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An Analysis of Foreign Language Oriented Fifth Grade English Curriculum: Opinions of Students, Teachers and Administrators

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Within Turkey in recent years, there has been a testing period for the implementation of the foreign language oriented curriculum to understand its contribution to language learning for the fifth graders. Accordingly, by considering the experience of the students, teachers and school administrators in the schools where this curriculum is implemented, this study aims at developing suggestions to determine the improvements for the foreign language oriented curriculum, which is to be practiced in the fifth grade of middle school in Turkey as a pilot study during the year of 2017-2018 and planned to be practiced across the country in the upcoming years. The study was carried out with concurrent triangulation design, a mixed method design. The participants consisted of 209 fifth grade students, 6 English teachers and 4 school administrators in Hatay. The data was collected from the students through the survey developed by the researchers. As for the interviews with teachers and administrators, two separate semi-structured interview forms were used. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were utilized for the analysis of data. Validity and reliability of the data were strengthened by the use of various techniques which were getting expert opinion, pilot practice of the data collection tools, data diversity and coder compatibility. The findings of the study show that the participants are generally satisfied with this practice and support the continuation of it on the condition that some problems are solved. Students expressed positive views in the improvement of language skills except for speaking skill. However, some emergent problems related to the practice were revealed. Moreover, there could be possible risks of practicing this curriculum throughout the country considering regional differences, other lessons' hours and teacher insufficiency. It is essential to evaluate it continuously in terms of creating a sustainable curriculum and implementing it efficiently.

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Introduction

Knowledge of a foreign language has started to become more important than ever in today's world where the interaction between countries and cultures has increased. The fact that one of the key competencies of life-long learning determined by European Council is the ability to communicate in a foreign language is an indicator of the countries' needs of foreign language knowledge for their development (Eurydice Report, 2012). Such changes have also had influence in Turkey, which is in touch with other countries in terms of economic, political and social relationships and it has become clear that social progress within the scope of European Union especially depends on the effective communication of Turkish citizens at an international level (Çankaya, 2015). For this reason, "communication in a foreign language" has become prominent as one of the eight competency areas in the programs reformulated in 2017 in Turkey (Board of Education [TTKB], 2017).

Significant regulations affecting the current foreign language curriculum in Turkey have been the adoption of the Communicative Approach in 1997 and the Constructivist Approach together with other fields in 2005 respectively (Kırkgöz, 2007). On the other hand, despite these efforts, Turkey still seems to be failing at foreign language education (British Council & TEPAV, 2014). Turkey has recently been ranked as the 79th among 100 countries, putting it in the group of the lowest language competency level across the world (Education First [EF], 2019) and this situation increases the anxiety about the inability of the schools in teaching a foreign language satisfactorily.

To overcome this problem, it has been on the government's agenda to start language education at an early age. With the commencement of the 12-year compulsory education practice, which consists of three levels of primary, middle and high school known as 4+4+4, TTKB decided to start English education in the 2nd grade instead of the 4th grade during the school year of 2012-2013 (Demirtaş & Erdem, 2015). Moreover, by making arrangements that allowed an increase in the number of English lessons up to 18 hours per week for the fifth graders in middle school depending on the opportunities and volunteerism of the schools, the Ministry of Education (MoNE) announced in 2013 that they would implement this in all schools across the country in the upcoming years (Gür, Çelik & Yurdakul, 2016; Özkan, Özdemir & Tavşancıl, 2018). However, MoNE did not publish any curriculum related to that practice and the practices had to be implemented through the efforts of the teachers (Erdem & Yücel-Toy, 2017). In the school year of 2017-2018, a decision was made to apply and test the aforementioned practice across the country as a pilot study in some schools and for this purpose a curriculum was published for the first time (MoNE, 2017a). Within the scope of this curriculum, that students are expected to reach the level of B1.1 determined by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a result of 550 hours of English teaching per year. The testing practice of this curriculum started in 621 schools of 81 cities in Turkey with the participation of about 110 000 students in 2017 (MoNE, 2017b).

There have been some arrangements in the curricula over the years in order to solve the problems related to teaching English. Yücel, Dimici, Yıldız and Bümen (2017) reached the conclusion in their study, which analyzed the language programs of the last 15 years, that there had been various enhancements in the programs over the years and the developments in the field of language education had been followed. However, since the effects of the curriculum are limited as a document, it is necessary to carry out program evaluation studies to see what is actually happening in practice (Çankaya, 2015). Although there are many studies evaluating foreign language programs at various grade levels, the actuality of these studies is also lost as the programs are constantly being renewed rapidly. After the last

arrangement to start English lessons in the 2nd year within the scope of language education at an early age, the programs were examined in various studies (Adıgüzel & Özüdoğru, 2014; Çankaya, 2015; Demirtaş & Erdem, 2015; Erarslan, 2016; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015); however, because the arrangement of the fifth grade for foreign language oriented education requires changes in program practices in other grade levels, the need for new studies has emerged.

In this context, there have been some studies to examine the voluntary practices before the publication of a curriculum for foreign language oriented education in fifth grades from various perspectives (Gür, Yurdakul & Çelik, 2016; Özkan et al., 2018; Erdem & Yücel-Toy, 2017) and the practices and the curriculum of the pilot study process started in 2017-2018 school year (Aksoy, Bozdoğan, Akbaş & Seferoğlu, 2018; Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Kambur, 2018; Kaya, 2019; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Most of these studies were conducted by examining the opinions of teachers (Aksoy et al., 2018; Erdem & Yücel-Toy, 2017; Dilekli, 2018; Dinçer & Koç, 2019; Kambur, 2018; Özkan et al., 2018); with a limited number of studies with students (Erdem & Yücel-Toy, 2017; Kaya, 2019) and school administrators (Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Taking the opinions of students and administrators, two of the most important stakeholders of the curriculum, within the scope of this program is at least as valuable as the opinions of the teachers. In addition, the related literature shows that there is no study on this practice analyzing the experience of teachers, students and school administrators, who are the three important stakeholders of teaching, in one single study. For this reason, this study is expected to provide an integrated understanding of the practice through the opinions of various stakeholders by taking into account the shortcomings in the literature. As a result, the study will contribute to making the necessary arrangements by informing the curriculum developers, decision-makers, teachers who will apply it and academicians who conduct research in the field of curriculum studies, about the applicability of the program.

