

An investigation of the effectiveness of the modular general English language teaching preparatory program at a Turkish university

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Evaluating existing foreign language programs on a regular basis is essential because program evaluation leads to more effective programs. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the modular intensive general English language teaching program applied at a university in Turkey by investigating students' and English instructors' perceptions of different program dimensions, such as the materials, teaching process, and assessment. The data were collected via questionnaires filled out by students and interviews with the English instructors at the preparatory program. The findings of the study show that the modular system should be discontinued as it has certain drawbacks and should be replaced by a more manageable and feasible system considering specific contextual constraints, such as the number of instructors, classrooms and teaching resources. Also, it was found that there are certain aspects of the curriculum that need to be improved in order to develop a more effective program. It is hoped that this study will lead to more evaluative studies in foreign language teaching programs.

Keywords: modular program; program evaluation; teaching English

Introduction

As English spreads around the world as the language of science and education, the medium of instruction at many universities in Turkey is English and the number of universities providing English instruction is increasing (Kırkgöz, 2005). Therefore, all private and most of the state universities in Turkey offer intensive English programs for their students. These intensive English programs offered to university students in Turkey before they enrol at their departments are known as the *English preparatory program* because they prepare students to follow their chosen degree courses offered in English. While these programs focus mainly on general English skills such as listening, reading, writing, speaking, grammar and vocabulary (Çetinavcı & Topkaya, 2012), the academic English needs of university students are generally neglected in these programs (Kırkgöz, 2009).

Out of 53 state universities in Turkey, 23 are English-medium universities offering a one-year intensive English preparation for all new students who are not successful in the English proficiency exam administered at the beginning of the first academic year (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005). The general aim of these programs is to teach university students to read English so that they can cope with departmental

courses offered in English in their faculties. Furthermore, writing skills are also taught so that students can take notes during lectures and write essays of different types. These programs also address listening and speaking skills in order to help students follow their lectures, ask their lecturers questions and make presentations when they start their university studies in their selected fields (Tunç, 2010).

Despite the importance attached to preparatory English programs in Turkey to bring university students up to an adequate level in terms of English and to help students use English internationally in various fields (Toker, 1999), the preparatory school programs have many problems. A few program evaluation studies recently carried out in the context of preparatory schools at different universities revealed many issues that need to be improved for a more effective English preparatory school program in Turkey (Karataş & Fer, 2009; Tunç, 2010; Gökdemir, 2010; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010; Örs, 2006; Gerede, 2005). Moreover, according to a recent survey conducted on the internet by Education First (EF), a trusted private education company, the English Proficiency Index (EPI) ranks Turkey 43rd among 44 countries. In other words, Turkey falls behind many of its neighbours in Europe with its rank as a very low proficient country (Koru & Åkesson, 2011). In fact, there is an urgent need to evaluate the English language teaching programs in Turkey, especially the preparatory English programs as they are the only intensive English programs currently offered at university level. Therefore, it is hoped that this evaluative study, aiming to evaluate a modular preparatory English language teaching program from the perspective of students and English instructors, can set an example of program evaluation for other preparatory programs in Turkey and trigger more evaluation studies in the context of any intensive English programs.

Literature review

It is an undeniable reality that English has become a lingua franca enabling communication between speakers speaking different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2005) and the language of higher education (Brumfit, 2004). As stated by Kirkpatrick (2011), the number of universities where English is used as the medium of instruction has increased in line with the changing status of English as an international language. In parallel with this change, English-medium instruction and universities offering most of their courses in English have attracted more than half of the international students all over the world (Graddol, 2006). English-medium instruction is popular not only for international students but also for students attending universities in their own countries. Although many researchers both abroad (Evans, 2000; Master, 1998; Lucas & Katz, 1994; Heugh, 2000) and in Turkey (Demircan, 1988; Sinanoğlu, 2004; Köksal, 1995) resist the spread of English in academia, Turkish students mostly prefer to study in English-medium universities in Turkey (Kırkgöz, 2009). The main reason why the idea of providing English-medium education is opposed by many researchers is that English is seen as an obstacle preventing students from fully understanding their

specialist subjects (Sinanoğlu, 2004). According to Görgülü (1998), English-medium instruction in Turkey is also disapproved of because it is considered to be a threat to the mother tongue and the national identity of the Turkish citizens.

