English Language Needs Analysis of University Students at a Voluntary Program

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Abstract

This study investigated the English language needs of the university students in the voluntary preparatory classes at GOP University in Turkey from the perspectives of the current students, former students, EFL teachers, and the director of the program, in the hopes of being able to make needs-based curricular recommendations for preparatory program. Data were collected through questionnaires and a structured interview. The study found that while students are generally satisfied with the program and felt it meets their needs, there are specific areas that need to be improved. The results suggest, the goals and objectives need to be clearly identified and communicated to students and faculty. Further, program curriculum and courses need to be aligned with these goals.
Key Words: Needs Analysis, Curriculum, Curriculum Development

İsteğe Bağlı Programda okuyan Üniversite Öğrencilerinin İngilizce İhtiyaç Analizi

Özet

Bu çalışma, ihtiyaca dayalı bir müfredat hazırlanması beklentisiyle, Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi isteğe bağlı hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin İngilizce dil öğrenim gereksinimlerini; eski öğrenciler, şu anda okuyan öğrenciler, İngilizce öğretmenleri ve program direktörünün perspektiflerinden araştırmıştır. Bu çalışma için veri, anket ve mülakat aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Bu çalışma, öğrencilerin, genel olarak programdan memnun olduklarını ve programın kendi ihtiyaçlarını karşıladığını düşünmelerine rağmen, belirgin alanlarda gelişmeye ihtiyaç duyulduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Aynı zamanda, program hedef ve amaçlarının net bir şekilde, öğrenci ve öğretmenlerle iletişim kurularak belirlenmesi gerektiğini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bununla beraber, programın müfredatı ve dersler bu amaçlara uygun olmalıdır
Anahtar Kelimeler: İhtiyaç Analizi, Müfredat, Müfredat Geliştirme

Introduction

Because of the developments and innovations in language teaching and curriculum design, the importance of the learners in the educational process has been recognized. The focus in language teaching has changed from the nature of the language to the learner; the learner is seen as the center of learning and

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teaching. Learners are seen to have different needs and interests, which have an important influence on their motivation to learn and on the effectiveness of their learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Brindley (cited in Johnson, 1989) points out that teaching programs should pay attention to learners' needs as the principle of a learner-centered system of language learning. In a learner-centered approach to curriculum design, learners are asked what they think about the curriculum, and their wishes and wants are taken into consideration. The resulting curriculum is thus a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision making process regarding the content of the curriculum and even how it is taught (Nunan, 1988). This contribution of students to the curriculum can create a better learning atmosphere, as well as motivating them by involving them in the designing of curriculum. In a learner-centered curriculum, the teacher creates a supportive environment in which learners can take initiative in choosing how and what they want to learn. As pointed out in a recent study, Altan and Trombly (2001) focus on positive effects of learner-centeredness in language teaching and offer learner-centeredness as a model for countering classroom challenges because of its possibility for meeting different needs.

A needs analysis aims to describe a current situation, to analyze the deficiencies of the situation and to contribute to plans for improving it. While needs analysis are useful for all institutions, they can be especially important for newly founded programs where there may not be a well-established curriculum and students' needs may not have been taken into account. Voluntary preparatory classes, as opposed to mandatory ones, are rare in universities in Turkey. Voluntary preparatory classes were opened in GOP University in 2001. Students at GOP University either go to the full-time preparatory classes for one year or enter directly into their departments and take only a three-hour weekly compulsory English course. Students who enter the preparatory school are rank ordered at the beginning of the semester according to the results of the preparatory school's own placement test. Despite these attempts to place students in appropriate classes, the students' needs, goals and objectives are different.

The School of Foreign Languages at GOP University has expressed several concerns about the preparatory program. There is still neither any overarching curriculum or syllabus, nor any common teaching approach in the

school, with each teacher designing his or her own plans and materials. For each of its three years, the program has used different textbooks, and there has not been a careful study to determine the appropriateness of the texts. Further, the English language needs of the students enrolled in this program have never been clearly defined.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the English language learning needs of students in the preparatory classes of GOP University based on the perceptions of current students, former students, EFL teachers, and the director of the program. This study will help to clarify the objectives and goals of the program, and assist teachers in planning a curriculum matching students' expectations and needs.

