

**ATTITUDES OF COMPULSORY PREPARATORY CLASS STUDENTS
TOWARDS ENGLISH IN THE SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
(YADYOK) AT ONDOKUZ MAYIS UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

University students who must attend one year of Preparatory classes at Ondokuz Mayıs University are supposed to reach at least B2 level of proficiency according to CEFR at the end of the academic year they are attending. During this programme their English proficiency is achieved not only by the curriculum but also by their attitudes towards English. As seen in literature, if their attitude is positive, they will learn better and motivating themselves, they reach greater proficiency in a foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

Prospective students of the Faculties of Education (English Language Education), Medicine (English Language Program), Engineering (Materials and Technology, Aviation and Space Sciences) and the Faculty of Commerce and Administrative Studies (International Trade and Logistics, and Commerce) are asked to take a proficiency exam at the beginning of each Academic Year. Those who receive a score of over 60 are allowed to start their departments. The rest are considered to have failed with a score of less than 60, and must attend at least one year of prep classes.

University students who must attend one year of Preparatory classes at Ondokuz Mayıs University are supposed to reach B2 level of proficiency at least according to CEFR at the end of the academic year they are attending. Those who receive a score of over 60 are allowed to start their departments. The rest are considered to have failed with a score of less than 60, and must attend at least one year of prep classes.

During this programme their English proficiency is achieved not only by the curriculum but also by their attitudes towards English. As seen in literature, if their attitude is positive, they will learn better and motivating themselves, they reach greater proficiency in a foreign language.

They are given one week orientation before their program. The orientation program is given by the School of Foreign Languages to prepare the students not only for foreign languages but also their life on campus. Regulations of the school, expectations of both instructors and students are discussed in orientation sessions. A library visit is planned to prepare prep class students for research which is one of the important requirements in foreign language learning.

After the orientation program students are given a placement test for language level according to the Common English Framework of Reference (CEFR). Depending upon the needs of the faculties and the percentage of English medium instruction, ELT and Medical Prep class students are placed according to language levels. The other students from the Faculties of Engineering and Commerce and Administrative Studies are mixed according to their language levels. Therefore, the curriculum is designed according to the differences of the needs of the faculties.

According to the regulations of the School of Foreign Languages, it is mandatory to attend no less than 80% of the whole year. The ones who fail to fulfil this will be considered unsuccessful in their own program, and they will lose the right to take the exams within that semester.

The achievement criteria for the students in prep classes:

Throughout one year, there are two midterms held- one in fall semester and one in the spring semester. 30% of each midterm is added to the final grade;

There are quizzes, portfolios, presentations and other forms of assessment during each term. 40% of the total quizzes and other forms of assessment are added to the final grade; There is a final exam at the end of the academic year. 50% of the final exam will be added to the final grade. However, students must score 50 out of 100 for these extra scores to be added. If students get a score of 60, then they pass the preparatory year. At the end of the program the desired language level for prep class students is C1

Motivation

Dörnyei (2001b:8) states that the definition of motivation includes “the direction and magnitude of human behaviour”. Thus, motivation is concerned with why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it.

Uçar (2009:13) discusses Gardner’s (1978:9) definition of language motivation as “a desire to learn the second language, attitudes toward learning it, and a correspondingly high level of effort expended toward this end”.

However, Gardner (1978: 9) links motivation to language learning in his definition of this concept as “a desire to learn the second language, attitudes toward learning it, and a correspondingly high level of effort expended toward this end”. Gardner (1985) states that all three components, effort, desire, and attitudes, complement each other.

Motivation in language learning is very important, therefore motivation of prep class students in Turkey has also been investigated. One such study has been conducted by Tilfarlioğlu and Kurtoğlu (2015) who examined the connection between Language Learning Strategies (LLS), language learning motivation and academic achievement among 520 students at a school of foreign languages. They found that students had high scores for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational elements. They also found that language learning motivation and LLS had a positive relation with academic achievement.

Although the motivation of prep class students is high at the very beginning of the term, it gets lower and lower towards the middle of the semester. They are less willing to attend classes and have active participation in classroom activities.

The instructors think that prep class should not be given according to the regulations of the faculties with regard to the medium of instruction, but the motivations of the students.

Attitude

‘Attitude’ is a concept that has been considered important in language learning and teaching. It has been investigated by many scholars and they all define it differently: Gardner (1985:91-93) defines attitude as:

“An evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual’s beliefs or opinions about the referent.”

