

The Macrotheme Review

A multidisciplinary journal of global macro trends

A STUDY OF THE NEEDS, PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES CONCERNING THE LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE , EXPRESSED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Abstract

This paper explores recent needs analysis conducted at Namık Kemal University School of Foreign Languages Preparatory Classes. Responding to related questionnaires, 50 students and 26 Turkish EFL instructors were asked a number of questions concerning their ideas about learning and teaching. Results revealed both the successes and failures of the school curriculum to satisfy the expectations and desires of students. It also showed ways that these two populations differed and provided valuable insights for directions for further curriculum development.

Keywords: curriculum development, needs analysis, questionnaire, learning and teaching preferences

1. Introduction

Needs analysis (also called needs assessment) is claimed to be a critical part of the process of curriculum planning in second language learning (Brown, 1995; Richards, 2001). In 1994, in his overview of needs analysis studies, West (1994) stated only a handful of needs analysis studies have come out over the last 25 years. In the past decade, however, there has been an increase in such studies. Most of these studies, however, only use one method and one data source. Except for Busch, et al, which employed both teacher and student questionnaires, all other studies were based solely on student self-reports. In his book on the curriculum development, Brown (1995, p. 52) states:

. . . multiple sources of information should be used in a needs analysis — although the specific combination appropriate for a given situation must be decided on the site by the needs analysts themselves (probably after input from program administration, faculty, and perhaps students).

If possible, it is important to use different research methods and sources to analyze needs. West (1994), Brown (1995), Long (1999), as well as Witkin and Asltschuld (1995) have emphasized the importance of triangulating data from many sources and using multiple methods.

2. Research Questions

This paper explores the following research questions:

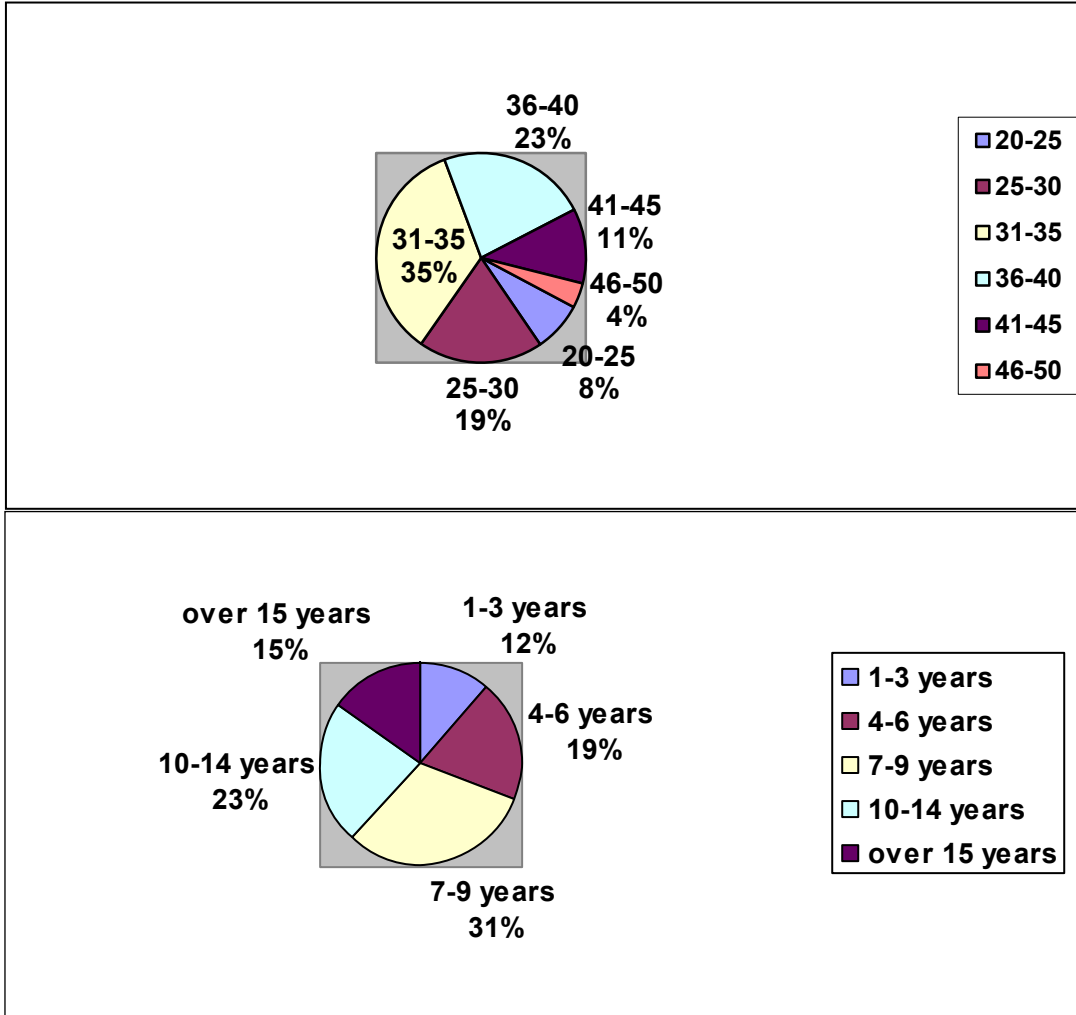
1. What are students' preferred English learning styles and expectations of instructors?
2. What are instructors' perceptions of their students' English learning and teaching styles?
3. What are the major points of agreement and disagreement between students and instructors in terms of preferred learning/teaching styles?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This study uses two research populations: (1) 50 preparatory students at Namık Kemal University School of Foreign Languages (2) 26 Turkish instructors of English. The students share basic demographic characteristics, such as L1, and field of study. Both male and female students were among the participants and the age range was between 17 and 20. The EFL learners have studied English for 9 years, mainly through highly controlled formal education in Turkey. Information about the non-native speakers of instructors is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure A : Ages of the Turkish instructors of English and Figure B : Teaching experience of the Turkish instructors of English