Despite the opposition against providing English-medium instruction in Turkey, the popularity and the number of English-medium universities with English preparatory programs is increasing. Nearly all private and most of the state universities in Turkey provide obligatory English preparatory programs to prepare students for their English-medium academic studies. Thus, the role of these programs in the whole higher education system of Turkey becomes more important (Toker, 1999), and the effectiveness of these programs has been focused on by many Turkish researchers in the last decade (Karataş & Fer, 2009; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010; Kırkgöz, 2009; Gerede, 2005; Örs, 2006). One of the common findings revealed by these researchers is that these programs do not adequately prepare students for the academic English-medium environment in which they have to operate throughout their university studies. For instance, Karataş and Fer (2009) evaluated the English preparatory program at Yıldız Technical University and found that students' academic needs related to their fields and the business life-related English knowledge are missing in the program. Examining the effectiveness of the English preparatory program at Eskişehir Osmangazi University through qualitative and quantitative data from the perspective of students, Özkanal and Hakan (2010) revealed that the students were generally satisfied with the program although they thought that their academic English needs should also have been considered while developing the program. Kırkgöz (2009) conducted a needs assessment at Çukurova University using questionnaires and interviews with 15 lecturers and 220 first-year undergraduate students who were continuing their studies in their respective departments of the university offering English-medium instruction after completing the one-year compulsory program. The findings of this needs assessment showed that a gap was noticed between the requirements of department courses and what they were taught at the centre of foreign language. The English preparatory program at Anadolu University was evaluated by Gerede (2005), collecting data by means of interviews and questionnaires to compare what students think about the old and the current program. Most of the participating students stated that their language needs related to their subject area in their departments were not met in the program at all. In another study, Örs (2006) evaluated the preparatory program at the University of Gaziantep and revealed that it incorporated a few hours of instruction in technical terms into the program.

Considering the review literature above showing the inadequacy of the English preparatory program in terms of preparing students for academia, it would be fair to recommend a shift in Turkish higher education from the pure general English structure of the English preparatory programs to a more English for General Academic Purposes framework (EGAP) whose main principle is that the language forms, study activities, and skills considered to be common for all disciplines are isolated (Hyland, 2006).

Liyanage and Birch (2001) also argue that English programs aiming to prepare students to carry out their studies in English in their chosen degree should be academic-oriented in that rather than dealing with everyday interaction and the skills needed in the immediate context, they need to include study skills such as getting meaning from context, note taking, summarizing, and interpreting graphs (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992) that are needed by students who will continue their education in an English-medium environment. Students' needs for the kinds of academic English and literacy skills could best be revealed by means of conducting a needs analysis (Weddel & Van Duzer, 1997) with the involvement of various program stakeholders, such as English instructors and students in the preparatory program as well as content course instructors and students continuing their education in their English-medium departments.

Context of the Study

When students in Turkey are eligible to enrol at the university depending on their scores at the University Entrance Exam, they have to pass the English proficiency exam administered by the preparatory programs of universities at the beginning of their first year. Students' scores obtained from this exam are taken into account so as to decide whether their English proficiency is sufficient for them to follow their departmental courses in English. The current preparatory program is based on a modular system which was implemented in the preparatory program in the context of the study. The modular system in the program requires students to pass all four levels of English proficiency (A1, A2, B1, B2) as described in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). As written in the CEFR report (Council of Europe, 2001:1), the framework "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc." across Europe. The proficiency levels in the CEFR are especially used for the assessment of foreign language learners' proficiency levels as they reveal realistic and ideal expectations from foreign language learners at different levels (Council of Europe, 2001). For instance, in B1, students are expected to develop the speaking skill of being able to "... describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans" (Council of Europe, 2001:18). The four levels which aim to boost students' general English skills in the program are followed by the exam preparation course preparing students for the proficiency exam. The modular structure of the program does not let students proceed to a higher level unless they are successful in each level. On the other hand, passing all the levels does not guarantee success at the preparatory school as students have to obtain a passing score in the proficiency exam prepared by the school at the end of the academic year.

