



## Feeling In-Between Experienced by Tertiary-Level English Preparatory Students: An Investigation of Two Turkish EMI Universities

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### ABSTRACT

English preparatory programs at English medium instruction (EMI) universities aim to help students gain the necessary competence in English so that they can fulfil their academic and communicative goals at the international level. Preparatory students may experience different psychological situations including feeling in-between. Being neither a high school nor a bachelor student, they may experience difficulties likely to stem from the uncertainty regarding their status and environment and this could have adverse effects on the quality of their language learning including distraction and demotivation. This study is the first of its kind investigating English preparatory students' feeling in-between by exploring their descriptions, reasons, and suggested solutions. The data were collected from 238 students at two Turkish EMI universities through a questionnaire and interviews and thematically analysed. Findings show feeling in-between was defined as "not feeling like a real university student". The participants likened their environment to high school and complained about lack of activities and contents not related to their majors. The suggestions included content-based instruction and social, psychological, and academic support. The study implies preparatory students be fully included in educational life and have a say in relevant policies. The research also has implications for tertiary-level EFL instruction worldwide.

**Keywords:** feeling in-between, EMI universities, content-based instruction, learner psychology, language policy and planning

## Introduction

English preparatory programs of universities are intended to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills in English so that they can become prepared to receive English-medium instruction (EMI) in their majors, conduct academic studies at the international level, and accomplish their communication purposes. Having left high school years behind and having to cope with not only English but also adaptation to a new life in this very first year of studying at a university, English preparatory students may experience contrastive feelings such as the relief of achieving university admission on the one hand, and the stress and anxiety of new responsibilities and obligations on the other hand. Also, they might have a high level of motivation for new experiences, but at the same time, they may be living moments of demotivation, likely to stem from the new challenges of this novel period. In addition, being within a period in-between high school and undergraduate education, they may face ambiguities which may cause them to experience different forms and levels of feeling in-between.

Feeling in-between is a psychological situation that can affect tertiary-level English preparatory students as they are neither a high school student nor a bachelor student and may experience challenges due to different types of uncertainty concerning their status and environment. To illustrate, they may feel like an adult for the first time in their life but they may not have an established adult status; they have to pass the English proficiency exam of the institution in order to start their majors, but they may feel incompetent at the same time; they may socialize in different environments but also feel lonely, and, when one studies at a university away from their family, they may experience the excitement of a new life at a new school and in a new city while feeling homesick. Besides, the educational context may pose physical, social, and curricular challenges which may make English preparatory students feel in-between and this constitutes the focus of the study. The researcher, having worked as an English language instructor in the preparatory classes of English-medium universities in Turkey for twenty years, commonly observed many of her students' feeling in-between and their sufferings and found out that although feeling in-between is a widespread situation among English preparatory students, it remains unexplored, thus she felt the need to make an in-depth investigation into this seemingly significant topic.

## Review of Literature

### Feeling In-Between

Feeling in-between is a sense of non-belonging one may have in-between two spaces and/or periods of time with different and often contrastive characteristics (Arnett, 2000). You do not feel you belong to the space and/or time period where you are expected to be, but there is also not an exact sense of belonging to the space/time that contrasts with the former. Feeling in-between is often mentioned in literature with regard to emerging adulthood, the period with distinctive characteristics that follows adolescence, but is not exactly adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The participants in the period of emerging adulthood share a perception of "feeling in between", which refers to knowing they are getting away from the struggles of adolescence and starting to feel responsible for themselves, but are still closely connected to their parents and family and/or do not feel like an adult.

Feeling in-between can also be defined as an acute limbo situation in which there is a lack of clarity about the roles of people and spaces, and the future (Preston et al., 1999). The process is characterized by different forms of anxiety, worry, impatience, frustration, anger, dread, and despair (Capps & Carlin, 2010). The implications of the situation may be feelings related to confinement, neglect, or oblivion (Grimell, 2019). Due to not belonging anywhere, a person feeling in-between can be disoriented and confused and/or unable to take decisions or accomplish goals

that have been desired (Capps & Carlin, 2010). The aspects within such feelings of limbo may include an uncertain period of waiting, indefiniteness about what to expect next, and a sense of powerlessness and loss of control over one's life (Presten et al., 1999). In a nutshell, the state of in-betweenness, "is not heaven, but neither is it hell" (Grimell, 2019, p. 401). In terms of language learning and education, if this feeling of uncertainty is experienced among learners, it is very likely to form a barrier to successful language learning since the situation could bring about adverse psychological effects like intense disappointment, feelings of constraint, and lack of self-strength and cause distraction and demotivation.