However, Oskamp and Schultz (2005: 9) define attitude as a “predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given attitude object.”

In addition, Mc Groarty (1996:5) believes that attitude is thus linked to a person’s values and beliefs and —promotes or discourages the choices made in all realms of activity, whether academic or informal.

On the other hand, Trinadis (1971:2) believes that “An attitude is an idea charged with emotion which proposes a class of actions to a particular class of social actions” (Atlı, 2008:7). The importance of attitude in language learning has been expressed by Gardener and Lambert (1972) who believe learner’s attitude towards the target language as the most significant component affecting language acquisition. This view is further supported by Krashen (1987) who argues that attitude can act as a barriers or bridges in a new language (cited by Görgün F 2013). Gardener (1985:9) then develops this theory by explaining that: “In the language learning situation, if the students’ attitudes are favourable, it is reasonable to predict, other things being equal, that the experience with the language be pleasant, and the students will be encouraged to continue. Simply, favourable attitudes tend to cause the experience to be perceived positively. If, on the other hand, attitudes are negative, the experiences will tend to be perceived unfavourably”.

It is clear from these definitions, that if a student is motivated to learn a language, then he or she will have a positive attitude towards the target language, an in the long run will be a more successful language learner than the unmotivated language learner because he will have the perseverance to continue when facing difficulties with the target language.

Attitude towards language learning has been investigated by a number of scholars in Turkey. Temur (2013) researched the attitudes and motivational levels of compulsory and volunteer students of English Preparatory School of foreign Languages at Inonu University in Malatya. He administered questionnaires based on motivation and attitude to 121 students from compulsory classes and 49 from volunteer students (170 students in total).He found that Volunteer students had higher positive attitudes than compulsory students towards English language learning. He believes that this is due to the fact that volunteer preparatory students’ sacrifice of a year in the language program is for promoting self-prestige and for integrating into the target language community (Temur 2013:62).

Görgün (2013) investigated Uludag University School of Foreign Language students’ attitudes towards learning English and the factors influencing these attitudes. He gave a questionnaire to 462 students and interviewed 10 students (5 male and 5 female) and they were asked about reasons for learning English, their attitudes and their parents’ attitudes towards English. Görgün found that females tended to have higher scores than males for attitude. In addition, there was a low relation found between learners’ achievement and their attitudes. Although most of the students had high positive attitudes towards English, it did not strongly affect their success.

Görgün (2013) also investigated whether learner’s attitude differed according to their fields of study. She found that medicine, engineering, arts and sciences, foreign trade and veterinarian students showed significant differences in terms of their attitude towards English. Students in the faculties of Engineering, Arts and Sciences and Foreign Trade tended to have more positive attitudes than Faculty of Medicine students. Görgün suggests that this is because the language of instruction in the department of medicine is not English, so they may think it is unnecessary for them. Furthermore, the Faculty of Engineering students showed more positive results than the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences.

ELT and Medicine preparatory students;
14 hours of CORE lessons
4 hours of WRITING lessons 6 hours of LISTENING & SPEAKING
The A1 class has 24 hours of CORE lessons in the first semester. The skills lessons are introduced in the second semester.
Compulsory and Other Faculties Preparatory students;
24 hours of CORE lessons throughout the semester.

Aim of the Study

This study aims at exploring attitudes of compulsory preparatory class students towards English in YADYOK at Ondokuz Mayıs University.

Research Questions

The study will be based on the following research questions:

- 1) What is the attitude of compulsory preparatory class students towards English?
- 2) To what extent are they able to use English proficiently?
- 3) Are there any significant differences among the preparatory class students according to their departments?

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire to check students' attitudes has been given to 209 prep-class students. 116 compulsory ELT and Medical prep class students have answered the questionnaire of 10 questions, whereas 93 prep- class students from the faculty of engineering (Materials and Technology, Electrical and Electronics, Aviation and Space Sciences) and the Faculty of Commerce and Administrative Studies (International Trade and Logistics, and Commerce) have also answered the questionnaire of 10 questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results were statistically analysed using SPSS 22.0. Statistical significance of results was tested by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The Cronbach' Alpha is 0.78, which indicates that the questionnaire is variable.