Research Questions

The following constitutes the research questions of the study:

1. What are the English language needs of students in the voluntary preparatory classes of Gaziosmanpasa University?

2. To what degree do the preparatory classes meet the English language needs of students?

3. What are the EFL teachers' expectations from students and their ideas about teaching English?

4. What are the goals and objectives of the program for English language teaching?

Although many needs analyses have been reported in the literature, including a needs analysis of the freshman reading course (Eng 101) at Middle East Technical University (Akar, 1999) and the English language needs of management students at the Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University (Atay, 2000), none, however, have been directly related to the English needs of students in voluntary preparatory classes.

This study is important for several reasons. This study will provide information about the needs of voluntary preparatory classes' students in a Turkish medium university. Since students' objectives for attending voluntary programs are likely to be different from those in a compulsory one, there is a need to study why the students choose the voluntary preparatory classes at GOP University. Since the purpose of this study is to determine the English language

needs of students, as background for this study, literature on needs analysis will be reviewed.

Overview of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is an important tool for determining the objectives of the curriculum and organizing the content of a program. When the needs of learners have been defined, they can be stated in terms of goals and objectives. Tests, materials, and teaching activities can be designed based on the needs of the students (Brown, 1995; Richterich & Chancerel, 1980). Moreover, analyzing the needs of learners is also a critical means of finding criteria for reviewing and evaluating the existing curriculum (Richards, 1984), because needs analysis is a means of gathering detailed information about students, program, and teachers. Brown (1995) defines needs analysis as "a process of gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students" (p. 35).

Before starting a need analysis, several factors should be considered. The collected data is used to design an appropriate curriculum for the learners, the data about the materials will be used to choose or to design authentic materials for the learners and as a general the data collected by the needs analysis will be used for teaching process. Deciding the exact purposes for the curriculum, the time and the performer of the needs analysis, the way of conducting the analysis, and the participants can be listed as important factors. According to Richards (1990), collecting this data serves the purposes of "providing a mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input into the content, design and implementation of a language program and providing data for reviewing and evaluating the current program"(p. 1-2).

Methodology

The participants, instruments, data collection and data analysis procedures in this study will be explained. This is a descriptive study in which data related to the perceptions of the participants were collected through questionnaires and an interview.

Participants

There were four groups of participants in the study. The first group was made up of 40 current students studying at the preparatory classes at GOP University. The second group was composed of 81 former students who have graduated from the program, and are now studying in their chosen departments. The third group was made up of the seven EFL teachers teaching at the preparatory classes. Finally the director of the program who also teaches at the preparatory classes was included.

Instruments

Data were collected using three questionnaires and a structured interview. Questionnaires were chosen to gather data because they are efficient tool for collecting information on a large scale and require little time or extended writing from the participants (Brown, 1995; Oppenheim, 1993). They are also useful to make group comparisons among large groups, which was appropriate for the study. Questions on the questionnaires were developed to answer the research questions of this study. They also reflect the researcher's experience teaching English, as well as informal interviews with EFL teachers and former students. The categories in the students' questionnaires were developed by the researcher through readings of literature, especially Brown, (1995); Nunan (1988).

The first questionnaire was administered to current students to determine their perceived English language needs. In the Current Students' Questionnaires, there were three open-ended questions, 44 Likert-scale questions, and two multiple response questions. Likert-scale questions consisted of four different options: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). Students chose among these to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement. A similar though slightly different questionnaire was given to former students. In the Former Students' Questionnaires, there were five open-ended questions, 34 Likert-scale questions, and two multiple response questions. This questionnaire was meant to identify former students' perceived language needs and the degree to which the program addressed them. The third questionnaire was administered to EFL teachers in order to reveal teachers' expectations for students, their ideas about teaching English, and their perceptions of the goals and objectives of the program. The EFL Teachers Questionnaire consisted of 39 open-ended and multi-response questions. A structured interview consisting of eight questions

was conducted with the director of the program. The questions were about the placement procedures of the program, students' attitudes towards the voluntary aspect of the program, how the program determined the needs of the students and general goals and objectives of the program. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

The first drafts of the questionnaires were initially prepared in English and then translated into Turkish by two experienced EFL teachers. They were then translated back into English again by two other experienced EFL teachers to check for content accuracy and clarity. The revised questionnaires for students were piloted with nine preparatory students, seven former students and three experienced EFL teachers. The interview questions were read by an experienced EFL administrator and changes made for clarity and content.