### **Belonging and Non-Belonging**

Belonging and non-belonging are concepts intertwined with the psychological situation of feeling in-between. Belonging is defined as a basic human need which derives from the need for a sense of connectedness and being cared about, valued, and respected by others and it is marked by being able to establish and maintain positive significant relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging is defined as a spatial notion commonly investigated in terms of geographical, social, and temporal spaces (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). The spatial concepts on belonging present a variety of places dependent on each other such as homes and neighborhoods. As stated by Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), belonging is also closely connected with the notions of time and body. As a temporal process, it synthesizes one's experiences about the past, their current situation, and expectations from the future. As a materialized and bodily experience, it connects temporality, materiality, and embodiment. The concept of belonging is not defined as a permanent state but is changeable across contexts and time. Belonging is commonly associated with "feeling at home" and embraces spaces of familiarity, comfort, and emotional attachment, and feelings of security (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Marcu, 2014). Belonging therefore is a process of space-making in search of security, comfort, and acceptance.

In the process of space-making, where people are seeking to belong to a new environment as an "outsider", it is possible to experience feelings of in-betweenness and non-belonging with social, emotional, and/or spatial dimensions (Dewhurst et al., 2020). Non-belonging as a concept involves the relational dimensions of both inclusion and exclusion (Gerharz, 2014). One experiences varying levels of exclusion rather than inclusion, which originates from both extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and as a result, one does not exactly feel they belong to the space where they are expected to be. As pointed out by Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), "non-belonging" offers a fruitful potential to comprehend the intricacies of inclusion and exclusion with simultaneously embodied or rejected, affectively felt, and socially constructed aspects. In language learning and education, this lack of self-belonging together with feelings of in-betweenness may pose a threat to effective learning as in such situations learners would possibly experience varying levels of discomfort, emotional detachment, and feelings of insecurity, likely to impede their academic achievement.

### **Studies about the Psychological Issues of English Preparatory Students at the Tertiary Level**

Language learning is a multidimensional process consisting of not only linguistic and cognitive but also affective and social dimensions and language learners are "holistic living, thinking, experiencing and feeling human beings" (Mercer, 2013, p. 163). Thus, learner's psychology plays a major role in language learning and it is particularly language learner's well-being which has a substantial impact on their mental and emotional balance and accordingly their academic engagement and achievement (Huo, 2022).

There are several studies reporting on the factors affecting the well-being of language learners studying in English preparatory programs at the tertiary level. To illustrate, in Armağan et al. (2016) and Aydemir (2011), the students were particularly found to be anxious about the English proficiency exam they take at the end of the academic year. Additionally, in Özdoruk (2016), Soruç

(2012) and Tekin (2015), most of the students reported they felt stressed with the number and difficulty levels of the exams. In addition to stress and anxiety, demotivation is also reported to be a psychological issue among tertiary-level English preparatory students. Dinçer et al. (2010) reported that physical conditions of the school, existing school facilities, classroom atmosphere, and attitudes of their teachers and peers decreased the motivation level of students. It was also added that not using the language itself as a communication tool outside classes made the students demotivated. Özkanal (2009) stated disconnection of the preparatory school campus from the main campus, physical inadequacies of the school building, and demotivation of some teachers overall affected motivation in the preparatory education process.

Amidst the social, physical, and educational conditions of tertiary-level English preparatory programs, students may also experience feeling in-between. There is no research on the topic to the best of the researcher's knowledge. This study investigates feeling in-between experienced by tertiary-level English preparatory students within their preparatory programs. It accordingly explores their descriptions about the case, reasons as well as suggested solutions. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do the English preparatory students describe their feeling in-between within the preparatory program?
2. What are the reasons for their feeling in-between within the preparatory program according to the students?
3. What solutions do the students suggest to address the situation of feeling in-between within the preparatory program?