3.2 Materials

The student questionnaire consisted of 35 5-point Likert scale questions in Turkish. The questionnaire appears in [Appendix 1A](#), along with an English translation and the mean scores and standard deviations of the responses. This questionnaire was based on a survey developed by Busch, et al. (1992) to identify the needs of students at Kanda University of International Studies. Some of the items from the original Busch et al. study were deleted because of they were not relevant to the Turkish foreign language education system and four background questions were added to obtain more information about the participants.

The instructor questionnaire consisted of 16 5-point Likert scale questions in English. This was also adapted from Busch, et al. (1992), though some items from that original study were deleted and three extra background questions were added. Questions of the survey appear in [Appendix 2](#).

4. Results

4.1 Students preferred learning styles and expectations about their instructors.

The items in the survey concerned attitudes about learning and how instructors should perform. There was a strong preference for the conditions mentioned in Questions 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 20 and 35 and less preference for those mentioned in Questions 2, 3, 15, and 25. If this data is accurate, it would seem that students prefer to learn under so-called "communicative" conditions with an emphasis on pair/group work, fun learning, individual help from instructors, with a positive classroom atmosphere. Many students also seem to enjoy translation exercises and immediate error correction and strict instructors were not appreciated.

Table 1 summarizes salient responses:

	Statement	<i>Descriptive mean</i>
1.	I learn best when working alone.	2,82
2.	I learn best when following textbooks closely.	1,92
3.	I learn best with much homework.	2,68
4.	I learn best with strict teaching.	3,86
5.	I learn best with Turkish explanations.	4,30
6.	I 'm irritated with immediate error correction.	2,38
7.	I learn best with AV materials in language labs.	4,32
8.	I don't like to study grammar.	2,60
9.	I like when the teacher helps us individually in class.	4,46
10.	I don't like translation exercises.	2,92
11.	I like to study in groups	4,00
12.	I like to choose my own group partners.	4,08
13.	I like to see words rather than hearing them.	4,46
14.	I like to try guessing answers.	4,08
15.	I prefer native EFL instructors over Turkish EFL instructors.	2,34
16.	Having a friendly class atmosphere is important.	4,32

17.	I like using video/TV in class.	3,94
18.	I like practice English outside of class.	3,66
19.	I like helping friends while studying in the lesson	4,08
20.	I like to learn in classes that are fun.	4,66
21.	I don't like talking with classmates in English.	2,96
22.	I like choosing class work on my own.	4,14
23.	I prefer working in the group with my female classmates	3,88
24.	I prefer working in the group with my male classmates	2,92
25.	I like studying in language labs / library.	2,78
26.	I don't like research assignments in English	2,90
27.	I like to read newspaper and magazines in English	3,74
28.	I prefer teacher's telling the answer rather than letting me discover answers by myself	2,90
29.	I think worksheets are useless	2,80
30.	I like my projects to be displayed on classroom or school boards	3,70
31.	I think playing games in the class is a waste of times	2,02
32.	I think repetitions and revisions are not necessary	1,92
33.	I like to learn English with computer assisted language learning programme	3,94
34.	I prefer female English instructors	4,18
35.	The teacher's being in a friendly manner motivates me in learning English	4,64