Data Analysis Procedure

A quantitative analysis technique was done for the questionnaires except for the open-ended questions and interview. In analyzing the data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 10.0) was used. Initially the data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, and percentages. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to have a general view about the participants of the study. Means were calculated for each item to provide a standard way of comparing answers across items. In addition to these, standard deviations were also calculated to identify the extent of agreement in the participants' responses to the questions. *T*-tests were also applied to the Likert-scale questions to compare the results of current and former students' questions. There are 34 identical Likert-scale questions both in current and former students' questionnaires. The responses to the open-ended questions are transcribed and analyzed question by question. The interview was transcribed from the tape and analyzed with qualitative analysis techniques by dividing the transcription. The data was used to supplement data from the students' and teachers' questionnaires.

Results

For parallel questions in the students' and teachers' questionnaires, the tables are displayed and explained together for the questions in order to compare the perceptions of current and former students. In this part questions

are grouped into the categories: the questions about the needs of students, program, and skills.

There is one multiple-response question asked for the students and teachers to identify their reasons for studying English. The options for this question were: to pass the English course (O1), for future career (O2), to continue with MA or PhD studies (O3), to get a certificate (O4), and other (O5). The participants' first choice for learning English, for each of the groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.First choice for studying English: Current students, Former students, and EFL teachers

Options	Current Students		Former Students		EFL Teachers	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
O1 (To pass)	1	2.5	5	6.2	2	28.6
O2 (Career)	36	90.0	69	85.2	5	71.4
O3 (MA/ PhD)	2	5.0	5	6.2	0	0
O4 (Certificate)	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
O5 (Other)	0	0	2	2.5	0	0

Note: Question: Why do the students need English in General? N: Number of Participants. %: Percentage

For all groups, future career was the first choice. The second most important reason to learn English is shown in Table 2. For both current and former students, the most frequent second choice to learn English was to continue with their MA or PhD studies.

Table 2. Second choice for studying English: Current students, Former students, and EFL teachers

Options	Current Students		Former Students		EFL Teachers	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
O2 (Career)	1	2.5	5	10.0	2	28.6
O3 (MA/ PhD)	17	42.5	27	54.0	1	14.3
O4 (Certificate)	5	12.5	10	20.0	3	42.9
O5 (Other)	5	12.5	8	16.0	1	14.3

Note: Question: Why do the students need English in General? N: Number of Participants. %: Percentage

Since the number of teachers is small, no statistical analysis has been applied in order to compare the groups. In Table 3, the questions related to the program are analyzed and compared. In this table, means and *t*-test results are shown.

Table 3.Perceptions of current students and former students towards the program

Questions/Item	Data Source	N	M-x	sd	*t*
Q2 I like studying English in this program	Current Students	40	3.02	.70	-2.17
	Former Students	81	3.29	0.6	
Q12 Additional Courses after program	Current Students	40	3.42	.71	-.82
	Former Students	81	3.53	.65	
Q13 Program should be compulsory	Current Students	40	2.85	1.17	-.72
	Former Students	81	3.00	1.04	
Q14 Program is successful	Current Students	40	3.02	.66	-1.12
	Former Students	81	3.16	.63	
Q15 Students are happy at the program	Current Students	40	3.08	.88	-2.24
	Former Students	81	3.39	.60	
Q19 Students would like to continue studying English	Current Students	40	3.62	.62	-1.54
	Former Students	81	3.78	.45	

Note: N: Number of participant group   M: Mean   sd: Standard Deviation   *t*: *t*-test value

For all the questions asking about the program, analysis results showed that both current and former students' perceptions about the program were similar. Students would like to continue studying English after finishing the program. Especially former students think that there should be courses after they finish the preparatory program. This is probably because former students do not have any English courses after the program. Former students suggested in the open-ended questions that they were concerned that they might begin to forget what they had learned from the program. In the open-ended questions, most students also stated that they would like to go on studying English. Some students stated that the preparatory program should be at the end of the university education in order not to forget English. Three of the questions

related to the program were asked to the EFL teachers. The responses to these questions were similar to the students' responses. Frequencies and the percentages of the results are shown in table 4.

Table 4.Perceptions of EFL teachers towards the program

Questions/Item	Data Source	N	SA	A	D	SD	M
Q16 Additional courses after program would be useful	EFL Teachers	7	2	5	0	0	3.29
Q17 Program should be compulsory	EFL Teachers	7	6	1	0	0	3.86
Q18 Program is successful	EFL Teachers	7	1	6	0	0	3.14

Note: N: Number of participant group M: Mean   SA: Strongly agree A: Agree D: Disagree   SD: Strongly Disagree

As can be seen in Table 4, teachers' responses were similar to the students' responses. When the overall results are observed, both students and teachers think that there should be additional English courses after this program. Students and teachers also think that the program should be a compulsory, though former student and current students feel much less strongly than teachers about this.