The assessment process for each level consists of the tasks in the on-line platform, portfolio assignments, quizzes, attendance and an exit exam. Students have to enter the on-line platform to complete the tasks assigned by the teachers. Portfolio assignments are out-of-class projects (e.g. preparing a poster describing their hometown) enabling

students to get exposed to English outside the classroom. Two quizzes and an exit exam are administered in each proficiency level.

The general English program implemented at the preparatory school is a two-semester 28-week (30 hours per week) intensive program putting emphasis on four macro skills (writing, reading, listening, and speaking) and other micro sub-skills like grammar and vocabulary. The integrated-skills instructional materials, such as the four-level (beginning, high beginning, low intermediate, intermediate) course book and other additional materials like hand-outs aim to cover these macro and micro skills.

In order to better understand the frequency of focus on different skills and sub-skills in the context of this evaluation study, students who participated in the study were asked to mark the frequency of emphasis on writing, reading, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary.

Table 1 Students' perceptions of emphasis for skills and sub-skills

Items	Always		Usually		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Writing	68	17.8	206	54.0	91	23.9	15	3.9	1	0.3
Reading	58	15.2	154	40.4	127	33.3	37	9.7	5	1.3
Listening	46	12.1	162	42.6	131	34.4	39	10.2	3	0.8
Speaking	51	13.4	121	31.8	138	36.3	67	17.6	4	1.0
Grammar	132	34.6	175	45.9	49	12.9	23	6.0	2	0.5
Vocabulary	99	26.0	163	42.8	83	21.8	31	8.1	5	1.3

As Table 1 illustrates, there is a general consensus among students that sufficient emphasis is placed on all four skills and other sub-skills. The skill perceived to be the least frequently focused was found to be speaking marked as "sometimes" by 36.3% of the students and "seldom" by 17.6% of the students. On the other hand, it is worth noting here that grammar was considered by a great majority of the students (80.5%) to be either always or usually emphasized.

Research question

The main aim of the study is to evaluate a CEFR-based modular (A1, A2, B1, B2) general English Preparatory Program at a state university in Turkey by focusing on course materials, the teaching-learning process, and assessment, which are described by Brown (1995) as key elements of a language curriculum. Considering the aim and the context of this study, the following research question was formulated: *What are students and instructors' perceptions of the effectiveness of the preparatory English program in relation to three program dimensions: course materials, the teaching-learning process and the assessment?*

Participants

English instructors at the preparatory program and all the students who came to class on the day when the data were collected participated in this evaluation study. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to all the students and 381 returned. While 64.8% of the student participants were female, the remaining were male. Their age range is from 17 to 23. In addition, 22 English instructors attended the focus group interviews.

Method and data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used in this evaluation study. The qualitative data were collected through interviews with 22 instructors working in the preparatory school and the quantitative data were obtained from 381 preparatory school students through a questionnaire adapted from Tunç's (2010) study. In addition to demographic information about the participating students, the questionnaire, which consists of open ended questions as well as four- and five-point Likert-type items, aims to reveal their perceptions of the materials (1 = completely insufficient, 2 = not sufficient, 3 = sufficient, 4 = quite sufficient), the teaching-learning process (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always) and the assessment (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree) dimensions of the program.

