

# Comparison of Secondary Education Mother Tongue Teaching Courses in the International Baccalaureate Program with the National Program in terms of Critical Thinking\*

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## Abstract

The current study has aimed to compare the objectives, content, teaching-learning process, and evaluation dimensions of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) Language A1 Course teaching program with those of the teaching programs of high school 12th grade Language and Expression and Turkish Literature courses in relation to critical thinking skills based on the opinions of students within a Turkish context. The present study adopted a qualitative research method and employed a case-study design. The study was conducted in Istanbul Prof. Dr. Mümtaz Turhan Social Sciences High School, which was the first and only state school implementing IBDP in Turkey during the fall term of the 2011-2012 school year. The study group was composed of 11 twelfth graders from this high school who participated in the IBDP and 15 twelfth graders participating in the national program. The study's data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the students. The collected data were structured in the Nvivo 9 qualitative data analysis program and then analyzed by means of content analysis. At the end of the study, based on the students' opinions, it was concluded that although the objectives, content, learning-teaching process, and evaluation of the Language A1 Course made greater contributions to the development of students' critical thinking skills as compared to those of the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression Courses, there are several problems in implementing the IBDP in Turkey.

**Keywords:** National program • International Baccalaureate Diploma Program • Critical thinking • Language A1 course • Turkish literature • Language and expression courses

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as borders between cultures, communities, and countries are becoming increasingly nominal, intense and fast changes continue to be experienced. In a shrinking world of rapid developments in communication technologies, just as societies must be competitive in order to maintain their existence so should individuals making up societies adopt global values and attitudes. Thus, globalization profoundly affects communities and their members, urging them and their systems—including education—to change their structures and processes. In an information society, greater attention should be paid to the training of individuals able to think creatively and independently, who have self-confidence, who are able to solve problems and take risks, who know the available avenues to access to information, who can produce information, and who can easily adapt to a changing environment.

As such, there is a great need for internationally influential education systems and curriculum to determine the quality and road map of the education to be given in these systems (Çalık & Sezgin, 2005). By means of curricula, while national values are imparted to students, they should be encouraged to adopt an international perspective. Therefore, curriculum to be developed and implemented in one country should be able to contribute to the development of students in compliance with international standards.

Among the European Union countries, the foundation of the Bologna process was laid in 1999, after which attempts were made to develop an European standardization and diploma accreditation system in higher education. These attempts have aimed to facilitate the transfer from the higher education system of one country to that of another so that the movement and employment of students and academicians will be made easier (Higher Education Council [YÖK], 2009). In this direction, important developments and changes occurred in EU member countries from 1999 to 2012. These attempts were directed to the standardization and provision of higher education at an international level, requiring the adaptation of a similar approach in the primary and secondary levels of education. It is now not possible to talk about a standardization stemming from the adaptation of international perception at elementary and secondary levels among countries throughout the world. However, it can be argued that such standardization is particularly important at the secondary level so as to continue

education at the tertiary level because, as a result of globalization, an individual can freely travel around the world and share information. Based on this requirement, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) has developed curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels, implementing these programs in many countries around the world. The implementation of a common program developed at an international level in different parts of the world and in countries having different cultural structures requires the consideration of the programs' reflections at the national level. In this regard, the examination of the curriculum implemented at the national level within the framework of international standards can be instructive for the new curriculum to be developed.

Some factors, such as some structural adjustments done in the education system in Turkey within the context of the European Union harmonization process, rapid changes observed in the information age, and the inability to achieve the desired outcomes on international exams has resulted in a number of new regulations in elementary and secondary school curriculum. Within the framework of these regulations, the curriculum of those countries experiencing high achievement on international exams in particular were examined with attempts being made to develop curriculum in compliance with international standards.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a period during which information is rapidly produced and consumed, it can be claimed that those societies composed of individuals able to access information and who are equipped with the skills to process information are successful. In the past, while what controlled social change was the military and economic power, societies having access to information and which are able to control it hold the power of starting a social change (Şahinel, 2002). Curriculum assumes an important role in the creation of societies able to reach information and control it. Therefore, in the information age, training individuals with various skills, such as research, inquiry, problem solving, and creative and critical thinking has gained greater importance. Based on this need, the new elementary school curriculum implemented during the 2005-2006 school year, which include new curriculum placing a special emphasis on the teaching of critical and creative thinking skills, communication and empathy skills, problem solving skills, decision-making skills, skills needed to use information technologies, entrepreneurship skills, and the proper and effective use of Turkish.

In the determination of these skills, one of the programs taken as an example was the IBO. It was aimed that these skills be imparted to students in the IBO programs called the "IBO Student Profile." IBO student profiles place students into the center of the program, stating clearly what is expected from students, teachers, directors, and parents in terms of supporting teaching and the learning process. IBO student profiles aim to train students to be inquisitive, knowledgeable, considerate, and open-minded, who can think critically and communicate effectively, who are able to take risks wisely, and who have strong principles. Such individuals are able to recognize problems and think critically and creatively to solve these problems while acting ethically in making decisions to solve these problems (Hill, 2003; International Baccalaureate Organisation [IBO], 2006).

In both the national and IBO programs, there is an agreement on the basic skills to be possessed by individuals of the information age. Without a doubt, all of these skills are very important; yet, critical thinking skills in particular should be given special attention by educational institutions for people to adjust to the complexity brought about by the rapid change experienced in every part of the world (Koç, 2007). Hence, programs should be carefully designed by experts so that they can help students to acquire these skills starting from the early years of schooling (Demir, 2006). As a result of the study conducted by a group of scientists under the leadership of Facione to come up with a definition of critical thinking, the following statement was issued in the Delphi report (Facione, 1990, p. 15):

"The main goal of elementary and secondary school programs should be to foster critical thinking skills and tendencies. This goal should be incorporated into the curriculum of all the courses offered in elementary and secondary school programs."

There are many reasons for the implementation of curriculum grounded on critical thinking skills. The first of these reasons is the requirement of maintaining and improving a democratic community culture because in essence, democracy relies on trust and human will. The premise that individuals can make reasonable, appropriate and onsite decisions is one of the main pillars of democracy. Another reason is "information explosion." The proliferation of information and changing of it in this process require the determination of the content of curriculum and how this content should be understood. That is, the question of what to think and answers to these

questions are not enough on their own; instead, answers to the question of how to think should be sought and curriculum should be designed in such a way as to respond to this question. One of the reasons presented for making critical thinking obligatory in school is the close link between school achievement and critical thinking. In the literature, there are many studies reporting that students possessing critical thinking skills are more successful than other students (Akınoğlu, 2001; Alkaya, 2006; Allison, 1993; Eskitürk, 2009; Overton, 1993). Critical thinking provides meaningful learning experiences and thus, increases success (Doğanay & Ünal, 2006; Şahinel, 2002). In this respect, the acquisition of critical thinking skills by students at school followed by the use of these skills throughout one's life is of great importance. By attaching such a great emphasis to critical thinking skills in school curriculum, students can be rendered more autonomous, they can make greater contributions to the social problems experienced in today's world, they can be critical observers and supporters of democratic institutions and human rights, and they can easily proceed in their careers (Akınoğlu, 2001). In this line, it is seen that both the national curriculum and IBO programs emphasize the importance of the above-mentioned skills, particularly those of critical thinking. In order to determine how successful curriculum is in imparting these skills to students, interviews should be conducted with practitioners and students of schools in which these programs are implemented.

In the literature, there are two main approaches proposed for the teaching of critical thinking. These are topic- and skill-based approaches. McPeck (1981) argues that thinking does not occur in a vacuum; hence, there is a need for subject area knowledge. Ruggiero (1988 as cited in Aybek, 2006) stresses the need for the incorporation of thinking education into all courses in an education program. Paul, Benker, Jensen, and Krelau (1990 as cited in Şahinel, 2002) contend that critical thinking elements and skills should be instructed within certain disciplines and subject areas. Beyer (1991), on the other hand, argues that critical thinking skills instruction should not be grounded on any subject area. According to Lipman (2003), critical thinking should be taught within a specific course because if it is taught based on a specific subject area, most of the attention will be directed to the subject area and thus, critical thinking may be neglected. Ennis (1991 as cited in Doğanay & Ünal, 2006) stresses that critical thinking instruction should be skill-based.

As can be seen, there are different opinions about how critical thinking should be addressed in curriculum. Huitt (1998 as cited in Demir, 2006) emphasizes that critical thinking is a complex cognitive activity; therefore, a single approach to its teaching may not be enough. However, there seems to be a consensus on the idea that critical thinking skills can be best taught by associating it with a subject area. When it is taught within a single course, students may not be turned into critically thinking individuals because in such a case, there will be many underused critical thinking skills which can be lost over time. Therefore, curriculum should be designed in such a way so as to encourage students to use these skills (Kurnaz, 2007; Paul & Elder, 2001).

