with the teachers. Through implementing these data collection methods, the researcher tries to justify and validate the conclusions derived from the analysis of the data. It should also be mentioned that the analysis of the interviews is carried out through finding common patterns and codes within the data, and this process is never free of subjectivity of the researcher (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). That is why it is important to note that the themes and codes that have emerged and the results that have been mentioned reflect the interpretation of the researcher. The themes that are included and excluded are constrained by the verdicts of the researcher about the goals and scope of the study.

### 3.3.1 Interviews with the students

As mentioned above, a series of interviews were conducted with the students in 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> weeks of the program. Each interview lasted for approximately 10 minutes, in total, the duration of the interviews was 323 minutes and 38 seconds. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The first interview focused on the impressions and the expectations of the students from the program. The students also mentioned their language needs, as well as mentioning what should be included within a strong preparatory program. In the second interview, the students commented on the implementation of the program, and whether their expectations have been realized. In the last interview, the students identified strengths and weaknesses of the program as well as proposing certain improvements. During all of

the interviews, students emphasized several of their experiences within the program (See Appendix A for interview questions, and Appendix B for the consent form).

### 3.3.2 Focus group study

Three weeks after the proficiency exam on the 14<sup>th</sup> week, the students were invited to a focus group study. The focus group study lasted for one hour and eight participants discussed the weaknesses and strengths of the program, as well as offering certain improvements. The data collected through Nominal Group Technique (NGT). In this technique, the participants wrote down or articulated their evaluative statements about the program. Their statements were listed, and the researcher created a master list. Each student assigns points and weights to the statements. At the end of the process, the statement with the most points and weights are listed as the most prioritized answers to the questions. Through this process, the participants are able to agree upon the answers of the questions as a whole (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005).

The product at the end of the NGT represents a “list of actions for the improvement of the program” (p. 168). Kiely and Rea-Dickins suggest that the transparent process of NGT contributes to the validity of the study. Also, McPhail (2001) puts forward that NGT is a valid process in capturing the perspectives of the students as NGT is “unobtrusive and honest with the subjects, involves the participants in all parts of the process, and the researcher is present throughout the whole NGT procedure” (p.168). Appendix C presents the form and the questions used in the NGT process. The questions that are asked in NGT process focused on the weaknesses and strengths of the program, as well as possible improvements that can be done. The statements of students were collected, and the students assigned a weight to each statement.

For this study, NGT is used to:

- allow participants work together to provide their opinions about the program
- help participants justify their experiences and perspectives of the program in with other participants
- to raise awareness of the participants about the language program
- to help participants explore their answers with other participants
- to create a safe environment for participants to discuss the program.

### 3.3.3 Teacher interviews

In order to improve reliability and validity of the data that is collected through the interviews and focus group study, a series of interviews with the teachers in the program were conducted. A total of three interviews were conducted with the teachers. Within the interviews, the teachers were asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program, as well as commenting on the themes that are raised by the students in the same topic. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Appendix D presents the interview protocol used during the interviews, while Appendix E shows the consent form signed by the participant teachers. All the interview protocols were approved by the Boğaziçi University the Ethics Committee for Master and PhD Theses in Social Sciences and Humanities (SOBETİK). An ethical approval form can be found in Appendix F. The following table presents the research questions and the methods that are used to collect data. It also presents the ways in which the data is analyzed.



Table 5. Research Questions, Data Collection Methods and Data Analysis Methods

Research Questions	Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Methods
How is the implementation of the preparatory program processing according to the experiences of the students?	Interviews with the students, Focus group study	Qualitative analysis of the interview transcriptions and items from the focus group study
What are the strengths and weaknesses of the preparatory program according to the students?	Interviews with the students, Focus group study, Interviews with the teachers	Qualitative analysis of the interview transcriptions and items from the focus group study
Based on the evaluations and experiences of the students, how can the preparatory program be improved	Interviews with the students, Focus group study,	Qualitative analysis of the interview transcriptions and items from the focus group study

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Student interviews

The findings section will present qualitative analysis of the data that is obtained from the interviews with the students. This data analysis consists of two subprocesses;

- 1) data reduction and pattern identification
- 2) producing objective analytic conclusions and communicating those conclusions (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015, p.421)

In parallel with the first subprocess, the researcher identifies patterns, categories and themes within the data. Coding, clustering and finding concurrent themes is used to identify the patterns within the data. NVivo 12 software was utilized during the process. Later in Chapter 5, these codes and themes were analyzed to create analytic conclusions.

##### 4.1.1 First student interviews

These interviews focused on the expectations of the students from the program. The interviewees also stated their language needs from the preparatory program. Some emergent topics were identified through the transcription of the interviews.

Regardless of their language levels, one theme that has emerged in those interviews was focus on the speaking ability. The students placed a great emphasis on improving the speaking ability in the interviews, and it has been referenced a lot. The main findings of the first interviews with the students are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of the First Interview Data

Code	n	% of all codes	Example Statement
Expectation – improving speaking ability	12	30.0	My only expectation from the program is improving my speaking ability. I am here, I am starting as Advanced. I want to be more comfortable while speaking. I am not expecting them to teach me grammar. (S6)
Expectation – creating a strong background to learn the language	9	22.5	Starting from a low level is not a problem for me. I think I can improve through the time. I want to have a better background while learning the language. (S15)
Aims to learn the language	7	17.5	I want to improve my language as quickly as possible. I want to finish the program at C1 level. I even want to reach a level which would allow me to go abroad and live there. (S9)
Components of a good program – fun	6	15.0	I think the classes within a program should be fun. This makes the learning process less stressful for us. (S8)
Components of a good program – using the language in a global context	6	15.0	English is global language. You can find English sources about many topics that you are interested in. For example, if I want to study something related to architecture, I can find many online sources in English. (S1)
Total	40	100.0	

Students emphasized that they expected to improve their speaking skills in the program. Examples of this can be found in interviews of many students:

S1: I don't think I will be at C1 level at the end of the program, probably B1. As I will study in English in the department, I want to learn the language to a level that I am good at speaking. I want to understand the professors in subjects such as physics or architecture and I want to be able to talk to them. (S1, Elementary, Architecture)

S2: I want to speak in English throughout the lessons. This will help me learn the language in a better way, because language learning is easier when “we have to use it!”. (S2, Beginner, Radio, TV & Cinema)

S6: My only expectation from the program is improving my speaking ability. I am here, I am starting as Advanced. I want to be more comfortable while speaking. I am not expecting them to teach me grammar. (S6, Advanced, Medicine)

S13: I want to be more fluent in speaking. That is my expectation from the program. I had my first class. When the instructor asked us about our expectations from the class, almost everybody said “speaking”. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems)

Among students with lower levels, a strong emphasis was placed on improving their already existing English proficiency throughout the program. They reported being content with starting the program at a low level, as this will provide them a chance to have a “stronger background” while learning the language:

S7: I don’t have any previous language background. You know, I study English for some time, but I failed to establish a background for the language. I am excited now; I think it will be nice. We will study English every day. (S7, Beginner, New Media)

S1: I started off as Elementary. I studied until Pre-Intermediate level at high school. I trusted my language abilities. Here I started at one level below, which I liked. I think I can have a stronger background for the future. (S1, Elementary, Architecture)

S5: I thought I would start at a higher level. That is not a problem for now, but I am expecting to learn more as the program continues. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture)

S15: Starting from a low level is not a problem for me. I think I can improve through the time. I want to have a better background while learning the language. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering)

S4: I want to brush up my language. I studied English at high school. But while I was preparing for the university exam, my language abilities weakened. I knew that. Now I want to build up on that. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy)

S14: I need to go through this program, as I need to improve my language skills. As I will be reading a lot in my department, I have to improve my reading skills. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature)

When the students were asked about their expected levels at the end of the program, the students listed some skills that can be used to identify their goals in completing this proficiency program. Several issues were raised, ranging from “a level to be enough to live overseas” to “a level that is enough to pass the proficiency exam”.

S9: I want to improve my language as quickly as possible. I want to finish the program at C1 level. I even want to reach a level which would allow me to go abroad and live there. (S9, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics)

S10: I want to learn the academic language, a language that would help me pass the proficiency exam, rather than learning the language that I can learn in any other private English courses. (S10, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics)

S14: I was upset when I didn't pass the proficiency exam. But then I thought “I have to learn the language very well”. I want to improve my English to a level that I can read a lot, because I will study English Language and Literature. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature)

S1: When I finish the program, I want to have a good English proficiency. I want it to be so good that I won't need any kind of private classes or tutoring for improvement. (S1, Elementary, Architecture).

The students were also asked to provide some opinions about the components of a good language program. The students provided certain components. From the

interviews, a general theme that emerged was parallel with the students' opinion of focusing on speaking abilities. Apart from this, the students mostly provided their own personal opinions about the components of a good program. While some of them proposed that a good program should address the area of interests of the students, others provided some suggestions, such as familiarizing students with the language that would be used in the future academic program:

S4: I want to be honest with you. Preparatory programs have a process that is actually mixed with fun. This is important. But I also have some problems with my grammar, so it would be nice to focus on that, too. I also have a friend, who is a second-year student in the Dietetics program. She told me that they are learning English through the content related to their fields. I think a preparatory program should have this. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy)

S8: I think the classes within a program should be fun. This makes the learning process less stressful for us. (S8, Intermediate, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation)

S13: I think a good program should focus on the interests of the students. For example, I will be studying management information systems, and I would like to read texts on politics or economy. Rather than talking about subjects that I am not interested in; I can talk about these subjects. A program should give importance to the areas of interests of the students. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems)

Lastly, the students were asked about their motives behind learning the English language. Apart from the fact that the students would be studying in academic programs that uses English as their medium of instruction, the students also touched upon the importance of the language as a global language. They provided ideas on why it is important to learn the language:

S1: English is global language. You can find English sources about many topics that you are interested in. For example, if I want to study something related to architecture, I can find many online sources in English. (S1, Elementary, Architecture)

S7: I have chosen English purposefully. As we say in Turkish, “One language makes one person; two languages make two people”. I started off the learning process with this thought. I want to use the language in the outside world. (S7, Beginner, New Media)

S14: Language is a communication tool and it is the most important thing between two people. I like communicating with people. That’s why I have chosen this language. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature)

#### 4.1.2 Second and Third Student Interviews

On the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> weeks of the program, a series of interviews were carried out with the same group of students. These interviews aimed to find out about the implementation of the program. Students were asked to evaluate whether their expectation and needs have been met until that time. The students mentioned certain experiences and provided some insight on the real implementation of the program. During the interviews the students were also asked to provide strengths and weaknesses of the program, and they provided certain improvement suggestions. This part of the study provided a large data to analyze.

As the answers to the second and third interviews did not show any great difference among the themes that have emerged, the results of those interviews will be given together. Table 7 and 8 provides the general themes that have appeared in these interviews. Sample statements and the occurrence rate of the themes in the data are also provided in the tables.