### **Methodology**

The study is a descriptive case study in that it seeks to describe the case of feeling in-between along with its contextualization via in-depth analysis (Yin, 2018). Accordingly, the descriptions, reasons and suggested solutions regarding the issue have been explored via thick descriptions to uncover hidden and sophisticated patterns. This has made it possible to clarify the issue and present a detailed picture of the case.

### **Setting**

The data were collected from preparatory program contexts at two Turkish EMI universities for triangulation and the settings were chosen due to accessibility. The main goals of the preparatory programs at both universities include providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills required to use English for academic and communicative purposes and supporting them in meeting the demands of the courses in their majors. The curricula in both settings comprise courses aiming at improvement in English for Academic Purposes and advance at the use of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Also in both contexts, the materials include coursebooks focusing on academic and communicative use of English as well as grammar- and skills-oriented materials prepared by the preparatory program instructors of the institutions.

Another commonality of the participants at both universities was that they had their preparatory education in a campus separate from the main campus. These campuses of the preparatory classes were distant to the main campus and students used public transportation to reach the campuses. In one of the campuses, there were also dormitories for students' accommodation.

### **Participants**

238 students studying in the English preparatory programs of two English-medium state universities in Turkey participated in the study. 107 of them were male and 131 were female. The participants were between 18- 25 years old.

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## Data collection

The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and focus group interviews. The students were informed about the study, the procedures and confidentiality and voluntarily participated in the research. Both the questionnaire and interviews were applied towards the end of the academic year.

The open-ended questionnaire was prepared to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue. In the open-ended questionnaire, the participants were first asked if they experienced feeling in-between due to studying in the preparatory program. The ones who said “yes” were further asked to describe their experience of feeling in-between in detail, state the reasons they thought that might have caused this situation and make suggestions to address the relevant challenges, in the second, third and fourth items of the questionnaire. As for the procedure, prior to the application of research instruments, the participants were informed about the study and their consents were received. They were also briefly informed about the meaning of feeling in-between as a psychological situation. Then the questionnaire was administered.

Focus group interviews were applied to gain deeper insights into the issue. It was thought interaction with group members would encourage further communication paving the way for a greater variety of information and clarification of ideas among participants. The interviews about feeling in-between were implemented after the questionnaires were administered. The participants of the interviews were chosen from among students who said they experienced feeling in-between in the questionnaires. The students who volunteered to take part in the interviews were interviewed in groups. There were 58 volunteer-students and they were interviewed in six groups, with five groups of ten students and one group of eight students. Each interview lasted about an hour and was recorded. In the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their cases of feeling in-between as a preparatory student and state the possible reasons as well as suggest solutions. The details given about each aspect were explored with further questions for the purpose of in-depth analysis. All the interviews were conducted in Turkish considering that learners could express themselves fluently and competently in their L1 and they were transcribed and translated for the study.

## Data analysis

The data were analysed via thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). In thematic analysis, the salient and recurring themes are identified and categorized by moving back and forth within the data via iterative readings. For this purpose, the data from the open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews were thematically analysed through multiple readings and in-depth analyses and meticulous efforts were made to define and classify the repetitive patterns.

## Findings and Discussions

### Descriptions about Feeling In-Between

According to the findings, the situation of feeling in-between related to studying in a preparatory program was described with reference to i) school-, ii) stress-, iii) vacuum-, iv) limbo-, and iv) delay-related aspects. The following sections elaborate on the descriptions where these aspects were emphasized.