In Turkey, it is seen that with the new elementary school curriculum for the teaching of critical thinking skills implemented during the 2005-2006 school year, the preferred approach turned out to be the teaching of it by incorporating it into the curriculum of all courses rather than teaching it within a single course. The same approach to the teaching of critical thinking has also been adopted by the programs offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization. In both programs, special attention is paid to the teaching of critical thinking skills in language teaching courses. This indicates the importance attached to critical thinking skills in learning a language because it is a means of expressing thoughts. In this regard, it can be argued that without linguistic development, the development of thinking does not occur and without the development of thinking, language development does not occur. Language is not only a means of expression, according to Piaget, it is a tool in the service of reasonable thinking. According to Vygotsky, it is a means of thinking (Tuna, 2006). Besides the meaning of the words used, thoughts and motives of the individual should be known to make sense of the things told (Ergün & Özsüer, 2006). Hence, language and thought are claimed to be in a mutual interaction (Özbay & Melanlıoğlu, 2008). In this respect, one of the main objectives of language education should be to improve individuals' thinking and communication skills (Özbay, 1997). Therefore, it can be concluded that critical thinking skills can be best improved through language teaching programs. Namely, there is an important role to be assumed by language teaching programs in the training of individuals who can think critically. In the national curriculum, mother tongue education is given within the framework of two courses, Turkish Literature and Language and

Expression. The objectives of the Turkish Literature course are stated as follows: students are taught how to analyze every type of text, primarily literary texts, in terms of their structure, theme, language and narration, meaning, interpretation, tradition, genre and author; the students are equipped with skills needed to create a work of literary art with Turkish and perform every type of daily writing, to read and comprehend scientific texts written in Turkish and to read and comment on literary texts (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2011a). On the other hand, the Language and Expression course aims to develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills so that they can understand the main characteristics of the Turkish language so as to provide them with practice opportunities to use their mother tongue properly, to make them aware of their identity and universal values and developments, and to make them thinking and feeling individuals and express their thoughts and feelings in the Turkish language (MEB, 2011b).

Within the framework of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP), mother tongue education is given in a Language A1 course. A Language A1 course aims to develop students' power of expression in written and spoken communication, improve their viewpoints by comparing works produced in different cultures and languages, impart the skills of understanding and interpreting the relationships between different works to students, foster students' skill of conducting detailed analysis of written texts and instill lifelong literary pleasure and interest in students (IBO, 1999).

As can be seen, the national secondary education language curriculum and International Baccalaureate Diploma Program language teaching programs emphasize thinking skills, attaching particular importance to critical thinking skills, such as interpretation, inference, recognizing connections, and analysis skills.

Though the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program has been implemented in 27 schools in Turkey since 1996, not much research focusing on these programs has been conducted. The existing few studies mostly focus on the achievement level of the students and job satisfaction of teachers involved in these programs (Başer, 2007; Demirer, 2002; Gültekin, 2006; Özkaya, 2005; Yılmaz, 2005). In this respect, it can be argued that language teaching and thinking skills addressed in these programs have never been the subject of any research.

Moreover, when the studies conducted in Turkey are examined, it is seen that critical thinking skills have become the subject of many different studies. Many of these studies focus on the *critical thinking of students at different levels of schooling and factors affecting their critical thinking* (Akar, 2007; Bilgin & Eldeleklioglu, 2007; Demir, 2006; Gulveren, 2007; Hamurcu, Ozyilmaz Akamaca, & Gunay, 2005; Kalkan, 2008; Kaloç, 2005; Korkmaz & Yesil, 2009; Tumkaya & Aybek, 2008); *teachers' and pre-service teachers' critical thinking power and tendencies* (Akar, 2007; Cetin, 2008; Cigri Yildirim, 2005; Dutoğlu & Tuncel, 2008; Ekinci, 2009; Guven & Kurum, 2007, 2008; Korkmaz, 2009; Kucuk, 2007; Kurum, 2002; Narin, 2009; Sogut, 2009; Sengul & Ustundağ, 2009; Tufan, 2008; Turnuikli & Yesildere, 2005), and *the effect of various teaching practices on critical thinking skills* (Alkaya, 2006; Aybek, 2006; Caliskan, 2009; Eskitirk, 2009; Gunhan Cantirk & Baser, 2009; Koc, 2007; Koray, Koksall, Ozdem, & Presley, 2007; Kurnaz, 2007; Ozcan, 2007; S. Ozdemir, 2005; Ozdemir & Yalin, 2007; Sahhuseyinoğlu, 2007; Turkmen Dagli, 2008). However, very few studies on the *investigation of teaching programs in terms of critical thinking skills* have been conducted (Demirkaya, 2003; A. Karadeniz, 2006; Sentirk, 2009; Unal, 2007) with none of these studies addressing language teaching programs. Given the relationship between language and thought and the importance attached to thinking skills in renewed programs, the lack of research done on language teaching programs in relation to critical thinking skills seems to be an important issue.

IBDP was constructed on the basis of instilling an international viewpoint of education in curriculum, making the international movement possible by means of an internationally recognized diploma and developing individuals' intellectual capacity and critical thinking skills (Hill, 2003). Critical thinking skills have been placed in the center of the program for individuals to actualize themselves and so that they may develop an international understanding. In this regard, it seems important to reveal the similarities and differences between a national curricula and an international curricula implemented in many parts of the world in a standard manner in terms of imparting critical thinking skills to students and to determine their relative advantages and disadvantages in relation to instilling critical thinking skills. This seems to be necessary for presenting a comparative viewpoint of the goals, content, learning-teaching, and evaluation processes to be pursued to impart critical thinking

skills to students. Furthermore, just as determining the extent to which national curriculum have been successful in instilling thinking skills requires their comparison against internationally-set standards so does understanding how successful IBDP is in imparting critical thinking skills to students requires the investigation of its implementation at national level. This study was designed in line with these requirements.

The purpose of the present study is to compare the objectives, content, teaching-learning process, and evaluation dimensions of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) Language A1 Course teaching program with those of the teaching programs of high school 12<sup>th</sup> grade Language and Expression and Turkish Literature courses in relation to critical thinking skills based on the opinions of students.

## Method

### Research Model

In the present study, a case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was employed. A case study is a research model focusing on an up-to-date phenomenon, event, case, or groups which requires a detailed description of the time and place during which the study took place as well as an in-depth analysis (McMillan, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Case studies may be divided into a variety of different designs. Yin (2009) talks about four types of designs. These are: the integrated single case design, the nested single case design, the integrated multiple-case design, and the nested multiple-case design. As in the current study, both the DP Language A1 course and 12<sup>th</sup> grade Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses were investigated to ascertain the opinions of those attending these programs, using an integrated multiple-case design. In an integrated multiple-case design, more than one case may be conceived on their own. Each case is examined in a holistic manner and then compared with each other. In such a design, it is important for the researcher to collect comparable data from the field, as it would otherwise be impossible to compare cases (Yin, 2009). Therefore, critical thinking skills were considered to be the common point in the current study. Based on this common point, the researchers concluded that comparable data could be collected.

### Study Group

The study was conducted in Istanbul Prof. Dr. Mümtaz Turhan Social Sciences High School, the first and only state school implementing the IBDP in Turkey during the fall term of the 2011-2012 school year. In this particular high school, both the national secondary education curriculum and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program were offered separately with students given the choice to enroll into the IBDP upon having completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Those students who choose not to enroll into this can attend the national secondary education curricula. The IBDP is implemented in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades of high school. Therefore, the study group of the current study consists of 12 graders believed to be attuned to IBDP. While selecting participants for the study, the criterion-based sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was employed. In criterion-based sampling, the main principle is to work with those cases meeting certain criteria. These criteria may be determined by the researcher or gleaned from the literature (Merriam, 1998). Criterion-based sampling provides rich information about research questions and allows for an in-depth analysis of the selected cases or individuals by filling in conceptual and theoretical gaps (Cresswell, 2007, 2012; Huck, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In the current study, the following criteria were set: (1) students should be 12<sup>th</sup> graders, (2) some of the participants should be attending the national curricula and some should be attending the IBDP, and (3) participation should be on a voluntary basis. Based on these criteria, four female and ten male students from class 12-C in which the national curricula was being implemented as well as four female and seven male students from class 12-D in which the IBDP was being implemented made up the study group for the present research project.

### Data Collection

The data of the present study were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the students. In semi-structured interviews, although interview questions are developed in advance, additional questions can be directed depending on participants' responses (Ekiz, 2003; Mertler & Charles, 2011). The *Semi-structured Student Interview Form* was developed by the researcher for the purpose of this study which was then sent to three experts. In line with the feedback received from the experts, the required corrections were made to the forms, bringing them to their final forms. Between December 26 and 30 of, 2011,

the interview forms were administered to the 14 students attending the national curricula in class 12-C and the 11 students attending the International Baccalaureate curricula in class 12-D. Two separate interviews were conducted with the students attending the national curricula in class 12-C, one for the Turkish Literature course and the other for the Language and Expression course. The interviews with students lasted between 15 and 45 minutes.