The questionnaire consists of the following questions:

- 1) Do you believe in the importance of the preparatory program?
- 2) Which course would you like to have in the preparatory program?
- 3) Are you satisfied with the preparatory program?
- 4) Which language skills (Reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking) do you have difficulty with? Please write them in order of difficulty level. Please, also list the reasons why you face these difficulties.
- 5) Can you express yourself well when speaking to foreigners in English?
- 6) Do you feel nervous when speaking in English?
- 7) Are you bored in learning a foreign language? If so why?
- 8) Has the preparatory program fulfilled your expectations?

9) What are your suggestions to be motivated better in class? Please list them.

10) If you do not attend classes regularly, please state the reasons.

The questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 only require Yes, No answers. For some questions some students seem undecided and they have not answered, whereas the questions 2, 4, 9 and 10 ask the prep-class students to give detailed answers. In that sense, the data are analysed in two different ways. The first part indicates the percentage of the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ answers, while the second part gives a list of the answers.

Part I Answers of the Compulsory ELT and Medical prep class students

Table 1: Do you believe in the importance of the preparatory program?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	99	85.3
NO	13	11.2
UNDECIDED	2	1.7
UNANSWERED	2	1.7
Total	116	100.0

Almost all the students believe in the significance of the prep classes for their education. It means that they are intrinsically motivated for learning a foreign language.
Answers of the Compulsory ELT and Medical prep class students

Table 2: Are you satisfied with the preparatory program?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	91	78.4
NO	19	16.4
UNDECIDED	1	.9
UNANSWERED	5	4.3
Total	116	100.0

An overall majority of the prep classes from ELT and Medicine are satisfied with the preparatory program. It means that they feel that their education has been worthwhile and they have fulfilled their aims of language learning.

Answers of the Compulsory ELT and Medical prep class students

Table 3: Can you express yourself well when speaking to foreigners in English?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	71	61.2
NO	23	19.8
UNDECIDED	9	7.8

UNANSWERED	13	11.2
Total	116	100.0

A majority of students feel confident that they correctly express themselves when speaking to foreigners in English. This shows that the preparatory program has assisted in developing their speaking skills to the point where they are not afraid of speaking to natives of English.

Answers of the Compulsory ELT and Medical prep class students

Table 4: Do you feel nervous when speaking in English?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	64	55.2
NO	38	32.8
UNANSWERED	14	12.1
TOTAL	116	100.0

The results show that speaking is still a daunting task for many of the ELT and Medical Prep class students. Steps need to be taken to improve their overall confidence in speaking skills.

Answers of the Compulsory ELT and Medical prep class students

Table 5: Are you bored in learning a foreign language?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	48	41.4
NO	53	45.7
UNANSWERED	15	12.9
TOTAL	116	100.0

There is only a 4.3% difference in positive and negative responses to this question. Only a slight majority are not bored in classes. This shows that more steps should be taken to make classes more enjoyable, which in turn assist language learning.

Table 6: Has the preparatory program fulfilled your expectations?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	74	63.8
NO	29	25.0

UNANSWERED	13	11.2
TOTAL	116	100.0

A majority of 63.8% responses for ELT and Medicine students show that the program has fulfilled their expectations. They have met their aims of the program.

Answers of Prep-class Students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce & Administrative Studies

Table 7: Do you believe in the importance of the preparatory program?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	72	77.4
NO	20	21.5
UNDECIDED	1	1.1
Total	93	100.0

Most students believe in the significance of the prep classes for their education. It means that they are also intrinsically motivated for learning a foreign language.

Table 8: Are you satisfied with the preparatory program?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	37	39.8
NO	55	59.1
UNANSWERED	1	1.1
Total	93	100.0

The results show that 59% of prep-class students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce & Administrative Studies are not satisfied of the program. The structure of the program should be revised to meet the students' expectations.

Table 9: Can you express yourself well when speaking to foreigners in English?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	30	32.3
NO	40	43.0
UNDECIDED	5	5.4
UNANSWERED	18	19.4
Total	93	100.0

A moderate amount of students feel that they cannot express themselves well when speaking to foreigners. They still feel a lack of speaking skills and confidence.

Table 10: Do you feel nervous when speaking in English?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	58	62.4
NO	18	19.4
UNANSWERED	17	18.3
Total	93	100.0

The results show that 62.4% of students in these faculties still suffer from anxiety when speaking in English at the end of the preparatory program.

Table 11: Are you bored in learning a foreign language?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	49	52.7
NO	24	25.8
UNANSWERED	20	21.5
Total	93	100.0

The results of the table show that a majority of students are bored in learning a foreign language. Steps should be taken to improve motivation towards language learning.

