A Contrastive Qualitative Evaluation of Two Different Sequential Programs Launched at the School of Foreign Languages of a Turkish University

Uğur Recep Çetinavcı

Uludağ University, Turkey

cetinavcı@uludag.edu.tr

Ece Zehir Topkaya

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey

ecetopkaya@yahoo.com

Abstract

In a year-long preparatory English class in a state university in Turkey, students are expected to develop knowledge and skills related to language including grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing ,and speaking. In this context students and teachers are challenged in considering how much accuracy should be emphasized in the learning and teaching process, which leads to rethinking and reframing to what extent and how grammar teaching/learning should take place in the language program. Having been challenged with these questions, this paper presents an evaluation of two different regimes of grammar teaching, one that follows its own language content and another that follows the language content of the main course. To determine the value of the programs, the administrator, 5 instructors and 36 students were interviewed with one-on-one and group interview techniques and 6 classroom hours were observed and relevant exam results and attendance records were compared. It was found that the program following the language content of the main course is favored much more strongly as a positive step in the course of producing the desired learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Program evaluation; language teaching program; grammar teaching.*

Introduction

With especially the emergence of the communicative principles in the 1970s, the recent decades have seen various arguments for and against grammar instruction in language teaching. After being underestimated and even claimed to be deleterious for a considerable time, it has become clear that grammar is a "tool or resource to be used in the comprehension and production of oral and written discourse" (Celce-Murica, 1991, p.466) and recent research has demonstrated the need for formal instruction for learners to attain high levels of accuracy and proficiency and this has led to a resurgence of grammar teaching (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004, p.126).

The reconsideration of grammar teaching in language classroom is rooted in currently favored language acquisition studies, which consider language learning without consciousness of form highly questionable. Schmidt (1993) suggests that conscious attention to form, i.e. noticing, is a prerequisite for language learning. Investigators such as Skehan (1998) have supportingly reported that it is necessary for learners to notice target forms in input; otherwise they process input for meaning only and do not attend to specific forms, and consequently fail to process and acquire them (Nassaji and Fotos, 2004, p. 128). Besides, as related research has substantiated, focusing on forms in some way is essential for high accuracy levels (Ellis, 2002; Mitchell, 2000) and explicitly presenting the structure, exemplifying it and giving rules for its use culminates in durable gains in the learning of target structures in comparison to implicit instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000).

As for the manner of grammar teaching, while its exact nature is unclear yet, Ellis (2002) points to the current research that support the need for combining and harmonizing form focused instruction and meaningful communication opportunities with output, collaborative practice and interactional feedback mechanisms secured (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004).

Preparatory English Classes and the Teaching of Grammar: Case in Turkey

In Turkey, some state universities and all private universities where medium of instruction is English offer preparatory classes. On the other hand, in some other state universities such as Uludag University (Bursa), students from some departments where 30 % of the undergraduate compulsory courses are delivered in English are obliged to go through a preparatory year (for the regulations see http://www.yok.gov.tr/content/view/1047).

The general purpose of the English preparatory year is to introduce grammar and vocabulary and help students to develop skills of aural comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. Usually this objective is met by designing separate courses for these language areas and sometimes by merging some of these in one course, such as speaking-listening. In this context, grammar is mostly taught as part of the content of the main course, which in fact includes all the skill areas but puts more emphasis on explicit grammar learning. In the preparatory year students usually receive 24-30 hours of English instruction per week depending on the proficiency level they enroll.

Research studies on English preparatory year in Turkey reveal certain positive and negative aspects inherent in such programs. For example, Özkanal and Hakan's (2010) study investigated the effectiveness of Eskişehir Osmangazi University English Preparatory Program as perceived by the students enrolled and the results suggested overall contentment with the program and its instructors, with the agreed-upon deficiencies that the physical conditions were not satisfactory and there was no component for English for specific purposes. Similarly, Tunç (2009) studied the effectiveness of the English Language Teaching Program at Atılım University, Preparatory School. The findings pointed to the need for targeting all language skills and making the materials, instruction and exams compatible with each other. Another sample study that can be cited is Karataş and Fer's (2009), which evaluated the English curriculum at Yıldız Technical University Preparatory School. The major findings indicated that it was essential that the audio-visual materials had to be varied and the students' needs related with their fields and English knowledge necessary for business life had to be determined. In line with the findings of these studies, Tunç's (2010) study also investigated effectiveness of Ankara University Preparatory School program through the perspectives of instructors and students and the findings showed that the program partially served for its purpose but some improvements in the physical

conditions, content, materials and assessment dimensions were required to make the program more effective.

As this brief literature indicates, English preparatory year programs face several challenges in general. There are certainly many reasons lying behind these problems. For instance, it is a fact that these programs serve young adults who have diverse needs and expectations. They come from different educational backgrounds and their motivational drives also differ (Genç & Kaya, 2010), thus making it impossible to have somewhat homogeneous classes, a circumstance which negatively influences student achievement of the learning outcomes. Moreover, due to excessive number of students in English preparatory classes, insufficient number of instructors and poor physical conditions as cited as major handicaps by aforementioned studies, the quality of the programs usually decreases (Tunç, 2010; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010).