During the interviews, questions were asked to the participants with the researcher taking great care to avoid directing participants while also encouraging them to explain their thoughts in detail by giving more examples. During the interviews, the participants were addressed with their names whereas a code was given to each participant while analyzing and reporting the interview data. The interviews were recorded using an audio-recorder for which both written and oral permission was obtained from participants. The interviews were mainly conducted in the school's project room, and when the room was not suitable, in the school library.

### Data Analysis

While analyzing the data collected through the semi-structured form, content analysis was used and the following steps were followed:

**Organization of the Interview Data:** The recordings of the students were transcribed and then the researcher read the transcriptions, which consisted of 225 pages while also listening to the recordings simultaneously so as to correct mistakes in the transcription. In order to test the correctness of the transcriptions, 30% of the transcriptions were submitted to two experts who reported that the transcriptions were congruent with the recordings.

**Rereading of the Data and their Organization around the Interview Questions:** The researcher read the transcriptions several times in order to comprehend them within the context of the research questions with participants' opinions being subsumed simultaneously under the interview questions.

**Doing Comparative Reading:** The data organized according to the interview questions were comparatively reread in such a way as to reveal the similarities and differences among participants' opinions.

**Coding of the Data:** Following the rereading of the data through comparison, the researcher encoding the data into the computer using NVivo 9.

**Comparison of the Codings and Reliability:**

Thirty percent of the transcriptions obtained from the interviews conducted with students from class 12-D for their Language A1 course and with students from class 12-C for their Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses were submitted to an expert who was asked to conduct coding activities. The ratio of agreement between the expert and researcher on the findings was calculated according to Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis scheme (1994, p. 64). The ratio of agreement was found to be at .85 for the data obtained from the interviews conducted with students from class 12-D's Language A1 course, .81 from the interviews conducted students from class 12-C's Turkish Literature course, and .80 for the same students' Language and Expression course.

**Thematizing:** Following the data encoding process, suitable themes were devised with data being placed into these themes accordingly.

**Definition and Interpretation of the Findings:** The themes and sub-themes obtained were supported with excerpts from participants' statements.

### Findings

The interviews were conducted with 11 students from class 12-D and 14 students from class 12-C separately. With the students from class 12-D, a single set of interviews was conducted for the Language A1 course whereas two separate sets of interviews were conducted with the students from class 12-C. The first of these sets was in relation to their Turkish Literature course and the second one in relation to their Language and Expression course. The data obtained from the students were subjected to content analysis, conducted separately for each course. Afterward suitable themes were developed with the data being placed into appropriate themes. The themes and sub-themes devised are presented comparatively in relation to the courses and are supported with direct quotations. While presenting the quotations, each student has been given a code.

In Table 1, the themes and sub-themes obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the students from Classes 12 D and 12 C about the courses of Language A1, Turkish Literature and Language and Expression and their frequencies are presented.

As can be seen in Table 1, the data obtained from the students were analyzed under the following themes: (1) Skills to be Imparted in the Course, (2) Content, (3) Learning – teaching process, (4) Evaluation, (5) Language A1 – Turkish Literature and Language

and Expression Relationship, (6) Comparison of the National Curriculum and the IBDP, (7) Reasons for Preferring/not Preferring the IBDP, and (8) the Problems Experienced in the Implementation of the IBDP in Turkey. The findings obtained through the analysis of the interview data will be explained below under these themes. The themes and sub-themes are supported with direct quotations and presented within the context of the courses from which they were obtained.

### Skills to be Imparted in the Course

The students of class 12-D attending the IBDP stated that in their Language A1 course, they acquired such skills as being able to analyze, ascertaining the correctness of information, making inferences, showing proofs for one's thoughts, thinking skills, developing literary taste, performing literary work reviews, acquiring different viewpoints, comparing, raising inter-cultural awareness, creating inter-textual connections, learning how to learn, increasing self-confidence, questioning, and associating newly learned information with previous information. The students from class 12-C attending the national curricula stated that in their Turkish Literature course, they acquired the following skills: thinking skills, developing literary taste, performing literary work reviews, acquiring different viewpoints, comparing, questioning, self-expression, reading comprehension and writing, and test taking and interpretation skills. Class 12-C also expressed that in their Language and Expression course, they acquired the follow skills: thinking skills, self-expression skills, test taking skills, and grammar skills. Here, it is important to note that "thinking skills" were perceived to be acquired in all three of the courses.

Student 1 from class 12-D expressed his/her opinions about the critical thinking skills acquired in the Language A1 course as follows:

"I can think differently when confronted with various events and cases. I can evaluate the events more critically. I mean that [the skills learned] extend beyond the course because the main goal of the course is to enhance our critical thinking skills, and it does this very effectively. This class makes great contributions to our critical thinking skills, which is something very useful outside the classroom."

Table 1  
 Themes and sub-themes obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with students from Classes 12-D and 12-C for their Language A1, Turkish Literature, and Language and Expression Courses

Themes	Language A1	Turkish Literature	Language and expression
<b>Skills to be imparted in the course</b>			
Thinking skills	15	10	7
Comparison	5	3	-
Developing literary taste	4	8	-
Literary work review	4	2	-
Questioning	4	2	-
Checking the correctness of information	3	-	-
Making inferences	2	-	-
Providing proofs for thoughts	2	-	-
Different viewpoints	1	3	-
Intercultural awareness	1	-	-
Creating inter-textual connections	1	-	-
Learning how to learn	1	-	-
Self-confidence	1	-	-
Matching of the newly learned information with prior information	1	-	-
Self-expression	-	2	8
Reading comprehension and writing	-	2	-
Test taking	-	1	1
Interpretation	-	1	-
Grammar	-	-	11
Communication	-	-	1
Correct and effective use of Turkish	-	-	4
<b>Content</b>	16	27	17
<b>Learning – Teaching Process</b>			
Activities performed in class and their benefits	8	19	16
Teacher roles	18	21	12
Student roles	20	18	14
Instructional materials	19	15	9
Methods – techniques			
Brain storming	1	2	-
Dramatization	14	1	-
Direct instruction	2	5	7
Case Study	2	6	-
Questioning	1	7	4
Discussion	10	-	7
Memory-enhancing strategies	-	1	-
Benefits brought about by the use of different methods and techniques	4	-	-
<b>Evaluation</b>			
Evaluation activities	12	7	-
Content of evaluation activities	16	17	13
Benefits brought about by evaluation activities	10	-	-
<b>Language A1 – Turkish Literature and Language and Expression Relationship</b>	15	-	23
<b>Comparison of the national program and the IBDP</b>	25	-	26
<b>Reasons for preferring/ not preferring the IBDP</b>	12	-	15
<b>Problems experienced in the implementation of the IBDP in Turkey</b>	6	-	-

Student 11 from Class 12 C expressed how his/her inquiry skills, ability to recognize different viewpoints, and critical thinking skills developed as follows:

“I think that through books, we acquire most skills and that literature directs us to certain books, writers, and ideas, which means that it



directs our way of thinking. I think this class can also contribute to the development of critical thinking skills. At least, we are able analyze different viewpoints and get information about these viewpoints.”

Student 23 from Class 12 C expressed his/her opinions about the skills imparted in the Language and Expression course as follows:

“It has a close relation with literature. While teaching this course, you need to focus on words and sentences. You need to have a text at hand. You need to have a text so that you can study it. This text tells us something. It shows some expression techniques. It improves thinking and strengthens one’s power of expression. Therefore, it can improve our critical thinking skills.”

Student 18 from Class 12 C stated that since the Language and Expression course was not open to inquiry, it could not make great contributions to students’ thinking skills:

“I do not think that critical thinking can be developed very well in our Language and Expression course because a sentence is given to us and then we analyze it and try to recognize its components. You find a conjunction, a verb, an adjective, an adverb clause etc. But you do not think why this conjunction is a conjunction or why this verb is a verb or whether another verb can be used instead of this one. There is only a sentence given and that is all. Therefore, I think it won’t contribute much in developing thinking skills. It can only help us learn our mother tongue well.

### Content

The content of the Language A1 course is determined by teachers, and is constructed by selecting from the list of works proposed by the IBO on the basis of student opinions and can therefore be claimed to contribute to students’ inquiry skills.

Student 2 from class 12-D stated that through the content constructed in the Language A1 course, they analyzed similar literary works and thus improved their inquiry and comparison skills as well as their skills in finding common points in multiple works, a skill set which helped students improve their abilities to recognize similarities and differences:

“The literary works used in this course were selected from among the works considered similar to each other and which have some

common points. This is because students can recognize the connections between the works and see how a specific time period imposed certain influences on writers. In this regard, making connections between works and periods can be considered a by-product of developing a critical perspective.”