Accordingly, this study aims at making suggestions for improving and revealing the status of the foreign language oriented curriculum by analyzing it in line with the experiences of students, teachers and administrators. Within the scope of this study's purpose, the following questions were considered:

1. What are the opinions of the students, teachers and administrators regarding the applicability of the fifth grade English language oriented curriculum (in terms of objective, content, education-training experiences, evaluation)?
2. What are the problems encountered during the implementation of this curriculum and the suggestions to overcome these problems?

Method

Research Design

This study uses concurrent triangulation design, which is one of the mixed method research designs, was used (Creswell, 2003; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). This design is suitable for this study because of making stronger inferences by verifying and comparing the findings using two different data types within the same study. In this study, quantitative data obtained from students and qualitative data obtained from students, teachers and administrators were collected simultaneously and comparisons were made.



Study Group

In order to meet the main purpose of the study mentioned above, opinions of teachers, students and school administrators were taken. Convenient sampling method was used to identify the participants. Accordingly, the participants of the research consisted of 209 fifth-grade students, six English teachers and four school administrators who were studying and working in four public schools in Defne, Samandağ and Payas districts of the province of Hatay where the pilot practice took place in the 2017-2018 academic year.

Five of the teachers participating were female and one was male. Their teaching experience varied between 0-10 years. In addition, they taught fifth grade courses during all of their professional lives. All of the school administrators in the research were male. Their years of administrative experience varied between 0-15 years. In determining the teachers and administrators who participated in the research, no criteria other than being included in the program were applied and volunteering was taken as basis. Besides, consent was obtained from the administrators and teachers regarding their participation. While presenting the findings related to the interviews, codes as “T1, T2...” for teachers and “A1, A2...” for administrators were used to provide confidentiality of identity. 106 of the students in the study were females and 102 were males. In the first part of the survey, which was formed to get the opinions of the students, there were questions regarding the personal information of the students. According to data obtained, the personal information of the students is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Personal Information of the Students Participating in the Study

Variables		f	%
School	A	27	12.9
	B	72	34.4
	C	56	26.8
	D	54	25.8
Gender	Female	106	50.7
	Male	102	48.8

Data Collection Process

Quantitative and qualitative data were used together as the study was based on mixed methods. These data were collected at the same time. In order to obtain the quantitative data of the research, “Evaluation Survey of Foreign Language Oriented Curriculum” prepared by the researchers was used. In the preparation of the survey, primarily the skill areas that were taken as basis in language teaching and the practices in the curriculum in question were utilized. In addition, a draft of the survey form was prepared and presented to the expert opinion. The survey form, which was restructured as a result of the expert opinions of three faculty members working in the department of Curriculum and Instruction and one faculty member working in the School of Foreign Languages, was applied to the fifth grade students in a school implementing foreign language oriented curriculum. In accordance with the data obtained from this pilot practice of the survey, the form was finalized and made ready for implementation. The survey included various questions about the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and vocabulary activities, and the assessment approach. In addition, the survey involved questions on the general effectiveness of the new curriculum, the percentage of the activities in this practice, and in which language the lessons were taught. In the last part of the survey, qualitative data were obtained by asking open-ended questions

about students' attitude towards the process, the difficulties they faced during the process and whether they had any attempts to improve their language skills apart from the practice.

In order to collect qualitative data, two separate semi-structured interview forms were prepared for the teachers and administrators. In the creation of the interview forms, the related literature was examined (e.g. Demirtaş & Erdem, 2015; Dilekli, 2018; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019) and the draft forms were rearranged after the review of two faculty members from the field of Curriculum and Instruction. The final forms included 6 main questions and 14 probes for teachers and 4 main questions and 5 probes for administrators. In the interview form prepared for teachers, questions such as “How do you generally teach English lesson? Can you explain the activities you do in the classroom? What do you do / what do students do during the lesson? ”, “What do you think about the basic dimensions of foreign language oriented fifth grade English curriculum? ”; and in the interview form held with the administrators, questions such as “How did the implementation of a foreign language oriented education for the fifth grades affect the lessons, teachers and students in your school?” were included.

The process of data collection was carried out in the last two weeks of the second semester of the 2017-2018 academic year in order to evaluate the implementation. Data were collected by the researcher from 209 students studying in the specified schools through the survey form.

Meetings were held simultaneously with teachers and administrators in the same schools. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview forms with the teachers and administrators volunteering to participate in the research. Each interview lasted approximately 20-25 minutes with teachers and 10-25 minutes with administrators. In all these interviews, voice recording was obtained with the confirmation of the participants in order to prevent data loss.

Data Analysis

The survey data obtained in the study were analyzed using Excel and SPSS programs. Findings were estimated by calculating frequency and percentage from descriptive statistics and tabularized. The answers to the open-ended questions at the end of the survey were analyzed through content analysis and the findings were presented in the form of themes and codes.

In this study, content analysis was used in the analysis of qualitative data obtained through the interviews. In line with the techniques suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003), the codes were classified under general themes. In this context, firstly, the audio recordings were transcribed and the coding was done one by one by the researchers. Later, the coding compatibility between the researchers was calculated using the reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and the compatibility between the coders was obtained as 89.02. After the codings were agreed on, the data was organized by means of themes and sub-themes.

Reliability and Validity Measures

Some validity and reliability measures were taken in the data collection process and data analysis of the research. Expert opinions were used in the preparation of the survey and interview forms, and the forms were structured in line with these opinions. Experts made some suggestions like splitting the skills in all parts in the survey and also mentioning specifically the four components of curriculum (aims, content, experience and evaluation) in



the interview forms for teachers. Data from different types of participants were collected in both quantitative and qualitative ways and analyzed by two separate researchers, and diversity/triangulation was provided in terms of the data and researchers. In order to ensure intercoder reliability in the analysis of the qualitative data, the data were analyzed by the two researchers separately and the percentage of compatibility between coders was calculated. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed and ensured about recording the interviews and keeping their identity information confidential. In addition, pilot practices of the survey and interview forms were carried out.