One of the central issues of these programs has always been the emphasis put on grammar and the relatively much time allocated to grammar teaching/learning. In such cases courses that reinforce the productive skills of speaking and writing, which require more student-student and student-teacher interaction and intensive/ongoing feedback on student progress, are usually neglected. In such a context, grammar learning and teaching inevitably becomes one of the main focuses of the programs. Besides, 'a need for more speedy processing of language', as stated by Leki and Carson (1994, p. 90), often leads students to place more emphasis on grammar courses. Last but not least, the pressure to test large number of students in a relatively short period of time objectively gives way to the development and implementation of summative and/or formative tests based largely on techniques and items measuring grammatical accuracy at the expense of requiring productive and communicative skills. As Mendelsohn (1989) puts it, this impossibility or failure to design a communicative test of what is to be taught or being taught and the resulting grammar-based discrete-item tests have a backwash effect on the teaching, which is heightened by the central nationwide language proficiency exams prepared with similar features for any student who would need to certify how proficient he/she is during or after his/her higher education. As expected then, the preparatory foreign language higher schools in Turkey predominantly offer explicit grammar courses in varying regimes.

Within this context, this particular study attempts to determine the outcomes and effects of two regimes of grammar teaching that were followed in the English preparatory year program at Uludağ University. With this aim in mind, the study tries to find answers to the following question:

In comparison with the grammar program that followed its own content, what are the outcomes of the grammar program aligned with the main course content by a curricular change?

Methodology

This study was mainly designed as a case study and being as such, it mainly followed a qualitative approach to find answers to the research problem posed. Scheerens et al (2003, p.390) emphasize that qualitative approaches have the characteristics of "open" research formats, such as "open" interview questions, and "free" observation and a strong dependence on the views of persons that are part of the "evaluand (evaluation object)". This is confirmed by Lynch (1996, p.107) indicating that the most common methods for gathering and recording data in a naturalistic qualitative program evaluation are observation, interviews and document analysis. In this respect; based on its main data

sources, which are interviews and observations, it is possible to mention that the qualitative side of the present study is predominant.

Embedded in the naturalistic paradigm in pursuit of understanding a phenomenon within its context free of any manipulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Yüksel, 2010), the emic approach of qualitative evaluation is believed to enable the evaluator to deepen his/her understanding of the program, thus "accounting more thoroughly for the outcomes of the program" (Van, 2008, p.4). Besides, because of the observations of actions in their natural context and interviews with participants, naturalistic evaluators can have a good chance to adjust their assumptions according to the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1982 cited in Van, 2008).

However, the study is not completely distant from quantifiable data. In consideration of the argument that suggests a mix of evaluation strategies (Lynch, 1996) like in making use of pencil-and-paper tests together with interviews, the study also benefits from a comparable set of data offered by exam results and attendance records. The aim here is to make the investigation more effective through achieving "triangulation", which is based on the premise that each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality (Denzin, 1978, p.28) and multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill (Patton, 1999, p.1192).

Setting

The locale for this evaluative study is Uludag University Foreign Language Preparatory School, whose programs giving 1-year elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate level language training have not been formally evaluated so far. As a first attempt to do that, this study aims to determine the outcomes of two different regimes of grammar teaching that the program has adopted so far (see Table 1 for details).

Table 1. Comparison of the Two Regimes of Grammar Teaching

Grammar teaching	Approach	Curriculum Alignment	Hours per week	Materials
1st Regime	Explicit	Not aligned; used the course book's content as the curriculum	Elementary: 10 Pre-Int. : 7 Intermdiate: 6	Grammar Way Series
2nd Regime	Explicit	Aligned with the main course content	9 for all levels	New English File + Supplementary pack developed by instructors

The first regime in question was followed until the end of the 2009-2010 academic year and as the table reveals, it was based on the use of an independent grammar textbook imposing its own syllabus free of the grammar points studied in the main course lessons taught via a different textbook. The second one, on the other hand, was implemented in the academic year of 2010-2011 in which direct grammar instruction and practice was provided through a grammar pack compiled by the instructors to be studied in parallel with the sequence of the grammar topics that the text book used in the main course lessons sets forth. From this aspect, the study can be considered an outcomes-based

evaluation of change resulting from a small-scale curriculum renewal. As O'Dowd (2002, p. 23) emphasizes, instituting changes without determining their effect on students, teaching staff, management, future curriculum changes, and the educational entity itself may doom the curriculum innovation to failure.