Before the administration of the questionnaire, an expert was consulted about whether the items in the questionnaire were appropriate for the purpose and context of this study to achieve construct validity. Based on the feedback obtained, some modifications were made. In terms of reliability, the data collected from 50 students during the piloting stage were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 15 and the questionnaire was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of .83.

The interview guide for instructors was designed parallel with the three components of the questionnaire. Instructors were asked to reflect on the problems related to the materials, teaching process and the assessment dimensions of the program. The qualitative data were obtained by means of focus group interviews with the instructors because the data collected through the interactions in the focus-group interview are known to be richer than those gained from one-on-one interviews (Thomas, MacMillan, McColl, Hale & Bond, 1995). The researcher took notes during the focus group interview sessions. The qualitative data were analysed by applying content analysis revealing common trends regarding the materials, teaching process and the assessment dimensions of the program.

Results

The results of the student questionnaire are presented in tables illustrating percentages (%) and numbers (N). These results were supplemented with students' responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire and instructors' comments made in the interviews about each dimension of the program.

Materials (Course book, Hand-outs)

Students' perceptions regarding the different aspects of the instructional materials are given in the following tables. After analysing what students think about different parts of the materials, instructors' comments are presented.

Table 2 Students' perceptions of the materials

Items	Quite Sufficient		Sufficient		Not Sufficient		Completely Insufficient	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
	Reading parts	71	18.6	207	54.4	80	21.0	23
Listening parts	59	15.5	177	46.4	112	29.4	33	8.7
Writing parts	77	20.2	176	46.2	100	26.2	28	7.3
Grammar parts	86	22.6	169	44.4	96	25.2	30	7.9
Speaking parts	51	13.4	126	33.1	149	39.1	51	13.4
Daily life materials	79	20.7	155	40.7	111	29.1	36	9.4

Generally, more than half of the students held the idea that the materials were sufficient in general except for the parts dealing with speaking skills. While 46.5% of the students marked "quite sufficient" or "sufficient", more than half of the students (52.5%) marked either "not sufficient" or "completely insufficient" for the speaking parts of the materials. As for other parts focusing on certain skills and sub skills, the majority of the students indicated that the reading parts (73%), listening parts (61.9%), writing parts (66.4%), grammar parts (67%), daily life materials (70.4%) are either "quite sufficient" or "sufficient".

On the other hand, regarding the effectiveness of the materials, most of the instructors agreed that the materials are not suitable for their students' needs. There is consensus among instructors that although the materials focus sufficiently on speaking skills; the grammar, reading and writing parts of these materials are not adequate. Four instructors commented negatively on parts of the materials teaching the spoken discourse markers like "well", "you know", "I guess". They felt that there was no need to spend time on these discursive expressions as they are not relevant to their students' academic needs. One instructor drew attention to the difference between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) referring to learning English in a country where English is not the mother tongue (e.g. Turkey) and English as a Second language (ESL) referring to learning the language in a native-English speaking country (e.g. the United States of America [USA]) and claimed that the instructional materials currently in use in the program are designed for ESL contexts mainly dealing with immigrants or visitors to native-English speaking countries, especially the USA.

Another instructor argued that the materials do not have academic content preparing students sufficiently to follow their departmental courses in English. Similar to 8 students, two instructors thought that the materials should be supplemented by

readers at different levels and extensive reading should be encouraged in the program. Like two instructors, six students commented that the listening materials for the first four modules have most of their recordings in American English whereas the exam preparation materials are mainly centred on British English. There was a common belief among these students that the variation of accents at different modules should be replaced by either British or American accent at all levels of the program.