There were additional issues about the program that came from the open-ended questions and the director's interview. Both students and teachers found the program to be successful. Students seem quite happy to be studying in this program. The director of the program stated that the program was newly founded and a "developing program". He also said that students were not involved in the program evaluation process, but teachers came together to discuss and evaluate the program.

The questions related to the skills are analyzed and compared according to the perceptions of current students and former students. In this table means and *t*-test results are shown.

Table 5.Perceptions of current students and former students about the skills

Questions/Item	Data Source	N	M	sd	*t*

Q3 Reading is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	40 81	3.16 3.44	.77 .59	-2.33
Q4 Speaking is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	40 81	3.08 3.74	.76 .52	-5.64
Q5 Grammar is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	38 81	3.79 3.56	.41 .59	2.20
Q6 Writing is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	39 80	3.49 3.33	.56 .67	1.30
Q7 Listening is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	40 81	2.73 3.35	.93 .74	- 3.96*
Q8 Translation is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	40 80	3.48 3.51	.75 .64	-.29
Q9 Vocabulary is important in learning English for me	Current Students Former Students	40 80	3.63 3.63	.54 .56	.01
Q10 Pronunciation is important in learning English for me	Former Students Current Students	40 81	3.05 3.46	.93 .59	-2.92

Note: N: Number of participant group   M: Mean   sd: Standard Deviation   *t*: *t*-test value   *p<.05

Only for Question 5, the importance of listening to learn English, do the results point out a significant difference between the current and former students. The mean value for current students was 2.73 and 3.35 for former students. The results show that current students think that listening is less important than the former students think. Most of the current students stated in the open-ended questions that they do not like the listening course because students never listen to English conversations in class. For the rest of the skills are important for both current and former students.

Table 6. Perceptions of EFL teachers, about the skills.

Questions/Item	Data Source	N	SA	A	D	SD	M

		N	SA	A	D	SD	M
Q7 Reading is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	5	2	0	0	3.71
Q8 Speaking is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	0	7	0	0	3.00
Q9 Grammar is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	5	2	0	0	3.71
Q10 Writing is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	1	6	0	0	3.14
Q11 Listening is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	1	6	0	0	3.14
Q12 Translation is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	2	5	0	0	3.29
Q13 Vocabulary is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	6	1	0	0	3.86
Q14 Pronunciation is important to learn English for my students	EFL Teachers	7	1	6	0	0	3.14

Note: N: Number of participant group M: Mean SA: Strongly agree A: Agree D: Disagree SD: Strongly Disagree

As shown in Table 6, as for the questions about the skills, teachers think that reading, speaking, grammar, writing, listening, translation, vocabulary, and pronunciation are all important for students in learning English. For the question about listening, there is a small but a noticeable difference between current students' (2.73) and teachers (3.14).

The researcher asked one open-ended question to the current students about their expectations from the program. Two open-ended questions were asked the former students about their expectations and how their expectations were met by the program. EFL Teachers were asked two yes/no questions about using English in class and about whether teachers used students' needs to plan courses. Three additional open-ended questions were asked about the goals, strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Question 46 asked current students their expectations of the program. The responses were transcribed and analyzed question by question. Since the

program is voluntary, it was not surprising that students were satisfied with the program. Most students restated their most desire to learn English was to assist them in future career. Students' responses to the open-ended questions reinforced much of the information from the other questions on the questionnaires. There were additional topics that students mentioned in the open-ended questions. Most students would like to continue to have English courses after the program, as they are afraid they will forget English after they graduate from the program. The students expected to be able to practice what they learned in class and complained about the listening and speaking course, not providing these opportunities. They also complained about the limited use of the language laboratory. They expressed a desire to watch films and use videos in classes. Further students said that they would like extra materials such as stories, film, English CDs, and games to be used in class. Students want more translation courses and less listening and speaking courses.