Participants

The participants of the study are one administrator, 6 instructors, 18 students trained with the previous system and 18 others trained with the new program. The reason for choosing that particular administrator was that it was her by whom the change was originated. The six instructors in question were all testing office members who had taught students from all levels in the previous system. The first 18-person group consisted of the previous year students from three different faculties, for which the preparatory school is compulsory. In each of the three 6-person subgroups consisting of elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate level students, there were 2 students from each faculty. The logic was the same in distributing the students in the other 18-person group, which was comprised of last year's students.

Another participating group was a current pre-intermediate class whose lessons were observed by the evaluator systematically. They contributed to the study not as interviewees but as the focus of the observational tasks.

Data Collection Techniques and Procedure

To investigate the research question of the study, one-on-one and focus group interviews and observation were conducted. Additionally, to further understand the effects of regime change in grammar teaching, test results of the students were also documented and analyzed. The step by step procedure for data collection is briefly summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Procedures for Data Collection

Steps	Procedures	Aim
1	One-on-one interview with the administrator	To elicit the motives behind the curricular change regarding grammar teaching
2	One-on-one interview with the instructors	To understand their perceptions about the curricular change
3	Focus group interviews with students	To understand the student perceptions about both of the regimes to see if they and those of the administrator and instructors cross-validate one another
4	observation of classes	to see the way the theoretical framework of the curricular change was put into practice
5	analysis of the exam results and attendance records of the previous and last year	to reinterpret and cross-validate the qualitative data with an additional perspective based on quantified

information

The preliminary stage of data collection was the one-on-one interview with the abovementioned administrator. After the elicitation of the motives behind the change from her, the instructors were interviewed individually on the same day in a sequence. With the information obtained from the administrator in mind, they were asked to convey their any kind of positive and negative opinions on the old and new program.

In the following two weeks, focus group interviews were carried out with the two student groups to see where their views coincided with and differed from those of the administrator, instructors and other students. The students were made a central figure of the evaluation considering the fact that, while curriculums supposedly exist to serve their interests, learners' preferences, if sought at all, are marginalized and their voices are mostly silent in curricular interventions (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999, p. 84).

Over the ensuing two weeks, a total of six Main Course 1 and Main Course 2 (3 each) lessons of the same class were observed. The instructors of the class were not among those interviewed and did not know what the evaluator specifically looked at so that they did not concentrate on giving what they thought the evaluator particularly expected to find. With the role of a "passive participant" observer (Spradley, 1980 cited in Lynch, 1996, p.121), the aim was to see the way the theoretical framework of the curricular change was put into practice, thus to check if the underlying theory is merely espoused ("declared" to be implemented) or a one in actual use (Argyris & Schön, 1989). To record as thoroughly as possible what was happening in the observed context, descriptive field notes were taken. As it is not possible to observe everything (Patton, 1987), the thematic framework set as based on the aims and expectations shared by the related administrator and instructors served as the "sensitizing concepts" (Patton, 1987, p.82), which eased the observational tasks.

As the last step, access was gained to the documents of the program on a computerized database. The exam results and attendance records of the last two years, belonging to two different regimes of grammar teaching, were examined to reinterpret the qualitative data with an additional perspective gained through quantified information. This was done to be able to check the conclusions across different kinds of data and thus contribute to validity establishment (Lynch 1996, p.152). Another important point here is that, after getting at the exam results, a follow-up meeting was held with the members of the testing office and a consensus was reached that the exams had approximately the same level of difficulty.

Data Analysis

As Lynch (1996, p.139) indicates, for focusing the evaluation in qualitative data analysis, a useful way is to develop a *thematic framework* that represents the most important evaluation questions. It is used to classify and organize data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 220). Based the ideas and expectations behind the curricular change shared by the administrator as its originator, the thematic framework which was set to focus the interview questions and analysis is presented below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Thematic Framework: U. Ü. School of Foreign Languages

1. Student and instructor perception of the old program in relation to the

curriculum design

2. Student and instructor perception of the old program in relation to the teaching practices
3. Student and instructor perception of the old program in relation to skill development
4. Student and instructor perception of the old program in relation to the exams
5. Student and instructor feelings regarding the old program
6. Effects of the new program on teaching practices
7. Effects of the new program on skill development
8. Effects of the new program on the exams and perception of the exams
9. Student and instructor attitudes towards the new program with its new curriculum design

The interview data had already been recorded by taking simultaneous notes confirmed by the related interviewees and as the second step, using the thematic framework as a guide, the entire data set was read through several times to code it. This procedure of recursive data reading was done throughout the entire study for every data set as based on the analytical framework of analytic induction, according to which the data are read several times in pursuit of the relevant emergent patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) that can be coded and/or categorized. The codes were put in the margins of the notepapers to reduce and classify the data. The code system used is below (see Table 4).