#### *School-Related Descriptions*

Almost all the participants described the situation of their feeling in-between as “not feeling like a real university student” and complained about curricular and spatial restrictions. According to the statements, the repetitiveness of the schedule, i.e., having the same lessons in the

same hours every day made several students feel bored. Several of them added they went to the same school building every day. There were also students who said they did no or a very limited number of speaking activities in the classes and spent all or most of the class time filling in the exercises of the coursebook and worksheets. Most of the students likened the situation to studying in a high school and used the phrases “high school» or “high school, grade 5” to refer to their setting. As high school lasts 4 years in Turkey, the latter phrase implies continuation of the students’ high school conditions in the tertiary-level preparatory classes. According to the students’ statements, these conditions referred to lack of activities and lack of variety in the curriculum and being passive and not speaking much in the classroom. Here is a typical excerpt of such a case:

I feel as if I were still continuing with high school. Here is like high school, grade 5. We cover some coursebooks in the class with the same teachers. (...) We speak very little, we just do the coursebooks and sit, and write, and write.

Another student said

I feel like I am in high school, grade 5. I don’t feel like a real university student. Here is very different from my perception about a university. When I was at high school, I thought a university would be a cool place with lots of activities, students, and different courses. Here everything is the same. We are doing the same things every day.

Some participants also likened the situation to being educated in a university preparation course or a language course:

We are not like university students. It is rather like a language course, a language school.

A great majority of participants also said they had imagined a lively educational setting with a variety of clubs, activities, and courses, but found a “dull” place with few activities and courses. In school-related descriptions, several participants also mentioned being distant from the main campus as their schools were not located in the main campus and so they felt they did not belong to the university in a real sense. Since they said the preparatory school campus also lacked university-related social activities and there was no cooperation with the departments about major-related courses and/or activities, they said they did not feel like a university student. Here are some excerpts about the case from different students:

I feel imprisoned in this campus disconnected from the university. I have won a place at this university in the centralized university exam, I have come here and I said ‘What’s this?’

My expectations haven’t been met. As I don’t see anything about my major, I don’t feel like I am studying at a university.

We come here every day in the same hours and do things disconnected from our majors.

I feel a barrier between me and the university even if I won a place in the university exam.

Everything is in the main campus, clubs, activities, departments. We feel like strangers here.

### ***Stress-Related Descriptions***

The participants overall described the situation of feeling in-between as a stressful period. The students stated particularly the obligation to pass the English proficiency exam to start one’s major caused distress, frustration, anxiety, boredom and/or exhaustion. On the other hand, as they said,

they did not feel they had the required competence and motivation to pass the exam, so experienced a state of in-betweenness, a state in-between struggling and giving up, which caused further distress. As one student said

I have difficulty to learn a language and I have the urge to give up, however if I give up, I can't start my major, all these lead to my feeling in-between.

Some students expressed their views about feeling inadequate by comparing themselves to their peers who are more successful in English and how such a comparison caused distress and pessimism:

I feel inadequate particularly in English. I feel as if I won't be able to pass the exam and move on to my major. I feel as if I am going to stay here while my friends start their majors.

### ***Limbo-Related Descriptions***

Some participants said they felt as if they were in limbo. Accordingly, their expressions implied being caught in-between two stages and not being able to continue towards a goal. Some examples include

I feel stuck in the middle of the road.

I feel squeezed with the fear of failing.

Some other limbo state-related descriptions implied cases of struggle:

You feel like a patient in an emergency clinic.

I feel as if I am struggling not to drown.

Some statements also implied feelings of confinement and/or sadness stemming from neglect or oblivion:

I feel as if I am forgotten in this prison.

### ***Vacuum-Related Descriptions***

Several participants expressed being in a vacuum. Vacuum-related descriptions included expressions implying a feeling of hollowness or nothingness. The descriptions in this category included expressions like “feeling as if one didn't know anything”, “being educated in vain”, “feeling of not belonging anywhere”, “existing, but feeling as if one did not exist” or “being at a zero point”.

### ***Delay-Related Descriptions***

Some students described their feeling in-between with the concept of delay. They said they felt delayed from majors and/or work life as they felt stuck in the English preparatory class and could not start their majors. Some students who studied in the English preparatory program for the second time since they were not able to pass the English proficiency exam in their first year were seen to compare themselves with their peers who had passed it and started their majors:

I feel bad when I think of my friends studying in their departments. I am still here. Maybe I will not be with them at all. I must pass the exam or else I may leave school. It is such chaos.