Insights of this curriculum in question and its practices were enhanced by the fact that both researchers in this study had Bachelor's degrees in English Language Education and were PhD students in the field of Curriculum and Instruction. In addition, researchers' experiences in language teaching in both MoNE and higher education institutions were positive features in order to evaluate the results in terms of both theory and practice.

Results

The findings of the research are presented as the findings of survey and interviews separately.

Survey Findings

Firstly, the findings related to the students' answers to the survey questions were organized and tabulated. The opinions of students related to the types of activities included in the content of the course, the process of the course and the tools and equipment used are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Findings Related to Course Content and Activities

Questions	Responses		Sometimes		No	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
Teaching the lesson in English	157	75.1	49	23.4	3	1.4
Utilizing technological tools in class	128	61.2	55	26.3	25	12.0
Relating activities to daily life	98	46.9	83	39.7	15	7.2
Doing activities for listening	159	76.1	47	22.5	3	1.4
Doing activities for speaking	166	79.4	41	19.6	1	0.5
Doing activities for reading	167	79.9	38	18.2	2	1.0
Doing activities for writing	168	80.4	37	17.7	2	1.0
Conducting vocabulary learning activities	167	79.9	34	16.3	2	1.0
Doing activities for grammar	133	63.6	59	28.2	9	4.3

When the findings in Table 2 were analyzed, it was noticeable that the teachers taught the course mostly in English (75%), as the foreign language oriented curriculum suggested, and the ratio of students who answered 'Yes and Sometimes' about the use of technological devices in the course was 88%. Listening, speaking, reading and writing activities, which are basic language skills, were mostly included (80%) compared to grammar activities (not combined with any other skills) (63.6%). In the question about the association of activities with daily life, 46.9% of the students answered 'Yes'.

In the study, the students responded to the questions about the activities in the classroom and the type of activities they had the most difficulty in the implementation of the curriculum. Findings related to this question are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The Most Performed and the Most Challenging Activities in Learning Process

Questions	Responses		Speaking		Listening		Reading		Writing		Grammar	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
The most performed activities	35	16.7	21	10	33	15.8	62	29.7	37	17.7		
The most challenging activities	69	33	21	10	37	17.7	44	21.1	14	6.7		

As can be seen in Table 3, the students stated that they performed writing activities most in the lessons (29.7%). It was followed by grammar (17.7%) and speaking (16.7%) activities, respectively. In the response of the students to the question about which activities they had difficulties, speaking activities (33%) were the most difficult activities.

The survey included questions about how the activities in the lessons were carried out. Answers to these questions are shown in Table 4. Findings included the most used methods in the activities.

Table 4. How the Activities in the Lessons are Performed

How activities are performed		1st place	2nd place	3rd place
Speaking	Role-play	109		
	Responding to teacher's questions		70	
	Creating their own dialogues			57
Reading	Reading aloud in turns	117		
	Listening while one or more students read		43	
	Repeating what teacher reads			28
Writing	Writing as homework	104		
	Writing in accordance with the rules given by the teacher in the classroom		54	
	Writing an article with certain words			32
Assessment	Quizzes	80		
	Written exam		55	
	Oral exam			48
How listening is carried out		F	%	
From the recording		163	78	
Teacher talk		40	19.1	

Analyzing the findings related to the way of carrying out the activities, it was noticeable that speaking activities were mostly carried out in the form of role-plays. Moreover, practices included speaking activities like students' answering the questions of the teachers and creating their own dialogues. In reading activities, the method of reading aloud in turn was the main method used, and listening while one or more students read and repetition of what teacher reads were also other activities. Students responded that the main practice in writing activities was homework. In addition, students also mentioned such activities as writing in accordance with the rules given by the teacher and writing an article using certain words. Most of the listening activities were carried out through recording (78%). Finally, written and oral exams, especially quizzes, were used as the assessment method.



Another question directed to students was about the way they worked in classroom activities. In the survey, the students were asked how they usually worked in the activities and the answers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. How Students Work in Activities

The way of work in the activities	f	%
Individual	117	56
Pair-work	57	27.3
Group work (3 and more)	34	16.3

Students mostly worked individually (56%) in the activities held in the classroom and pair-work (27.3%) and group work (16.3%) were also used (seen in Table 5).

Students were also asked how competent they considered themselves in terms of the different skills and practices in the curriculum and the answers are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Students' Self-Efficacy Perception Regarding Foreign Language-Oriented Curriculum

Questions	Responses	Very		A little		Not	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Competence in terms of listening skill		77	36.8	124	59.3	6	2.9
Competence in terms of speaking skill		59	28.2	141	67.5	6	2.9
Competence in terms of reading skill		98	46.9	99	47.4	9	4.3
Competence in terms of writing skill		114	54.5	85	40.7	4	1.9
Competence in terms of course evaluation		135	64.6	58	27.8	10	4.8

As seen in Table 6, a significant number of students expressed themselves as 'Very' or 'A little' competent in terms of the skills in the program. Among these, the students considered themselves the most competent in terms of course evaluation (64.6%), and they also considered themselves quite competent in terms of writing (54.5%) and reading (46.9%). In terms of speaking and listening skills, students described themselves as 'a little' competent (speaking 67.5%, listening 59.3%).

Students also answered questions about the overall effectiveness and benefits of the courses and activities carried out in the foreign language oriented curriculum implemented during the semester. Findings regarding the answers to these questions are given below.