In light of students’ opinions, it can be argued that the content of the Turkish Literature course is not sufficient in improving students’ critical thinking skills.

Students 13 from Class 12-C complained about the dominance of Republic Era literature in the content of their Turkish Literature course, stating that they only memorize the information presented so that they may pass their university entrance exam and that after the exam, they will forget that information.

“... We are 12th graders this year, the Republic Era is a real problem for us because there are 129 writers and even more literary works. We are expected to learn them all by heart. Yet, I am thinking of forgetting all of them after I have graduated from high school because my brain needs cleaning out. In fact, this information is just instrumental and is valueless one-time information that shouldn’t kept for more than one year...”

Students expressed similar opinions about the content of their Language and Expression as about the content of their Turkish Literature course. According to students, since Language and Expression course is composed of rules, it cannot contribute much to their critical thinking and inquiry skills.

Student 22 stated that grammar subjects, such as conjunctions, prepositions, and exclamations, are taught within the Language and Expression course and that they usually memorize them simply to pass the university entrance exam. For this reason, the content of this course cannot contribute much to critical thinking skills.

“As I said, this year we are again memorizing rules and learning how to recognize prepositions, conjunctions, exclamations, etc. in grammar questions, but we do not make any comments on them. Apart from paragraph questions, there is no need for interpretation on the YGS [the university entrance exam], but paragraph analysis requires interpretation skills. But even here I don’t think the teacher can help us much in acquiring it.”

### Learning – Teaching Process

During the collection of data related to learning-teaching processes, questions concerning the activities performed in courses and their benefits, student and teacher roles, the tools and equipment used in doing so, and the methods and techniques employed by the teacher were asked. Students' responses to these questions are presented below.

#### Activities Performed in the Course and their

**Benefits:** According to students' opinions, the literary works included in their Language A1 course that were read both before and during the class were deeply analyzed in relation to time, setting, characters, and the messages presented.

Student 4 emphasized that students continuously interact with each other and in this way, they create an environment conducive for discussions and that sometimes even students enact the works through plays:

“First, our class constantly has discussions. It is an environment very conducive for discussions. When a certain issue pops up, everybody states their opinions about the issue. Moreover, we sometimes draw some scenes in the books we read on the board so that we can better conceptualize them. Or we act out a specific scene in class. In this way, we live out the book and end up learning it better.”

According to the students, while more activities such as in-class discussions as well as book, text and poem analyses are conducted in the Turkish Literature course in the lower grades, in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, a greater emphasis is placed on learning about writers and their works.

Student 23 first discussed in-class activities they did in 12<sup>th</sup> grade and that students enjoyed the class when the main emphasis was not on exam preparation:

“Because we're seniors, the university entrance exam dominates most of our classes. I mean that there's a lot of information we need to memorized. So, we try hard to do it. We aren't thinking much about the classes themselves. Rather, we are trying to remember the information that we'll need for the entrance exam. But there isn't much we can do because we absolutely must be prepared for the exam. Apart from this, we sometimes focus on texts in general. We read a text and have some discussions about it. Once, we discussed the *Fecr-i Ati* and *Servet-i Fünun* movements in literature. We compared them, and during the comparison there were some

conflicts, but of course not very big, mostly small conflicts of ideas. This is a good environment because discussions are constructive. Some good outcomes may come out of them.”

Based on students' opinions, it can be argued that in general, activities designed based on students' questions and missing information are taught through teacher lecturing in the Language and Expression course. Student 15's opinions support this finding:

“This year, we tell our teacher which topics we are weak in during class. The teacher helps us in these topics. We learn the topics we need help in and in general, classes proceed like this.”

It is observed that most of the activities conducted in the class are structured in such a way as to teach answers to questions relating to grammar. Student 16 expressed his/her opinions about this as follows:

“The Language and Expression course proceeds as follows: the teacher teaches the grammar subject. Then he/she gives a test. Then he/she reinforces the grammar subject by asking some questions. The Language and Expression classes go like this because this course doesn't require interpretation. It's like mathematics, we use formulas.”

**Teacher Roles:** Students taking the Language A1 course emphasized their teacher's role as a guide rather than his/her role as a teacher.

Student 6 stated that the teacher makes a concerted effort to show students different viewpoints rather than simply dominating the class, specifically that their teacher opens new channels of thinking for students and directs the process with his/her questions when the students find themselves at an impasse.

“...[The teacher] opens certain ways of thinking for us. These ways of thinking are not only for directing us. I mean, we can call them question marks.... well, he/she provides us with different doors to pass through. It is like the Paradise and Hell metaphor; there are places which have many doors. In folk stories, there are places with seven doors. The teacher provides you with, let's say, at least seven doors. It's more like opening you to a new horizon than directing students to do a specific task. After doing this, the teacher stands aside and the students start discussing. The teacher is more like an instigator. He/she opens new channels when students get stuck. He/she is not only a teacher, but also a guide.”

Students taking the Turkish Literature course defined the teacher as the leader of the class, placing more emphasis on his/her role as an instructor.

Student 20 emphasized both the teacher's instructive and supervising role:

"When necessary, [the teacher] becomes the person giving information and when necessary, becomes the supervisor of the process."

In the Language and Expression course, the students defined the roles of a teacher as follows: he/she transfers information, lectures, and asks questions.

Student 20 stated that he/she cannot imagine the teacher beyond his/her roles of giving information and testing students:

"[The teacher] is someone who lectures and gives tests. I can't think of any other role."

**Student Roles:** In the Language A1 course, students defined themselves as individuals with an active role in the direction of the lesson, discussing, questioning, criticizing, checking the correctness of information, supporting their opinions with proofs, and participating in the learning-teaching process.

Student 6 stated that the Language A1 course instills a sense of curiosity in students which then leads them to research, question, and think critically. This student also stated that the roles assumed by students act to direct them toward discovering and understanding different viewpoints:

"You have to ask 5 W 1 H questions. You need to check every door and something new comes out of each door. I mean, your sense of curiosity leads you to investigate. You start to discover so many new things in a brand new world... This naturally makes students more active. Probably, this has some positive effects on students... In a normal literature class, the teacher can't offer you forty different doors to pass through. Even if a teacher offered you forty doors, he would open them one by one. Yet, in the classroom, there are 15 students, and if these 15 students open their own doors, everyone needs to open just three doors each. This way more intellectual activities can be performed in a shorter period of time. As a result, we're able to widen our horizons. As we open these new doors, the doors within our mind also open and start processing information."

In the Turkish Literature class, students defined themselves as passive receivers of information.

Student 12 likened the learning-teaching process to a forum, defining students as participants asking questions in the forum:

"If we were to imagine the class as a forum, as participants speaking, expressing their ideas,

asking questions, and listening. The class is more like this. It's not only teacher-centered. It's student-centered. I mean, we speak, speak our minds, and make inferences in class. This way, we're able to discover on our own and the learning becomes more permanent. In such a setting, your viewpoints change."

As in the Turkish Literature course, in the Language and Expression course, students mostly defined themselves as passive receivers, waiting to receive information and asking questions about the information the teacher has presented to them.

Student 13 focused on his/her role of providing feedback to the teacher in the Language and Expression course:

"...as a student, mostly we just assume the role of a remote control. For instance, our teacher asks whether we have understood or not, and we say "yes" "or "no." Or the teacher asks a question and then we give responses showing whether we have understood or not. Then, if necessary, we review the topic. As I said, we simply act as a remote control."

**Instructional Materials:** In the Language A1 course, students stated that in addition to the courses main works, they had also read reviews, theses, and articles written about them. They used the projector to watch plays in the class in order to gain a better understanding.

Student 9 stated that they used internet in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of academic literature:

"We try to use technology a lot. Since the internet is such a medium where academic literature on any field can be found, we make heavy use of it. We are continuously using technological equipment, such as computers, projectors, etc."

Students from class 12-C stated that most of the time, they used various instructional materials, such as the class room projector, computers, course books, and different books. They also stated that they were able to access the internet in school.

Student 13 explained that they solved questions using a projector:

"We solve questions by reflecting them through a projector in our literature classes. That means we use the projector, computer, projection screen, etc."

Students stated that they used the black board, chalk, the course book, and a projector in their Language and Expression course.

Student 23 thinks that a black board and chalk is enough for the Language and Expression course, stating, “We mostly use the board. I think the board and chalk is enough for our Language and Expression course.” Student 18 stated that together with the course books, they also used the projector for visual presentations:

“...the course book used is the one recommended by the Ministry of National Education, but it’s not provided by the Ministry of National Education for students. We rarely use the projector, although it’s good for visual students who like learning by seeing ...”

**Methods and Techniques:** In three of the courses, it was observed that direct instruction as well as questioning techniques were used commonly.

Student 8 from class 12-D thinks that in the Language A1 course, the lecturing method is used to introduce a movement or a technique whereas the teacher uses question and answers in order to start discussions.