Table 7. Summary of the Second and Third Interviews

Code	n	% of all codes	Example Statement
Expectation – met	6	5.9	... and now, my speaking skills, writing skills have improved. I have activated them. (S11)
Expectation – unmet	9	8.83	I think we are going one level behind. Even though I am advanced now, we are still working on intermediate topics. (S5)
Strengths – implementation – portfolios	8	7.85	... the fact that we have to write book reports has contributed a lot to me. (S1)
Strength – implementation – speaking	5	4.9	We used to be shy when it came to speaking despite knowing a lot. We got over this feeling ... (S4)
Weakness – implementation – slow progress	8	7.8	The topics in the syllabus were really progressing slowly... That process was really slow. We want to keep moving forward. (S1)
Strengths – instructors	8	7.8	Foreign teachers helped us improve our speaking skills, and Turkish instructors were always there to help us. (S4)
Weakness – instructors	6	5.9	... but I think the teachers should use less Turkish. (S4)
Strengths – textbooks	5	4.9	<i>Interchange</i> books are good in terms of grammar. (S9)
Weakness – textbooks	10	9.8	I think the books are not adequate in providing enough vocabulary or grammar instruction... (S1)
Strengths – content classes	6	5.9	I didn't have much knowledge about my department. Now, I know what I will learn in the future. (S9)
Weakness – content classes – materials	7	6.87	The way that we conducted those content classes made me think that I had chosen the wrong academic department. (S13)



Table 8. Summary of the Second and Third Interviews (cont.)

Code	n	% of all codes	Example Statement
Weakness – content classes – teachers	3	2.94	The teachers in the content classes had lacking knowledge about content. (S3)
Improvements – faster implementation	6	5.9	For now, we are repeating simple structures. I think the program should go quicker. (S1)
Improvements – getting in touch with the future academic departments	4	3.92	In the university's copy center, there are notes that are used by the students in the pharmacy department. We can conduct our lessons around them. (S4)
Improvements – out of class activities	4	3.92	...my brothers' preparatory teachers take them to certain places around Istanbul and they talk about the history of these places in English. I believe we can do the same here. (S2)
Improvements – classroom practices	7	6.87	Why not more speaking hours? It would be OK for me if we had more hours of English. (S13)
Total	102	100.0	

#### 4.1.2.1 Met and un-met expectations

As stated in the first interviews, students placed a great emphasis on improving their speaking abilities and building up their language proficiency in time. The theme appeared many times within the data. In the second and third interviews, students were asked to refer back to their expectation and whether their expectations have been met within the program. On the one hand, some students pointed out that the program did not address their needs and expectations fully:

S1: I have started the program at Elementary level. I was actually a higher-level student. At first, I was happy with this, but after six weeks, I feel like I am still at the same place as I have started. I believe we haven't improved much. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S2: My brother is studying at another university. He has foreign instructors and although I am better at grammar, he is better at speaking. He speaks English better than me. I know that some of my friends didn't understand the instructor when she spoke in English, but I wish we had used English more in speaking. I think my speaking ability is weak now. I can understand 90% of what is said to me, but I have problems in speaking. (S2, Beginner, Radio, TV & Cinema, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview)

S4: I expected to improve my speaking ability and grammar knowledge. I thought we would first work on grammar structures and build up with some content knowledge. But our classes were based on the textbooks. This was something I didn't like. I know that textbooks are the core of such programs, but the way I see it, I and some of friends have some problems with our grammar. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S5: I think we are going one level behind. Even though I am advanced now, we are still working on intermediate topics. I believe we are lagging behind. I think we should work on some higher-level topics to improve. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview)

S10: I expected that the program will help us study towards the proficiency exam. However, we just covered subject the way it would be in any private language course. Of course, we are learning some tips about academic writing or reading, but I expected it to focus more on the details of academic language. (S10, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S13: I think we were dependent on the textbooks a lot. Listening tracks were unnecessarily long and boring. These components were not effective, and I don't know how much it can help me develop my language skills. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

On the other hand, some students indicated that the program successfully met their needs and expectations. Their insights focused on programs' achievement in providing them with a steady pace to build up their language proficiency and improve their speaking skills. The excerpts given below shows us the experiences and insights of the students on this claim:

S11: I believe the program has met my needs. At first, I started the program at the beginner level. I didn't know any English, I was zero. And now, my speaking skills, writing skills have improved. I have activated them. (S11, Beginner, Civil Engineering, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview).

S3: In general, the program succeeded in meeting my needs. Although I think there were some problems in the content classes, I was able to improve my general language skills throughout the program. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview).

S6: I expected the program to focus on speaking abilities, and I think the program delivered this. That is mostly because our instructors are all foreigners and you can't talk to them in Turkish, because they don't understand Turkish. I expected the program to improve my speaking skills. It did improve my skills. I would be really unhappy if it didn't. (S6, Advanced, Medicine, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S8: I was aware of my language skills. I believe the classes that I attended helped me to improve my language skills. It was planned in a good way and it was consistent. (S8, Intermediate, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S9: I believe the English instructor here was more challenging than I had expected, which increased my expectations from the program. They are sometimes pushing us too much, but this is a good thing to improve our language skills. (S9, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

#### 4.1.2.2 Implementation of the program, its strength and weaknesses

Next, the students were asked about the implementation of the program. These questions aimed to get the perceptions of the students about the performance of the program. The students evaluated certain components within the program, and they identified ones that have or have not contributed to their language development. The questions asked in this session provided data on the actual implementation of the program, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the preparatory programs.

Throughout the interviews, students explored their answers. The weaknesses, and the

strengths of the program were identified by the students. The coded data presented certain themes on which student provided similar understandings on strengths and weaknesses of the program, such as the effectiveness of the portfolio works, improvement of the students' speaking skills and "slowness" in the program implementation.

The ideas on portfolios showed that these works had positive effects on language abilities of the students, claiming that it presented a chance to improve their language skills, especially writing skills, by creating their own products:

S1: We are studying on our writing skills much more than we did in high school. Even though I graduated from an Anatolian Lycée, we hadn't focused on writing that much there. I came from Izmir and I graduated from a high school that is believed to have a good English education. Despite that, the fact that we have to write book reports has contributed a lot to me. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S10: Assignments are fine, so are book reports. At the end of the day, we have to read books to get points, and I believe this helps me improve my English. When I read books that are for one level above me, I learn more words. (S10, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S11: As I have said, portfolios are nice. We complete assignments, the instructors check them and provide feedback. This also creates a sense of responsibility. I believe portfolios are more important than the exams, because we cannot say that exams are the only way to assess the knowledge of the student. Assignments, exams, attendance... They are a whole. We cannot solely rely on exams for assessment. Within this system, portfolio has a really important place. (S11, Beginner, Civil Engineering, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S13: You know the weekly assignments and checklists, right? They motivate us. When we realize that we are doing something in English outside of the classroom, we feel like we are improving. For example, watching *How I Met Your Mother* have improved my English a lot. I had finished the series twice before with Turkish subtitles, but now I realized that I can motivate myself to watch it without any subtitles. I can understand it. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S14: For example, we portfolios. It provides a chance to showcase our work. Many opportunities to improve our language are provided through portfolio. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S3: I actually don't like reading books. However, here, we have to. Whether you want it or not, it improves your English. I learn new words and how to construct sentences. I am not going to lie, it helped me improve my language. Portfolios compose of the things that we have to do to improve. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S5: Assignments and portfolios helped us improve. They are one of the most effective components of the program... the ones that we have to put an effort on. I really liked portfolios. For example, when you are listening to a lesson, you are passive, you are not doing much. But when you are trying to compose something on your own, you have to put an effort. And putting an effort makes you improve your language skills. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

The students also agreed upon the perspective that the program improved their speaking abilities. It was mostly noted as a strength of the program, claiming that the program provided a chance to use the language in a meaningful context. The fact that students sometimes had foreign instructors and friends forced them to use the language in an effective way:

S8: I really think that foreign friends had a big impact on me. They were involved in the communication and the context, and I realized the importance of their effects. We always had to speak in English so that they would understand us. They also had to communicate with a language apart from their native language. This helped us improve our daily language as well as our academic language. I became more enthusiastic in speaking. (S8, Intermediate, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S15: The program improved my language. Speaking was an important part of this improvement. We did a lot of speaking tasks. I made a lot of mistakes, but I have learned a lot by making a lot of mistakes. I am now less shy in speaking. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S14: As we have lots of listening tasks and lots of foreign friends and instructors, we are bringing many cultures together. When I talk about my experiences with my parents, I feel really happy. I am doing something with another language, I use it for speaking. I feel like I am in the right place. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S4: It was really effective when the instructors told us something about their daily lives and urged us to do the same. We used to be shy when it came to speaking despite knowing a lot. We got over this feeling through speaking tasks and now I feel more comfortable. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S3: Now, I am able to use the language more comfortably outside of the classroom. The program helped me improve my speaking abilities. Sometimes, I even use English words while talking to my Turkish friends, and it feels good. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview)

Other weaknesses of the program were also revealed through the student interviews.

The students provided feedback on the problematic sides of the program. They mostly focused on the course syllabus, claiming that the linear planning of the program sometimes left them with a feeling of “slowness”, meaning that rather than focusing on different or more complex structures, they kept on repeating the same subjects. The students pointed out that the program was relied too much on the textbooks and the topics that they have covered progressed slowly:

S11: After the exam, I talked to my friends from lower levels and I realized that the subjects that we were responsible for were nearly the same. After passing the exam, I thought that I was still at the same level. The progress was really slow. Even after I pass the level, I feel like I am still at the same place as I have. (S11, Beginner, Civil Engineering, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview)

S1: The topics in the syllabus were really progressing slowly. We have worked on the topic “transportation” for many days. I am going to puke transportation now. That process was really slow. We want to keep moving forward. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S4: Even though the program was good, I believe we relied too much on the textbooks. I think we should have studied more grammar points. two of our teachers helped us with our grammars, but still I believe we still lack some grammar knowledge. Even though our teachers focused on the grammar, they were still too reliant on the textbooks. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S5: The program needs to be more to-the-level of the student. It has been progressing really slowly. I believe it should be faster. It has been six weeks, and I think I added only a little to my language knowledge. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S6: The program failed to make me do things that I wouldn't do elsewhere. I want to improve, but for now, I feel like we are repeating mostly. (S6, Advanced, Medicine, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S9: I don't think I am learning complex grammar points. For now, I am repeating what I have already knew. This is sometimes affecting my psychology. (S9, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

#### 4.1.2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of the instructors of the program

Other themes on the strengths and the weaknesses of the program appeared when the students were discussing the instructors of the program. Many interviews pointed out that the instructors within the program worked passionately and they helped the students improve their language abilities. Students pointed out that the teachers were really helpful and considerate. Students who had a chance to work with foreign instructors also focused on the instructors' contribution to their speaking abilities:

S7: I really like the way our teachers are conducting the lesson. They encourage us to ask questions. They say, "Come and ask your questions even if we are not in the class". This is very important. They help us a lot. (S7, Beginner, New Media, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S1: It is good that our teachers are not hard-shelled. They help us improve a lot. For example, when we are learning new words, my instructor gives extra information about the word, such as “Did you know that the origin of this word is from German?”, “Do you know its adjective form?”, etc. I believe this is a great help for me. These are really good extra information for us. I like learning such things. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S15: Our foreign instructors are urging us to speak more. This is a big advantage for us because it is easier to learn the language when you have to. I learn more words like that. It also helps my speaking. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S11: The best side, the most important side of the program is the quality of the teachers. There are some teachers and there are other teachers. I believe they have a great impact on us. I believe we are lucky because we have teachers who are very knowledgeable, well educated. Sometimes, the teacher might not improve their students, but our teachers always contributed to us. (S11, Beginner, Civil Engineering, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview)

S3: We have great relationships with our teachers. They tried to help us non-stop. We even went for a dinner once as a class. They helped us a lot with our classes. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S4: Foreign teachers helped us improve our speaking skills, and Turkish instructors were always there to help us. When we didn't understand a part, we could consult them. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

Students did not abstain from providing their negative opinions about their instructors, as well. These opinions were few, but two general themes emerged from the data on the weaknesses of the program instructors, (1) failing to support the students' adaptation to the program and (2) using Turkish language more than necessary during language instruction.

