

2ND YEAR STUDENTS' AND THEIR TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM APPLIED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2012-2013 ACADEMIC YEAR

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ABSTRACT

In Turkey, with 30.03.2012 dated and 6287 numbered Primary Education Law, 4+4+4 system has started to be implemented in 2012-2013 academic years and with this law, English language teaching level is lowered to 2nd year from 4th year in public schools. The purpose of this research is to discover the general perspectives, willingness, positive and negative emotions and experiences of 2nd year grade students with the help of their weekly written diaries. Besides, their teacher's opinions are asked about the implementation of curriculum and positive and negative aspects of it. For this purpose, the study is conducted in the academic year 2013-2014 with 30 students (7-8 years old) from a public school located in the center of Tokat city and named as Vali Mehmet Özgün Primary School. Also, the researcher individually interviews with this class' English language teacher. This study generally shows that 7-8 year-old students demonstrate positive attitudes towards English lessons. Students' are more enthusiastic when they learn a new language with different games and activities in early ages. Furthermore, findings show that 2nd graders curriculum is more appropriate than 4th year curriculum for the level of students.

Key Words: Turkey, primary public school, 2nd year graders, English course.

INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that language is an important, maybe one of the most crucial necessities of human communication. For centuries, it has been known that language is the source of power in the lives of people. One of the clearest indications that language has an important part of being human can be given from some tribes of Africa. In these tribes, new born babies are called as 'kintu' (a thing), and when they gain the ability to speak they can be called as 'muntu' (a person). (Fromkin et al, 2003).

Why is language so important for human being? Most obvious reason is, of course, its usage as a tool for human interaction. In today's world, people need languages other than mother tongue to interact with people globally. People are now able to interact with each other easily with the help of devices like radio, television, telephone and internet. However, to convert this interaction into the communication, they should have a common language. Nowadays, English is seen as a common language for the communication of individuals who have different native tongues (Graddol, 2000). For that reason, people try to teach and learn English as a foreign language and countries spend high amount of energy and money for English language learning. This concept is on the agenda of Turkey, too. English language learning has taken place in Turkey's education programs for years.

Long-term studies have been conducted in Turkey for many years in order to ensure foreign language teaching. Despite these efforts, many deficiencies are found in language teaching. According to a study carried out by Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, the country takes place in 43 out of 44 states about language proficiency. After conducting this research, Koru and Akesson (2011) state that Turkey is insufficient in language teaching and it is emphasized that in order to overcome these shortcomings, changes should be made in education system. They also indicate that language teaching should start in early ages of primary school level.

The necessity of teaching languages at an early ages is affected by Lenneberg's (1967) critical period hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, language acquisition efficacy does not increase with maturation and development but as the time passes and individual become older, language acquisition skills are decreased (Johnson and Newport, 1991). As the age of the individual grows and matures, s/he experiences difficulties in learning a language, too. For instance, in their study, Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979) state that older children acquire the second language faster than younger ones. However, acquirers who expose to second language in early ages achieve higher second language proficiency than adults. In other words, when we provide students with language in early ages, the possibility of being proficient in language learning can be increased.

There are some considerations to pay attention in teaching languages to young learners. One of them is the effect of environmental input in shaping the neural organization of language (Perani et al, 2003). It is known that environmental factors are affective in first language acquisition. Likewise, in second language learning, environmental factors affect the individual. When it is considered in instructional perspective, it can be seen that if the environment constructed in the way that attract the attention of students, they can concentrate on the lessons and learn more in these kinds of places. Teachers should also provide students with environments where different activities can be found for ensuring attendance in class. Studies show that game-based learning activities have a big role in language learning especially in the younger age group of students (Genç-İlter ve Er, 2007; Kaya, 2007; Liu ve Chu, 2010; Macedonia, 2005; Yolageldili ve Arıkan, 2011). Through the games, students can learn to communicate and cooperate with their friends and language can be learned in a context. Another issue also emerges as the necessity to focus on oral language skills at an early age of language learning. In this period, students have just gained reading and writing skills in their native tongue. If same skills are focused in the same period, it can cause students to have difficulty in learning these skills in another language and lose self-confidence. Lack of confidence in foreign language learning and language learning anxiety frequently encountered problems in Turkey. Factors that cause anxiety in students can be listed as students' self-efficacy level, teachers' behaviors, the difficulty level of foreign language courses, students' language acquisition ability level and cultural differences (Aydın ve Zengin, 2008). It is important to prevent students from experiencing these kinds of anxieties in early ages of language teaching for their language development.