“Direct instruction be used to introduce, for example, a movement or a technique. For example, items related to theater can be explained through lecturing ... while trying to find messages or other things in the work, question and answer sessions, as well as discussions, are dominant. Discussions are more common, but if it were to start with a question and answer session and then morph into a discussion, it would be better.”

According to student 18 from class 12-C, in the Turkish Literature course, the direct instruction method is mostly used when it is necessary to finish a topic:

“...now, when teachers are teaching the course, they only transfer information. On the other hand, when a student explains a topic, more discussion and questioning occurs. Because teachers worry about keeping up with the curriculum, he can’t make much use of question and answer sessions.”

The questioning technique is mostly used to reinforce what had already been explained. Student 19 explained his/her opinions about this issue as follows:

“After direct instruction, the things we haven’t understood are asked about...”

Student 13 from class 12-C thinks that in the Language and Expression course, lecturing is used to transfer information whereas the question and answer technique is used for clarifying ambiguous points.

“As only information is given and asked, there is no need for discussion. Yet, there may be some points either not understood or misunderstood by students. So some questions are asked about these issues. All that is done is inject information.”

### Evaluation

Internal and external evaluation activities are conducted in the Language A1 course. For internal evaluations, assignments are given whereas external evaluations include exams consisting of two stages. While expressing his/her opinions about the evaluation activities conducted in the Language A1 course, student 7 stated that these exams primarily focused on evaluating students’ creativity and critical thinking skills rather than gauging how much information they had retained:

“These exams primarily test creativity, critical thinking skills, and somewhat of our literary knowledge. What I mean by literary knowledge is not like what’s in the national curricula, so how are we evaluated? The national curricula requires students to know the name of the writer who wrote a work in Servet-i Fünun Literature. But in our curricula, what we need to know is, for example, a term related to theater, such as “protagonist.” We need to know what a hero does. That’s what we need to know.”

In the Turkish Literature course, evaluations are performed by written exams consisting of open-ended or multiple-choice questions. Student 13 explained how knowledge-based questions dominate these exams and that these exams do not contribute to critical thinking skills.

“We take tests. Our opinions about these tests are not asked for. If we know the required information, we can answer the questions. Even if we don’t know the answer, it’s easy enough to guess. What I’m trying to do here is not complain, but if we were asked to write something requiring any amount of thinking, or to express our opinions about an issue, we would need to force ourselves to think. But now, we don’t need to think. You see, there are some key words in literature, you just mark the right answer. Sometimes, even one word is enough to find the answer, but this wouldn’t be enough for questions requiring critical thinking. We need to force ourselves and learn to our fullest capacity.”

In a similar manner to the Turkish Literature course, both written and oral exams as well as

multiple answer tests are used in the Language and Expression course to evaluate students. Student 16 stated that since the main emphasis is on grammar rules in the Language and Expression course, critical thinking skills cannot be imparted to students because there is nothing to question in relation to these grammar rules:

“Critical thinking skills aren’t conducive to the requirements, content, and topics in the Language and Expression course because there is nothing to criticize in a formula. How to construct a sentence is clear. Specifically, there is nothing to be gained from adopting a critical viewpoint.”

### **Relationship between the Language A1 and Turkish Literature and Language and Expression Courses**

Since teachings grammar rules was not included in the content of the Language A1 course, Therefore, students attending the Language A1 course were asked whether this creates any gap in the teaching of grammar rules.

Except for one, all the students were of the opinion that not teaching grammar rules explicitly in the Language A1 course does not pose a challenge for them.

Student 8 stated that there is no need to focus on grammar rules as they had already studied a great deal of grammar. This student also stated, however, that during literary work analysis, they would also conduct grammar analyses:

“In our Language A1, we’re not losing anything by not being taught grammar rules or theoretical knowledge. Actually, it’s also even necessary. We have already studied grammar a lot in previous grades. If there are some students needing grammar, they can learn it on their own through additional resources. While analyzing literary works, we also analyze them in terms of grammar, but I think analyzing them in terms of language and expression is more meaningful. For instance, last year, we analyzed a work by Hedda Gabler, and there the main character was always asking questions, he would even express his normal sentences in the form of a question. From this, we concluded that the character was in need of constant approval and therefore lacked self-confidence. We may not have reached such an interpretation if we had not analyzed the work in terms of language and expression.”

Instead of the Language A1, the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses are offered in the national curriculum as courses independent

of each other. The students were asked whether the presentation of literature and grammar rules within two separate courses created a disconnect between literature and grammar rules.

In light of these students’ opinions, it can be argued that students think that teaching the Turkish Literature course and the Language and Expression course as two separate courses is more appropriate because the scopes of these two courses are too comprehensive while at the same time, one of them promotes thinking whereas the other focuses on teaching rules. Though the students believe that these courses should be taught separately, they are cognizant of the connections between them.

Student 23 stated that since their scopes are too broad, teaching these courses separately is more suitable:

“If they’re taught as one course, it can be a bit problematic because they are both very broad in scope. They should be taught as separate classes. If they were to put them into the same class, it would be even more challenging to understand. This way, it is also more time-saving while also facilitating our understanding. Though both of them seem to be traveling down the same road, they tell different things.”

Some students, on the other hand, think that integrating these two courses is more meaningful because literature and language are inseparable from each other.

Student 13 thinks that separating things into categories and drawing borders between them is not good and that since literature and language are closely connected to each other, they should be taught in an integrated manner:

“I think teaching them in an integrated manner is more logical because language and expression are not independent from literature. Showing them as separate entities and causing students to perceive them as so is also nonsense. For instance, when I think about it now, it seems to me that language and expression and literature are the same thing. I mean, as I’ve already said, it’s not logical to divide something into so many categories. Putting things into boxes and separating them with sharp lines may prevent creativity. Therefore, if they were brought together, it would make more sense. In language and expression, what is analyzed is written texts, and that means literature. For that reason, teaching them as separate courses is not very logical.”

### Comparison between the National Program and the IBDP

The students were asked whether they saw any difference between the national curricula and the International Baccalaureate Program in terms of imparting critical thinking skills.

Student 4 expressed his/her opinions about the issue by comparing student roles as follows:

“There is a big difference. In the national curricula, you enter the class and listen to the teacher; then the teacher leaves. However, in IB, it is not like that at all. You always have to question something. You have to support some thesis or present an anti-thesis. This is a different education systems requiring thinking, researching, and assigning responsibility to students. That’s why it’s better.”

Student 7 explained the difference between the two programs in terms of the teaching-learning process through the following analogy:

“Which one is better? Trying to teach someone how to make a cradle by just showing a design of it on a piece of paper or by telling him to take a certain piece of wood, some nails, and a chipping hatchet and then do it together? Telling him that you need to do this and that or watching him while he actually makes the cradle, which one is better? I think the national curricula is similar to explaining how to make a cradle on a piece of paper, while IB is the latter one.”

Student 6 thinks that while the national curriculum sees students as a storage house needing to be filled with information, the IBDP sees them as individuals processing the existing information by means of various thinking processes which then encourages them to make use of these skills and information. This student explains his/her opinions through the following analogy:

“Imagine a table full of food, and you eat a lot. While you’re leaving the table, you feel sluggish and after a while of doing this over and over you become obese. It is similar with information. There is certain information in the national curricula, it is like a feast full of information. We always consume this information and our brains become sluggish, too. Our brains become obese. We create people with obese brains. Sluggish brains cannot think or reflect. We continuously consume and are force fed information, no different from a USB flash drive. Our brains have a limit of 4 gigabytes. What keeps a brain

dynamic is thinking activities, and that’s why humans need to be encouraged to think. This is one of the most basic characteristics of humans.”

Student 9 emphasized the program’s evaluation activities, stating that while students in the national curricula are assessed through multiple-choice style tests, IBDP students form and express their own options.

“You’re accepted into university by choosing the right answer to a bunch of multiple-choice questions. It’s very difficult to turn such people used to getting into university this way into creative individuals. Instead, in IB, the exams are not multiple-choice, they are classic exams and each stage of which is scored separately. This may result in individuals forming their own options and using different means to get a good grade. This process certainly contributes a lot to the creativity of students.”

Student 12 from class 12-C explained the differences between the two programs in terms of the pressure put on students’ thoughts and the respect shown to students’ opinions as follows:

“There are many differences between IB and the normal program. IB allows the internalization of information without forcing students to adopt a certain opinion. You can pursue your own ideas.”

Student 17 stated that students in IBDP are different because they are required to support their own opinions with various proofs, they are more active in the process, and they organize more social activities.

“For instance, in IB, you take a paragraph and interpret it. Then, you defend some of the opinions presented in the text. On the other hand, we make interpretations without referring to any source. I mean that we don’t present any proof to defend our interpretation. There is more information-type questions asked. However, in IB, more questions requiring interpretation are asked and the exams last for a few hours. It’s more useful, I think. We aren’t very active whereas they are doing more social activities. They are organizing projects. They participate in activities organized by TÜBİTAK. For example, they’re participating in competition where they make social sciences projects, but we’re not.”