The first theme that is identified shows that the students expect the teachers to quicken the adaptation process of the students to the program by helping them more in participating classroom activities:



S1: The teacher might accelerate the adaptation process until we get used to the program. You know, sometimes people are shy, or not too outgoing. I am like that too sometimes. When these people want to say something, they might shy away. Even if I like speaking a lot, there are moment when I am afraid of speaking. The teachers might try to encourage us more. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S7: It is in some peoples' nature. They are shy and they don't want to talk. I think teacher should help those people. People are mostly shy here. (S7, Beginner, New Media, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

The other theme about the weaknesses of the teachers was on their use of Turkish during the classes. All of the participants of this study speak Turkish as their first language, yet they have pointed out the instructors' usage of Turkish during the lessons as negative:

S3: Almost every class has at least one or two students from abroad. This is why our classes are multicultural. Sometimes teachers use Turkish in classes and those friends are discouraged. Sometimes, they dropout. I think the teachers should realize this fact. They should use less Turkish. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S2: I give a lot of importance to speaking. I expected that all the classes would be in English but sometimes the teachers are using Turkish. As I said before, the language is learned when you have to learn it. When teachers use Turkish, we sometimes choose the easy side and reply in Turkish, too. I think that's a problem. (S2, Beginner, Radio, TV & Cinema, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S4: When we know that the teacher is going to answer in Turkish, we ask them questions in Turkish. Laziness in human's nature, but I think the teachers should use less Turkish. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

#### 4.1.2.4 Evaluation of the materials by the students

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the program, the students provided feedback on the textbooks used in the program, claiming that these

textbooks play an important role in the success or failure of the program. As textbooks, the students use *Unlock Series* and *Interchange Series* by Cambridge Printing Press. The themes emerged around the evaluation of these books show that there is a dissatisfaction towards *Unlock Series*. The students remarked that the book was boring and did not provide necessary language input for their development. The book series were considered as having too long and too detailed reading and listening exercise, which hindered their motivation towards the language learning process:

S13: The publishing company is trying to do something. But I don't know. They have chosen boring topics. As I have said before, you are not able to add something you're your own life or experiences to the unit. For example, the theme of the unit is architecture. I am an MIS student, and I have no idea about architecture. I actually understand what the book is trying to do. It is trying to teach you the topics that you can talk about if you ever go abroad one day. This is a good aim, but it is too hard to cover this subject in class. Listening tracks and readings are really boring and all you are doing with the book is just memorizing some new vocabulary. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S1: I didn't like the books at all. I think the books are not adequate in providing enough vocabulary or grammar instruction. Although our teachers try to help us with the books, I feel like we could use better books. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S2: *Unlock* books are boring... really boring. The topics are really boring. We don't enjoy the topics that we are covering in the lessons. I have even witnessed teachers complaining about the book a few times. They also agree that *Unlock* books are boring. (S2, Beginner, Radio, TV & Cinema, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S6: We are now halfway through the program, and I realized that the topics in *Unlock* books are so irrelevant to our daily lives. I mean, if we didn't have any textbooks, we could just talk to our instructors about our daily lives and some other topics. But when we have the book, we are tied down to it. Moreover, the topics in the books are extremely absurd. They are not normal topics. The books made me feel like I was tied to a certain place. It stopped me from going forward. One of the topics was "manufacturing". Okay, the teachers are trying to teach us the topic, and we study. But I have already

forgotten the words I have learned there. It is not related to our daily lives. (S6, Advanced, Medicine, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S5: I didn't like *Unlock* books at all. The other books are fine. But *Unlock* books are not enjoyable at all. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S15: The books were really boring. We did lots of readings in *Unlock* books, but I and some of my friends were really not interested in the topics most of the time. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

Students did not provide any discontent with *Interchange* Series. A few students provided positive feedback on the series, claiming that those books have presented new grammar subjects in an effective way:

S7: *Interchange* is a good textbook. It has some good grammar activities in it. There are also lots of pictures, which are interesting. (S7, Beginner, New Media, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S9: *Interchange* books are good in terms of grammar. (S9, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3rd interview)

S5: I like *Interchange*. It has fun units in it, unlike *Unlock* books. I also had a chance to take a look at the books that we will be using next week. They look interesting. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

#### 4.1.2.5 Content classes, strengths and weaknesses

One component of the program that sets it different from other preparatory programs is the “content classes” that are offered on every Friday. In these classes, content materials that are designed by the program are used. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, due to certain physical limitations (e.g. the lack of adequate classrooms), students with relevant departments are placed together in the same

classroom. The curriculum of these classes includes materials from each department. For example, students from Architecture and Civil Engineering departments are placed into the same classroom and they use materials from both fields throughout their content classes. From the data, it can be proposed that the students perceive this adversity as a vital weakness of the program. Their evaluation of this component reveals that using materials of other departments affected their language learning processes and motivation negatively. As these classes were designed to help students prepare for the future academic classes, some students reported that initially, they thought that they have chosen the wrong academic field, because the content classes presented them topics that they did not need to cover:

S10: Next year, I will be studying molecular biology and genetics, but, so far, I have learned nothing about my department in these content classes. We only worked on pharmacy materials, as we are in the same class. Probably, we will focus on molecular biology topics later but, for these six weeks, I only studied pharmacy. I believe there is a problem with the planning. (S10, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S13: I don't think the content classes are achieving what their aims. These content classes are like the selling points of the program, like a "customized preparatory program according to your department". The way that we conducted those content classes made me think that I had chosen the wrong academic department. I was asking myself: "Why did I choose this department?". One of our topics was "what is government?". I am a MIS student. I shouldn't be studying MIS if I have to study "what is government?". (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S4: I wish the content classes had reached to their aims. All my friends also say this. We are all so eager to learn something about our future departments, but we didn't. But, so far, Fridays have been missing for us. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S1: In our content classes, there are students from three different departments: architecture, civil engineering and mechanical engineering. Two weeks we

used materials of the architecture department, two weeks we used materials of civil engineering and in the last two weeks, we used materials of the mechanical engineering department. I am an architecture student, it is OK for me to learn about civil engineering, they are close. But I know that mechanical engineers are very angry with this. I sympathize with them. They are learning about things that they don't need. This is a big problem for them. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

Another critical evaluation theme that has emerged from the interviews has been on the competency of the teacher on the covered content topic. Some students claimed that the English instructors that have been teaching these materials were not competent enough about the field, which caused some problems while conducting the lesson:

S3: I believe that the teachers in the content classes had insufficient knowledge about content. Sometimes we had to use the internet to check our answers. My mother is a pharmacist and sometimes I had to call her to learn the real answers of the questions. I usually compare my answer with my peers to see if I got them right. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview)

S4: The teachers in our content classes are not academic instructors, they are English teachers. Sometimes the teacher doesn't know the answer to a part. We also don't. That's why Fridays are usually more boring than the other days. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S15: Content classes have a good aim. But I think the teachers should do a little research about the field. Sometimes we ask them questions about the content, but they cannot answer. They should know more about the academic field that they are teaching on Fridays. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

As it can be seen from the excerpts, the students who had a mismatch between their academic fields and the content classes they take pointed out that these content classes were a point of weakness of the program. They also focused on the fact that

the instructors who are teaching their content classes are not academicians from that content area, thus their teaching practices can sometimes be ineffective and inadequate for them.

However, the students who did not have this mismatch between their content classes and future academic fields have stated that one of the strongest aspects of the program is these unique classes as they help them prepare for the future. They state that these classes were interesting, and they increased their motivation. Some students also pointed out that these classes help them understand what lies in the future for them, as content classes served as an introduction to their future academic fields. A few themes formed around the view that these classes help the students' language development as well:

S9: Content classes were great! They helped us get to know about our future field. I didn't have much knowledge about my department. Now, I know what I will learn in the future. (S9, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S8: We really need content classes. They help us understand the topics that we will cover in the future. We learn about the terminology. It helps us greatly in learning about the language that is used in the academic field. For example, I have never talked about health issues in English before. (S8, Intermediate, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S6: I like content materials. The teachers are trying to help us learn them quickly. I have learned a lot of things about hospitals, surgeries, equipment etc. (S6, Advanced, Medicine, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S14: Content classes have contributed me a lot. I am reading summaries and texts about my future academic field. It has helped me a lot. It improved my English skills, too. I am more confident now. Content classes also made me think that I am exactly where I belong. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S1: Content classes increase my motivation and my interest towards my academic field. We learn about different architectural movements, a unique building in India and more. These classes help us learn these in English. This is great! (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 2nd interview)

S11: I believe content classes are good. I think not many schools are offering such classes in preparatory year. I even talked to my uncle about this today. He had studied international relations in English. He said that they didn't have such a class in the preparatory year, that's why their first year in the university was really hard. It is good that we have such classes. (S11, Beginner, Civil Engineering, 2nd Interview)

S5: Content classes are nice. We have extra mechanical engineering topics for two weeks, but still, these classes prepare us for the next year quickly. This is a great advantage of the program compared to other universities. It helps us improve both in language-wise and content-wise. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

#### 4.1.2.6 Suggested improvements to the program by the students

Lastly, within the interviews, the students were asked to come up with ideas on how to improve the program. As the students identified the slow progress of the program as a weakness, the most visible theme that has appeared around the issue of improvement was the suggestion of quickening the process of the program. The students suggested that more advanced structures should be introduced in a quicker fashion, so that there will be a sense of improvement for them.

S1: I think, we should learn more grammar structures in the program. If I were to improve the program, I would include more grammar structures. For now, we are repeating simple structures. I think the program should go quicker. (S1, Elementary, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S14: Sometimes, we lack the necessary language skills to talk about something. That's why I think in the program there should be more focus on more complex structures and topics. We want to talk more, write more, but we cannot do it with what we have right now. We are ready for more. (S14, Elementary, English Language and Literature, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S4: We are using these books, but I believe we still lack on more advanced topics. I think the program should be faster. We shouldn't repeat the same things for weeks. We can learn more and cover more. We should be improving ourselves quicker. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S5: The program is so slow right now. I think we should pick up the pace. (S5, Intermediate, Architecture, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S8: The textbooks lack many things, such as complex structures. We should focus more on them. Otherwise, we are not improving as quick as we want. (S8, Intermediate, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

Students also provided some ideas on improving the implementation of the program, such as indulging the academicians or professors from their future departments with the program or implementing more content related materials. Among the intermediate and advanced level students, there is a consensus that they lack the necessary contact with their future professors, and they came up with certain ideas to improve these contacts.