Teaching process

Students' perceptions of the frequency of the language activities (methods, strategies and techniques), the common responses given by the students to the open-ended question in the questionnaire and instructors' reactions towards the teaching process applied in the program in general are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Students' perceptions of language activities

Items	Always		Often		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Questions	102	26.8	131	34.4	119	31.2	22	5.8	7	1.8
Role play	27	7.1	89	23.4	185	48.6	57	15.0	23	6.0
Group work	98	25.7	169	44.4	83	21.8	27	7.1	4	1.0
Lecturing	194	50.9	139	36.5	35	9.2	9	2.4	4	1.0
Pair work	99	26.0	173	45.4	82	21.5	18	4.7	9	2.4
Eliciting	78	20.5	142	37.3	126	33.1	28	7.3	7	1.8
Discussion	38	10.0	100	26.2	136	35.7	79	20.7	28	7.3
Presentation	51	13.4	111	29.1	153	40.2	51	13.4	15	3.9

When asked how frequently these language activities are used in the program, a great number of students (87.4%) believed that lecturing was either "always" or "often" used as the dominant method whereas role-plays, discussions and presentation were marked as "sometimes" or "seldom" by more than half of the students. Role-plays (63.6%), discussions (56.4%) and presentations (53.6%) were only sometimes and seldom incorporated into the lessons from the perspective of more than half of the students.

In terms of the challenges encountered during the teaching process, a common concern among seven instructors is that although the CEFR and its proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, B2) should be taken as a reference in designing the teaching process, the principles of the modular system should be abandoned as students failing in one of the modules have to repeat the same module. The major problems with the modular system requiring failing students in one of the levels to repeat the same level before they can pass to a higher level are related to logistical constraints of the context of the study. Being aware of the fact that the school has to open a separate class for a particular module even if there are a few students failing in this module, instructors listed

the logistical reasons why the modular system cannot work properly in preparatory program at a state university: the lack of instructors, the limited number of classrooms, lack of new resources to use with repeating students and the lack of student motivation and hence discipline problems with repeating students. Four other instructors commented that after the first four levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2), the exam preparation course and the materials used to prepare students for this exam do not fit into the program because of the swift transition from general English to exam preparation. According to these instructors, the level of the mainstream four levels is manageable for the students whereas the final exam preparation course is not achievable by the students because of the heavy vocabulary and grammar load of this course. It is therefore advisable to use the time allocated for the exam preparation course for the earlier modules.

For a better teaching process, nine instructors, who agreed that students' needs are neglected in the process of designing the program, suggested that a detailed needs analysis should be done by involving not only students and instructors at the preparatory school but also the content course instructors offering their courses in English in various departments of the university. Arguing that the program does not have program objectives, three instructors underlined the need to have clearly defined objectives to stick to considering the results of a needs analysis. Related to the possible results of the needs analysis, two of the instructors underlined the need for more academic content in the program. According to them, academic tasks like report writing are not included in the current program but are required when they start taking departmental courses. Similarly, seven students indicated that they needed more academic skills like preparing oral or written presentations. For six students, speaking is a neglected skill and more time should be spent on speaking. Two of the students even suggested that a separate speaking course would help them speak more fluently. Two students indicated that they felt hesitant to speak English because of their "bad pronunciation" and recommended that more emphasis should be put on pronunciation. On the other hand, 14 students recommended that more in-class group work activities should be included and four students suggested that enrichment activities such as watching English films and reading English books should be incorporated into the program, or activities like picnics where everybody speaks English to one another should be organized.

As far as the number of teaching hours is concerned, five instructors and 33 students argued that 30 hours of weekly teaching and learning time (six hours a day) is too much. On the other hand, three instructors believed in the need for regular standardization meetings with the instructors as different teaching methods and approaches are used by different instructors. For example, some instructors preferred to speak mostly Turkish, especially while teaching English grammatical structures that have counterparts in the Turkish language so that students can make comparisons between the two languages and learn the target language more easily. The consensus,

on the other hand, reached in the relevant literature regarding the primary medium of instruction in English lessons is that the use of the mother tongue should be limited and selective while English should be maximized (Atkinson, 1993). In addition to standardization meetings, two other instructors argued for instructor evaluation forms to be filled in by students at the end of each academic year.