Table 7. Overall Effectiveness and Benefits of the Process and Activities

Questions	Responses	Very		A little		No	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Benefit of increasing lessons hours		181	86.6	23	11.0	5	2.4
The usefulness of lessons in speaking the language		152	72.7	47	22.5	9	4.3
Usefulness and effectiveness of the lessons in this semester		179	85.6	27	12.9	3	1.4
The benefit of listening activities		126	60.3	72	34.4	11	5.3
The benefit of speaking activities		157	75.1	45	21.5	6	2.9
The benefit of reading activities		159	76.1	42	20.1	6	2.9
The benefit of writing activities		151	72.2	39	18.7	15	7.2
Contribution of words to daily life		117	56.0	74	35.4	11	5.3

Table 7 shows that a significant percentage of the students felt the increase of the lesson hours was “Very” useful (86.6%). Regarding the general usefulness and effectiveness of the lessons, 85.6% of the students thought that they were “Very” useful and effective, and 72.7% stated that the lessons were useful for speaking this language. In addition, students had higher rates of expressing that the practices for basic skills were “Very” beneficial and effective (Listening 60.3%, speaking 75.1%, reading 76.1%, writing 72.2%, grammar 70.8%, vocabulary 56%)

Finally, students responded to open-ended questions concerning how the lessons were taught, how they were expected to be taught, the problems experienced and additional practices to increase the language skills. In this context, the findings are presented below in the order of the questions.

First, the students gave responses about how the lessons were generally taught. The emerging themes were “activities and practices for skills”, “practices and methods used in the course”, “materials used”, “general characteristic of the course” and “practices for assessment”. The themes and codes are presented in Table 8 in detail.

Table 8. Responses Regarding How Lessons Are Taught

Theme	Code	f
Practices and activities for skills	Reading	28
	Writing	17
	Listening	13
	Vocabulary	11
	Speaking	9
	Grammar	2
Practices and methods used in the class	Doing a test	16
	Note-taking	16
	Lecturing	13
	Greeting/Saying goodbye	13
	Homework check	12
	Playing games	12
	Giving homework	9
	Revision	7
	Question-answer	4
	Listening to music/Singing	4
Materials used	Activities in the coursebook	27
	Use of smartboard	11
	Puppets	1
General characteristic of the course	Fun	33
	Teaching in English	1
Practices for assessment	Quiz	1
	In-class assessment	1

Table 8 shows that activities related to all language skills were performed, but “Reading (f: 28)” activities were mostly performed. It also reveals that “Doing a test (f: 16)” and “Note-taking (f: 16)” practices were mostly carried out in the lesson, and lessons were usually taught through “activities in the course book (f: 27)”, and generally lessons were “Fun (f: 33)”.



In another question, the students expressed their opinions on how they would like the lessons to be taught. Findings regarding students' answers are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Students' Expectations About the Teaching of the Course

Theme	Code	f
Opinions and expectations for the way the course is taught	Satisfied with this way of teaching	71
	Teaching lessons enjoyably	25
	Using two languages in class	3
	Teaching in English	2
Expectations for activities and practices to be done in the course	Playing games	28
	Plenty of activities	7
	Doing listening activities	4
	Doing speaking activities	3
	Increasing the number of reading activities	3
	Less note-taking	2
	Doing writing activities	2
	Doing tests more	2
	Watching movies more	2
	Doing activities outside	2
No homework	2	
Expectations for the materials to be used	Using smartboard	6
	Using tablets	5
	Using puppets and models	1
	Having fewer coursebooks	1
	Using smartboard, blackboard and course book together	1
Expectations from the teacher	Change of teacher	2
	Simplifying	2
	Focusing on the student	1
	Being fair	1
	Self-assessment	1
Expectations for the duration and effectiveness of the course	Having fewer lesson hours	5
	Having more effective lessons	3
	Providing silence	2
	Longer duration of the lessons	2
	Being regular	1

When the students' expectations for the lesson (in Table 9) were examined, they generally responded that they were “satisfied with the way of lesson (f: 71)”, while some students were hoping for “enjoyable lessons (f: 25)”. Regarding the practices in the lesson, the students expressed their expectation that “playing games” should be included in the lessons. In addition, the table show that students expected “Smart board use (f: 6)” regarding the materials to be used; “change of teachers (f: 2)” and “simplifying (f: 2)” regarding teachers; and “fewer lesson hours (f: 5)” and “more effective lessons (f: 3)” regarding the duration and effectiveness of the course.

Another question at the end of the survey was about the problems experienced in these lessons. The problems stated by the students were gathered under the themes of “problems related to acquisition of skills”, problems in different activities and practices”, problems related to teacher and classroom environment” and “personal problems”. Details on themes and codes are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Students' Problems in Classes

Theme	Code	f
Problems with the acquisition of the skills	Difficulty in reading	23
	Difficulty in learning words	18
	Difficulty in speaking	11
	Difficulty in writing	8
	Difficulty in pronunciation	8
	Difficulty in translation	7
	Difficulty in understanding grammar	5
	Difficulty in listening	2
Problems with different activities and practices	Difficulty in solving questions	6
	Taking too many notes	3
	Not being able to form a sentence	2
	Difficulty in gap-filling activities	1
	Difficulty in attending classes	1
Problems with teacher and class environment	Difficulty in the spelling of words	1
	Disturbance of friends	9
	Classroom noise	6
	Teacher insult	2
	Teacher’s failure in explaining effectively	1
Personal Problems	Boring lessons	1
	Being unprepared for the lesson	1
	Health problems	1
	Forgetting the materials	1

Considering the problems experienced by the students during the lessons, the findings show that they experienced difficulties especially in the acquisition of basic language skills, among them the most mentioned problems being “difficulty in reading (f: 23)”, “difficulty in learning words (f: 18)”and “difficulty in speaking (f: 11)”. In addition, the students mentioned the problems such as “difficulty in solving questions (f: 6)”, “disturbance of friends (f: 9)”and “classroom noise (f:6)”.

Finally, the students answered a question about their studies outside the classroom so as to improve their language skills. Findings related to the answers are included in Table 11.