Table 4. Codes from the U. Ü. School of Foreign Languages Program Evaluation

POPC: perception of the old program curriculum design
POTP: perception of the old program teaching practices
POSD: perception of the old program in terms of skill development
POE: perception of the old program in relation to the exams
FO: feelings regarding the old program
ENTP: effects of the new program on teaching practices
ENSD: effects of the new program on skill development
ENE: effects of the new program on exams
AN: attitudes towards the new program
OTH: other

While the coding system revealed the most common themes, some of what the interviewed participants said in relation to the questions is directly quoted in the text to explicitly clarify the ideas and to support the emerging themes. Therefore, to maintain these participants' anonymity the instructors were coded in a range from I1 to I6 and students in a range from S1 to S36 while reporting their ideas.

As for the analysis of the observational data, the field notes taken according to the aforementioned notion of "sensitizing concepts" were read through several times to be interpreted. Below is the list of the observational foci, about which field notes were taken during the observational tasks according to the sensitizing concepts shaped by the interviews with the key administrator and instructors (see Table 5).

Table 5. The List of the Observational Foci of Classroom Observation at U. Ü. School of Foreign Languages Program

• Whether any omission occurs in the scheduled materials for work on each skill
• Teacher and student use of the target language
• The academic readiness of the students for the topics to be studied
• The teaching pace
• Student motivation and collective participation
• Whether any extra materials can be used for reinforcement and consolidation

The smoothness of the transition between the lessons of the two instructors to have an idea about the parallelism between the courses and cooperation between the instructors

For the analysis of the quantitative data, two midterm and two quiz averages of all the previous and last year elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate classes were calculated to compare the success rates with one another. Besides that, the average 8-week attendance performance of all the level classes of the previous and last year was calculated to have an idea about the motivational aspect of the two programs.

Results

Interview with the Administrator

This interview had the "standardized open-ended interview" format, which has an exact wording and order of questions determined in advance (Lynch, 1996, p.127) and is appropriate especially when limited time for the interviewee is a problem (Patton, 1987; Lynch, 1996). As she was the person who introduced the change into the system, this format was preferred also to have a clear picture of the theoretical motives behind that curricular intervention and focus the subsequent interviews with the instructors and students. The questions asked and the answers are below:

1) What problems were identified about the old system to introduce this change?

> "The success rates in the exams were not satisfactory and the situation was not any different in terms of the national and international language exams. We had two independent courses called"

> "Main Course" and "Grammar" with their own instructors and textbooks, and they were inevitably taught in a disconnected way right from the first day of school. In order to expose the students to the whole theoretical coverage of the two courses in a certain period, the teaching practices favored input too much in predominantly teacher and lecture-based sessions with limited learner language production. When things had to be omitted because of lack of time, writing and speaking activities were always the first. This caused weariness and boredom for both students and instructors. Despite all these, I can say that the grammar points taught neither in the main course nor in the grammar course could be consolidated decently."

2) Does this curricular intervention have a theoretical and/or practical background?

> "Because I am an instructor as well, I had first-hand practical experience myself about the problems. On the other hand, the curriculums of 7 different universities were

examined and discussed with related people in congresses. I synthesized this background information with what I got from a training program on curriculum renewal provided by the American Embassy."

3) What do you expect from this change? Do you have any specified concrete objectives?

"We no more want to talk about any "omitted part" in any teaching material. For this, we converted the "Grammar" course into "Main Course 2" integrated with "Main Course 1" to achieve parallelism and properly consolidate what is learned in any of the courses. We now try to offer a less detailed grammatical coverage to create more time for language production. The aim is to teach less but in a more effective way through multi-skill development. We are going to try to support this with more production-oriented and contextualized exam items. We expect higher grade point averages in the exams and increased attendance at the courses."

4) Do you consider this year a trial period for the implementation of this change? Do you have any established criteria to get back to the old system or revise the new one?

"Of course this is a year of trial. For instance, we have some concerns about the pack that replaced the independent grammar books used in the old self-contained grammar course. It was not produced by expert material developers. We might need to get help about it to revise or change it. Our main target is multi-skill development and we will keep working for that. I can definitely say that we need feedback on what we are trying to do."

5) Do you plan to get feedback from the practitioners and students throughout the process?

"It is not systematized but I keep getting informal feedback. Comparable exam results and attendance records can serve as a concrete leading indicator."

6) Is there any related thing you would like to add?

"We plan to carry out detailed needs analysis about our prospective students. It is an ideal to shape the education given here according their academic and professional life. This requires faculty-based investigation and cooperation. Besides this, in accordance with the change in the system, we plan to integrate speaking and pronunciation components into the exams to measure what we are trying to give."

Interviews with the Instructors

These interviews had the "informal conversational interview" format, in which the interviewer attempts to engage the interviewee in a natural conversation with questions arising more or less spontaneously (Lynch, 1996, p.126). In conformity with this format, there was not a predetermined set of questions (Patton, 2002, p.342) and a premium was put on discovering the interviewees' perceptions of the two programs in their own words (Lynch, 1996, p.127). Initiation of the interview by just asking them to compare the programs of the previous and last year produced a comprehensive mass of data. In consideration of the thematic framework already set according to the information obtained from the key administrator, some related complementary questions were asked when needed. The recurring themes across the interviews are as follows:

* The coverage of the grammar course was considerably extensive and detailed.