Table 2 Preferred Conditions (General mean scores above 4,00):

5.	I learn best with Turkish explanations.	4,30
7.	I learn best with AV materials in language labs.	4,32
9.	I like when the instructor helps us individually in class	4,46
11.	I like to study in groups	4,00
13.	I like to see words rather than hearing them.	4,46
16.	Having a friendly class atmosphere is important	4,32
20.	I like to learn in classes that are fun	4,66
35.	The instructor's being in a friendly manner motivates me in learning English	4,64

Table 3 Less Preferred Conditions (General mean scores lower than 3,00):

2.	I learn best when following textbooks closely.	1,92
3.	I learn best with much homework.	2,68
15.	I prefer native EFL instructors over Turkish EFL instructors.	2,34
25.	I like studying in language labs / library.	2,78

4.2 Instructors' perceptions of their students' English learning and teaching styles

Items of the instructors' questionnaire pertained to their perceptions of students' preferred English learning and styles and beliefs about what students expect of instructors. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics for each question. Turkish instructors of English agreed with students about many basic learning factors. Though there were slight differences of opinions about the use of translation exercises or using Turkish in class, the only statistically significant difference concerned attitudes towards video or TV use while teaching: instructors were significantly positive about using this technology in class .

Table 4 Instructors' perceptions of students' preferred English learning/teaching styles:

	Statements	<i>Descriptive means</i>
1.	Students do not like to express their opinions in class.	3,33
2.	Students do not like to talk freely in English during the class.	3,33
3.	Students learn effectively when classroom learning is fun.	3,83
4.	I think it is an advantage to use Turkish when explaining classroom activities and assignments to students.	3,67
5.	Students learn most effectively when working in same-sex groups.	2,28
6.	I like students to work in pairs and small groups.	3,50
7.	Students learn best when the instructor is very strict and controls the lesson.	3,00
8.	Students learn best when the instructor gives tests and homework.	3,39
9.	I try to correct all student mistakes promptly, including oral errors.	3,17
10.	I like teaching English grammar and the rules of correct English.	3,50
11.	My students learn best when I move around the class and help them individually.	3,61
12.	Translation exercises help develop English proficiency.	2,89
13.	Students learn best when the instructor lets them discover their own answers.	3,53
14.	I ask students to correct their own work.	3,17
15.	I like to use video and television in class.	3,78
16.	I assign homework, which makes students read English newspapers or listen to English radio programs.	3,06

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on a careful examination of Tables , some generalizations concerning learner needs can now be attempted. Four items that showed a mean of 3.5 or higher the two populations used in this survey are listed below:

Table 5 Major points of agreement between students and instructors in terms of preferred learning/teaching styles:

- Both students and instructors think students learn best when instructors use fun activities.
- Both students and instructors agree that students learn best when instructors let students discover answers.
- Both students and instructors like to use pair work and group work in class.
- Both students and instructors think that students learn best when instructors move around the class and help individual students.

It is important to note there are also significant contrasts. The table below lists some of the main points of variance between instructors and students.

Table 6 Major points of disagreement between students and instructors in terms of preferred learning/teaching styles:

- While many students perceive that they learn best when they have translation exercises, some instructors do not think that it helps them improve their English proficiency.
- Most of the students do not seem to be in favor of doing much homework while, the instructors tend to give research or other kind of assignments to students.

For further research, it would be good to use more studies using multiple methods and sources of information about student/ instructor attitudes. Future studies should include both qualitative interviews and direct observations of learners.

Despite its limitations, this is one of the studies which analyzing English language learning needs by comparing students' views with the views of Turkish English instructors. This study has shown some of the effective strategies and techniques for a communicative language learning / teaching process. In the light of this study, the course and the curriculum plannings for the following academic year are to be redesigned.

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Appendix 1**İNGİLİZCE DERSİ İÇİN ÖĞRENCİLERİN TERCİH ETTİKLERİ ÖĞRENME STİLLERİ VE ÖĞRETMENDEN BEKLENTİLERİ ANKETİ**

Cinsiyetiniz nedir? a) Kız b) Erkek

Ne tip bir okuldan geldiniz?

a) Özel Okuldan b) Devlet Okulundan c) Yurt Dışındaki Bir Okuldan

Ailenizde İngilizce bilen var mı? a) Evet b) Hayır

Aşağıda sıralanmış 32 ifadeye belirtilen değerlere göre 1'den 5'e kadar bir puan veriniz.