Table 11. Extra-Curricular Studies of Students for Improving Language Skills

Theme	Code	f
Doing activities for basic skills	Reading a book	26
	Vocabulary learning activities	8
	Speaking practice	8
	Listening activities	6
	Forming dialogues	5
	Doing reading activities	4
	Translation	2



	Writing activities	1
	Additional work	38
	Revision	28
	Private lesson	8
	Doing homework	5
Doing extracurricular activities	Playing games	5
	Watching cartoon/movie/video	3
	Listening to music/Singing	2
	Preparing a project	1
	Doing research	1
Activities for evaluation	Solving a test	31
	Quizzes and exams	1
Technological support	Using translation programs on the phone	1
	Utilizing English applications on the phone	1

Considering the studies that students did to improve their language skills outside the classroom, it was apparent that students utilized various activities such as “additional work (f: 38)”, “reading books (f: 26)”, “revision (f: 28)” and “solving test (f: 31)”.

Interview Findings

Interviews were held with some teachers and administrators on a voluntary basis. In parallel with each other, teachers and administrators were asked questions such as whether the level of the class was appropriate for the foreign language oriented curriculum, what kind of path they followed in practice, what problems they had, and suggestions for solutions. Findings regarding the answers to these questions were gathered under 5 general themes. In addition, 14 sub-themes emerged for these themes. Themes and sub-themes are shown in Figure 1.

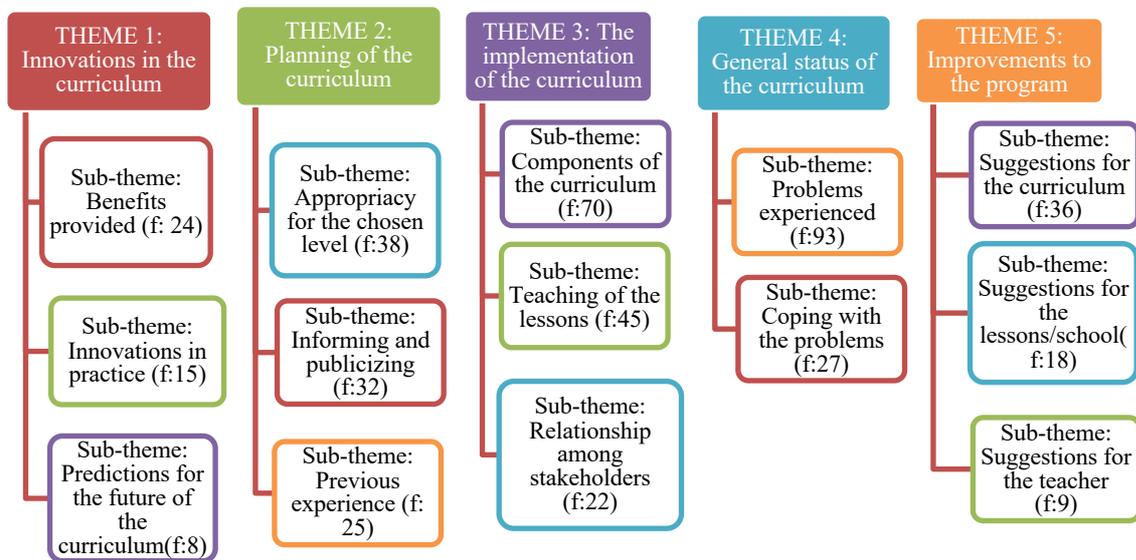


Figure 1. Themes and Sub-themes Emerged As a Result of the Interviews

The first theme that emerged was “Innovations in the Curriculum”. Three sub-themes were formed under this theme. Regarding the most emphasized sub-theme of “Benefits provided (f:

24)” the codes such as “the positive increase in lesson hours (f: 8)”, “increased interest of students (f: 5)” and “eliminating deficiencies in basic education (f: 2)” were the most frequently emphasized ones by both teachers and administrators. For example, for the benefit of the increase in lesson hours, T2 expressed his/her opinions: *“In a better sense, I think I helped children to reach to at least the 5th grade level. The level should be five, but I can clearly say that if these children take English course for 3 hours a week, half of the current success would not exist”*.

The most emphasized codes of “ability to devote time to skills (f: 3)”, “increase in student-centered activities (f: 3)” and “support of the curriculum for different teaching methods (f: 2)” were under the heading of another sub-theme called “Innovations in Practice (f: 15)”. In this context, the opinions of teachers and administrators were as follows: *“We could spend more time talking or pronouncing things because there was more time so we could concentrate” (T1)* and *“The way of implementation is different. We need to apply something different from the usual English curriculum; we need to apply the program. While the usual English lessons are more grammar-based programs, here there is practice predominantly, the child is learning English with songs, drama, sketches...” (A3)*.

Regarding the sub-theme “Predictions for the Future of the Curriculum”, the expressions of “belief that an advanced level will be reached in language learning (f: 3)” and “the effect may vary according to the region (f: 2)” emerged. Regarding this, the opinion of T5 was like this: *“If it is applied this way, it does not reach its purpose. They say all children speak, all learn English, as if English is something that will be learnt in a year, so maybe the program will not be taught as desired. Otherwise, children can learn in a way that works really well, but as I said, it may not attract everyone's attention or every family may not pay so much attention to English. After all, the family is also important, the way children are raised is also important. You have to take all of them together. I do not think it will be effective for places that are remote and isolated.”*

The second theme that emerged was “Planning the Program”. Along with this theme, sub-themes of “Appropriacy for the Chosen Level (f: 38)”, “Informing and Publicizing (f: 32)” and “Previous Experience (f: 25)” emerged. First of all, regarding the sub-theme of “Appropriacy for the Chosen Level”, “level is appropriate (f: 8)”, “critical period for language learning (f: 3)”, “level is not appropriate (f: 4)” and “not being appropriate for the development level of students (f:3)” expressions became prominent. T6 expressed her/his opinions on the fact that the level was appropriate for this practice as follows: *“I think it was appropriate because I think the earlier the foreign language education starts, the better. I always support this. So it was good to start at 5”*. On the other hand, A3 stated that it would be appropriate to start a foreign language oriented education right after the mother tongue before the fifth grade *“So, first of all, I think the child should have a full native language, so that a second and third language could be acquired. Now, when the second language starts in children before mother tongue is settled, the child may experience turmoil, not every child, but it happens to most children. So I think it's a little early. It can also be practiced in the third or fourth grade, for example, if they are going to do the fifth grade in English, if they are going to do it, for example, the fourth grade is appropriate.”*

Codes such as “insufficient information (f: 9)” and “official documents (f: 5)” emerged regarding the “Informing and Publicizing” sub-theme. T3 stated that they were insufficiently informed about the curriculum and they were unsure of what to do with the course book with these words *“When the course book finally reaches us, which is the most important thing...”*

The annual plan of 40 units has been published, which is good, but where is the book of this, how will we teach, we see the plan, but how far we will go, it is up to all the teachers, whatever teacher has given, it has been shaped accordingly.”