Student 15 thinks that the national curriculum sees students like a bucket to be filled with information whereas students in the IBDP are equipped with thinking skills rather than simply being filled with information.

“...In our literature courses, they see students like a bucket to be filled with what they deem to be necessary information, even if it’s actually unnecessary. However, in general, thinking is not taught. In the Baccalaureate program, more emphasis is put on thinking and thinking systems.”

### Reasons for Preferring or not Preferring the IBDP

The students from class 12-D were asked their reasons for having chosen to partake in the IBDP. The students stated that they preferred this program as it is not based on rote-learning, offers an international diploma, provides opportunities to pursue education abroad, offers some extra advantages in career development, gives high quality foreign language education, and makes some contributions to cultural development.

Student 5 from Class 12 D stated that he/she preferred the IBDP particularly for career development and the opportunity to pursue education abroad, stating: “The most important reason for my selecting IB is career development and an international diploma.”

Student 10 stated that he/she preferred IB as it provides a good foreign language education, stating: “My primary reason for selecting IB is the foreign language education it offers.”

Student 4 stated that he/she preferred to attend this program because of his/her desire to be away from an education system based on rote-learning, the opportunity to pursue education abroad, the good second language education, and his/her desire not to enter the university exam in Turkey. He/she explained his/her opinions as follows:

“...First, the education system is different. It’s an education system based on thinking rather than rote-learning. In addition to this, there’s an opportunity to study abroad, a good second language education, and I don’t want to take [Turkey’s] university exam, although it seems like I’ll have to. Yet, if it can, I want to go abroad to study.”

Students of class 12-C were asked why they prefer not to attend the IBDP despite being available in their school. The reasons stated by these students were the university exam, hard work, their bad command of foreign language, the IBDP diploma not being recognized by Turkish universities, and that they did not want to study abroad.

Student 20 stated that he/she did not want to attend IBDP due to its foreign language component:

“The main reason for me not selecting this program is foreign language.”

Student 13 stated that he/she did not want to attend this program because it is a very intense program, involving a higher risk of failing on the nation-wide university exam, and because he/she does not plan to study abroad.

“To tell the truth, it’s very difficult to complete IB together with the normal program. You have to do all the requirements of IB at school, but you also need to go to private course to get ready for the university exam where you need to learn the things taught in the normal program. Together, they can be very hard for a student. If you want to study in a good university, you cannot risk it by attending IB. If you do not think of studying abroad, you just can’t risk it.”

Student 22 explained why he/she did not want to participate in the IBDP as follows:

“My first reason for not selecting this program is that it’s not parallel to the national curriculum because the IB program has not been widely adopted in Turkey. Many universities do not accept students graduating from IB, and even if they accept them, they don’t offer many opportunities for scholarships. The content of the program doesn’t comply with the content of university exam for the most part. If you choose IB, you need to postpone entering university. Or you’ll have to focus on the university exam instead of on the requirements of IB... I mean, if I were to participate in IB, it wouldn’t contribute anything to my success in the university exam. It’s true that it enables students to acquire a more critical viewpoint. In fact, it is better than our system in terms of the skills imparted to students, but since it doesn’t contribute much to success on the university exam, I chose not to enter this program.”

### Problems Experienced in Implementing the IBDP in Turkey

In the interviews conducted with students, it became clear that though the students thought that the IBDP was better than the national curricula, they believed there to be a number of problems experienced in implementing the program. Some of these problems also affected students’ perception of the IBDP, reflecting on their reasons for not preferring to participate in the IBDP.

Although not specifically asked, students from class 12-D participating in the IBDP mentioned many

problems, such as the difficulty of implementing an international program in a strictly structured education system, the necessity for students to receive a diploma from the national curricula together with the IBDP diploma, and the fact that the IBDP diploma is not recognized for university education in Turkey.

Student 5 explained the implementation of the IBDP in Turkey's education system through the following analogy:

"There are some problems about implementing IB because it seems to be very utopian, too perfect. When it comes to its implementation within the conditions of Turkey and its education system, it turns out to be very difficult. They've attempted to adapt it to the current system, but it's stuck somewhere in the middle."

Student 4 stated that he/she sometimes has to overlook the requirements of IBDP due to the university exam and if he/she puts a greater emphasis on these requirements, then he/she will not be well enough prepared for the university exam, as is explained in his/her comment below.

"Because of the university entrance exam in Turkey being such an obstacle, we cannot fully meet our responsibilities for IB. So we have to skip some assignments during the last year of IB. If we don't do this, we won't be well-prepared for the university exam. This means more work and less sleep."

Student 5 complained about the work load in IBDP and the different approaches adopted by these two programs, stating that students cannot decide on which one to focus on and therefore experience great anxiety about the possibility of failure on the university exam:

"You have such a high work load and you might lose your concentration because one of the programs requires us to think and the other doesn't. One of them wants you to accept without questioning whereas the other wants you not to accept blindly, but to think. You are a human, a complete being, and they want you to be divided. It's very difficult. There is a very important exam on the one side, which determines your future. And there is a diploma program, on the other side, which encourages you to think. In fact, IB is quite a satisfying program when you really concentrate on it. You are divided into two. This is why it may be very difficult for us."

## Discussion

In the present study, the researchers aimed to compare the objectives, content, teaching-learning process, and the evaluation dimensions of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP)'s Language A1 Course with those of 12<sup>th</sup> grader's Language and Expression and Turkish Literature courses in relation to critical thinking skills, as based on the opinions of students. In light of the study's results, it can be argued that the objectives of the Language A1, Turkish Literature and the Language and Expression courses were set in such a way as to enhance students' critical thinking skills. However, students stated that the Language and Expression course mostly focuses on teaching rules and therefore does not contribute much to critical thinking. In this regard, it can be claimed that there is a problem in achieving the objectives and anticipated outcomes of the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses, particularly for 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

In the Language A1 course, a content constructed by IBO is presented. In the teaching program of the course, there is a list of books from both Turkish and World literatures from which students are asked to select based on their interests, expectations, and needs. Instead of simply taking a number of extracts from the books, a holistic analysis of the books is preferred. Within the content of the Turkish Literature course, on the other hand, parts of the works written by poets and writers of the related periods are taken and then analyzed. In modern language and literature instruction, teaching is based on texts. Instruction based on information transfer and teaching the characteristics of periods and movements is to be avoided (E. Özdemir, 1994). Otherwise, students are directed to memorize works and writers of certain periods and are not engaged in any intellectual activity. It is of great necessity for students to find meaning in the works being analyzed in their own lives and to be engaged in literary works suitable for their own social and cultural environments (Kavcar, 1993). In this respect, it can be argued that teaching both the Language A1 course and the Turkish Literature course through texts is a suitable approach. However, in the Turkish Literature classes, it is seen that the texts analyzed are parts extracted from literary works. As such, students may not be able to form a meaningful connection as they are unable to see the whole text. Accordingly, they are rendered less able to improve their critical thinking skills. Though some effort is made to



relate the literary works used in the Language A1 with each other, there is no chronological literature teaching. Moreover, works are selected in line with the interests and expectations of students. In the Turkish Literature classes, Turkish literature is presented to students at stages of its historical development. In the research sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of National Education for the evaluation of secondary school curriculum, it was reported that only the names of units are given in the Turkish Language and Literature courses' curricula. Thus, it was not possible to determine whether students' developmental characteristics were considered in the selection of the content (MEB, 2012). According to Oğuzkan (1991), in determining the contents for the Turkish Language and Literature courses, students' developmental characteristics, information level, academic tendencies, and needs are not taken into consideration with a chronologic approach, rather than thematic approach, being preferred. Kandemir (1996) reported that in the teaching of literature in Turkey, a chronologic approach aiming to teach the history of literature is adopted. Therefore, it can be argued that students learn the characteristics of different periods, their writers and literary works by heart, do not make any connection between the periods, and do not form cause and effect relations in their mind. For this reason, students cannot internalize information and as a result, cannot develop their critical thinking skills.

In the Language A1 course, the literary works to be studied are selected from Turkish and international literature whereas in the Turkish Literature course, particularly in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, only literary works selected from the national literature are used. In this respect, the content offered in the Turkish Literature course robs students of their opportunity to see the differences between Turkish and international literature and are thus educated under a single viewpoint. Işıksalan (1996) found that a great majority of the teachers and inspectors participating in his study favor literary works from world literature to be presented along side with those found in Turkish literature.