S3: We need instructors who can teach about Pharmacy. In this way, I will be able to improve my English and learn more about my department. Those instructors would be using the language in the academic field and this can help us a lot. (S3, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S13: Content classes didn't make me familiar with my future academic field and we don't have any contact with the instructors from our academic fields. I think the program can create chances for us to improve our language skill by helping us getting in contact with our future field. We can meet with the professors there. They can have some special classes for us. They can help us a lot in improving our language. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S4: I think we should study more about our academic fields. I think in the university's copy center there are notes that are used by the students in the



pharmacy department. We can conduct our lessons around them. This could improve our language greatly. It will also motivate us. (S4, Intermediate, Pharmacy, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

The students also stated that in order to improve the program, out-of-class activities should be introduced to the program. A noticeable theme appeared around this idea, as the students claimed that there is little English usage outside the classroom, and the program can introduce certain extra-curricular activities to improve their language usage outside the classroom.

S2: The teachers can have some extra activities with us. We are sometimes too shy in the classroom. But my brothers' preparatory teachers take them to certain places around Istanbul and they talk about the history of these places in English. I believe we can do the same here. That's my suggestion to improve the program. (S2, Beginner, Radio, TV & Cinema, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S11: I think there should be more out-of-class activities. We use English a lot during the class hours but there is almost no chance to use the language outside of the classroom. I don't have any ideas right now, but in the program, there should be more activities that we can do outside of the classroom. (S11, Beginner, Civil Engineering, 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview)

S15: We have lots of foreign students here. They are also trying to learn English. I think the program should have some out-of-class activities. We can join these activities with our foreign friends, and we can improve our language together. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

Some themes have also emerged around the suggestions related to improving class hours and classroom practices. Some students pointed out that they could use more instruction about their language skills, and for them, one way of ensuring this could be through including more instruction hours. Secondly, the students came up with

ideas about how to improve classroom practices to make the program more efficient.

Their opinions mostly revolved around the idea of improving speaking ability:

S10: I think the number of hours of instruction is not enough. We could use more. For instance, we can have two or three more hours in which we focus on writing and reading skills. (S10, Advanced, Molecular Biology and Genetics, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S13: Why not more speaking hours? It would be OK for me if we had more hours of English. We can especially benefit from more speaking hours. (S13, Advanced, Management Information Systems, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S6: I think there should be more activities in which we do speaking. We can have discussion in class. I have no other chance of using the language outside of the classroom, so I think our classes should focus more on helping us speak. (S6, Advanced, Medicine, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

S7: The classes cannot be about books only. The students should also be the center. Some chances on improving the dialogue between the students can be provided if the teachers include the students' more in their lessons. For example, if there is a theme or a topic for the class, instead of the teacher, the students can plan a lesson and they can teach the lesson that day. This would improve the interaction between us. Moreover, we would be asking each other questions. (S7, Beginner, New Media, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S8: The classes should be more fun. The books and their topics are sometimes too boring. The program should include some fun in it. (S8, Intermediate, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview)

S15: The classes should be built around the interests of the students. Some topics are just boring. We feel like we shouldn't learn about them. But if we have topics that are interesting to us, we would be reading and listening with pleasure. (S15, Pre-Intermediate, Civil Engineering, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

#### 4.1.3 Summary of the interview data

These extensive series of interviews provided profound data on the students' experiences and perceptions about the program. When combined with the results

from other data collection tools, the themes that have been identified can be utilized to answer the research questions. The interviews, being the most extensive data collection tool in this study, provided crucial and central data for the discussion about the implementation, strengths and weaknesses of the program, all of which can be utilized to evaluate the program in question.

The first interview focused on the experiences of the students, as well as their needs. From the themes that have emerged from the data, the expectations and the needs of the students' cluster around the issue of improving their speaking skills. They have placed a great emphasis on improving that particular skill. The students also expected to improve their content knowledge about their future academic fields. Additionally, they were aware of the role of the language within the global sphere, thus they hoped to use the language within multinational contexts.

The second and third interviews focused on the implementation of the program. Some students problematized the speed of the progress of the program, claiming that the slow pace had left them with a feeling of not improving as much as they desired. The students claimed that after certain amount of time, they were still at the same language level. On the other hand, the students who expected to improve their speaking abilities has found their expectations met to some extent.

The portfolios and assignments within the program have been regarded as a strength by the students, claiming that these assignments and portfolios create a space for them to showcase their work and create their own language products. They also helped improve their language skills, especially writing and reading. The students also provided positive feedback about their instructors, although some

critiques were also made about their failure to incorporate all of the students to the lessons.

The students' evaluation of the program also revealed that the textbooks that are used in the program are not effective for them, as they are mostly identified as being unhelpful in improving their language skills.

The last component of the program that the students have evaluated was the content classes. While some students pointed out that these classes were helpful for them to get to know about their future academic fields, others proposed that the physical limitation hindered any positive effect that can come from this component.

The students also identified certain improvements to the program. The students pointed out that in order to improve the program, its pace should be re-addressed. They also argued that the program should lose its "slow" progress. Certain changes for in-class activities were stated and the students put forward that out-of-class activities should be introduced to provide opportunities for language use and improvement.

In order to increase the validity of these findings, a focus group study was conducted with the students. Nominal Group Technique (NGT, see Chapter 3 - Methodology), was utilized to see whether the themes that have emerged in these interviews would also emerge in the focus group study and to see whether any new themes would be brought up. The students provided statements about the given questions and assigned weights to each given statement, revealing the priority order of each statement. The results of this focus-group study are given in the next section.

## 4.2 Focus Group Study

The focus group study was conducted with students in the 17<sup>th</sup> week of the program. On the 14<sup>th</sup> week of the program, the students had gone through the proficiency exam. All the students except one advanced student had failed this proficiency exam that is conducted in the middle of the term. The 3-week interval between the data collection and the proficiency exam allowed students to reflect on their performance, as well as the performance of the program in a more critical way. Within the focus group study, the students discussed three questions as a group. These questions were:

- 1) What are the strengths of the program?
- 2) What are the weaknesses of the program?
- 3) What can be done to improve the program?

Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was utilized to collect the data. In this technique, students first came up with a list of answers to each question. Later, they were asked to assign a weighing to each statement in a round-robin system. Students gave weighting from 1 to 5, 5 being the highest priority item and 1 being the lowest priority item. This process lasted until there was no more points to give. The statement with the highest point was ranked as the highest priority answer to the questions above.

For the first question, the end product is given in Table 9 below. In this question, the students focused on the strengths of the program. The statements that were made by the students, were clarified and simplified by the researcher during NGT process. Later, the students assigned points according to priority of these statements.

Table 9. Students' Answers to the First Question "What are the Strengths of the Program?"

Statement	Rankings of the students, 5 = highest priority 1 = lowest priority
The teacher quality	3,4,3,2,4,4,1,2
Grammar and vocabulary teaching	2,2,5,5,5,4
Improving speaking skills	5,1,2,3,3,4,5
Assignments and portfolio work	5,5,2,1,3
Content classes	3,1,4,1,3,2
Foreign instructors	4,1,3,5,1
Intercultural interactions	1,2,1,2,3

Surprisingly, three identified statements share the same weights for the first question. The students remarked the quality of the teachers, vocabulary and grammar teaching and speaking skills improvement as the strongest sides of the program. Assignment and portfolio work were also identified as a strong suit. The content classes followed these. The students also proposed that foreign instructors are also a strong side of the program, claiming that they have created a cultural diversity, as well as a chance to use the language in a meaningful context.

Towards the end of the first term, the students had a chance to reflect upon their learning processes and their English levels. By focusing on their language learning experiences, the students were able to see certain theoretical weaknesses within the program, the first one being the uncertainty about their CERF levels. They reported that one of the main weaknesses of the program is that there is no clear description about their English levels. Although they are called "intermediate students", "pre-intermediate" students by the program planners, the students claimed

that they are not very sure if they have actually attained to those levels. Along with this, several other weaknesses were also proposed by the students, namely the books, the assessment types and the program's ability to prepare the students for the proficiency exam. Table 10 presents the statements about the weaknesses of the program and the weights that were attained to them during the NGT process.

Table 10. Students' Answers to the Second Question "What are the weaknesses of the Program?"

Statement	Rankings of the students, 5 = highest priority 1 = lowest priority
Mismatch between the curriculum and the proficiency exam	5,5,4,5,3,4,4
Textbooks used in the program	3,4,3,3,2,4,5,3
No clear indication of their language levels	5,4,5,4,2,5
The systems' being unresponsive to plagiarized portfolio works	2,3,2,2,3,5,3
Slow progress of the program	4,2,1,1,2
Attendance	1,2,1,
Little speaking opportunities	1,2,
Teacher quality	1,1
Problems with getting in touch with the program planners	1,

As the focus group study was conducted after the students had taken the proficiency exam, a theme that was different from the interview was found. The students placed a great emphasis on the opinion that there is a big mismatch between what they are covering in their classes with what they are responsible for in the proficiency exam. They stated that the textbooks that they have been covering presented them with texts and listening tracks that are far below the level of the ones

in the proficiency exam. It is reported that this created a great worry among their peers.

In line with this statement, student also placed a great emphasis on the textbooks used in the program. These textbooks were usually identified as being too boring, too simple and not challenging enough to promote language learning. As the books are at the core of the program, this claim is also in parallel with the statement that the program is progressing slowly. The textbooks, especially *Unlock Series*, were recognized as a crucial weakness within the program.

Students also claimed that the program did not provide them with a clear understanding and description of what their levels actually are. Although they are called “intermediate students”, “advanced students”, the students remarked that they are not at that particular level, rather they are below that level. Some students, for example, remarked that although they moved up to “intermediate level”, they were still pre-intermediate level students.

Although the portfolio works and the assignments were regarded as a strength of the program, the students pointed out that some of their peers are turning in plagiarized assignments and portfolios, which are sometimes not noticed by the instructors. The students claimed that this creates a break in their motivation towards completing the assignments and the portfolio works, a component of the program that is claimed to be contributing to their language development a lot.

Some students also raised certain points that were generally recognized by the student but did not receive the utmost importance as the ones discussed above. Some students problematized the necessary attendance limit, claiming that the fact that they have to attend 80% of all the classes is too challenging. Few students claimed that



the program did not provide them many chances to improve their language skills.

There was also a concern on the hardship of getting in touch with the program planners to talk about the problems within the program.

The last part of the focus group study included discussions on the possible developments that can be offered to the program. The students came up with many suggestions aimed to obliterate the weaknesses that has been identified by them. The students focused on changing the curriculum to make it more compatible with the requirements of the proficiency exam. To this end, certain changes to the textbooks were suggested. The students also wanted the program to be more challenging and more interesting. Lastly, the students proposed that the program should include a more transparent and clear description of their language levels. The statements about the improvement of the program and their weights are provided in Table 11:

Table 11. Students' Answers to the Third Question: "How can the program be improved?"