Under another sub-theme, “Previous Experience”, opinions about two different experiences were expressed. The views such as “insufficiency of the lesson hours (f: 2)” for the practice of usual 3-hours language teaching and the “positive aspects (f: 4)” of the 11-hour pilot practices that they implemented before were revealed. In this context, T2 commented on the insufficiency of the old program that *“I can say clearly, if these children learn English for 3 hours a week, half of the current success would not exist”*, while T5 working at the school, which had been in the pilot practice for a certain period of time, stated that this practice allowed her to gain experience: *“Preparatory classes have been held since I came to Payas, even the first year I came, this was the only preparatory class in this area. Therefore, I did not feel inexperienced”*. In addition, A1 in another school, which had been implementing an 11-hour pre-pilot, expressed how they benefited from this system: *“We started it ourselves. Before MoNE starts this practice, we were implementing a different practice of a total 11 hours of language program, 8 being elective and 3 obligatory. So we saw that there were children who really wanted to learn languages. We made very good progress. The children learned”*.

“Implementation of the Program” was another theme related to the interviews held. Regarding this theme, sub-themes emerged such as “Components of the Curriculum (f: 70)”, “Teaching the Lessons (f:45)” and “Relations among the Stakeholders (f: 22)”. Under the first sub-theme, opinions such as “content is not appropriate for the level (f: 7),“ practice of written exam in evaluation (f: 5) ”and “playing in the process (f: 4) ”were included. T5 expressed her opinion regarding the inappropriacy of the curriculum for the level: *“Of course, it attracted students, but after a while things became very difficult, they could not do it, they did not have their mind, or they felt that they had to turn it directly into memorization.”* Another participant (T3) gave an example of the content not being suitable for the level: *“Cambridge sent the book to us, so some things are so complicated, too scientific; for example, they are talking about the volcanic eruption somewhere, so it sounds a little above level again.”* Another sub-theme highlighted under the theme of the implementation of the program was the “Teaching of Lessons (f: 45)”. While more time was devoted to teaching the related skills, emphasis was given to various activities such as “practicing listening activities (f: 4)”, “creating dialogue in speaking activities (f: 4)” and “grammar teaching in activities (f: 1)”. Another sub-theme emerged as “Relations among the Stakeholders (f: 22)”. In this context, situations such as “working in harmony with teachers (f: 3)”, “parent-teacher relations should be organized (f: 2)” and “influence on other lessons (f: 4)” were expressed. A3, one of the school administrators, expressed his opinions on the harmony as follows: *“Of course we met teachers who taught these classes, so we talked together from time to time as to what the children want, how they can do it, of course, our communication is good.”* In addition, the negative effects on other courses were especially emphasized by the managers. A2 stated this situation as follows: *“Yes, I am teaching English, but it could be 9 hours instead of 14 hours. Let it be music, painting, physical education instead. It deprives a child of physical education, painting and music lessons for a year so there are students who are prone to these fields, you say to the students that you become blind for a year and that is a separate handicap.”*

Another dimension of the interviews with teachers and administrators regarding the foreign language oriented curriculum was about the theme of the “General Status of the Program”. Regarding this theme two sub-themes, “Problems Experienced (f: 93)” and “Coping with

Problems (f: 27)” were formed. As for the sub-theme of the problems, problems such as “the late arrival of the material (f: 8)”, “low student readiness (f: 7)”, “differences in student levels (f: 7)”, and “the program is not suitable for the level (f: 6)” were emphasized. Regarding the delay in the arrival of the material, A4 shared his opinions: *“When you look, the books came late. Late arrival of the books caused some trouble. There were smart boards Thanks God, there were things, movies, songs, and they helped a little. But still, being without a book affected a little”*. By pointing out that the student levels were not the same, T4 commented on this situation: *“Because there are individual and readiness level differences between students, there are a lot of students who are not at the same level, the book sent to us, Oxford is very intense.”*

The last theme that emerged as a result of the interviews with teachers and administrators in the research was “Improvements to the Program”, under which there were three sub-themes. The first was “Suggestions for the Curriculum (f: 36)”. In the context of this sub-theme, the codes of “editing the content (f: 6)” and “simplifying the curriculum (f: 5)” came to the fore. T6 expressed that the content needed to be revised with the following words *“Maybe a little more, they can revise those last 10 units. In other words, maybe a little more or maybe other topics can be replaced.”* Another sub-theme was “Suggestions for Lessons/School (f: 18)”. In this context, the codes of “performing the practice on a voluntary basis (f: 3)” and “providing technological equipment (f: 2)” were emphasized. Regarding the sub-theme of “Suggestions for Teachers”, recommendations such as “training teachers (f: 4)” and “employing sufficient / permanent teachers (f: 3)” emerged. A4 explained the problems of teachers as follows: *“First of all, teachers should get in-service training, they should explain the curriculum to English teachers. They should explain that the work is not just grammar. Then what level the student will reach at the end of the year should be known, and the student should be told about it for example, look, at the end of the year you will be here and you are expected to be here. In other words, there will be a teacher deficit. For example, we have employed paid teachers. In terms of English, one paid teacher will not be enough for the next year. We will find teachers elsewhere. Since there will be an English preparatory class for another school, they will not give us the teacher there.”*