In the Language A1 course, literature and language curriculum is not separated from expression. Students are expected to conduct both literary and linguistic activities while completing a single task. In the national curricula on the other hand, the content of both literature and the language and expression classes are presented to students in two different courses separately. In the Turkish Literature classes,

only literary information is presented whereas mainly grammar rules are presented in the Language and Expression course. In this respect, students are not given the opportunity to integrate literature and grammar rules in the national curricula. Hence, the Turkish Literature course is seen by students as a means to memorize the names and works of writers whereas the Language and Expression course is viewed primarily as consisting of grammar rules to be memorized. Sağır (2002) reported that language is presented as information and failure is experienced on in turning information into skills and habits, resulting in the emergence of language teaching based on memorization and rules. The interviews conducted with the students from class 12-C revealed that they define the Language and Expression course as focusing on the memorization and application of rules, without contributing anything to their critical thinking skills. According to many writers who have produced works focusing on language, mother tongue comprehension tasks should be conducted in integration with grammar rules, literary works should be capitalized on while teaching grammar, and rule teaching based on comprehension and narration activities should be given greater priority (Demirel, 2007; Erdem, 2007; Nas, 2003; Özbay, 2006). The 12-D students stated that by studying literature and language rules together, they were able realize more meaningful learning.

In the Language A1 course, while activities focusing on listening to and analyzing literary works in the curriculum are also conducted, in both the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses, the classes are dominated by activities to transfer literary information and to solve problems. The students of class 12-D stated that at the preliminary stages, they participated in activities based on transferring information, after which they analyzed the works by conducting activities, such as interpretation, checking the reliability and validity of information, providing proofs to support ideas, making inferences, and expressing their thoughts freely so as to foster their critical thinking skills. According to the students' opinions, the main focus of the Turkish Literature class is on solving questions to prepare students for the university entrance exam. And in a similar manner, the students from class 12-C stated that within the Language and Expression course, they were engaged in activities directed to the improvement of language, expression, and wording skills in their former years, but that in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they mostly conducted activities to prepare themselves for the university exam.

While, in the Language A1 course, the teacher is defined as a guide within the class, giving direction to discussions and showing diverse viewpoints to students. In both the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses, students emphasized that the teacher's roles were more instructive and supervisory in nature. In a study conducted by Demiral (2007) to investigate secondary school students' perceptions of Turkish Language and Literature course teachers, it was found that students preferred a teacher able to control the class, as well as one who is unbiased, fair, and gentle toward students and their mistakes. In the present study, the instructive and supervisory roles of the teacher are emphasized. However, the desired type of teacher is defined as someone who focuses on improving students' critical thinking skills, who starts and directs discussions in class, who makes students feel valued, and who encourages students to think, make decisions, and express their opinions. (Demirel & Şahinel, 2005; Doğanay & Sarı, 2012; Gürkaynak, Üstel, & Gülgöz, 2003). Such roles can be performed by a teacher who provides guidance rather than one who simply supervises and presents information. In this regard, it can be claimed that while the Language A1 teacher assumes a role aiming to develop students' critical thinking skills, teachers of both the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses mostly stick to their instructive role due to a number of practical issues.

According to the students' own remarks, while students only take an active role in the Language A1 course, they play a more passive role in the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses, waiting to acquire information and asking questions for this purpose. In the Language A1 course, students are kept active by emphasizing their inquiry, interpretation, critical thinking, and self-expression z, while in both the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses, students' participation is encouraged through their asking questions about the issues in which they lack knowledge or by answering questions asked by their teachers. According to students' own admissions, they become passive in their Turkish Literature course during their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year because of their need to take the university entrance exam. Moreover, they stated that their Language and Expression course mostly included the teaching of rules and that students had no other function than answering teachers' questions or asking questions about those issues they did not understand. In the field literature, an individual able to think critically

is defined as someone who has self-confidence, is respectful to differing opinions, is open to inquiry, expresses his/her ideas comfortably, asks questions, and who both looks for and questions evidence (Beyer, 1991; Büyükkantarçioğlu, 2006; Nosich, 2012). Without doubt, for an individual to exhibit these skills, s/he needs to be active participant in the classroom environment. Açıkgöz (2002) stated that as in many different fields, active learning is effective in teaching critical thinking skills. In a study by Koç (2007), it was found that in classroom environments where active learning occurs, students have higher level critical thinking skills than do students in a traditional classroom environment. In this respect, in the Language A1 course, given that students are active participants and given that this active participation is encouraged with activities requiring questioning, interpretation, critical thinking, and self-expression, it becomes clear that the Language A1 course makes greater contributions to critical thinking skills than do the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses.

It is observed that the three courses make use of a projector, the internet, course books, and ancillary books. However, while the internet and projector are used by students to explore different resources and conduct research in the Language A1 course, they are generally used in the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses to explain a topic and solve problems. Research in the literature reports that in Turkish Language and Literature classes, primarily the blackboard, course books, and other supplementary books are used whereas visual and audio equipment are less frequently employed. Moreover, computers and the internet are never used (Balci, 2002; Işıksalan, 1996; Sever, 1985). Çelik Öztürk (2002) found that although academicians believed books and blackboards to be the most used tools in Turkish Language classes, they also believed that tape recorders, computer and internet should also be used. Sarıca (2010) also reported that in Language and Expression classes, course books and spelling books were the most frequently used materials whereas such tools and equipment as computers, video projectors, and overhead projectors were less frequently used. Given that the main purpose of using tools and equipment is to construct enhanced learning environments for students, attempts made in this direction in the courses investigated in the present study are apparent. However, in the Language A1 course, while literary works, various resources, projectors, and the internet were used not only to introduce different viewpoints to students, but also

to create discussion environments, the same tools were mainly used to solve problems in both the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses, something that can be considered as a deficit in these courses. In this connection, though the tools and equipment used in the three of the courses are same, they are more appropriately used to enhance students' critical thinking skills in the Language A1 course.

In regards to the teaching-learning process, the Turkish Literature and the Language and Expression courses made use of questioning techniques as well as dramatization to reinforce learning during general lecturing. In the Language A1 course however, discussion and brain storming techniques were used along with the above-mentioned techniques. It was found that direct instruction and questioning techniques were common techniques used in the three courses. While direct instruction was mainly used to introduce specific techniques in the Language A1 course, the Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses used it to teach main topics. While questioning was used to initiate discussions in the Language A1 course, it was used in the other classes bot to test students' understanding and for students to seek clarification of ambiguous issues. In a study carried out by Sever (1985), it was found that in Turkish Language and Literature classes, although direct instruction and questioning techniques were the most frequently used techniques, students themselves wanted to engage in discussion and dramatization activities more as they required students to be more active. Işıkalan's study (1996) revealed that although teachers most frequently used questioning and discussion techniques in Turkish Language and Literature classes, they never used case study techniques. Balcı (2002) reported that direct instruction, questioning and problem solving techniques were more frequently used in Turkish Language and Literature classes while discussion, role play, and dramatization techniques were relatively less used. Çelik Öztürk (1999) stresses that the most suitable techniques to be used in Turkish Language classes are discussions and demonstrations, questioning, and group work. Çakır (2009) found that the most frequently used techniques by Turkish Language and Literature teachers were questioning, discussion, case studies, brain storming, and problem solving whereas cooperative-learning, dramatization, and debate were relatively less used. In the literature, various authors pointed out that such techniques and methods as discussions, case studies, demonstrations, dramatization, and

problem solving can be used to promote students' critical thinking skills (Aybek, 2006; Doğanay & Ünal, 2006; Gelen, 1999; Şahinel, 2002). In this connection, it can be argued that in all the courses studied in the current study, the methods and techniques which effective in improving critical thinking skills are employed. Nevertheless, it was found that discussions were only used in the Language A1 course whereas questioning techniques were used to start discussions in the Language A1 course, it was used to determine what information students knowledge. Thus, it can be argued that the techniques and methods used in the Language A1 course are more conducive to students' critical thinking skills.

The students from class 12-D stated that evaluation activities conducted in their Language A1 course contributed to their critical thinking skills. The students from class 12-C on the other hand, stated that prior to their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year, their critical thinking skills had been nurtured through open-ended writing questions asked in Turkish Literature exams. Yet, due to worries about the university entrance exam, the emphasis was shifted to multiple-choice questions in their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year, despite the fact that they do not make any contributions to their critical thinking skills. Moreover, they think that since the Language and Expression course is rule-centered, the exams of this course do not aim to enhance or measure critical thinking skills. In this connection, alternative assessment and evaluation techniques proposed in the teaching programs of Turkish Literature and Language and Expression courses cannot be heavily implemented in 12<sup>th</sup> grade due to students' worries about the university entrance exam. In a study conducted by Türkyılmaz (2007), it was found that of the exam questions asked in Language and Expression course taught during secondary education, 54% were knowledge questions, 6.66% were comprehension questions, 37.11% were application questions, 0.54% were analysis questions, and 0.72 were synthesis questions with there being no evaluation question. Kandemir (1996) argues that in Turkish Language and Literature classes, not much importance is attached to evaluating classroom activities in the evaluation of students and that written exam questions do not sufficiently serve the function of enhancing students' thinking and evaluation skills.