For the former students, questions Q36 and 37 asked them about their expectations of the program and whether their expectations were met. The responses show that most of the students thought that the program did not meet all their expectations, but they thought this program was a good start to learn English. Like the current students they desired more speaking and listening activities in class and more extra materials for courses. Most of the former students would have liked to use the language laboratory as part of their class. In looking back on their experiences, the former students have several specific suggestions about the program. Some said that they had learned English well, but they were unable to speak English. The students thought that the teachers were the strengths of the program. Most of the students felt that additional English courses after they graduate from this program would be useful and they complained about not having chances to study English in their own departments. Some students from departments with additional English classes thought that the preparatory program helped for them in these classes. Some students believed the program would be improved by having courses by native speakers. As students had only three level courses, some students felt more levels, including advanced level, would be helpful.

In responding to the open-ended questions, the EFL teachers provided additional information about their planning and teaching courses. The question about the use of English shows that all the teachers said they used Turkish in

class in order to explain and clarify (Q35). For the next question (Q36) about whether teachers use students' needs to plan their courses or not is asked. Most teachers also said they planned their courses based on their assumptions about the needs of students. Expressing a common sentiment, one of the teachers said "I have chosen subjects that my students will need, such as phonetic symbols, intonation, word stress, sentence stress".

For the open-ended questions, the teachers provided information about the program. When asked to identify the goals of the program, teachers responded in a variety of ways. These included teaching English for students' future career, to prepare students for post-graduate studies, to enable students to use the target language, to have the basic knowledge of English, and to prepare them for academic purposes.

Teachers also identified several deficiencies of the program (Q38). They mentioned the lack of in-service training, lack of native speakers, lack of communication among teachers in discussing and sharing ideas about students, lack of authentic materials, lack of testing specialists, and the need for a needs analysis. In outlining program strengths (Q39) teachers felt that students in the program developed a good understanding of grammar. They also believed the program benefited from being level-based, and utilizing placement tests for placing students according to their levels.

Discussion

In this part, the research questions will be answered by discussing the results of the questionnaires and the interview.

Research question 1: What are the English language needs of students in the voluntary preparatory classes of Gaziosmanpasa University?

An important source for determining the language needs of students is the students themselves. In both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions, students provided detailed information about what they perceived as their language needs. These seem to fall into two categories: reasons or goals for studying English and skills to be learned. Although these are related, they will be discussed separately here.

Both the current students (90%) and former students (85.2%) were clear on their primary goals in studying English; they want to learn English for their future career. In the open-ended questions students expanded upon this.

Students said that they would like to find a good job and they are aware of the importance of English when looking for a job.

A second important goal for many current students (42.5%) and former students (54%) was to go on to MA or PhD studies. These students are aware that for entry into an advanced degree program, they must pass the UDS and KPDS foreign languages proficiency exams, which are a grammar and vocabulary, based exam. The English preparatory program seems as an important step towards passing these exams. The importance of these exams is reinforced by the director of the program. In the interview with him he mentioned that he gave "information to the students about what will happen and the role of the exams, when they graduate from this university about post-graduate studies."

The skills students see as important are closely related to their goals for studying English. While all students say all four major skills are necessary, grammar (current students) and speaking (former students) were identified as the most important. These are consistent with the goals of learning English for their future careers and further university graduate studies. The emphasis upon grammar is also reinforced by the nature of the preparatory program. The exams and tests in the program are mainly based on grammar. Even for the listening and speaking course, listening and speaking ability are not tested. In addition, the foreign language proficiency exams required for entry into graduate schools (UDS and KPDS) are largely grammar, reading, and vocabulary based. Students' goals for learning English for these two distinct reasons create challenges for the program.

Research question 2: To what degree do the preparatory classes meet the English language needs of students?

In general students and teachers are satisfied with the English preparatory program, though they have some concerns about specific aspects of it. Most of the students think that the program is successful and are generally happy with the number of the course hours. Most of the students also satisfied with the EFL teachers in the program. The comments of one former student are typical "…our teachers teach well and they try their best to teach us and they help both in class and out of the class". This satisfaction does not extend to all elements of the program.

While students were happy with the course hours for most courses, they did not think the correct balance had been struck for the translation and listening and speaking courses. According to the students listening and speaking course hours (6 in a week) should be decreased and translation course hours (2 in a week) should be increased. The dissatisfaction with listening and speaking course extended beyond the course hours. Current students think the listening and speaking courses are boring, perhaps explaining why they want fewer hours for the course. In the open-ended questions, students complain about not being able to speak and understand what they hear. One of the current students said that "Grammar, reading, and vocabulary courses are helpful but not the listening, speaking, and pronunciation courses". The generally negative view of the listening and speaking course was reinforced by other specific complaints. When asked whether they were comfortable when speaking English, the current students generally were not.