Discussion

In this research, detailed information about the activities carried out in the process of the foreign language oriented curriculum prepared for the fifth grades was obtained as well as problems and solutions for them. First of all, some information about the process was obtained through a survey administered to the students. Within the scope of the curriculum, it was apparent that there was a similar level of listening, speaking, writing, reading and vocabulary activities, while grammar was given less place. This seems to be an appropriate practice for the purpose of the curriculum, prepared with a communication focus. In the need analysis study conducted by Erdem and Yücel-Toy (2017), the students stated that they regarded language skills such as listening, pronunciation, reading, and speaking as important and they stated that grammar skills were in the second place in terms of importance. However, Dilekli (2018) shows that teachers' views focused more on grammar rather than language skills, and this situation may cause the practice not to show the expected effect. As a result of this study, the need for other language skills intersected with what the curriculum suggested. Moreover, unlike other studies, the need for grammar was not focused too much in this study. However, this may also be due to the sampling characteristics (inadequate knowledge of grammar and the lack of previous learning). In the research of Erdem and Yücel-Toy (2017), the fact that students defined themselves as least sufficient in the area of



grammar supports this. Küzeci (2007) emphasized that basic skills should be developed in parallel with each other in language teaching and these were the basic conditions of foreign language learning.

When the students were asked about the association of the activities in the program with daily life, the students stated that the activities were presented in relation to life with a rate of 47%. The inadequacy of this rate may also be due to the students' inability to understand the question adequately in terms of age and developmental levels. However, it can still be explained in relation to teachers' views regarding content and activities being intense and ineligible for this level. Seçkin (2011) indicated in their research that teachers stated that they could not reach enough explanations and examples regarding the activities. In addition, Kaya (2019) concluded that teachers had anxiety about associating with daily life and that they did not consider some of their practices sufficient. In this study, the inability of teachers to reach sufficient instructions about the activities may have reduced the overall effectiveness of the activities.

The activities that students had the most difficulty with were speaking activities. In this context, it can be concluded that the fact that the curriculum was prepared with a communicative approach was not effective enough in the development of students' related skills. Erdem and Yücel-Toy (2017) also indicated that there were difficulties in speaking skill. Similarly, Kaya (2019) found in his study, which compared fifth grade students with and without foreign language oriented education, that despite the 15-hour language teaching per week, the students subjected to foreign language oriented education were not different than the students who were subject to 3 or 5 hours of language teaching per week in terms of speaking skills. In the same study, teachers also confirmed this situation and emphasized that there was always a deficiency in speaking skills, even though they did not experience any difficulties in developing other skills of the students. On the other hand, teachers' intensive use of communicative activities also played an important role in the development of students' listening, writing and reading skills (Sreehari, 2012). The results obtained from the students' responses about how the speaking activities were performed showed that these activities were generally in the form of animating ready-made dialogues or question-and-answer rather than the speeches that students constructed. The difficulty students experience in speaking can be explained partly by this situation. In the literature, the use of visual materials in the development of students' speaking skills (Ertürk & Üstündağ, 2007), utilizing various games (Bekdaş, 2017; Aydın, 2014) and including such activities as drama, role playing, storytelling, jokes and songs in the coursebooks (Batdı & Özbek, 2010) are suggested as alternative ways. Therefore, it can be inferred that limited methods are ineffective in developing communicative skills in line with the research result.

Listening, reading and writing activities parallel to speaking skills were carried out with limited methods, causing students to have difficulties in developing these skills. Miller (2003) mentioned the importance of listening activities to enable students to develop a significant level of independence regarding the language they might encounter in real life. Accordingly, he stated that authentic texts selected from real life should be presented to students. Participants stated that most of the listening activities were carried out through the recordings and the listening activities provided 60% benefit. Renandya and Farrell (2011) stated that the recording of listening activities did not have any non-verbal clues, as they were not contacted with the students, and thus this prevented the listener from understanding the meaning of the text or some words. Although very few (f: 2) of the students in the research stated that they had problems in listening activities, it could be pointed out that the listening activities

performed from the recording were not generally meaningful and authentic enough. Therefore, it is very important to plan listening activities that will make it easier for students to communicate in daily life. It was also seen that the students did not consider themselves in reading skill as competent as other skills and stated that they had problems in this regard. In parallel, they stated that they had difficulty in learning words. When these findings are evaluated together, it could be stated that students' difficulties in understanding the words also make them have difficulty in reading. In addition, reading activities in the form of reading aloud in turns, listening while someone reads or repeating the reading of the teacher may be considered insufficient in terms of making students understand what they read.

The Constructivism Approach, which is the basis of today's education system, has a structure that cares about cooperation. There are also studies emphasizing the importance of cooperative teaching in language education (Nunan, 1992; Ibrahim, Shak, Mohd, Zaidi & Yasin, 2015; Rao, 2019). When the responses of the students in this study were analyzed, it was noticeable that individual studies were more common in the process and group studies were neglected. It is necessary to include more group activities that can provide students with the opportunity to work together and gain different communicative skills. In addition, the study's findings show that task-based learning and process-oriented evaluation system, which were included in this curriculum in relation to the Constructivist Approach, could not be used sufficiently when the expressions of the students were taken into consideration. Traditional assessment methods are still used in many schools in Turkey (Dilekli, 2018). Although teachers could not give up this habit within the scope of this practice, other studies conducted in different provinces show that teachers give importance to process-oriented evaluation products such as portfolios and projects (Kambur, 2018). This shows that many situations proposed in the curriculum within the framework of constructivism are shaped by teachers in the classroom and teachers are important in this role.