There is a shift toward the use of multiple-choice questions in the exams given to 12<sup>th</sup> graders and this is believed to form an obstacle to the development of students' critical thinking skills. As it was pointed

out by the students during the interviews conducted, there is a great difference between the cognitive efforts used while making a selection among already given alternatives and in constructing one's own response. The reason for the dominance of such multiple-choice style tests might be the result of the increasing dominance of a centralized exam system. Particularly, students' concerns about answering as many questions as possible in a limited time period on the university entrance exam leads to schools favoring multiple-choice questions and rote-learning. In a study by H. Demiral (2011), it was revealed that the Turkish Language and Literature teachers believed the university entrance exam to be the most challenging obstacle both to adopting international standards in Turkish Language and Literature classes and to reducing the dominance of rote-learning in language and literature education. Alkin (2012) found that one of the reasons for elementary school teachers' not exhibiting behaviors supporting critical thinking is the obligation that they feel to prepare their students for level determination exams. Interestingly, however, is Melanlıoğlu's study (2005) in which he stated that the vast majority of teachers believe that teaching programs used in Turkish Language and Literature classes are not effective in preparing students for the university entrance exam. Thus, it is natural for teachers and students, particularly 12<sup>th</sup> graders, to turn to resources outside of the state teaching program. As a result of the interviews conducted with the students, it can be argued that both the 12-D students attending the IBDP and the 12-C students attending the national curricula think that the IBDP is superior to the national curricula and that it makes greater contribution to the development of their critical thinking skills. According to the students, while the national curricula represents an education system based on the transfer of information, the IBDP focuses on students' ability to think, produce, and use information. Taylor and Porath (2006) aimed to elicit the IBDP graduates' perception of the program, finding that students believed that they were able to improve their critical thinking and time-management skills due to the enhanced program, the extra effort that they made to receive an IBO diploma, and because the IB experiences prepared them well for higher education. Thelin et al. (2002, p. 11 as cited in IBO, 2008) also reported a high level of satisfaction toward the IBDP. Hayden and Wong (1997) revealed that IBDP students were both open-minded and knowledgeable who were able to work cooperatively while making use of their research skills. Gültekin (2006) reported that the IBDP was more effective

than the national curricula in increasing students' levels of achievement in terms of both their diploma and their university entrance exam grades. In much of the research in international literature, it has been found that students participating in the IBDP exhibit a higher likelihood of being accepted to a university than those who do not (Daniel & Cox, 1985; IBO, 2004 as cited in Varner, 2009; Thomas, 1998; Varner, 2009). Furthermore, Thomas (1991) and Duevel (1999) reported that IBDP graduates completed their university education successfully, meaning that graduation from an IBDP is effective in predicting university graduation success. While both the students participating in the IBDP and those students participating in the national curricula expressed positive opinions about the IBDP and its effects on critical thinking skills, it was found that class 12-C students in particular preferred not to be educated in this program. When the students were asked their reasons for preferring or not preferring the IBDP, students from class 12-D stated that they preferred it since it is not based on rote-learning, offers an international diploma, provides opportunities to pursue education abroad, offers a number of extra advantages in career development, provides a good foreign language education, and contributes to cultural development whereas those students stating that they did not prefer the program did so for such reasons as the university exam, it requiring participants to work hard, their poor command of foreign language, the fact that the IBDP diploma is not recognized by Turkish universities, and because they were not interested in studying abroad. Paris (2003) conducted a study to determine the reasons for selecting or not selecting the IBDP in Australia, finding that those students who do not prefer to participate in it did so because it was expensive and too academic while those who preferred it did so because they felt that it would prepare them for international higher education and because it had quality teachers. Varner (2009) reported that the IBDP is preferred by students as it encourages them to think, to improve their skills, and offers some advantages for being accepted by a university. Güven and Çam Aktaş (2012) stated that IBDPs are preferred in Turkey by students wanting to improve themselves culturally and socially because it is of higher quality than the national curricula, because it provides good foreign language education, because it offers possibilities to study abroad, because students can earn an international diploma, because they have the opportunity to finish high school with two diplomas, and because it is not based on rote-learning. Those who preferred not to pursue an IBDP

did so because of the university exam, the program requiring them to work hard, their poor command of foreign language, the fact that the IBDP diploma is not recognized by Turkish universities, and because they had no desire to study abroad. As can be seen, the findings reported in the literature support the findings of the present study.

In Turkey, the IBDP diploma is only recognized by small number of private universities whereas in order for one to be able to find a place at these universities, one still must enter the university exam. Those students participating in the IBDP, and particularly 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, graders must work very hard because students have to graduate from both the national curricula and the IBDP in Turkey. As such, students need to complete the requirements of both the national curricula and the IBDP while at the same time needing to prepare for the university exam, as it will determine their future to a great extent. Therefore, students may not be very eager to attend the IBDP in Turkey. As stated by students during the interviews, in Turkey, the status of the IBDP is not very clear. The former president of The Council of Higher Education, Yusuf Ziya Özcan declared that IBDP graduates would be accepted to universities without exams in 2011; however, this did not happen. This aroused great interest in the media as there are 26 private and 1 state schools offering the IBDP in Turkey (IBO, 2012). IBDP are not widely adopted in Turkey, particularly in state schools.

### Suggestions

The following suggestions should be taken into consideration by a mother tongue teaching course aiming to develop critical thinking skills:

- Objectives and gains should be organized to include the sub-dimensions of critical thinking skills such as questioning, inquiry, evaluation, interpretation, detecting relationships, and developing different viewpoints. Objective should also allow students to make connections by conducting comparisons between different cultures and the works of art of these cultures.
- The content should not be strictly structured by the Ministry of National Education. It should be constructed based on students' interest, desires, and expectations. Topics and information to be included in the content should enable students to acquire skills such as questioning, comparison, finding similarities and differences, and evaluating events from different perspectives.

Information about literature and language rules should be presented together so that students have the opportunity to recognize the connections between literature and language. Instead of simply taking short extracts from literary works and including them in the content, the whole text should be provided for students so that they can analyze it more deeply. The content should not focus on only Turkish Literature and Turkish Language skills but should instead present information about literary concepts and the language structures of different cultures while also allowing students to make comparisons between national and international literature.

- Teaching-learning activities to be conducted in the course should be suitable for students to participate actively and to conduct inquiry, research, and questioning. Samples of the activities to be conducted in class should be provided in teaching programs, but the teacher should determine which activity is to be used in class. The teacher should forgo his/her role of information transferrer, instead assuming the role of a guide leading students to discussions and presenting different viewpoints. Students should be perceived as individuals who are to ask questions, construct the lesson, discuss, criticize, check the correctness of information, provide proofs for their opinions, and actively participate in the teaching-learning process. In lessons, methods and techniques, such as discussions, questioning, case studies, and creative dramas should be employed to encourage students to ask questions, express their opinions, show respect to others' opinions, and feel empathy for the experiences depicted in a literary work. Apart from the course book, resource books written by different writers need to be used instead of simply parts of the literary work so as to be able to analyze the work as a whole. Tools and equipments such as computers, projectors, and the internet should be used in such a way as to help students to have access to various information and to question and compare this information.
- Evaluation-assessment activities should be process-oriented rather than product-oriented, alternative evaluation and assessment approaches should be included, questions asked on exams should enable students to think creatively and critically, conduct inquiry, make inferences, and express their opinions freely. Objectivity should be ensured in evaluation

and assessment processes and standard criteria should be determined for students to be evaluated objectively. Instead of centralized exams, evaluation system focusing on students' evaluation during the process and aiming to assess students' thinking skills as much as their academic achievement should be adopted.

The following suggestions can be taken into consideration in the implementation of IBDP in Turkey:

- The IBDP diploma should be recognized by universities in Turkey and additional points can be given to IBDP graduates on the university entrance exam.
- For IBDP graduates to be able to receive extra points on the university exam, IBDPs can be made more widespread in state schools with some of students' expenditures being met by the state, each student can be given an equal opportunity to study within an IBDP. The Ministry of National Education can organize seminars, conferences and workshops to inform teachers, students, and parents about this program.
- IBDP students can be made exempt from the courses of the national curricula.

The following suggestions can be considered by future researchers seeking to study International Baccalaureate Programs:

- Teaching programs of the courses offered in IBDP can be compared with the national teaching programs in terms of the skills stated in IBO student profiles.
- Applications of IBO programs in both Turkey and abroad can be evaluated through comparative educational studies.

The following suggestions can be considered by future researcher conducting research on critical thinking skills:

- Research can be designed to investigate the effects of various teaching strategies, methods, and techniques on the development of critical thinking skills.
- Teaching programs of the courses offered in the national curriculum can be analyzed more thoroughly in terms of their objectives, content, teaching-learning processes, and evaluation methods through a qualitative research method in relation to critical thinking.

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