Though being under stress and surrounded with feelings of difficulty and incompleteness, there was also hope among some students:

I will be in my major. God knows when but I know I will pass this year.

Hence, according to the learners' statements, effectiveness in language learning was impeded by restrictions in the school setting as well as high levels of stress and/or feeling in limbo, vacuum or delay. As a result of these affections, the learners stated they experienced a sense of frustration, which in turn hindered their L2 improvement and achievement.

### **Reasons for Feeling In-Between**

The first reason category is about the curriculum content and school expectations. Several participants said there were classes always held in the same hours and done with coursebooks and listening to the teacher most of the time, as in their high schools. Most of them complained about being passive listeners in the classes. They said they felt in-between and explained that they were not a high school student any more, but still felt like a high school student due to the continuation of their high school conditions including repetitiveness of the schedule, teacher- and coursebook-centered education and the small amount of students' speaking in the lessons. Some of them complained about the number and difficulty of the exams and pointed out that they were overwhelmed by the pressure of passing them. Several of them mentioned that particularly the obligation to pass the English proficiency exam to start one's major caused feelings of in-betweenness.

Lack of major-related courses was also a common complaint among the participants. They said they needed to have content-based instruction specifically focusing on each major. As they explained, the coursebooks gave passages about daily life and events as well as some texts related to sociology and/or psychology, but there were not any specific texts about majors like engineering, business administration, educational sciences, and tourism. Most students said they would like to focus on their majors through related contents. Via such form of education, they said they would be able to read texts, listen to related contents, learn more terms and specific details about their majors and become prepared specifically for their undergraduate education. Here are some excerpts exemplifying the case:

I don't see anything related to my major. (...) I will study mechanical engineering. It seems my university life will be difficult.

I come to school every day in the same hour as in high school and we do general things unrelated to our majors. We are in-between in the real sense.

There should be language education connected to our majors.

The second reason category involves lack of activities. The participants said there were few or no social activities, no language-related extracurricular activities and no activities related to their majors in the preparatory school. They also complained about lack of cooperation with the departments and asked for activities related to their departments like seminars and conferences in the preparatory program. Some students also asked for the representation of each department and each club of the university in their campus:

Here is very detached from our departments. There should be seminars, conferences, clubs. Each department, each club should be represented in our campus.

There were also complaints about physical limitations. In this category, the participants mentioned being distant from the main campus and not having regular shuttle services to travel



between campuses. There were also some complaints about lack of equipment and inadequacies of the school building.

Some students also said problems about their peers and teachers might have caused them to feel in-between. They said they missed the past high school days, but they had to adapt to their current environment. In this context, not being able to find close friends, immaturity of one's peers and differences between teachers in teaching styles were mentioned as relevant factors. A couple of participants said that their being lonely caused them to feel in vain:

I feel lonely. I don't have enough friends. I couldn't attend any activities.

Furthermore, some participants indicated that there were personal reasons for their feeling in-between. To illustrate, some of them mentioned they were not apt to memorize words or grammar rules so English was hard for them. Some others said there were private reasons and did not want to give details.

### **Students' Suggested Solutions**

The students made several suggestions related to language learning and education. Firstly, a great majority of students suggested the inclusion of major-related content in the preparatory class curricula. The students said that in order that they could feel like a real university student and get ready for education in their majors, there should be courses and contents in the preparatory class curriculum relevant to their majors. This could not only provide them with content knowledge but also improve their academic English and terminology.

Several students also recommended an increase in speaking and discussion activities. Some students suggested modifications in the schedule, attendance, and assessment system. It was said that in order to break the repetitive routine of the school and make it more like a university, the lessons should start at different times during the week and each level should have varying schedules. Some students recommended the amount of compulsory attendance be reduced. As for the exam system, some students said the number of the exams within the year should be reduced and their difficulty level should be re-examined.

Furthermore, the students also suggested academic and psychological support services specifically given to English preparatory students. They said they needed support centers to improve their communicative skills as well as academic English. As they stated, these facilities would help them improve their linguistic skills and get answers to their immediate questions about linguistic issues. Several students also suggested psychological counselling services in their campus so that they could share their problems and seek solutions in cooperation with experts. They said that since this was their first year at university, they had adaptation problems and they needed professional support in both academic and psychological issues in their campus:

Prep life shouldn't be that difficult. Here, we need to be professionally supported in every aspect.