* The pace of the grammar course had to be so fast that the academic readiness of especially the elementary students could not always be taken into consideration.

* Within the time given, it was a lot more than most of our students could take and it gave us no chance to teach according to communicative language teaching principles.

* As we were in a rush to theoretically cover all the salient features in the content of the two courses, we sacrificed so many activities and they were mainly those calling for language production. We often omitted even some parts in the workbook and supplementary materials in the teacher's book.

* What we had to do in the grammar classes was '*talking about* English grammar in *Turkish*' in a mechanical way. Although a considerable amount of time was allocated for grammar, there was almost no chance to make it functional with appropriate activities.

* There was no communication between the instructors of the 'Main Course' and 'Grammar'. It was so difficult for it to happen anyway as teachers needed to follow their own syllabuses that included the instruction of language points in completely different sequences.

* In time, the students adopted an attitude according to which knowing a language and/or succeeding in exams means knowing a lot about the grammar of that language.

* The tendency to grammar-based lessons that resulted from the old system created mainly grammar-oriented exams.

Two quotes that can characterize the kind of responses above are as follows:

> *"We were teaching in a way just the opposite of what we had been taught to do in our language teacher education."* [I2 (Instructor 2)]

> *"For the students, English almost consisted of gap-filling activities of grammar. There were many of them skipping main course classes with the thought that attending grammar classes would suffice to achieve in big exams."* [I3]

* No need is felt now to omit things. Besides the speaking course, it is now possible to offer all the speaking sessions scheduled for the main course classes.

* We feel relieved about covering the syllabus. There can be time even for activities like games. Confused and bored student faces are fewer now.

* No urge is felt now to teach in Turkish.

* When a language point is studied, we and students can practice it more from the pack compatible with the course book. Last year, it sometimes took a very long time to restudy a point in the grammar book used.

* Like last year, there are two courses with different names and different instructors but one carries on from the point where the other has stopped. This has brought uniformity and inevitable cooperation to revise and consolidate the points studied.

Two quotes that can characterize this kind of responses are as follows:

"*The motto of the current program can be 'Use English!'*" [I2]

"*This system allows production and recycling.*" [I6]

* The pack should be revised and enriched. For some specific points, it fails to provide sufficient reinforcement.
* In order for the new program to be more effective and achieve its objectives, the exams should change too. In a way, they should measure more of productive skills so that students and instructors try harder about writing and speaking sessions.

* As some advanced grammar points are not taught any more, learning them is left to only self-study for students. This might be questioned in terms of such student needs as achieving in exams like KPDS and studying at departments teaching in English.

Interviews with the Students

Group interviews were conducted with the students. As the interviewing approach, the "interview guide" format was adopted. This approach allows the interviewer to specify a range of questions to be covered in advance, formulate the wording of the questions as well as the order for asking them as the interview progresses, make efficient use of time and phrase the questions in response to the natural flow of the interview conversation (Lynch, 1996: 128). Taking these into consideration, it was decided that the interview guide format would be ideal to keep pace with the dynamism of the groups as much as possible. The questions were formulated according to the thematic framework set as based on the previous interviews with the administrator and instructors.

In accordance with the fact that typically such interviews involve six to eight participants with similar background (McKay, 2006: 52), there were six people in each group of elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate level students of the previous and last year.

Previous Year's Students: 1st Regime

Below are the questions asked to the students of the previous year and the themes shaped as based on their agreed-upon responses:

1) You had main course and grammar classes. How complementary do you think they were? Did you consider any of them "more important?"

The courses were distant from being complementary in any way. Intermediate students were aware right from the beginning that the two book series used in the two courses were from different publishers anyway. Especially elementary students often felt the need to ask their main course instructor to teach about the agenda of the grammar course or vice versa. Intermediate students favored main course classes more as they thought that they had already known a lot about grammar

and needed to benefit as much as possible from the speaking sessions in main course classes. On the other hand, elementary students considered grammar classes almost indispensable as they saw in the first quiz that grammar knowledge would make up most of exam success.

2) Do you believe that sufficient reinforcement was given for the topics studied? Were the materials at hand used effectively for that?

For all the groups, every on-paper thing was done in the grammar book. Most of the time, the topics in the main course classes were confined to limited practice after being presented in a particular context. The time allocated for main course sometimes did not suffice for workbook and supplementary worksheets or checking the related answers properly. It can be said that reinforcement was left to the extent the students individually tried to benefit from the self-access material unit. Intermediate students were a bit more comfortable in this sense. As they had started ahead of the other groups and needed to finish two books fewer, they had more time for everything.

3) Were you given enough chance to practice the instructed points writing and speaking?