Students' motivation to language learning can be the third issue. As we all know, individuals' learning is directly related to their motivation. Motivated students show more active attendance to class activities while less motivated students show low participation. As a result, less motivated students' learning rate and retention reduce (Oxford and Shearin, 1994). In this respect, we can say that student's participation also has a crucial role in language learning. Active participation has great importance for the provision of language acquisition and retention. For the smooth execution of communication, individuals find themselves while acting, using their body language, arguing and moving around. In these circumstances, interpersonal contacts and relation and coordination with other people can be developed (Korczynski, 2012). In language learning classes, the environments in which communication and coordination provided are needed.

In Turkey, with 30.03.2012 dated and 6287 numbered Primary Education Law the duration of compulsory education and training increased from 8 to 12 years and it separated into 4-year primary school (1,2,3,4 grades), 4-year secondary school (5,6,7,8 grades) and 4-year high school (9,10,11,12 grades) levels (Official Gazette, April 11, 2012, 28261). With this law, English language teaching level is lowered to 2nd year from 4th year. Listening and speaking activities are included in the curriculum to provide love and confidence in language learning in this level of students. English language teaching curriculum based on learning activities in

which students can encounter with daily life situations, visual, auditory and audio-visual materials and learn with game-based learning.

In Turkey, English language teaching lessons are carried out in 2nd year grade students for the first time in public schools and with this study; we try to determine the consequences of this situation. This study is important for the reason that it provides information about the implementation of the program to the preparers and practitioners of the curriculum with the help of students' and teacher's opinions.

The purpose of this study is to discover the general perspectives, willingness, positive and negative emotions and experiences of 2nd year grade students with the help of their weekly written diaries. Besides, their teacher's opinions are asked about the implementation of program and positive and negative aspect.

METHOD

Participants

The sample of research is determined as one of the purposive sampling methods called typical case sampling. This kind of sampling method can be described as "subjects are selected who are likely to behave as most of their counterparts would." (Bamberger et al, 2006). For this purpose, the study is conducted in the academic year 2013-2014 with 30 students (7-8 years old) from a public school located in the center of Tokat city and named as Vali Mehmet Özgün Primary School. Also, the researcher individually interviewed with this class' English language teacher.

Instruments

As data collection tool, student diaries are used. In the first week, students are asked the questions to determine their general point of view about English language learning class sessions. Other three weeks, the purpose of open-ended questions in diaries is to reveal process of language learning, students' positive and negative emotions and experiences towards the same lesson. Students' diaries are distributed by the researcher after the English lesson and students complete them without time limitation and submit it to researcher again. For teachers' interview, the questions that search out what kind of differences the teacher notice between the 4th graders and 2nd graders in language learning and which grade is more appropriate for English language teaching is asked to her. Except for two main questions, several probing questions are asked to explore her ideas more openly. The researcher tries to avoid any bias while asking the probing questions. Interview is lasted about 15 to 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data including student diaries are analyzed with content analysis method which is one of qualitative research design. In this method, researcher tries to find certain concepts in a text or a group of texts (Şencan, 2005). With explorative approach, the texts are segmented and grouped under specific categories. Teacher's interview is also documented and subjected to content analysis.

Validity and Reliability

First of all, validity and reliability of the data collection tools are carried out. To determine the surface validity of open-ended questions asked in student diaries, researcher gets the opinion of students' primary school teacher and English language learning teacher. For content validity, in the opinion of two experts from curriculum and instruction department and one English language instructor are consulted. After making the necessary arrangements, applications are conducted and in order to ensure reliability in content analysis perseverance, reproducibility and accuracy features are provided (Şencan, 2005). To achieve these three properties, coding is made by multiple researchers and regulated by the comparison of findings in each stage. When the equivalence is provided in findings, encoding is performed.

FINDINGS

The students' answers to the questions during four week and these answers are categorized into the sub-titles. Categories are defined under the headings of general attitudes towards English sessions, willingness, topics in lessons, students emotions, positive experiences and negative experiences during the lessons.

1. Students' general attitudes towards English Sessions

After the students start to take English language courses, they provided to write diaries during the four week. First of all, students are asked whether they like English courses or not and why. 13 of the students state that they 'like' English courses, 6 students say they 'love' it. However, 4 of them indicate that they 'do not like' the lessons.