Lastly, there were a majority of students suggesting an increase in social activities. They stated that for a real university life, there should be activities all over the campus related to arts, sports, science, and culture so that they could both improve themselves and have fun. As their campus was not close to the main campus, several students recommended moving to the main campus if possible or activities' being conducted in all the campuses. Regular shuttle services among the campuses were also recommended. In their recommendations, the students emphasized English preparatory classes should be seen as a part of the university and should not be neglected at all. As the students noted down, this requires a change in mindset all over the university about the significance of the English preparatory classes and cooperation between the administrators:

I feel as if I hadn't passed the university exam. I feel as if I am unsuccessful, dull, idle. The administrators should see this. Our campus, our life should be livelier and more meaningful. We should live like a real university student.

The researcher as a teacher in one of these settings also confirms that in order that negative consequences originating from feeling in-between can be settled, each setting should be enriched with major-related lessons, communicative contents as well as academic, psychological, and social activities through the joint efforts of all the administrators, English teachers and learners involved. It is deemed that only if a holistic view of curriculum is applied with services addressing academic, psychological and social needs, can students' well-being and academic achievement in English be feasibly supported.

We have seen from the findings that the psychology of students has a substantial impact on the whole educational quality of pedagogical settings since it is likely to influence the motivation and work performance of all the stakeholders involved, and tertiary-level English preparatory schools are no exception. In order that the system can work effectively and efficiently, the needs and demands of these students must be taken into consideration in language policy and planning. In academic education, English is a very important component since it is the international lingua franca (Kemaloglu-Er & Deniz, 2020). Communication across cultures and dissemination of information can easily be possible via the use of English in today's world. In English-medium universities, learning to use English is indispensable since the main medium of instruction is English and proficiency in English is necessary to cope with the requirements of the tertiary-level courses. To fulfil this goal, preparatory programs assume a significant role in equipping learners with the knowledge and skills to use English for communicative and academic purposes. The effectiveness of such a form of education can be achieved by meeting the needs of educational settings and establishing the psychological well-being of their students.

In this study, it was found that there are students who feel in-between in their preparatory programs. They expressed their concerns about their sense of non-belonging to their current status and emphasized that they did not feel like a real university student. Although they were not high school students any more, and were officially admitted to a university, they mostly likened their situation to the one in their high schools due to both curricular and spatial restrictions. As they pointed out, they thought they had a repetitive schedule, they were not active enough in the classes particularly in terms of speaking, they felt insufficient in English, the contents of their courses were not related to their majors, they were deprived of academic and social extracurricular activities, lacked academic and psychological support, and were confined to a building and a campus away from the main campus.

Also in this study, most participants were under the pressure of the obligation to pass the proficiency exam and experienced constant distress and de-motivation with feelings of inadequacy in English and fear of failing in the English proficiency exam as in several studies about English preparatory programs (Armağan et al., 2016; Özdoruk, 2016; Soruç, 2012; Tekin, 2015). On the other hand, unlike these studies, the participants in this study pointed out they were in a state of in-betweenness where there is an obligation for a struggle to move on to their majors on one side, and the possibility of giving up because of not feeling competent and willing enough to do this on the other side. They implied they were in a state of indecisiveness and inertia in-between these states waiting in limbo. Their statements accordingly referred to a sense of powerlessness and loss of control over one's life, which in turn was said to negatively affect their improvement and achievement in English.

The findings of the study are also similar to the ones reported by Dinçer et al. (2010) and Özkanal (2009) in that the participants had problems like lack of facilities at their schools, disconnection of the campus from the main campus and issues with their peers and teachers. Yet, unlike these studies, the students in this study explicitly mentioned that they did not have a real sense of belonging to the university they were studying at as they thought their tertiary setting was

limited in variety, had a repetitive schedule, and lacked speaking activities. In more severe cases, the participants expressed their feelings of being in a vacuum and/or limbo, and feelings of delay to life. Overall, they wanted to feel like real university students, be more active in and outside the classroom and speak more in classes, achieve success in their exams, be exposed to more extracurricular activities and receive content-based instruction related to their majors. They also expressed their needs for academic and psychological support services. To sum up, they asked for well-constructed courses and services that contributed to their psychological well-being as well as academic achievement in English language learning.