Assessment

The results in Table 4 showing students' perceptions about the assessment dimension of the program reveal that despite agreement on the effectiveness of the assessment system, a certain level of disagreement was found, especially regarding use of the on-line platform.

Table 4 Students' perceptions of assessment

Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Exams reflect the content of the lessons	72	18.9	229	60.1	57	15.0	22	5.8
Quizzes and exit exams help me learn better	34	8.9	172	45.1	34	35.2	39	10.2
The difficulty levels of the exams are consistent in general	27	7.1	176	46.2	123	32.3	55	14.4
The on-line platform is a good criteria to assess my performance	51	13.4	96	25.2	82	21.5	152	39.9
Portfolio helps me learn better	69	18.1	178	46.7	91	23.9	43	11.3
Number of exams is high	102	26.8	198	52.0	49	12.9	32	8.4

As can be realized from Table 4, students were found to be generally satisfied with the way the preparatory school assesses their ability. However, the on-line platform was not appreciated by the great majority of the students as a good criterion to evaluate their performance. The use of the platform as an assessment tool is disagreed (strongly disagree and disagree) by 61.4% of the students. Another interesting finding is that the number of exams was considered to be high by 78.8% (strongly agree and agree) of the participating students. Likewise, in terms of the assessment dimension of the program, 12 instructors agreed that they suffer from "burn-out" because of the high number of quizzes they have to prepare for each level. Two other

instructors commented that it is not only the number but also the length of these exams causing instructor burn-out. Twenty-one students responded similarly to the relevant open-ended question in the questionnaire. Their suggestions were more about length of the assessment tools, rather than quality of their content. They suggested that the number of quizzes and the length of these exams should be optimized. Another concern focused on by both instructors and students is the ineffectiveness of the use of the on-line system for the assessment of students' progress and the possibilities for plagiarism or false authorship of the portfolios. Similar to 8 instructors who believed that students generally asked their friends to do their assignments on the on-line platform, eight students claimed that some of their friends had other people do their work on the platform. Likewise, the out-of-class projects (called portfolio in the program) assigned to students were considered by both four students and two instructors to be done by other people, not by students themselves. Six students also argued that they had to spend quite a long time in the on-line platform, which was not always possible due to their lack of access to the Internet.

In terms of objectivity in assessment, open-ended questions in the students questionnaire and focus-group interviews revealed that few students ($n = 18$) and instructors ($n = 5$) agreed on the fact that scoring of productive skills like writing and speaking was not very objective in the program. According to what two of the students explained, the same piece of writing could be scored very differently by two instructors. As a solution to this problem, one of the instructors recommended that rather than holistic scoring criteria, an analytic rubric should be used. Another point about the assessment of students' success in the program is related to feedback. As no feedback is provided to the students about their quizzes, four instructors and eight students urged for feedback as follow-up for the quizzes.

Another point of criticism by the instructors is the content of the exams. Seven instructors argued that the multiple choice format of most of the tests should be replaced by more open-ended test types assessing students' language productivity. Especially, the writing test format was thought to be prescriptive by five instructors because it enabled students to only memorize certain written discourse patterns and to write these down in the writing parts of the exams.

Summary and recommendations

This study revealed students and instructors' perceptions about different dimensions of the program (i.e. materials, teaching, assessment) implemented in an intensive English preparatory school program aiming mainly to prepare students to follow their English-medium departmental courses in English. The objective dimension of the program could not be focused in the evaluation as the program does not have clear objectives. According to Brown (1995), objectives are necessary as they serve as basis to develop more observable program outcomes. To formulate program objectives for a language program, it is necessary to conduct needs analysis (Kaur, 2007; Richards,

2001) which is described by Weddel and Van Duzer (1997) as a way of exploring the kinds of English and literacy skills needed by the students for the specific contexts where they will use the language. The need for a comprehensive needs analysis was also emphasized by some instructors to develop a preparatory program curriculum preparing students for academic studies in their chosen degrees.