As the instructors mentioned it, speaking activities and sessions always proved to be the first for omission. Elementary and pre-intermediate students added the sacrifices made from listening exercises as well and reminded that one should listen and understand first to speak after that. All the groups made mention of the writing course of two hours a week but in an agreement that they were not motivating and fruitful at all. The reason turned out to be that the writing parts in the exams mainly required cloze test performance but not production of paragraphs and/or texts. Therefore, in writing classes and writing sessions in the other courses, they did not feel the need to make the effort to write from scratch.

4) What was the predominant medium of instruction?

It was substantially Turkish in the elementary and pre-intermediate grammar classes. The intermediate students could cope with the instruction in English, which was given at a slower pace than the others were. A striking quote about this from an elementary student is as follows:

> *"The only conversation in English was when we exchanged a 'Hello' at the beginning of the classes. It was really interesting why it was not a 'Merhaba'"* [S3 (Student 3)]

5) What about the exams? What did they stimulate you to focus on while the program was being run?

The way the exams led the students was motivating them to focus on detailed grammatical issues and memorize as much of the lexicon as possible. As the end-of-year proficiency exam, which was the biggest one, was common for all the students, it is the elementary and pre-intermediate students' criticism that it could be considerably hard for them while fairly easy for intermediate students. There were no planned omissions for the intermediate level but the intermediate students admitted that they learned the omitted parts from the students of the other levels so that they did not concentrate on them while studying for the proficiency exam as it was common for all.

6) Did you ever feel that the instructors were in a hurry to teach things?

Especially for the elementary and pre-intermediate students, it was felt almost at all times when the exams came closer. They also saw that some arbitrary omissions happened mainly from scheduled speaking and listening sessions. A related quote worthy of note is as follows from an elementary student:

> *"I once asked my teacher why we always skipped such parts. She told me that we would not be able to speak anyway."* [S4]

7) Did you enjoy being a part of the program? Can you identify the times when you felt bored and those when you had fun?

The feelings were predominantly negative about it. Some extremist comments like "it was just a loss of time" were made. Besides, this was the item about which significant in-group conflicts occurred especially for the elementary level students. It was understood that they favored main course classes most but the conflicts in question made the evaluator think that it was closely related to the instructors.

8) Any other things you want to add?

The related additions were about the lack of parallelism between the courses and the message they got from the program, which can be roughly formulated as "English is its grammar." A pre-intermediate level medical student's metaphorical utterance about it may sound impressive:

> *"OK, grammar is the skeleton of a language but what is a skeleton good for without the body covering it?"* [S11]

A quote from another pre-intermediate student, which can give an idea about how the old program functioned in general, is as follows:

> *"If I need English in the future for an academic or professional reason, I definitely think that I will need a new process of training again."* [S9]

Another recurring theme brought forward was the demand for learning professional English and they declared that their academic life now does not necessitate the use of English, which makes the preparatory school dysfunctional and their language knowledge doomed to be forgotten.

Last Year's Students: 2nd Regime

The disadvantage for the students of last year was that they had been exposed to the new program for nearly 3 months when the interviews were conducted. For this reason, they evaluated a certain period of the program while the students of the previous year gave their responses considering the whole year. Below are the questions asked to the students of last year and the themes shaped as based on their agreed-upon responses:

1) You have Main Course 1 and Main Course 2 classes. How complementary do you think they are? Do you consider any of them "more important?"

For all the groups, it was understood that the two courses meant one compact course for the students though the documentation reports them as two different courses with different names. As this was the case, there does not seem to be a perception of superiority between them and a reason for considering the classes of either of them more suitable to be skipped.

2) Do you believe that sufficient reinforcement is given for the topics studied? Are the materials at hand used effectively for that?

For all the groups, sufficient exercises for revision and consolidation are provided. Besides what is offered by the workbooks, worksheets and additional communicative activities; a new term as the administration of "quick tests" was produced by the pre-intermediate students. The elementary students agreed that such extra reinforcement work sometimes even feels too much.

3) Are you given enough chance to practice the instructed points writing and speaking?

There is an agreement between all the groups that there has not been even a single part omitted. The pre-intermediate students seemed the most content with the work on speaking and writing and the constant provision of feedback on their performance. The intermediate students demand reduction in writing and reading lessons and even more work on speaking as they feel that it is their pressing need.

4) What is the predominant medium of instruction?

There is absolute agreement that English dominates as the medium of instruction. It is understood that Turkish is employed as a last resort in times of crisis.

5) What about the exams? What do they stimulate you to focus on while the program is being run?

The pre-intermediate and intermediate students do not perceive the exams grammar-oriented. Especially the intermediate students emphasized that the writing component is fairly demanding. It is important that the elementary students still called the exams grammar-focused like the students of the previous year. This can be because there is a concern for objectivity in the grammar level exams as their productive skills are rather limited yet.

6) Do you ever feel that the instructors are in a hurry to teach things?