The majority of students who reported that they like the lesson because it is fun ($f=6$), they like to learn new things ($f=7$). Also, the other reason is love of teacher ($f=3$) and they think if they can learn English, they can communicate and help foreign people ($f=2$). Students' expressions examples are as follows:

'I like it because we learn new things.' (Name of the student-Umut).

'I love English lessons. For example, if we go abroad and meet with a foreign child and I do not know English, I cannot communicate with her.' (Name of the student-Nidanur).

'I like English courses. Why? Because I love my English teacher.' (Name of the student-Ahsen)

Students who do not like English lessons explain that the courses are difficult ($f=4$) and for this reason they get bored ($f=2$). The examples are as follows:

'I don't like it because it is hard to learn. For this reason, I get bored.' (Name of the student-Çınar).

I don't like English because it is very difficult. I was born in Tokat not in England.'(Name of the student-Hamza).

2. Willingness to English Language Learning

20 of the students state that they want to take more English courses while 3 of them do not want it. This shows that students' willingness is parallel to their attitudes towards lessons. One of the students who indicates that she do not like the course states that they want to take more English lessons because when she learn easy subjects, the lessons are good. This is among the interesting findings. Student express this like that:

'I want more English courses because when I learn easy topics, it is good.'

3. The Topics Learned in the Course

Discovering how much the students can remember about the topic after the lessons and how they express them, first week the students are asked 'What do you learn in English courses?' and other three weeks, they are asked 'What are you learning in today's English course?'. In the beginning, the students have learned the name of objects in their environment and numbers, first week they have seen numbers again with games and activities, second week they have seen colors and the last week they have repeated the numbers and colors again. In general, it can be said that students do not focus only on games and activities, they are aware of the issues they learn and they are able to express it clearly in their diaries. While students give written answer to the questions, they use Turkish characters for the reason that they only focus on speaking and listening so do not know written version what they learn. The examples to this are as follows:

'Pensil (pencil), helo (hello), tedi (teddy), ambulans (ambulance) and numbers' (Name of the student-İrem Mert).

'Van (one), tu (two), tri (three), for (four), fay (five)... we learn these.' (Name of the student-Yılmaz).

4. The Emotions that Students Express about English Courses

Students are demanded to express their feelings about English courses in their diaries. They have expressed their positive, neutral and negative emotions. Students' positive emotions and frequency of them have been shown in table.1:

Table.1: Positive emotion expressions of students

	week	week	week
	N	N	N
I feel so good	11	10	10
I feel happy	3	4	2
I feel beautiful	3	6	7
I have so much fun	1	4	1
I am so excited	-	2	-
I love it	-	3	-
I feel curious	-	1	-
I feel full of love	-	1	-
I like a lot	-	-	1
I feel energetic	-	-	1
TOTAL	18	31	22

As seen in the table, students have mostly indicated that they feel 'so good' in the courses. Unlike their friends, some students use different expressions like 'curious, full of love, energetic' and 'liking it'. In total, students have expressed maximum positive emotions in second week ($f=31$), after that in third week ($f=22$) and lastly in first week of the research ($f=18$). Students' usage of positive expressions is as follows:

'I feel happy' (Name of the student- Zümral)

'I feel so good and I am curious about what I will learn.' (Name of the student-Çınar)

'I have so much fun. It was very nice' (Name of the student-Varis)

Furthermore, students have expressed their emotions as neutral and negative. In table.2, these emotions can be seen.

Table.2. Neutral and negative emotion expression of students

	week	week	week
	N	N	N
Sometimes good, sometimes bad	2	1	1
I feel nothing	-	-	1
I am sorry	2	-	-
I am afraid	2	-	-
I feel bored	1	2	1
I feel angry	-	1	-
I feel unhappy	-	1	-
TOTAL	7	5	3

Students have rarely used neutral or negative expressions about the course and the frequency of these feelings are decreasing gradually. In first week, it is 7, second week it reduces to 5 and last week it is 3. We can see neutral and negative expression of students as follows:

'It is sometimes good but sometimes bad' (Name of the student- Yılmaz)

'I feel bored.' (Name of the student-Zülal)

'I feel afraid and sorry.' (Name of the student-Esma Nur)

5. Students' Positive Experiences in English Course

Students have been demanded to write what they like in the English course after the course finishes during the three weeks in order to discover their positive experiences. They have written their positive experiences to the diaries during three week. Table.3 shows these experiences.