Research Question 3: What are the EFL teachers' expectations from students and ideas about teaching English?

The teachers in the study were asked questions covering essentially the same content as the students. In responding to these questions, the teachers revealed that they have many of the same issues as the students, though with some important differences. Most of the teachers (71.4%) thought that their students wanted to learn English to assist them in their future career. Differing somewhat from the students, they identified the second reason for learning English as being to receive the certificate. This option was chosen by very few students in their questionnaire (17.9%). Instead, students indicated that in addition to their future careers, they were studying English to assist them in possible graduate work. Only one teacher suggested this as an important motivation for studying English. It is not entirely clear what this difference means. On the questionnaire, teachers indicated that they planned their courses based on students' needs. If teachers have a different perception of students' motivations for attending the program, however, it suggests a probable mismatch between the courses and students' needs. Teachers generally think that all the skills are important for students, and results of the mean values support this idea. Teachers are aware that students should be proficient in all the skills.

Research question 4: What are the goals and objectives of the program on English language teaching?

Both the EFL teachers and the director of the program were asked to identify the goals and objectives of the program. Several teachers identified broad goals, such as to teach a basic knowledge of English and to encourage students to learn English. Another teacher was more specific, saying the program should prepare students for post-graduate studies, and their future career, prepare them to communicate in the target language, to make them fluent in speech, accurate in grammar, and prepare them for academic purposes. These data suggest that there is not a shared set of goals and objectives for the program. The teachers each have their own goals and objectives that they use to plan and teach. Clearly EFL teachers and the director of the program should come together and evaluate the program and set the goals and objectives of the program according to the needs of the students. This study is a first step in helping to develop the curriculum. Language programs should be centered on learners' needs and learners themselves should exercise their own responsibility in the choice of learning objectives, content and methods and evaluation (Nunan, 1988). The curriculum, which will be developed for this program, will be learner-centered, because the needs of the students are taken into consideration. All language curriculums have the same process, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. If language learning is to be successful, the learners' needs, rather than the structure of the language should be focused (Brown, 1995). In a learner centered curriculum, the individual needs of learners, the role of individual experience, and the need to develop awareness, self reflection, critical thinking, learner strategies, and other qualities and skills that are believed to be important for learners to develop (Richards, 2001).

Learner-centered curriculums are collaborative efforts between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process. In learner-centered classrooms students are placed at the center of classroom organization and their learning needs, strategies, and styles are respected. In learner-centered classrooms, students can be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups on distinct tasks and projects. In another study, Chan (2001) argues that while developing language curricula, syllabus design should meet the needs of learners. In this study the learners were shown to know their

needs best because they knew what they wanted to do with the target language in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The study emphasized how a needs assessment is necessary to develop the curriculum and to determine whether it meets the students' and teachers' needs.

There have been a number of studies carried out using needs analysis in different institutions in Turkey. These include: an English language needs analysis of management students at the Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University carried out by Atay (2000) and an investigation into students' academic and occupational English language needs at the Office Management and Secretarial Studies Departments of Nigde University's Vocational Colleges by Celik (2003). In both of these studies researchers investigated the academic and occupational English needs using the perception of learners and teachers.

This study differs from the previous ones in at least one important way. In both of these institutions, English classes are compulsory, with students required to take these classes. The preparatory program in GOP University, founded in 2001, is a relatively new institution, and enrollment in English preparatory classes is voluntary. This study will provide important data that may be used to design an appropriate curriculum with the involvement of current students, former students, EFL teachers, and the director of the program through the needs analysis study.

Conclusion

As defined by Brown, (1995) and Jordan, (1997) this study attempted to determine the English language needs of the target group by considering a wide range of audiences such as current students, former students, EFL teachers, and the director of the program various types of needs of the learners as defined in the needs analysis literature were sought.

This study suggests several important steps that need to occur in the English Preparatory Program at Gaziosmanpasa University. In order to address the students' English language needs, clear cut objectives should be set for the preparatory students and the courses should be planned and organized based on the goals and objectives set for each course. In order to develop a learner-centered curriculum, first, students' needs and interests should be taken into consideration. If the students' needs are not taken into consideration, the apparent mismatch, which presently exists in the program, will continue and

learners will not be successful. This study is a first step in moving towards developing such a curriculum. Students should also be informed about their English language needs. Before students enroll in the preparatory programs they should know what the goals and objectives of the program so they make informed decisions about their participation in the program and the method and the materials used in the program should match with these goals and the objectives.

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