The responses of all the groups point to a sharp contrast to those of the students of the previous year. It is understood that even some kind of tardiness is what is sometimes perceived. Besides the time that can be created for productive sessions; the pre-intermediate students noted that their time is enough for extensive reading as well, which helps vocabulary development.

7) Do you enjoy being a part of the program? Can you identify the times when you feel bored and those when you have fun?

Generally speaking and when compared to the old program, it can be mentioned that the new program is closer to provide language learning as a fun experience. The response of an elementary level student can be illuminating here:

"We do feel that we are learning the language and it feels really good." [S21]

8) Any other things you want to add?

It is interesting that especially the pre-intermediate and intermediate students have such demands as native speaker instructors, end-of-term drama shows in English, a much richer library, speaking clubs, training on professional English addressing different fields, special focus on linguistic features like phrasal verbs etc. This can be deemed interesting as the students of the previous year did not make even mention of any of them while concluding the interviews. This seems to suggest that their needs were rather "fundamental".

The Observations

Within the total of six Main Course 1 and Main Course 2 (3 each) lessons of the same pre-intermediate class observed, no omission in the scheduled materials was observed and all the activities targeted at the development of different skills including pronunciation and grammatical and lexical knowledge as well.

As for the use of the target language, it was seen that English dominated as the medium of instruction and classroom conversations. However, it was observed that Turkish was sometimes employed for teaching and asking about some particular grammar points like passives (the teacher felt the need to mention that "passive voice" is the equivalent of "edilgen yapı" in Turkish and gave sentences for translation).

As for the academic readiness of the students; it was seen that "passive voice" was presented with only its present and past forms in 3 hours, about which the majority of the students seemed ready and did not have any considerable difficulty. The syllabus design in the documentation of the old program suggests that "passive voice" was studied with all of its dimensions in 5 hours.

In all of the six hours observed, no sign of hurry to cover the content was detected although there was a quiz looming. It was an obvious attempt to give most of the students the chance to talk.

When it comes to student motivation; it was observed that no obvious lack of motivation or boredom arose from a one-dimensional mechanic and monotonous way of teaching, which was recurrently reported about the previous year's grammar courses and also some main course hours whose content was impoverished with omitted parts.

As for the use of extra materials for reinforcement and consolidation, it was seen that the grammar and conversational activities in the teacher's book were used when needed. Besides, an instructor used a matching game provided from the supplementary materials office.

As for the last focus point, it was observed that the second instructor started exactly from where the other one left. Before doing it, he checked the students about what they remembered from the previous hour about some crucial points like turning two-object sentences into passive and this conveyed the impression that he had seen the other instructor for cooperative teaching.

The Exams and Attendance Records

Table 6. The Exam Score Averages of the Students of the Previous and Last Year

Elementary	Quiz 1	Midterm 1	Quiz 2	Midterm 2	Average
2009 – 2010	57.79	58.96	60.29	44.26	55.32
2010 – 2011	73.98	72.57	68.73	68.61	70.97
Pre-Int.	Quiz 1	Midterm 1	Quiz 2	Midterm 2	Average
2009 – 2010	73.67	67.59	76.7	67.48	71.36
2010 – 2011	87.85	85.71	70.34	74.53	79.60
Intermediate	Quiz 1	Midterm 1	Quiz 2	Midterm 2	Average
2009 – 2010	77.7	66.53	58.68	68.80	67.92
2010 – 2011	78.84	90.89	77.79	74.17	77.92

Table 7. The Average Hour of Absenteeism in 8 Weeks of the Students of the Previous and Last Year

	Elementary	Pre-Intermediate	Intermediate
2009 – 2010	57.47	37.66	32.11
2010 - 2011	44.52	31.72	29.17

It is seen that the new program seems to produce higher achievement in exams and result in higher and more regular attendance.

The Measures Taken for Validity

As Maxwell (1992) states, validity in a naturalistic design is seen as the correspondence between the researcher's "account" of some phenomena and their "reality". In order to achieve this; triangulation, which refers to the *gathering and reconciling* of data from several sources and/or from different data-gathering techniques, deserves special consideration for validity check (Lynch, 1996, p.59). For Greene and McClintock (1985); if the student, the teacher and the administrator in a particular context all report the same perception of some aspect of the program, then these viewpoints converge on a conclusion whose validity is strengthened. For Lynch (1996, p.62), a main idea in a naturalistic evaluation is to arrive at evaluation conclusions as a result of a *consensus among persons from different perspectives* in relation to the program. In consideration of these; the present study employed different data collection techniques and elicited the perspectives of different stakeholders and according to the results presented above, they seem to suggest converging viewpoints regarding both of the programs evaluated.

As for the other techniques to confirm naturalistic validity, Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.233-43 cited in Lynch, 1996, p.56) provide:

* prolonged engagement, which is the immersion of the evaluator in the setting to establish "rapport and trust" with the participants. It can be mentioned that this was achieved to a considerable extent thanks to the personal relationships between the evaluator and the instructors for a couple of years.