As emphasized by Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) belonging is closely related to “feeling at home” and is often characterized with spaces of familiarity, comfort, and emotional attachment, and sense of security. In this study, the participants did not have this feeling as they could not have emotional bonds with their space due to feeling unfamiliar, uncomfortable, detached and insecure. They said they longed for a “real university”, which may be taken as a representation of “home” in Lähdesmäki et al.’s (2016) terms as it signifies security and comfort. They sought to belong to their defined environment and often felt like “outsiders” (Dewhurst et al., 2020). This seems to have happened due to the administrative decisions implying their exclusion like being sent off to a distant campus, exclusion of major-related in their curricula, not speaking much in classes and non-cooperation of the preparatory programs with the departments and other university units. Therefore, the data implies that although they were university students, they were not assumed to be active agents of the university they were studying at. They seem to have been forced to become passive and apply the routine imposed by their preparatory program and were driven into a state of inertia. All these factors appear to have made the students experience feelings of in-betweenness as well as non-belonging.

One of the significant implications of the study is that to comprehensively prepare the English preparatory students for education in English in their majors, providing them with major-related courses and equipping them with relevant content and vocabulary is a necessity. This was highly emphasized by the participants of this study since they thought it is content-based instruction that could act as a bridge between the preparatory program and the majors.

The study also displays the significance of learner-centred learning and learners’ speaking in the English classes. Most of the students complained about coursebook- and teacher-centred teaching and expressed their concerns about feeling insufficient in English and their demands to speak more in classes. Due to being forced to be passive, they stated they did not feel they belonged to their educational setting in a real sense, thus showed signs of alienation like being in a vacuum or limbo.

In Freire’s (1996) terms, students are potential agents or actors and the purpose of education is to help participants learn from their experiences and plan for collective action. English preparatory students should feel motivated, active, and powerful and must have a sense of belonging to their universities. In order that they can have such a feeling, there must be inclusive education with contents, activities, and services meeting students’ needs. It must be noted that only with the cooperation of preparatory program stakeholders with the departments and university administration can a genuine university life be established for these students. As a result, English preparatory students need to be fully included in tertiary-level educational and social life and they should participate in building policies targeting such form of integration.

The study also has significant implications for the EFL instruction of all tertiary-level students worldwide. As English is an international lingua franca, starting from the first year of undergraduate education, it would be useful to provide freshmen students with substantial language support including communicative and content-based EFL instruction preparing them for the English requisites of their majors and continue with such a form of education until the last semester. It would also be feasible to arrange extracurricular activities and counselling services to increase the students’ motivation to improve their English.

## Conclusion

This research highlights the fact that feeling in-between among tertiary-level English preparatory students is one of the psychological problems that universities should focus on for efficient practices. University students should have a sense of belonging to their educational contexts from the first year to the end of the graduation year and beyond, yet the case may be the opposite and they may feel alienated due to the unclear image they have in the eyes of the administrators. They are university students and they need to be active and sociable in their own classes and campuses. Thus, activity-wise, they have their own needs and demands as shown in this study. They also expressed their needs to receive content-based instruction and get adequately and efficiently prepared for English medium instruction in their undergraduate studies. Also, on condition that the quality of education is maintained, their suggestions about the curricula and exams may be taken into consideration. Finally, the preparatory programs could establish academic and psychological support centres to help the students accommodate to their new lives so that they can cope with the problems specific to the first year of tertiary education as well as language learning and have a smooth transition to their undergraduate education.

The study concludes that in English language planning at the tertiary level, the needs and demands of EFL learners at all levels should carefully be considered and from the first to the last year there should be sound practices to improve their English for academic purposes, enable them to efficiently communicate in global contexts, and encourage and empower them with academic, social, and psychological support services.

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