Table 12: Has the preparatory program fulfilled your expectations?

Answers	Frequency	%
YES	37	39.8
NO	35	37.6
UNANSWERED	21	22.6
Total	93	100.0

The results show that it is not clear if the students' expectations have been met. It can be suggested that students from these faculties should be asked to set clear language aims at the beginning of the academic year. This may in turn help them improve their attitude towards language learning.

Part II The answer of the second question of the ELT and Medicine students

Table 13.1: Which course would you like to have in the preparatory program?

LESSONS	%
Core	16
Vocational English	3
Reading	10

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Phonetics	2
Writing	16
Translation	0
Vocabulary	1
Listening	16
Speaking	22
Grammar	13
TOTAL	100

ELT and Medicine students prefer to have speaking lessons (22%), followed by listening, core & writing (all 16%). Next is grammar (13%) and reading (10%).

The majority do not feel the lack of Vocational English, Phonetics, Translation and Vocabulary lessons, as these are not given as a separate lessons in the preparatory program.

Answers of prep- class students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Administrative Studies

Table 13.2: Which course would you like to have in the preparatory program?

LESSONS	%
Core	5
Vocational English	11
Reading	12
Phonetics	0
Writing	14
Translation	0
Vocabulary	1
Listening	12
Speaking	28
Grammar	17
Genel toplam	100

Prep- class students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Administrative Studies prefer to have speaking lessons (28%). This is followed by grammar (13%) listening and reading (12%). Vocational English is also preferred (11%).

The majority do not prefer Core lessons (5%) Vocabulary (1%)Phonetics (0%) and Translation (0%) lessons.

Answers of the fourth question of the ELT and Medicine students

Table: 14.1 Which language skills (Reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking) do you have difficulty with? Please write them in order of difficulty level. Please, also list the reasons why you face these difficulties

LESSONS	%
Reading	13
Writing	13
Vocabulary	17
Listening	18
Speaking	24

Grammar	14
TOTAL	100

The results show that ELT and Medicine prep students find speaking (24%) the most difficult language skill. The second most difficult language skill is listening (18%). This is closely followed by vocabulary (17%).

The Reasons given by the students for their lack of motivation

- They are not doing enough practice.
- They believe that there is a lack of good instructors.
- They are shy.
- They are not good at memorizing.
- The classroom has bad acoustics.
- The equipment used is bad.
- The course-books are bad.
- They are not reading enough.
- They are anxious.
- They have limited vocabulary.
- They lack of knowledge of grammar rules.
- They have difficulty with writing in the mother-tongue.

The answers of prep- class students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Administrative Studies

Table: 14.2 Which language skills (Reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking) do you have difficulty with? Please write them in order of difficulty level. Please, also list the reasons why you face these difficulties

Skills	%
Reading	14
Writing	15
Vocabulary	15
Listening	17
Speaking	21
Grammar	17
Total	100

Prep- class students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Administrative Studies also find speaking (21%) the most difficult language skill. This language skill is closely followed by listening (17%) and grammar (17%).

Reasons given by the students for the level of their difficulty in learning

- They are not good at memorizing.
- They have poor knowledge of grammar rules.
- They feel anxious when speaking. They are not doing enough practice.

- They don't like writing.
- They believe that there inadequacies in the education given.
- They have difficulty with pronunciation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Prep-class students from the Faculty of Medicine believe in the importance of the preparatory program and they seem satisfied with their education. During their education they think that the program helped them to develop their speaking skills in communication with foreigners. Although, they have a lack of confidence. They admit that they are not motivated well, since classes are boring.

However, students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Administrative Studies seem unsatisfied with the program. They feel that their speaking skills need improvement and that they lack confidence.

While ELT and Medicine students prefer to have speaking, listening and writing, students from the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Administrative Studies prefer to have grammar and reading and some more Vocational English as well as speaking lessons.

Both groups are aware of their lack of motivation, communication and difficulties in learning.

Suggestions

- At the beginning of the academic year, students' needs must be analysed and assessed.
- Next, preparatory class students must be introduced to CLIL in their program.
- Some departmental meetings must be held to introduce them to their prospective professional life.
- In the Orientation program they must be motivated not only for language but also for university life.
- Last but not least, it must be borne in mind that they are learning a foreign language to be internationalised.

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