* persistent observation, which is the evaluator's attempt to identify the most relevant elements of the evaluation setting. The evaluator tried to do this by starting the evaluation interviewing the administrator who originated the curricular intervention in question. The aim here was to get at the

logic behind the change, what is aimed with it and what is expected from it. This served as a foundation and the following evaluative activities were based on the relevant thematic framework.

* peer debriefing, which is a discussion between the evaluator and a "disinterested peer" concerning the evaluation results. This was done with an instructor who has been teaching in the institution for 10 years and no conflict occurred.

* member checks, which refers to (formal or informal) repeated checking of evaluation findings with the members of the setting who provided the data. This was done in an informal follow-up meeting with the instructors and one representative from every participating student group.

* negative case analysis, which refers to the search by the evaluator for rival explanations about the evaluation data that do not fit the "working hypotheses". This was achieved over the views of a different administrator in the program, who had not been a participant in the evaluation process. She postulated that the positive outcomes that the new program seems to be producing should mainly be attributed to the decreased populations of the classes, which means approximately 7 students fewer per class. Thereupon several instructors were asked if they would prefer the old program if the classes were again made as crowded as they had been in the previous year. All of them kept defending the new program reiterating its positive outcomes. What is more, one instructor reminded that a considerable number of the previous year students either abandoned or largely neglected the program as they eventually ended up hopeless to achieve or planned to pass at summer school. This resulted in many classes with a population similar to the ones last year but did not create significantly higher achievement. This cyclical approach in data collection and analysis occurred throughout the study, in which every stage of collection and analysis was influenced by the data already collected (Borg, 2005).

Discussion

The key evaluation findings of the present study suggest that the implementation of the new program is a positive step forward for the school especially when the findings about the previous year's program are taken into consideration.

In the light of the experiences, aims and expectations of the administrator as the originator of the change, instructors and students; last year's program seems to be better functioning in the course of having parallelism between the courses, teaching at an appropriate pace with effective use of the materials, achieving multi-skill development as found by Arkın (2010) to be a positive language teaching program aspect, creating a positive learner attitude towards English, generating higher motivation, having greater exam success and increasing student attendance, which in fact can all be considered interrelated and seem to be the points that the previous program was lacking in. Bearing this in mind, it can be asserted that the new program should continue to be run working on its components found to be in need of improvement and/or modification and those which need to be added in it.

The investigation of the program documentation showed that there is one more trial of this kind in the history of the program. It was learned that it failed because of bad material choice, which makes last year's supplementary pack prepared by the program instructors a critical component as it was found that it needs to be improved and enriched to more effectively reinforce the acquisition of what is

taught through the main textbook. What this would call for can well be theoretical and empirical work on material development and evaluation, which can take the form of classroom/action research.

In the light of another important finding and parallel to those in Tunç (2009) and Tunç (2010) in terms of the need for the compatibility of tests and materials and instruction, it can be postulated that the logic behind exam preparation and the exams as another critical program component should support the new teaching/learning environment so that both teachers and students feel more motivated to work on language production via speaking and writing. It would not be hard to understand if some or even most of the learners and instructors in a program reluctantly worked towards the production of guided or free written/oral discourse samples as long as they know that their performance is going to be assessed with procedures like cloze tests in the end. To eliminate this, theoretical and empirical work on testing productive skills can be advisable.

As another finding worth consideration and echoing those in Özkanal and Hakan (2010) and Karataş and Fer (2009), the demand for learning professional English and the fact that the previous year's students' current academic life does not necessitate the use of English matches up with, as cited in Özkanal and Hakan (2010: p.304), Kınsız's (2005) emphasis that "foreign language education should be interdisciplinary, participatory and innovative" and "the need of professions for foreign language knowledge should be met". This idealistic call for English for specific purposes and integrating it into the program as a new component should be requiring a macro-level policy and planning based on cooperation between the faculties and the preparatory school, duly developing the specific programs and pedagogical materials and giving to-the-purpose training to the instructors.

Conclusion

This study was the first of its kind in the history of the school and it provided a comparative evaluation of two different programs characterized by two different grammar teaching regimes launched in the same institution. The last year's program was found to be strongly disfavored by the participants. This gets even more important in consideration of the fact that it had been implemented for nearly 8 years. If such an evaluative study as this one had been conducted earlier, things could have changed earlier too and it is hoped that the present study will serve as a source if it is ever planned to get back to the old system or bring about another curricular change in the program evaluated in the first place and secondarily in similar programs elsewhere to the extent that they make sense out of the evaluation findings.

The major limitation of the study is that the new program was evaluated as based on its first three months while the old one was assessed considering a one-year period. For this reason, a follow-up evaluative study at the end of the last year seems to be a need. Another limitation is that there was no chance to compare the students as based on the results of some national and international language exams. Considering the fact that a peripheral aim of the new program is to increase the success level in exams like KPDS, it can be mentioned that having related data would serve much.

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