Considering the participants' views on the instructional materials, it would be fair to conclude that the materials emphasizing different skills and sub-skills were positively evaluated whereas many students expressed concerns about the speaking aspect of the materials. On the other hand, some instructors claimed that grammar, reading, and writing aspects of the materials do not prepare students sufficiently. Moreover, the materials were evaluated by a few instructors as "not academic", and thus not suitable for their students' profile. Finally, both students and instructors favoured the idea of supplementing the materials with other additional resources like graded readers. It would be fair to suggest that the materials used in the program should be evaluated. The evaluation of the instructional materials is believed to be essential for the improvement of a language program (Tomlinson, 2006; Richards, 2001; Mukundan, 2007).

Related to the teaching process applied in the program, it was found that instructors' lecturing was the most frequently used method while student-centred activities like role-plays, discussions and presentations were the least frequently used from the perspective of students. Although teacher-centred teaching may be effective in some contexts, teacher-centred language teaching activities like lecturing are not favourable in language teaching in line with the principles of communicative approach (Thompson, 1996; Tudor, 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Relevant literature also indicates that student-centred activities should be incorporated into language teaching programs more to enable students to be the managers of their own learning process (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), and teachers' role in the language classroom should switch from an all-knowing bestower of knowledge to a facilitator and a guide (Brown, 2007).

While the interviews with the instructors did not reveal any perceptions about the teacher-centeredness of the classes, a more serious challenge in the process of implementing the program was voiced by them. As can be understood from the title of this paper, one of the main aims of this evaluation was to investigate perceptions about the modular system implemented in the program. Instructors touched on some of the chronic problems arising from the modular structure of the program hindering the teaching-learning process. From their perspective, repeating students with low motivation levels cause discipline problems. For some instructors, the modular system should be discontinued due to contextual constraints, such as the lack of instructors, classrooms and new resources to use with repeating students. Contextual constraints such as poor physical conditions and insufficient number of instructors were also revealed as problems negatively affecting the quality of the preparatory programs

(Tunç, 2010; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010). A viable alternative to this system is a more feasible program based on the local logistical constraints. To illustrate, students could be placed into an appropriate level depending on their scores in the exam administered at the beginning of the year and they could continue studying for the proficiency exam at the end of the academic year without necessitating repetition of any of the modules during the academic year. Thus, many of the problems stemming from unsuccessful students can be solved.

For the improvement of the teaching process in the program, a needs analysis study in which preparatory school students and instructors as well as the departmental course instructors teaching English-medium undergraduate courses could participate was thought to be necessary. Also, it was argued by some instructors that academic English should be emphasized in the program by means of tasks like report writing and presentation. The need to take students' academic needs, in addition to their general English needs, into consideration has also been emphasized by some Turkish (Özkanal & Hakan, 2010; Karataş & Fer, 2009; Mirici & Saka, 2004; Örs, 2006; Kırkgöz, 2009; Gerede, 2005) as well as foreign researchers (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 2001; Hutchinson & Waters, 2004; Hyland, 2006). English programs at universities in Turkey should not only provide students with general English proficiency (Genç, 2011) or focus primarily on teaching grammar (Çetinavcı & Topkaya, 2012) as they do now, but also deal with the academic English needs of the students. An EGAP program containing a common core of skills (e.g. academic writing) that can be transferred across different fields could be provided to preparatory program students after they have a good grasp of general English (Hyland, 2006). Considering that most of the EGAP course books address intermediate to advanced level students, a curriculum focusing on key academic skills such as essay writing skills rather than writing a story could be offered to students in the preparatory program. Apparently, it is equally important to continue offering EGAP courses when students pass the preparatory program and enrol in their departments.