Table. 3: Positive experiences

week		week		week	
Statements	N	Statements	N	Statements	N
Learning the numbers	11	Learning the colors	17	Learning the colors	15
Apologising	6	Songs	12	Activities	8
Activities	2	Games	8	Songs	3
Playing games	1	Friends' positive behaviors	1	Pictures	1
Listening to music	1			Learning the numbers	1
Answering the questions	1			Knowing everthing	1
				Teacher	1
				Friends' positive behaviors	1
TOPLAM	22		38		31

Considering the students' positive experiences stated, it is seen that the students feel happy when they learn new things in the course. Especially in the week that they learn 'colors', they use more positive experience statements. Other than this, classroom activities like songs, games and pictures have been recorded as positive experience. Students' positive experience statements in their diaries are as follows:

'I like the numbers.' (Name of the student-Ali Kemal)

'My friends and I like the music and games.' (Name of the student-Melda)

'I like colors. Other than this, I like the song which is related to colors.' (Name of the student-Sude Naz)

6. Students' Negative Experiences in English Course

In the same way, students have been demanded to write their negative experiences to their diaries after each English lesson. Table.4 shows the negative experiences of students and their frequencies.

Table.4: Negative experiences

week		week		week	
Statements	N	Statements	N	Statements	N
Friends' fights	8	Friends' behaviors	2	Friends' behaviors	2
Nothing	3	Teacher's anger	1		
Teacher's sadness	1	Numbers	1		
Discussion with friends	1	Colors	1		
Games	1				
TOTAL	14		5		2

It is seen that students' negative experiences are not related to processing of course and course's subjects but resulting of interaction between students and teacher. For example, in first week, the students have stated that they are disturbed by their friends fighting (f=8). Rarely, this condition has continued in the following two weeks with indication of annoying by their friends' behaviors. Negative experiences decreasing continuously in each week like negative emotion expressions. Examples of students' negative experiences are as follows:

'My friends are mistreated. They upset my teacher' (Name of the student- Melda)

'Our teacher gets angry with us. Also I find it hard to learn colors.' (Name of the student- Esin)

'Alperen is fighting with Yılmaz in this course. It disturbs me.' (Name of the student-Feyza)

7. Teacher's Views

'What kind of differences do you see between the 2nd and 4th graders in language teaching?' and 'Which level is appropriate for English language teaching?' are the questions asked to teacher lecturing 2/C class. She indicates that 2nd graders are more successful in pronouncing the words; they are able to pronounce the words in a way that is close to originals. Also they are eager and willing to the courses. They are able to learn more quickly through games and activities. However, they can quickly get bored and lose their attention. According to the teacher, 4th graders have more difficulty in pronouncing the words but they learn by writing and this provide them to concrete the words more easily.

'Frankly, I can say that 2nd graders are more successful in pronouncing the words. They can say the words more easily and close to the original pronunciation.'

Teacher thinks that 2nd graders are appropriate for learning a foreign language because 2nd graders are able to learn the language more easily, be aware of new language and differentiate it from their native tongue. Also, she states that 2nd graders learn the language more quickly.

'According to me, 2nd graders are appropriate for language learning. their age level is appropriate for learning a new language.'

Teacher has been asked to evaluate the 2nd and 4th graders teaching program. She indicates that 2nd year program is more appropriate than 4th graders because 4th graders curriculum includes a lot of words and topics and students get bored and confused more easily for this reason. 2nd graders' curriculum includes just listening and speaking activities, it provides students to repeat the words over and over again with games and activities and in this way, persistence increases. This teaching program is expected to increase the interest of students to the course and facilitate language learning.

'2nd graders' program is better, appropriate to students' level and teachable. Students get tired in 4th graders' program because it includes a lot more words and topics.'

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this article, primary school 2nd grade students' general attitudes, their willingness, learned topics, expression of positive, neutral and negative emotions, their positive and negative experiences are set forth. First of all, it is found that the students' like the English courses and consequently they want to take more English lessons. Only one of the students indicates that she does not like English courses. However, she thinks that the courses might be more because when she learn easy words, it can be more enjoyable. It can be said that when the courses are appropriate for the level of the students, their attitudes can be more positive. Previously, some studies are done for evaluation of 4th and 5th graders' English language teaching curriculum and it is stated that some objectives and activities are above the level of students (Er, 2006; Mersinligil, 2002; Topkaya ve Küçük, 2010). Considering these studies, experts have attempted to constitute a program which is suitable for the 2nd graders' level and it can be said that they can reach to their aims. However, the studies which will be conducted to evaluate the curriculum at the end of the semester shed light on the experts and they can revise and form the curriculum more appropriately.