Statement	Rankings of the students, 5 = highest priority 1 = lowest priority
Matching the materials and the curriculum with the proficiency exam	5,5,5,5,4,5,5,4
Introducing classes preparing students specifically for the proficiency exam	4,4,4,4,3,4,3,3
Making the program more challenging and interesting	3,3,2,5,3,2,5
Providing a clearer description of their language levels	2,3,3,2
Increasing speaking opportunities	2,1,4,2
Increasing the control mechanisms behind the portfolio works and assignments	2,1,1,1
Providing out of class activities	1,1,2
Increasing the quality of the content materials and providing teacher training for these materials	1,1

A theme that the students had a consensus on was matching the materials that are used in the program with the demands of the proficiency exam. The student proposed that introducing materials that are more in line with the proficiency exam could also be helpful to this aim. However, no specific textbook was suggested by the students. The students also reported that the program should be more challenging and entertaining for them, as lack of these factors are stated to be a top reason in the drop-out rates of the program. Portfolios and assignments were also brought into highlight here, as the students believe that to make them more efficient, the program should impose a better control mechanism over these works. Out of class activities were also asked to be introduced, as well as increasing the teachers' knowledge about the content that they are teaching on Fridays.

#### 4.2.1 Summary of the Focus Group Study

The focus group study allowed students to come together to discuss and exchange ideas on the program. After the long discussion, the students stated that one strong feature of the program is the quality of the instructors within the program. Their grammar and vocabulary teaching practices were prioritized. The participants also pointed out that the program allowed them to use the language in a meaningful context. The design of the classes as well as the fact that there are multinational instructors and students contributed to students' improvement of their speaking skills. The portfolios and the assignments were also regarded as a strength of the program, claiming that they have provided the students with a ground to produce their own works and improve their language skills.

As for the weaknesses, the students problematized the design of the curriculum, stating that it does not fully match the level of the proficiency exam. The

textbooks were also identified as a weakness. They are marked as “boring” and “uninteresting” by the students, who said that this factor hindered their language development in the long term. The students also claimed that the program fails to provide a good description about their levels and language skills. Despite the fact that the portfolio works, and assignments were identified as a strength of the program, the students also claim that the works of their peers sometimes contain plagiarized works that go unnoticed. This issue is problematic for the students, as they claim that this causes a decrease in their motivation.

The students offered certain improvements to the program. They have agreed upon the idea that the program should be changed to meet the demands of the proficiency exam more. In order to do this, the students claimed that the materials should be changed or adapted. As it was proposed that the programs’ being monotonous and unchallenging caused dropouts, the students claimed that the program should be altered to meet these demands via introducing different materials, in and out-of-class activities. As the portfolio works are regarded as important, the students suggested that these works should be evaluated more critically to prevent any plagiarized work. Lastly, in order to increase the quality of the content classes, the students recommended that the program should provide some training to the instructors about the target content that they will be teaching.

As the last data collection method, interviews with the instructors within the program were conducted. In these interviews, the teachers were given a brief summary of the points raised by the students about the strengths, weaknesses and points of improvement of the program. The responses of the teachers were collected to see whether the same strengths and weaknesses are also perceived by the instructors. Their reactions to the students’ ideas about the improvement of the

program were also collected. The results of these interviews are given in the following section.

#### 4.3 Teacher Interviews

The interviews with the teachers were carried out after the focus group study with the students. The interviews focused on the themes that have emerged from the student interviews and focus group study. These themes were on the strengths, weaknesses of the program and possible improvements to the program. Three teachers were interviewed separately, the interviews were recorded and then coded accordingly.

##### 4.3.1 Teachers' perspectives about the perceived strengths of the program

The teachers provided some matching accounts with the students during the discussion of the strengths of the program. They thanked and agreed upon the claim that the instructors have been putting a lot of effort to their profession to teach the students the language. They pointed out that in order to follow the curriculum they had to be very organized before the classes and they had to make sure that the students have understood the lesson:

I am really grateful to students for their comments. It has been a tough semester for us, too. It is nice to learn about their positive feedback. We have a really young team here; we are always ready to help students. Sometimes, they catch us in the corridor, and I spend half an hour or more to reassure that they have understood what I have been teaching. (T1)

It is great to know that the students are appreciating us. We are trying our best to make sure that they are getting what they need. It is sometimes too hard, too challenging for us. But it is rewarding to see their progress and to know that you have made a contribution to that. (T2)

I always have to be prepared for my classes. I have to follow the curriculum and I have to make sure that they have covered the necessary units. Sometimes, I feel that they are having problems with a certain subject. When that happens, I try to prepare some extra materials for them so that they can study more. (T3)

The teachers were a little surprised when they realized that the students identified portfolio assignments as a strength of the program. They stated that portfolio works have been a burden for them, as it required too much time and energy out-of-class. They were still aware that portfolio works contributed to the language learning process of the students:

It is strange actually. I believed that the students disliked anything related to portfolios. Reading books and writing book reports, completing assignments have often been something that they complain about. It is great that they are paying a lot of importance to those. I feel like I will pay more attention to that, as well. (T2)

I will be honest. I believe the students just copy and paste from their peers most of the time. As we have a lot of students, I cannot just go and find the person whom he copied from. However, it is nice to see that when they work alone it is a great help for them. (T3)

The last theme about the strengths of the program that have emerged from the interviews was on the teachers' perspectives about the content classes. They pointed out that those content classes were really hard to conduct. However, they agreed that the materials provide a door to the department for the students and they are beneficial classes to them:

It is sometimes really hard to conduct content classes. I am now fully proficient in that content area sometimes. So, I have to go online and do some research on that. Sometimes, our colleagues even go and talk to the professors in the departments to get their ideas about the content classes. When those professors also agree that the theme, we have chosen is good, I know that my class will be a really important contribution to the students. (T3)

There are of course some problems with the content classes. We can discuss them later, but I believe, in general they are beneficial. If we didn't have such classes, a student who will study engineering wouldn't know anything about the field. (T1)

#### 4.3.2 Teachers' perspectives about the perceived weaknesses of the program

It can be said that the teachers and the students came into an agreement when the textbooks used in the program were being discussed. The teachers shared a similar opinion with the students on their claims about the textbooks' being too boring, too simple and unchallenging. The teachers agreed that sometimes it is hard to connect the students to the theme of the unit, which affects the way that they are conducting the lesson. They also pointed out that the textbooks sometimes focus on simple grammar topics too much:

I think I will agree with the students on that [textbooks]. I believe they are boring, especially *Unlock* Series. They are not interesting enough. The videos are old, the topics are old. They are not very related to our daily lives and the textbooks fail to portray themselves as "good enough". When you put yourselves into the shoes of the students, you could understand that it is really boring to learn about "prepositions" with pictures of a box and a ball again. (T3)

The students are right. Definitely. The books fail to address them. The reading texts are too easy, and the exercises are really repetitive. The *Unlock* books that we are using at the intermediate level makes the student work on "subject and object agreement" at some point! The students don't need that anymore. When you see such an activity, and when you do it, you run the risk of losing their interests because you will start hearing discontent murmurs. (T1)

It is sometimes too hard to motivate students to the topics in the textbooks. The activities are repetitive, too. Same matching activities and same fill-in-the-blanks activities are all over. (T2)

The teachers also focused on the perceived “slowness” of the program by the students. Although they agreed to some extent with the students, the teachers also believed that they had to make sure that the students are proficient in certain grammar topics or writing skills before they moved on to the next steps:

The students might think that the program is slow. That is partially true, actually. However, sometimes when we do quizzes, I see that the students are still not using certain structures or strategies correctly. I am tired of grading essays whose first sentence is “Today, I will talk about...”. The students might feel that they are practicing the same skills, however, sometimes it is necessary to do that. (T3)

Sometimes progress happens in a long turn. I think that students are right to some extent to say that the program is slow. However, as teachers, when we see students making simple mistakes in grammar, we get upset and angry sometimes. In order to move to the next stage, we have to make sure that they are proficient in mediocre stages. (T1)

The issue of the mismatch between the curriculum and the proficiency exam has also attracted the attention of the instructors, as well. They reported that after realizing that the students did not do well in the listening and writing parts of the exam, the teachers had become more eager to provide more challenging extra materials to the students to improve their reading and listening skills for the proficiency:

I believe that we need to incorporate more proficiency related materials towards the end of the term. Right now, there is no such thing in the curriculum, but we might try to do that along the way. There are some

listening and reading parts in the textbooks, but they are not at the same level as the ones in the proficiency exam. (T1)

Yes, the students are a little right on that. Especially for high level students, we should start doing some extra work for the proficiency. The exam will be difficulty. (T2)

In the early levels, it is too hard to do long readings or listening exercises. But we should still use some extra reading materials and listening tracks for the upper levels. They most certainly need it. (T3)

The teachers also touched upon the issue of plagiarism among the students. They pointed out that grading assignments take a long time and it is a meticulous process. They reported that they have caught certain assignments with high plagiarism count, yet despite all the warnings the students continue their attempts:

I know. I know. The students are really handing in assignments that they have taken from the internet. I sometimes find it online and even tell them the name of the website, too. Grading and giving feedback are hard, and sometimes, some students make it harder by plagiarizing. I don't accept such homework and I warn them. But the only thing I can do is to cut off some points from their portfolio grades. Other than that, this is a problem that is too hard to cope with. (T2)

I talked to my students about this issue a lot. I know it is a problem and it affects other students, too. Some students give up writing their own assignments when they realize that their peers have just got away with a plagiarized one. (T3)

Lastly, the teachers focused on students' problematization of not knowing their corresponding academic proficiency levels. Two of the teachers admitted that this could be perceived as a weakness of the program, as although the students are called "B2" level students, they might not be "B2" according to CEFR levels, while the



other teacher dismissed this subject, claiming it to be “not yet relevant” to the students’ learning process at the moment:

Personally, I don’t dwell on this issue to much. The students should look ahead, and they should think about what they can do more, instead of focusing on what their level means. I believe they should focus on passing the proficiency exam. That is their first aim here. (T3)

Yes, I agree with the students here. Although we call them “intermediates”, they are not at that level. They are not too far behind it, but still to be complete intermediates they need more time and instruction. (T1)

I believe students have a point here. It is hard for us to classify the students according to their levels. But I don’t know if this is a real weakness of the program. (T2)

#### 4.3.3 Teachers’ perspectives about the suggested improvements to the program

As the last part of the interview the teachers shared their reflections towards the suggestions made by the students about the program. The teachers mostly agreed with the students upon the possible improvements that can be introduced to the program. The instructors agreed that there should be more preparatory related classes offered to the students, starting at the late stages of the program:

I agree with the students that there should be more proficiency related classes offered to them. We cannot do it at the beginning of term, but they can be introduced towards the end of the program. In this way we can improve their language proficiency; especially their listening abilities. (T1)

Classes towards proficiency exams is a good idea. I think everybody can benefit from that. With some extra materials, we should be able to do that. It will improve students reading and writing skills. They will need that a lot once they start their academic careers. (T3)

As the textbooks that have been used in the program received a similar critique from the instructors, changing to a more useful textbook was also seen as an alternative to the current practices. Besides providing a better learning environment, the teachers proposed that a new textbook could also make the program more challenging:

It is a really critical choice. We need to make sure that the students are using materials that will suit their interest the best. The books that we will choose must be intriguing and interactive. However, fun isn't the only aspect. The books should also be teacher-friendly, too. There are many aspects that we can focus on. It is a hard choice, but we need to make the best one. (T2)

Yes, changing the materials that we are using is a good option. We can use a better book. I understand students' frustration. They are the ones who are using the book to learn something. We already know everything on it, anyway. So, we have to put ourselves into their shoes and then decide. (T1)

We can go for a new one, especially instead of *Unlock* books. Sometimes the topics are too easy for them, so providing a book with more challenging themes can be good for each party. (T3)

One topic that the teachers do not agree with the students is the introduction of out-of-class activities. The teachers claim that actually there are many activities available, but the students are either unaware of them or they just shy away. The teachers complained the fact that sometimes, certain activities went too dull due to low attendance.