The fact that teachers did not have access to the curriculum and course materials on time and that they did not participate in in-service training in general may be an important factor in the failure of the teachers to carry out the program effectively. As a matter of fact, in his study, Kaya (2019) attributed the problems in the implementation of the curriculum to the teachers' inability to understand the program adequately and not achieving the desired goals although he claimed that the curriculum was in harmony with the constructivist approach. Similarly, various problems were asserted by teachers in different studies such as leaving the decisions about teaching to the teacher in the process as a result of late delivery of materials and insufficient information (Dilekli, 2018; Dinçer & Koç, 2019; Erdem & Yücel-Toy, 2018; Kambur, 2018; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Özkan et al., 2018). This suggests that similar difficulties were experienced in the implementation of the curriculum in Turkey. These kinds of problems suggest that the implementation of this curriculum throughout the country in the near future may have negative consequences. Indeed, Aksoy et al. (2018) stated that a comprehensive language education at the fifth grade level would not be possible soon due to lack of teachers, and that undergraduate education had to be rearranged in order for teacher candidates to apply this curriculum. In addition to the provision of a good teaching curriculum and materials in order to be successful in an intensive language program, it was often emphasized that teachers should participate in frequent and effective in-service trainings because teachers were the most important factor in the process. (Özkan et al., 2018). Despite these problems, the opinions of teachers and administrators regarding the implementation seemed to be positive because of its aspect of allowing students to be exposed to language and this was supported by various studies (Aksoy et al., 2018; Dinçer & Koç, 2019; Kambur, 2018). Teachers and administrators stated that the fifth grade was an appropriate year for

foreign language education, especially considering the student's willingness and ability. This indicates that this implementation has the potential to achieve effective results if solutions are found for the problems.

Although there were positive aspects of the implementation of this curriculum, one aspect that was frequently mentioned by some teachers and especially administrators was the possible risk of language classes leading students to keep away from areas such as arts and sports due to the increase in language lesson hours and practicing this curriculum on all fifth grade students, regardless of volunteerism. When the implementation of this curriculum was first announced, such risks were analyzed in the report of Gür et al. (2016) and they stated that just increasing the course hours may not cause an improvement in foreign language teaching and this implementation might be impossible throughout the country due to reasons such as lack of teachers and physical conditions. Hours of language lessons in this report were compared with other OECD countries and it was seen that there was not much difference in terms of teaching hours between Turkey and other countries. Therefore, it may not be the right approach to associate the reason for the failure of the country in foreign language teaching with the course hours. Similarly, other studies (Aksoy et al., 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Gür et al., 2016; Özkan et al., 2018; Tedmem, 2018) addressed the problems and physical impossibilities caused by the absence of other lessons in the fifth grade. Indeed, Turkey's Ministry of Education has also abandoned the plan of this curriculum to be implemented throughout the country and left the decision to the schools based on the opportunities they have and their volunteerism. In addition, if this practice is preferred by the schools, it was emphasized that students' development in fields such as art and sports should not be neglected (MoNE, 2018a). This decision, which was taken after the data of this study was collected, was a positive one in terms of reducing possible problems while the implementation was still in the trial phase.

Other negative aspects addressed by teachers were that the content of the program was dense and sufficient material was not provided. Similar situations emerged in other studies (Dilekli, 2018; Özkan et al., 2018; Tedmem, 2018), and it was stated that the curriculum imposed a cognitive load on students. Reducing the number of units in the updated curriculum was a positive step in this direction and showed that the problems related to the implementation were tried to be followed and solved by MoNE. Furthermore, the curriculum was updated by the Ministry of National Education and the materials available were shared with teachers (MEB, 2018b). Although the necessity to open student level groups according to the language level expressed by both teachers and administrators in this study was frequently mentioned in other studies (Dilekli, 2018; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019) too, it was highly recommended not to open the level groups in the information given by MoNE (MoNE, 2018a). This situation can be related to the Ministry's effort to create an equal environment among students.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings of the study show that students, teachers and administrators found the increase in the language lesson hours productive and effective, and the program provided opportunities and activities on all language skills for students. Although this was thought to be the most important contribution of the curriculum, obviously the deficiencies regarding the speaking and listening skills of the students continued. It was notable that the Ministry of National Education made updates in the new academic year on issues such as revising the content for the whole curriculum, making the implementation to be based on volunteerism, and providing alternative materials as this study also highlighted. This shows that in other provinces where pilot practices are carried out, problems similar to those encountered in this

study might have been experienced and reporting them is important. Other important results revealed in the research can be listed as follows:

- Although the practice has various benefits, deficiencies regarding the students' speaking skills in English continue to exist. This situation was especially emphasized by students in the study.
- Not all dimensions of the communicative approach discussed in the curriculum were realized. In particular there were deficiencies in the subjects such as using alternative evaluation methods and giving group and pair works in lessons.
- Such practices might be risky for the holistic development of students with the aspect of affecting the hours of other courses. Therefore, it is necessary to decide whether this practice will take place in schools, taking into account many criteria such as other courses in school, the participation and willingness of students and parents in the process, regional priorities, physical conditions, and teacher status.
- Especially in cases where the support provided by the MoNE is not sufficient, the important role of teachers once again emerges in the effective management of the lessons. For this reason, pre-service education should be restructured in a way to prepare teacher candidates for such a language oriented curriculum, and various incentives should be provided for language teachers working in these schools by organizing frequent and effective in-service trainings.

Since this research was carried out in the central and out-of-center districts of Hatay province, it was limited to teachers, administrators and students in the schools that decided to implement the curriculum as a pilot study in this city. As there may be differences in the practices of other provinces, generalizations cannot be made across Turkey. In addition, this study includes the implementation of the curriculum in its first year as it is a cross-sectional study, so the improvements and changes made in the program design or implementation after data collection may not be generalized with the results of this study. Accordingly, since the scope of the research is limited to some pilot schools;

- There could be similar current situation studies in different provinces and schools where the curriculum is implemented,
- There could be studies to analyze the opinions of the parents, another important stakeholder in education, on this implementation.
- In the research, data diversity was provided by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, research based on classroom observations could be carried out in order to observe the effects of the implementation.
- Moreover, longitudinal studies could be carried out in the following years of middle school on the students exposed to foreign language oriented education at the fifth grade so that the effects of the implementation in the long term could be understood.

Disclosure of Ethical Issues

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

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