Generally, students do not focus only on the activities done in the lessons but are aware of what they learn. This shows that English course reaches to its aim and it is a correct decision to decrease the level of English language teaching to 2nd level. When the students have been asked to explain what they learn in English courses, they use Turkish characters while writing them because they only make the activities which develop their listening and speaking skills and they do not know English writing system. The previous weeks have been repeated with different activities for ensuring the retention of learned knowledge. However, the students enjoy much more when they learn a new topic 'colors' in second week than they repeat the 'numbers' in first

week. This shows that when the students learn a new topic, they can be more enthusiastic and curious about the lesson.

Students have been expressed positive emotions more than negative ones during the three weeks. While mostly used positive emotion expressions are *'I feel so good, I feel beautiful and I feel happy'*, negative emotion expressions are *'I am sorry, I am afraid and I get bored'*. It is seen that in second week, students have used positive emotion expressions more. The reason for this can be learning a new topic with enjoyable songs and activities. Students' negative emotion expressions have been decreasing during the three week. It shows that students' attitudes towards English course change in a positive way in these weeks. It is known that even university students exhibit negative attitudes towards English language learning and have difficulty in learning a new language (Gömlüksiz, 2003). Therefore, it is important to provide students with positive attitudes from the first time they encounter with a new language. This ensures learning and retention of a new language.

It is seen that students state singing songs, playing games, pictures and computer-based learning activities among the positive experiences as well as what they learn in the course. As it known, games are important for the child development mentally, emotionally and improve the psiko-motor skills of students (Karadağ ve Çelişkan, 2005). In this article, it is concluded that playing games supported by songs and activities attract the attention of 7-8 year-old-children and provide the retention of learned items. Also, as we all know, importance of computer-based language learning increases day by day (Levy, 1997). It is beneficial for students to be in computer-based activities in language learning because it attracts students' attention and provides student to learn the language more easily.

Negative experiences are not directly related to content of the course. The reasons are generally students' communication problems with each other and teacher's negative attitudes towards students. According to Johnson (1981), students' interaction greatly influenced their academic achievement, socialization and health development. Furthermore, students' interaction affects their attitudes towards the school. This study shows that the students' interaction has an impact on their attitudes towards the lesson. For example, students who are uncomfortable with the other students' quarreling indicates that they do not like the course while in other week, some others are satisfied with the course because their peers are keep quiet and listen to their teacher's in the lesson. Especially, in small aged groups, teachers have a great impact on students. Researches show that teachers have influenced their students' academic achievement (Harris and Sass, 2011; Rockoff, 2004; Rothstein, 2010; Wright ve diğerleri, 1997). This study shows that not only the academic achievement but also attitudes towards the lesson are affected by the teacher. Teachers' attitudes towards the students influence both their cognitive and affective development. For this reason, teacher should know both cognitive and affective level of their students and behave accordingly.

Teachers' opinions show that 2nd graders' ages are more appropriate to begin language learning. small aged group is more successful in pronunciation of the words, they are more enthusiastic and willing to learn new things and the retention is more in this level. This is parallel the studies done previously (Cameron, 2001; Genç-İlter ve Er, 2007; Larson-Hall, 2008; Wilburn Robinson, 1998). Furthermore, she thinks that it is beneficial for students to develop only listening and speaking skills with different games and activities in 2nd grade level. 4th year students' curriculum is intensive for the level and this causes students to get tired and bored easily. The teacher indicates that 2nd graders' curriculum is a development in terms of education programs.

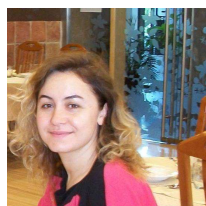
This study generally shows that 7-8 year-old students demonstrate positive attitudes towards English lessons. Students' are more enthusiastic when they learn a new language with different games and activities in early ages. Furthermore, findings show that 2nd graders curriculum is more appropriate than 4th year curriculum for the level of students. It can be suitable for researchers to evaluate the teaching curriculum at the end of the semester, taking students', teachers', parents and administrators' opinions about the English language teaching in this level.

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