I know that out-of-class activities are important for the students, and we actually have quite a few of them. We had our Karaoke Night, we had different celebrations and many more activities. The students sometimes

don't want to participate. I believe if they do, they will benefit from it greatly. (T2)

The program actually offers many activities. For example, each week a group of students prepare a weekly bulletin about their departments. They are free to put anything they want to these bulletins, and it actually contributes to their attendance score, as well. However, sometimes it is just too hard to find someone for it. They don't want to participate to it. (T3)

#### 4.3.4 Summary of the teacher's reflections

From the interviews of the teachers, it can be seen that they agree with the students on many aspects. The teachers appreciate students' feedback on their performance. The value of the portfolio works and assignments, which were perceived as a strength of the program by the students, have been uncovered for the teachers. They also agreed that, although they are challenging for them, content classes served as a door to the students' next academic field.

The teachers shared a similar understanding of the weaknesses of the program. They agreed with the students' claim that the materials that they have been using sometimes fail to meet the needs of the proficiency exam. The teachers suggested that when the students reach to a high level, they could study more towards the proficiency exam. Plagiarism within the program is also recognized by the teachers. They reported that this is not an uncommon case and certain suggestions were introduced such as using 3<sup>rd</sup> party software products, such as Turnitin to solve this problem. One topic that the teachers have shared a different opinion was on the slowness of the program. They proposed that the students are sometimes stuck in certain mediocre grammar subject or strategies. They point out that this slowness could be the result of this "getting stuck" factor.

The improvement suggestions were built around the weaknesses of the program, and the teachers agreed that classes on proficiency preparation could be introduced at the late stages of the program to help students prepare for the exam. Choosing an appropriate book was regarded as a tricky process that the teachers should spend a long time on. However, the general consensus is still on the improvement of the materials. Lastly, the instructors did not agree that out-of-class activities should be introduced to the program, as they believed that the program already have adequate out-of-class activities that the students are either unaware or choose not to attend to.

The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of the data. To understand the progress of the program, its weaknesses and strengths, the data that is obtained from three different sources will be discussed together. Later, suggestions on the improvement of the program will be provided.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to uncover (1) the way that the implementation of the program is processing, (2) the program's strengths and weaknesses and (3) some possible improvements that can be applied to it. The data to answer these questions were collected from one of the most vital stakeholders of the program; the students. Interviews and a focus groups study was conducted with them to understand their experiences during the implementation of the program, as well as their reflections on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> aim of this study.

The interviews and the focus group study revealed that the program has met the expectations and needs of the students to some extent, however there are still certain areas that needs addressing. Towards the end of the term, the students became content with the improvements in their speaking skills and the way that grammar topics and vocabulary have taught them. However, the repetitive and slow progress of the program has left them frustrated. The students stated that one reason why the program did not meet their expectations fully was because after some time, they came to realize that they have made little improvements to their existing knowledge. This finding can be combined with the outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> research question. Both in the interviews and the focus group study, the students pointed out that one of most critical weakness of the program is the pace that is applied. They claimed that it has been very slow, which discouraged them along the process. This issue was also addressed by the instructors within the program. Although they agreed that the process is not fast, the students are still struggling in some simple grammar points and writing skills. The teachers did not advocate for a slow process, yet they agreed

that the issue needs addressing by the policymakers. In a nutshell, the students perceive that the program is progressing slowly, which hinders their language learning process at some points. The teachers partly agree with this perspective. They also agree that sometimes they had to repeat and practice certain structures continuously. However, they are also pointing out that this slow pace might be caused by the students themselves, not by the program. An issue to be addressed for the policy makers remains here. This dilemma also provides another area of research in which an outcome evaluation could be carried out to see whether the outcomes intended by the program match the outputs of the students. The results of such a study could be used either to justify the pace of the process or to indicate that there is a need for improvement of the pace of the program.

Although the pace was a problem for the students, the people who are applying this pace, the instructors, were regarded as highly competent in language teaching. In the interviews and the focus group study, the students pointed out that the instructors within the program worked passionately and effectively to teach them the language. A similar strength identified in many other program evaluation studies, such as Kiely's (2000) study, in which the students revealed that although there are some major problems with the program, the teachers within the program were still the strongest aspect of the program. Students of this study also reported in various occasions that the high teacher quality is an important strength of the program. The teachers within the program were grateful for this positive feedback from their students, revealing that this appreciation could create stronger bonds with the program and the students. As Shimizu (1995) suggests that the opinions of the students about the language and their learning process is closely related to the instructors. While having a negative attitude towards the teacher can provide

detrimental effects to the students' learning experiences, positive attitudes could provide the otherwise. In this study, students mostly stated positive attitudes towards their instructors, which improved their learning process. Along with the responses of the teachers, it can be claimed that one of the strongest aspects of the program is the instructors within the program.

Along with this strength, the students also implied that the fact that there are foreign instructors in the program helped to improve their language skills, especially speaking skills. The theme has appeared in many students interviews and in the focus group study. These instructors provided a context where the students were required to use the target language in a meaningful context. The fact that these foreign instructors did not speak the students' first language forced students to use the target language, which the students were quite content about. This aspect of the program is regarded as an important strength of the program. This finding is also in line with Madrid and Perez's (2007) study. They point out that when the instructors do not have proficiency in the students' first language, the students are enforced to use the target language to communicate, which improved their language learning process. As the foreign instructors are also a better representative of their respective cultures (Andrews, 2007), the students indicated that they brought a cultural variety and intercultural interactions to the program, a concept that is mostly alien to the students outside of the classroom context. One important factor that should be noted here is that the students did not favor Turkish and non-Turkish instructors over the other, rather they indicated that having a combination of both is helpful for them. A similar finding is also provided in the literature (Gürkan & Yüksel, 2012; Lasabagaster and Sierra, 2005), that points out that the students prefer a combination of native and non-native teachers. The students indicated that their non-native instructors helped

them improve their language proficiency as much as their foreign and native counterparts, a finding that is parallel with Bayyurt's (2018) proposal on creating equity for non-native teachers of English. To this end, one of the programs strengths is the opportunities that is provided by native speakers; such as creating a meaningful context for interactions or introducing cultural varieties, as well as the combination of this factor with the Turkish instructors, which provide improvement to the students in many other language learning aspects.

One important concept that should be noted here is that although the students emphasized that they expected and succeeded to improve their speaking skills in the program, speaking skill is not a component of the proficiency exam. It has been noted that academic speaking skills play a crucial role in academic success (Mauranen et al., 2010) of an individual. Academic speaking skills show that the individual has access to academic resources to understand and convey academic conversations (Seong, 2017). Thus, it is also important to measure speaking skills of the students in the proficiency exam to make sure that they have the necessary equipment to use in EMI context. Development of speaking skills has already been regarded as a strength of the program by the students, and in order to help the students gain academic proficiency in all four language skills, speaking component can be integrated to the curriculum and the proficiency exam.

The students pointed out that the portfolio works and assignments that they were required to do contributed to their English repertoire greatly. This strength was raised by many students during the interviews, as well as in the focus group study. The students pointed out that this component of the program was helpful towards improving their language strategies. As it can be seen in McDonough & Chaikitmongkol's (2007) study, when the students perceive that a component of the



program helps towards their language development with tangible proofs, such as creating an essay by themselves, that component will be regarded as a strength of the program. In parallel with the aforementioned study, the students also stated that portfolio works and assignments created a space for them to develop and experiment with their own learning strategies. For the instructors, this finding was a little surprising, as they reported that they were suspicious about whether the students perceive portfolio works as useful. However, they also agreed with the students on the idea that when the students follow their assignments and portfolio works, they could improve a lot. To this end, portfolio works and assignments are marked as a strength of the preparatory program in question. However, students also indicated a weakness for this component of the program, which is the control mechanisms for these assignments and portfolio works. They pointed out that when they realize that their peers' plagiarized portfolio works go unnoticed or without a serious reprimand, their motivation towards completing these assignments is decreasing, which hinders the contributes that the assignments can make. Certain remarks on this issue were also provided by the instructors, who claimed that this is a challenging problem to cope with. Focusing on a similar issue, Chien (2014) suggests that plagiarism detection software products can be utilized to save teachers time and energy when they question the integrity of the students' works. These software products can provide chance for the learners to "get back on the right track when they make a mistake that may have several consequences" (p.137). Howard (1995) also states that programs that are facing a similar issue can focus on introducing further training to help students be more autonomous in their writings.

Another component of the program that has its strengths and weaknesses is the content classes. The physical constraints mentioned in the previous chapters, such

as lack of enough classrooms and merging of relevant fields in one classroom provides a weakness to the program. The students claimed that when they have to go through a syllabus that is only partially related with their academic fields, the content classes fail to achieve what it wants to achieve. In the interviews and the focus group study they pointed out that this issue of the component created caveats in their language learning process, as these classes were identified as “ineffective” by them. The students also commented on their teachers’ lack of enough knowledge about the content area and they identified it as a weakness. On the other hand, students who had the matching content classes and future academic fields pointed out that these classes helped them greatly both in language learning wise and in discovering their future academic fields. Liyanage and Birch (2001) state that using such discipline-specific materials could increase the motivation of the students towards the language learning process, for they could provide immediate benefits for the students. Taking the students’ academic needs into consideration has been suggested to improve the students’ current language learning processes, as well as help them in their future academic careers (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 2004; Hyland, 2006). From the student interviews, it can also be seen that these content classes also provide the students with a pre-knowledge about their future departments, which helps them justify whether they have selected the appropriate academic department or not. It can be said that, thanks to these content classes, the students are able to think more critically about their future academic lives. In a nutshell, it can be claimed that these content classes could provide certain improvement to the students in terms of language development and introducing them to the academic world; however, it should be noted that there are some suggestions to improve their efficacy. As stated by students, certain pre-training could be provided

to the teachers about the content material that they are going to cover in the program. This problem can also be tackled by giving freedom to the instructors in choosing the materials that they will use in these content classes. As suggested by Bayyurt & Yalçın (2014), giving autonomy to the instructors in choosing the materials that they will use in the content classes can serve better in meeting the academic needs of the students. Also, the program should solve the problems with the physical constraints to enable students from each department to study solely on their own academic content.

As the aim of these content classes is to make sure that the students have some content knowledge about their academic programs before they start it the following year, the program and the academic departments can work together for this goal. Kerestecioğlu and Bayyurt's (2018) report shows that various program planners, English instructors and academicians proposed that in order to help the students adaptation and integration to a university context where the medium of instruction is English, the academic departments should offer specially designed classes and seminars to their students in the preparatory program. This could allow students to be more familiarized with their academic department and also provide an opportunity for the preparatory program to develop materials based on those classes.