Kesinlikle Katılıyorum :5

Katılıyorum :4

Katılmıyorum :3

Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum :2

Fikrim Yok :1

		5	4	3	2	1
1.	İngilizce öğrenirken tek başıma çalışmayı tercih ederim.					
2.	Öğretmenin derste tamamen ders kitabına bağlı kalmasını isterim.					
3.	Öğretmenin fazla ödev vermesinin yararlı olduğunu düşünürüm.					
4.	Sınıf ortamında disiplinin öğrenmeye katkısı olduğuna inanırım.					
5.	Öğretmenin dersle ilgili açıklamaları Türkçe yapmasını tercih ederim.					
6.	Ders içinde yaptığım hataların öğretmen tarafından anında düzeltilmesi beni rahatsız eder.					
7.	İngilizce dersinde kaset çalar, cd ve bilgisayar kullanımının yararlı olduğunu düşünürüm.					
8.	İngilizce dilbilgisi kurallarını öğrenmekten hoşlanmam.					
9.	Öğretmenin sınıf içinde dolaşarak öğrencilere bireysel olarak yardım etmesini isterim.					
10.	Çeviri alıştırmaları yapmanın yararlı olduğunu düşünmüyorum.					

11.	İngilizce öğrenirken grup halinde çalışmayı tercih ederim.						
12.	Grup çalışmasında arkadaşlarımı kendim seçmek isterim.						
13.	Sadece duymakla kalmayıp kelimeleri gördüğümde daha iyi öğrenirim.						
14.	Eğer sorunun cevabını bilmiyorsa cevabı tahmin etmeyi tercih ederim.						
15.	İngilizce'yi Türk bir öğretmenden öğrenmeyi istemem.						
16.	Sınıf içinde samimi atmosfer beni motive eder.						
17.	Video ve televizyondan yararlanarak İngilizce öğrenmek hoşuma gider.						
18.	Sınıf dışında İngilizce pratik yapmak hoşuma gider.						
19.	Sınıf içindeki yazı çalışmalarında öğrencilerin birbirine yardım etmesini yararlı bulurum.						
20.	Öğretmenin öğrenmeyi eğlenceli hale getirmesi hoşuma gider.						
21.	Sınıf içinde öğrencilerin İngilizce konuşmak zorunda olması beni tedirgin eder.						
22.	Projelerdeki çalışma konularımı kendim seçmek isterim.						
23.	Grup içinde kız arkadaşlarımla çalışmayı tercih ederim.						
24.	Grup içinde erkek arkadaşlarımla çalışmayı tercih ederim.						
25.	Kütüphanede İngilizce çalışmayı severim.						
26.	Öğretmenin İngilizce araştırma ödevleri vermesini istemem.						
27.	Derste İngilizce gazete / dergi okuma çalışmaları yapmayı isterim.						
28.	Öğretmenin, soruların cevaplarını bulmama yardım etmesinden ziyade cevabı söylemesini tercih ederim.						
29.	Öğretmenin yardımcı kaynaklardan hazırladığı çalışma kağıtlarının faydalı olduğunu düşünmüyorum.						
30.	Hazırlanan proje ve ödevlerin panolarda sergilenmesi beni motive eder.						
31.	Derste İngilizce oyunlar oynamanın zaman kaybı olduğunu düşünürüm.						
32.	Sınıfta yapılan tekrar ve hatırlatma çalışmalarının gereksiz olduğunu düşünürüm.						

APPENDIX 2

INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS' PREFERRED ENGLISH LEARNING/TEACHING STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1. What's your sex? a) Female b) Male
- 2. How old are you?
- 3. How long have you been teaching English?

Please answer the following questions about your perceptions of students' preferred English learning styles in accordance with your experiences. Use rating scale:

1 = strongly disagree 3 = undecided
 2= disagree 4= agree 5 = strongly agree

		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Students do not like to express their opinions in class.					
2.	Students do not like to talk freely in English during the class.					
3.	Students learn effectively when classroom learning is fun.					
4.	I think it is an advantage to use Turkish when explaining classroom activities and assignments to students.					
5.	Students learn most effectively when working in same-sex groups.					
6.	I like students to work in pairs and small groups.					
7.	Students learn best when the instructor is very strict and controls the lesson.					
8.	Students learn best when the instructor gives tests and homework.					
9.	I try to correct all student mistakes promptly, including oral errors.					
10.	I like teaching English grammar and the rules of correct English.					
11.	My students learn best when I move around the class and help them individually.					
12.	Translation exercises help develop English proficiency.					
13.	Students learn best when the instructor lets them discover their own answers.					
14.	I ask students to correct their own work.					

15.	I like to use video and television in class.					
16.	I assign homework, which makes students read English newspapers or listen to English radio programs.					