Although it does not sound very feasible for preparatory programs in Turkey to implement specialist English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs relevant to each subject area because of the variety of students at different departments (Gerede, 2005) and the lack of English instructors knowledgeable in specific fields (e.g. English for Engineering), an EGAP program could be proposed for the current program. As rightly argued by Liyanage and Birch (2001), English courses developed to prepare students for an English-medium university environment should be different from the content of general English courses that focuses on the everyday interaction in the immediate context. Instead of a program dealing purely with general English, an academic-oriented program focusing on essential study skills such as note taking, summarizing, guessing word meanings from context, and interpreting graphs and diagrams (Richards et al., 1992) should be designed to better equip students with the language skills necessary to cope with the demands of university study (Evans &

Green, 2007; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). An EGAP program can ideally be fitted into general English preparatory programs after students reach a certain level of English proficiency (Hyland, 2006). Now that most of the EGAP course books target intermediate to advanced level students, it can be suggested that B1 is the ideal proficiency level to embark on an EGAP program in the context of the study.

As far as assessment is concerned, not only students but also instructors thought that the number of exams is high and instructors have the feeling of “burn-out” because of the number and the length of the exams they have to prepare. Another point of criticism against the assessment dimension of the program is that the assessment of the writing and speaking skills is not very objective, and as a solution some instructors recommended the use of analytic scoring criteria instead of holistic ones. In addition, some instructors argued against the multiple-choice test format applied in most of the exams administered in the program. The writing test format was also considered too prescriptive, forcing students to do a lot of memorization.

In line with the above findings of the present study and the relevant literature, the following recommendations could be made to improve the program:

- A large scale needs analysis involving preparatory school students and instructors in addition to the departmental course instructors teaching English-medium undergraduate courses would be a starting point to set clear program objectives.
- For an effective teaching-learning process in the program, it is strongly suggested that the modular system should be replaced with a more manageable system feasible for the preparatory program considering the number of instructors, classrooms and teaching resources at hand. Furthermore, the B1 level could be the ultimate goal of the program. In the report entitled National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (Yükseköğretim Kurulu [YÖK], 2011), the Turkish Higher Education Council suggests that B1 level would be sufficient for undergraduate students. When students reach the level of B1, they can be directed to an EGAP program.
- Instructional materials with a more academic content focusing on skills that students will need in their department should be prepared. Instructors can develop materials to accommodate the academic and language needs of the students.
- It can also be recommended that lecturing should be minimized in the program and more useful pair or group work activities ought to be maximized in the program. By means of these activities, students’ language production and their motivation increase as they give learners a safe opportunity away from the teacher pressure to test ideas before speaking out, which leads to the presentation of more highly developed ideas (Thompson, 1996; Yang & Cheung, 2003).
- Regarding the program’s emphasis on four skills and sub-skills, it could be argued that the focus on grammar should be lessened and more time should be allocated to the improvement of students’ speaking skills. As emphasized by Brown (2007), the main goal of foreign language teaching should be to engage learners in the

functional use of language for meaningful purposes rather than merely focusing on aspects of grammar. Similarly, researchers like Richards (2006) and Schulz (1999) argue in favour of teaching the language for a range of different functions to enable language learners to maintain a meaningful communication using the language.

- As for the assessment dimension of the program, it is recommended that the number and the length of the exams should be reduced and the test format needs to switch from multiple-choice to more productive open-ended questions. Also, in order to assess students' writing skills more objectively, analytic scoring rubrics should replace the holistic ones. As also emphasized by Wiseman (2011), analytic scoring rubrics based on the idea to assess nominated features of a written text give more information about students' performance than the single score of a holistic rating.

In conclusion, considering that educational objectives of institutions are more likely to be achieved when programs are evaluated and improved (Bellon & Handler, 1982), it would be fair to conclude this paper by calling for further evaluative studies dealing with English language teaching programs, not only at universities, but also at different educational levels in Turkey to be able to understand the reasons why Turkey falls behind many of the foreign countries in terms of English-language proficiency (Koru & Akesson, 2011) and to propose solutions for the improvement of the English language teaching system in the country.

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