The students identified that the textbooks used in the program caused a vital weakness for the program. Their opinions were shaped around *Unlock* series' being "too boring" and "not challenging enough". These ideas were supported by the teachers to some extent. They agreed that the themes within the textbooks might not be too intriguing for the students. However, the teachers also suggested that choosing a new book is a meticulous process and there are many variables that should be taken into consideration. One thing, however, that can be concluded from the literature is

that there is a positive correlation between using authentic and stimulating language materials and the students' positive attitudes towards learning the language (Richards, 2001; Garinger, 2002; Rahimi & Hassani; 2012). To this end, it can be claimed from the students' evaluation that the books were regarded as a weakness, which causes negative attitudes towards the language learning process. This aspect can be identified as a weakness and it requires an addressing by the program planners. A separate textbook evaluation study is needed to find out the effective and ineffective parts of the textbooks in the program. Changing to a new book series is also a suggestion made by the students, however, as the teachers point out this is a meticulous project to undertake. Finding "the perfect textbook" could prove to be a fruitless process (Grant, 1987), however through conducting an evaluation study of the existing materials, a textbook that matches the interests and the needs of the students the best can be chosen (Tomlinson, 2002).

An issue that is addressed by the teachers and the students was on the lack of clear description about the levels of the students. Both parties claimed that the level names; "intermediates" or "pre-intermediates" do not refer to the students' actual level according to Common European Framework of Reference. The students identified this aspect as a weakness of the program as they put forward that they demand to know their level exactly to compare their development from the previous levels as well as to reassure their current level.

The students problematized the mismatch between the curriculum and the proficiency exam that they are preparing for. This theme, which did not appear in the initial interviews, was brought into the spotlight by the students during the focus group study, which took place three weeks after the proficiency exam in the mid-term. The students claimed that what they cover in the classes did not match with the

proficiency exam, which caused serious motivation loss and dropouts. They urged the program to address this deficit by introducing classes that can prepare students specifically for the proficiency exam. The teachers, on the other hand, approached to this subject with a calmer fashion, claiming that these classes are necessary, but after some time when the students reach at a certain proficiency level. As the ultimate assessment in the program is the proficiency exam, more classes could be offered to prepare students specifically for the reading, writing and speaking requirements of this exam.

Out-of-class activities are important parts of language programs (Gao, 2008; Leese, 2009; Sundqvist, 2009; Chan, 2016). As Turkey, being an expanding circle country according to Kachru's (1985) circles, is a context where there is little English usage outside of the classroom context, it could be beneficial for students to indulge into out-of-class activities. Although the students claimed that the program fails to offer activities that can be done outside of the classroom, the instructors claimed that this side is not a weakness of the program, as there are many activities that the students can attend, but do not. In order to improve the students' participation into these activities, the program could promote these activities more enthusiastically, and improve the range of activities that are offered to the students to address a range of different points of interests.

Lastly, it should also be noted that from a language policy and planning perspective, in order to set a better ground for the future planning and changes to this preparatory program, the program planners and other policymakers of the university should provide a clarification on the main motives why EMI was adopted. This would help policymakers choose a path while evaluating the program outcomes and choosing a path for a change. Karakaş's (2017) study showcases that failure to match

the aims of EMI with the language teaching policies of the university can create problems in the implementation of the program. In his study, the students reported that they were dissatisfied about the way that program has been implemented as the students claimed that the program was mostly geared towards improving “general English skills”, rather than improving “academic language skills”. Providing clear and visible motives behind shifting to EMI can help program planners choose more suitable textbooks, materials or teaching strategies.

In conclusion, the study revealed that the progress of the program had certain issues that needs addressing from the program planners. The pace of the program has been questioned by the students in many occasions, as they claim that they are not making the progress that they wanted to do. In order to validate or falsify such a claim, an outcome and material evaluation study can be conducted by the program. The weaknesses and the strengths of the program are also identified through the data emerged from the student interviews, the focus group study and the teacher interviews. The data indicates that the following items can be identified as the strengths of the program;

- the teachers
- their teaching practices
- availability of the foreign instructors
- content classes
- portfolio works and assignments

There are still certain weaknesses provided for the items above. The students suggested that content classes were ineffective for the students who are sharing a class with students from other relevant departments. Unnoticed plagiarism was also

regarded as a weakness of the program. Along with these, the following items were acknowledged as the weaknesses of the program according to the data;

- mismatch between the curriculum and the proficiency exam
- physical constraints that prevent offering content classes for every academic field
- the teachers' insufficient knowledge about the content material that they are teaching
- lack of clear description about the levels of the students
- boring and unchallenging textbooks used in the program

The last aim of this study was to provide suggestions for the improvement of the program based on the evaluations of the students and the teachers' feedback. The improvements that can be suggested to the program are presented in the following list;

- conducting an evaluation study on the outcomes and the progress of the program to justify the claims on the pace of the program
- making adaptations to the program to match the curriculum with the proficiency exam
- introducing classes towards the end of the term to prepare students specifically for the proficiency exam
- introducing speaking component to the proficiency exam to make sure that the students are equipped with academic speaking skills
- providing pre-service training to the teachers on the content materials that will be used in the program

- giving freedom to the teachers in choosing the appropriate content materials
- solving the physical constraints to offer classes for every academic department separately
- involving the other academic departments in the university to provide an introduction to the students' future academic fields
- introducing plagiarism checkers to the program to prevent any problems that could arouse from unnoticed plagiarized works
- providing further training to the students to improve their autonomy in writing
- conducting textbook evaluation studies to select the best textbook available for the students in the program
- improving the number of out-of-class activities as well as the way that the out-of-class activities are promoted to reach more students.

This program evaluation study also provided a chance for the students to convey their ideas, perspectives and experiences to other stakeholders and policy makers of the program. With the focus group study and the interviews, they were able make their voices heard by program planners and other stakeholders in the program. Through the evaluation of the program, the students were able to think more critically about their language learning process, and they were able to realize their stake as one of the most important stakeholders of the program. The students urged the researcher to publish the results of the study as quickly as possible to make sure that the strengths and weaknesses are conveyed, as well as immediate measures will be taken in the near future. The study also created a link between the teachers and the students and made both parties realize the unnoticed strengths and



weaknesses of the program, such as the unrecognized effectiveness of the portfolio works.

### 5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to evaluate the language program that is applied in a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. By using an interactive evaluation form, the experiences and the perspectives of students and the instructors were collected to understand (1) the progress of the program, (2) strengths and weaknesses of the program. Certain areas of improvement were pointed out, as well. It has been found out that the students problematized the application of the program, claiming it to be not up to their pace. The teachers on the other hand proposed that although there is some truth in the students' statements, the program still followed an acceptable pace. In order to analyze this issue and to justify the pace of the program, an outcome evaluation is suggested. The data showed that the teachers within the program, the assignments that were given and the content classes offered in the program were among the major strengths of the program. On the other hand, the mismatch between the curriculum and the proficiency exam, textbooks used in the program and no clear description of the students' actual levels were identified as chief setbacks in the program. Based on the findings, certain improvements were suggested, such as making adaptations to the program to improve the link between the curriculum and the proficiency exam, creating collaborative work with the academic departments in the university to improve students' introduction to the academic world and the language, and improving the links between the students and the program planners.

This study presents a case that is present in a private institution. The study served a point of inspiration for the development and improvement of this new

program. Certain diagnostic conclusions were reached to serve as a basis in enhancement of this preparatory program. The study also presented certain implications for the pedagogy, which is given in the following section.

## 5.2 Pedagogical implications

The study in question was conducted by a researcher who is also an instructor within the investigated program. The study shows that the involvement of the instructors in the design and the improvement of the program can be crucial, as they are the “visible façade” of the program itself. The instructors are the conductors of the educational programs, and their evaluation of the programs have a potential to reveal the real implementation of the program and the problems that can come along with it. To this end, the program in question can utilize the findings of this study to create a starting point in the improvement of the program.

In addition to this, such evaluations can empower the instructors and the students of the program, the parties whose voices are not heard a lot in the implementation of the program. To this end, this evaluation provides a chance for more overlooked parties to involve in making critical decisions on the evaluated program.

Lastly, the study shows the importance of the involvement of the instructors in program evaluation studies to uncover the experiences and expectations of the students. This evaluation helped the instructors to understand how the program is conveyed to the students and how it is received by them. Through such studies, the instructors and program planners can comprehend the real execution of the program and relate more to their students throughout their learning processes.

### 5.3 Suggestions for further research

As indicated in the conclusion, in order to understand whether the program is implemented in an effective way, an outcome analysis is needed. Through conducting an outcome analysis and evaluation, the program can see whether it has become successful in achieving its goals. Such a study would typically include assessing students on their use of academic language and later observing the graduates of the program in real academic contexts to see whether they are making use of the academic language as intended.

A separate needs analysis is also needed to determine the real needs of the students for this specific university context. In such a study, the data from the graduates of the program would be as important as the freshmen of the program. The former groups' experiences in the academic world of this specific context can yield profound implications for the needs of the students.

Lastly, a follow up study could be conducted within the program to see whether the identified strengths are still protected and whether the weaknesses are still prevalent. Interviews with the students can be carried out in every three or four weeks to learn about their experiences in the program, while a separate series of interviews can be conducted with the program planners to share the findings and urge some changes, if necessary. Lastly, a focus group study with the students can be conducted to see whether their issues have been addressed.

### 5.4 Limitations

One limitation of this study is the number of student participants (N=15) to the interviews. Interviews could be carried out with more students to obtain more

comprehensive data. Such evaluation studies are usually carried out with the involvement of the past graduates of the program. However, as the year that the evaluation is conducted is the first year of the program, no graduates were available.

Because of the time constraints, the evaluation study had to cover the first 17 weeks of the 28-week program. Although this timing was selected purposefully to allow enough time to implement the preliminary findings of the study, more interviews could be conducted at the end of the program too have a more general picture of the preparatory program.

The number of teachers ( $N=3$ ) that have attended to the study was also limited. Conducting interviews with more teachers could have provided a more comprehensive data on the teachers' perspectives and justification of the program.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS

Study: Program Evaluation of a Preparatory Program: Insights of Students and Teachers

Duration of the interview: 15 minutes

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Yusuf Cengiz

Interviewee:

[This study is conducted to evaluate the preparatory program in a private university. The students and instructors within the program are expected to participate in this study. The data obtained from the interviews will only be used for an academic study. The obtained data can be used in scientific research. The names of the participants will not be published or given to any third parties. The interview will last for 15 minutes. Please read the participant consent for carefully and sign if you want to join.]

Questions:

1. Students' expectations from the program

- What are your expectations from the program?
  - Students ideas on the implementation of the program,
  - Expected language level at the end of the program,
  - Language skills that are expected to attain through the program

- What are some of the main components of a good program?
- Are you satisfied with the number of class hours?
  - Should the program offer more hours of instruction?
- To what extent did the program meet your needs?
  - Students' sharing the same perceptions with the teachers
  - Met and unmet needs
- What are some of the reasons why your expectations were not met?
  - Mismatch between the expectations and the program
- Do you think that the program prepared you for your upcoming academic program?
  - Students' ideas on their future academic lives and academic language use
- Did your expectations from the program changed in time?
  - If yes, how?

## 2. Strengths of the program

- What were the most effective aspects of the program?
  - What worked for you?
  - How did these aspects help you in your learning process?
- How did these aspects improve your language abilities?
  - The effect of program on language learning
- What were the strongest aspects of the program for you?

## 3. Weaknesses of the program

- What did not work for you?
  - Ineffective aspects of the program

- Negative sides of the program
- How did these ineffective aspects affect your language learning experiences?
  - Students ideas on the progress of the program

#### 4. Program components

- How did the major components of the program such as textbooks, portfolio works or out-of-class activities affect your language learning process?
  - Are these components strengths or weaknesses for the program

#### 5. Program improvement

- What would you suggest to improve the program?

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

**Institution: Boğaziçi University**

**Study: Program Evaluation of a Preparatory Program: Insights Of Students and Teachers**

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**Project topic:** This study aims to evaluate the preparatory program applied in Istinye University, a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. It aims to evaluate the English preparatory program on students' feedback. Through this study, it is aimed to gather the experiences of the students in the English preparatory program they are enrolled and to gain the students' ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the program they are in. At the same time, it is aimed to gather the opinions of the students about the developmental aspects of the program.

Dear student,

This research, which will be carried out under the supervision of Yasemin Bayyurt, will undertake a program evaluation study of the English preparatory program in your university. For this purpose, interviews and focus group studies will



be organized with 12 students, in which the strengths, weaknesses are discussed and improvements to the program will be proposed based on the experiences and opinions of the students. In addition, the opinions of the teachers involved in the program on these strengths and weaknesses and their perspectives against proposed developments will be included in the study. In this semi-structured interview, 12 students and 3 teachers will be interviewed by voice recorders. In the focus group study of the study, a group discussion will be held with all students in a class determined by the researcher. This study will be carried out at Istinye University English Preparatory Department with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Master and PhD Theses in Social Sciences and Humanities (SOBETİK).

**Consent:** We invite you to participate in this project in order to discover and analyze the experiences of the students of Istinye University English Preparatory Program related to the program that they are in, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to suggest changes that can be made to the program. We hope that this study will reveal the deficiencies of the applied English Preparatory Program, determine how the program reaches the students in theory, and reveal the changes that need to be made in the program from the perspective of the students.

If you agree to participate in the research, you will take part in a 15-minute semi-structured interview and a focus group study with the participation of all students. The data from the students will be collected through voice recorders and observer notes. During these observations, the voice recorder will be used and the researcher will take some notes about the content. Your name, experience, opinions and records will be kept strictly confidential.

Participation in the study is entirely optional. You are not charged any fees and you are not paid any money. Data from you can be used for further studies. You may opt out of the work at any time. In this case, the data we have received from you will be destroyed.

The research that we aim to conduct is not expected to bring you any risk. On the contrary, with this research, the participants will have the chance to convey ideas about the program and have the chance to use these views in the development of the program. The data to be obtained with this study can be used in writing more than one scientific article. Before signing this form, let us know if you have any questions about the work. If you have any further questions, you can ask the project manager (Office Phone: +90 212 359 6797) or the researcher (Cell Phone: +90 537 891 66 11). You can consult with the Ethics Committee for Master and PhD Theses in Social Sciences and Humanities (SOBETİK).

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I have read and understood the consent form above and I agree to participate the study. I want to / do not want to take a copy of the statement (in this case, the researcher keeps the document).

I agree to participate.

Name of the participant:.....

Signature: .....

Date (Day/Month/Year):...../...../.....

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP STUDY PROTOCOL

Study: Program Evaluation of a Preparatory Program: Insights of Students and Teachers

Duration of the interview: 15 minutes

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Yusuf Cengiz

Interviewee:

[This study is conducted for the purpose of evaluating the English preparatory program at a private university. The people who are expected to participate in this study are the students and teachers. The data obtained from this study will be used for a thesis study only. The findings can be used in academic publications. The names of the participants will remain confidential. This focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. Please read and sign the participant information and consent form given to you in the appendix.]

Questions:

1. Students' expectations from the program

- What are your expectations from the program?
  - Students ideas on the implementation of the program,
  - Expected language level at the end of the program,

- Language skills that are expected to attain through the program
- What are some of the main components of a good program?
- Are you satisfied with the number of class hours?
  - Should the program offer more hours of instruction?
- To what extent did the program meet your needs?
  - Students' sharing the same perceptions with the teachers
  - Met and unmet needs
- What are some of the reasons why your expectations were not met?
  - Mismatch between the expectations and the program
- Do you think that the program prepared you for your upcoming academic program?
  - Students' ideas on their future academic lives and academic language use
- Did your expectations from the program changed in time?
  - If yes, how?

## 2. Strengths of the program

- What were the most effective aspects of the program?
  - What worked for you?
  - How did these aspects helped you in your learning process
- How did these aspects improve your language abilities?
  - The effect of program on language learning
- What were the strongest aspects of the program for you?

## 3. Weaknesses of the program

- What did not work for you?

- Ineffective aspects of the program
- Negative sides of the program
- How did these ineffective aspects affect your language learning experiences?
  - Students ideas on the progress of the program

#### 4. Program components

- How did the major components of the program such as textbooks, portfolio works or out-of-class activities affect your language learning process?
  - Are these components strengths or weaknesses for the program

#### 5. Program improvement

- What would you suggest to improve the program?

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INSTRUCTORS

Study: Program Evaluation of a Preparatory Program: Insights of Students and Teachers

Duration of the interview: 15 minutes

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Yusuf Cengiz

Interviewee:

[This study is conducted to evaluate the preparatory program in a private university. The students and instructors within the program are expected to participate in this study. The data obtained from the interviews will only be used for an academic study. The obtained data can be used in scientific research. The names of the participants will not be published or given to any third parties. The interview will last for 15 minutes. Please read the participant consent for carefully and sign if you want to join.]

Questions:

1. Teachers' opinions on the program

- Do you think that the program is an appropriate program to improve students' level of English?
- Do you think that parts of the program serve this purpose?
  - Which of these parts contribute positively to language skills?

- Which of these parts do not contribute positively to language skills.?

## 2. Strengths of the program

- What were the most effective aspects of the program?
  - Determining the strengths of the program, the most positive and most useful areas for teachers
- How much of these employees contributed to improving their English language skills?
  - The effect of the program on language skills

## 3. Non-working aspects of the program

- What were the negative, ineffective aspects of the program?
  - Identifying the weaknesses of the program, the most negative areas for the students
- What impact did these non-working aspects have on students' English language skills?
  - The impact of the program on language skills,
  - teachers' ideas about the functioning of the program

## 4. On Students' Thoughts

- What are your thoughts on the factors that students identify as working aspects of the program?
  - What do you think are the main reasons why students identify these aspects?
- What are your thoughts on the factors that students identify as non-working aspects of the program?

- What do you think are the main reasons why students identify these aspects?
- What do you think about suggested improvements to the program?

#### 5. Developing the Program

- What changes would you recommend for the development of the program? If you were designing the program, what changes would you make?



## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INSTRUCTORS

**Institution: Boğaziçi University**

**Study: Program Evaluation of a Preparatory Program: Insights Of Students and Teachers**

**Project Manager: Prof. Yasemin Bayyurt**

**E-mail: bayyurty@boun.edu.tr**

**Phone: +90 212 359 6797**

**Researcher: Yusuf Cengiz**

**E-mail: yusuf.cengiz@boun.edu.tr**

**Phone: +90 537 891 66 11**

**Project topic:** This study aims to evaluate the preparatory program applied in Istinye University, a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. It aims to evaluate the English preparatory program on students' feedback. Through this study, it is aimed to gather the experiences of the students in the English preparatory program they are enrolled and to gain the students' ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the program they are in. At the same time, it is aimed to gather the opinions of the students about the developmental aspects of the program.

Dear teacher,

This research, which will be carried out under the supervision of Yasemin Bayyurt, will undertake a program evaluation study of the English preparatory program in your university. For this purpose, interviews and focus group studies will be organized with 12 students, in which the strengths, weaknesses are discussed and

improvements to the program will be proposed based on the experiences and opinions of the students. In addition, the opinions of the teachers involved in the program on these strengths and weaknesses and their perspectives against proposed developments will be included in the study. In this semi-structured interview, 12 students and 3 teachers will be interviewed by voice recorders. In the focus group study of the study, a group discussion will be held with all students in a class determined by the researcher. This study will be carried out at Istinye University English Preparatory Department with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Master and PhD Theses in Social Sciences and Humanities (SOBETİK).

**Consent:** We invite you to participate in this project in order to discover and analyze the experiences of the students of Istinye University English Preparatory Program related to the program that they are in, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to suggest changes that can be made to the program. We hope that this study will reveal the deficiencies of the applied English Preparatory Program, determine how the program reaches the students in theory, and reveal the changes that need to be made in the program from the perspective of the students.

If you agree to participate in the research, you will take part in a 15-minute semi-structured interview and a focus group study with the participation of all students. The data from the students will be collected through voice recorders and observer notes. During these observations, the voice recorder will be used, and the researcher will take some notes about the content. Your name, experience, opinions and records will be kept strictly confidential.

Participation in the study is entirely optional. You are not charged any fees and you are not paid any money. Data from you can be used for further studies. You may opt out of the work at any time. In this case, the data we have received from you will be destroyed.

The research that we aim to conduct is not expected to bring you any risk. On the contrary, with this research, the participants will have the chance to convey ideas about the program and have the chance to use these views in the development of the program. The data to be obtained with this study can be used in writing more than one scientific article. Before signing this form, let us know if you have any questions about the work. If you have any further questions, you can ask the project manager (Office Phone: +90 212 359 6797) or the researcher (Cell Phone: +90 537 891 66 11). You can consult with the Ethics Committee for Master and PhD Theses in Social Sciences and Humanities (SOBETİK).

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I have read and understood the consent form above and I agree to participate the study. I want to / do not want to take a copy of the statement (in this case, the researcher keeps the document).

I agree to participate.

Name of the participant:.....

Signature: .....

Date (Day/Month/Year):...../...../.....

APPENDIX F

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

T.C.

BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ

Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu

Sayı: 2019-50

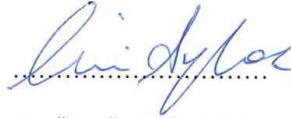
9 Mayıs 2019

Yusuf Cengiz

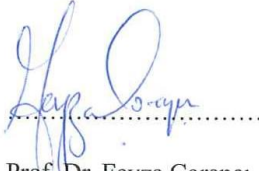
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi

Sayın Araştırmacı,

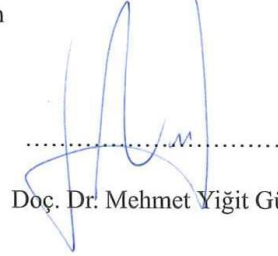
"Bir Yabancı Dil Hazırlık Programının Değerlendirilmesi: Öğrenci ve Öğretmenlerin Görüşleri" başlıklı projeniz ile ilgili olarak yaptığımız SBB-EAK 2019/51 sayılı başvuru komisyonumuz tarafından 9 Mayıs 2019 tarihli toplantıda incelenmiş ve uygun bulunmuştur.



Dr. Öğr. Üyesi İnci Ayhan



Prof. Dr. Feyza Çorapçı



Doç. Dr. Mehmet Yiğit Gürdal

RAPORCU

Doç. Dr. Ebru Kaya



Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Şebnem Yalçın

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