



| Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi |

## Investigating Students' Views Regarding the Effectiveness of Teaching-Learning Processes Developed for 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English Course

### 9. Sınıf İngilizce Dersine Yönelik Geliştirilen Öğretme-Öğrenme Süreçlerinin Etkiliğine Dair Öğrenci Görüşlerinin İncelenmesi<sup>1</sup>

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<b>Keywords</b> 1. Teaching-learning processes 2. Teaching English as foreign language 3. Effective language teaching 4. Action research 5. Views of students	<b>Abstract</b> <i>Purpose:</i> This study aims to investigate students' views regarding the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes designed to achieve the objectives set in the 9 <sup>th</sup> grade English curriculum. To this end, teaching-learning processes were prepared according to the objectives of the first four themes of the ninth grade English curriculum. <i>Design/Methodology/Approach:</i> This study adopted action research. Participants were selected through convenient sampling method. 52 ninth graders from two different classes were selected to implement teaching-learning processes. The implementation process lasted for 15 weeks. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with 24 students, 12 from each class, in groups of six students after the implementations. The focus group interviews were conducted via semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher. Data were analyzed through descriptive analysis using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. <i>Findings:</i> The data obtained through interviews showed that students were satisfied with the teaching-learning processes. Students believed that their speaking and writing skills improved the most and they stated that the presentations were of great importance in this improvement. Students' listening comprehension skills improved more than their reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension was the least improved skill, which can be attributed to the reading-focused instruction they received in the secondary school. <i>Highlights:</i> The results of the study revealed that in order to ensure high-quality and effective foreign language teaching, teachers should prepare their own teaching-learning process according to the objectives set in the curriculum rather than following the course books and materials provided to them. In this way, teachers not only free themselves from the limitations and shortcomings of course books and teacher's books but also teach more effectively with the teaching-learning processes designed according to the characteristics and needs of their schools and students. <b>Öz</b> <i>Çalışmanın amacı:</i> Bu çalışmanın amacı ortaöğretim 9. sınıf İngilizce dersi öğretim programındaki hedefleri gerçekleştirmeye yönelik düzenlenen öğretim öğrenme süreçlerinin ne derece etkili olduğunu öğrenci görüşlerine göre değerlendirmek olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu amaçla araştırmacı tarafından 9. sınıf İngilizce dersi öğretim programının ilk dört ünitesinde yer alan hedefleri gerçekleştirmeye yönelik öğretim-öğrenme süreçleri hazırlanmış ve uygulanmıştır. <i>Materyal ve Yöntem:</i> Eylem araştırması yöntemi kullanılan bu çalışmaya iki farklı sınıfta öğrenim gören 52 dokuzuncu sınıf öğrencisi katılmıştır. Katılımcılar kolay ulaşılabilir örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenmiştir. Uygulamalar 15 hafta sürmüştür. Uygulamaların sonunda her iki sınıftan 12 toplamda 24 öğrenci ile altı öğrenciden oluşan gruplar halinde yarı yapılandırılmış odak grup görüşmeleri gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler MAXQDA programı kullanılarak betimsel analiz yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. <i>Bulgular:</i> Araştırmada toplanan veriler öğrencilerin genel olarak uygulanan öğretim-öğrenme süreçlerinden memnun olduğunu göstermektedir. Öğrenciler en çok konuşma ve yazma becerilerinde ilerlediklerini düşünmektedirler. Öğrenciler bu ilerlemede hazırladıkları sunumların büyük öneme sahip olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Öğrencilerin dinlediğini anlama becerileri okuduklarını anlama becerilerinden daha fazla gelişmiştir. Okuma becerileri öğrencilerin en az geliştikleri beceri olmuştur. Bu durum öğrencilerin ortaokulda okuma becerileri temelinde bir eğitim almalarına atfedilebilir. <i>Önemli Vurgular:</i> Çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlar, daha nitelikli ve etkili bir yabancı dil eğitimi için öğretmenlerin kendilerine verilen kitaplardaki materyallere bağlı kalmak yerine, ilgili kademenin öğretim programında yer alan hedeflere göre kendi öğretim-öğrenme süreçlerini tasarlamalarının önemini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Böylece öğretmenler yeterli bulmadıkları ders kitaplarının sınırlayıcılığından kurtulup öğrencilerinin ilgili, ihtiyaç ve seviyesine uygun öğretim-öğrenme süreçleri tasarlayabilirler.
<b>Anahtar Kelimeler</b> 1. Öğretim-öğrenme süreçleri 2. Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi 3. Etkili yabancı dil öğretimi 4. Eylem araştırması 5. Öğrenci görüşleri	
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## INTRODUCTION

The increase in communication opportunities, the spread of the internet, and the ease of international travel have made the distance between societies almost obsolete. The rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic gives us an indication of how the world becomes so small in terms of interaction. Another issue pandemic teaches us is that the Internet makes it easy to communicate with others around the world. Online courses allow people from different cities and countries to share the same environment. Many business, health, and political meetings are also conveniently held online. However, this pandemic and online communication have shown that people need more than just the Internet to make the most of technological opportunities and communicate easily with people around the world. All these changes that people are going through make us realize once again how important it is to know a foreign language.

Teaching foreign languages has been a priority in Türkiye's education policy for a long time and English is accepted as the predominant foreign language in primary, secondary, and higher education in Türkiye. The rise of the U.S. as a global superpower after World War II and the impact of the British colonies contributed to English becoming the most spoken and most taught language, and this widespread acceptance of English was one of the reasons for this situation in Türkiye. Moreover, the fact that English is widely used in commerce, tourism, science, and technology makes English the dominant foreign language in most countries, including Türkiye. For example, 90% of students in Europe learn English as their first foreign language.

The annual school hours devoted to teaching English in Türkiye are almost equal to the European average. Assuming that an average school year lasts 35 weeks, students in Türkiye attend 210, 490, and 560 hours of English classes in primary, secondary, and high schools, respectively (MoNE, 2021). Students completing their twelve years of compulsory education have approximately 1260 hours of English classes. According to the Cambridge Assessment (2022), every 200 hours of instruction corresponds to a level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This means that every student in Türkiye should graduate from high school with a C2 English proficiency level. However, studies conducted in Türkiye have shown that 90% of students graduate from high school with an A1 level of English (British Council & TEPAV, 2013).

Another indicator that can be used to better understand the level of English in Türkiye is the English Proficiency Index (EPI), which was prepared and published by Education First, an institution that has language schools in more than 112 countries. According to EPI, with 478 points, Türkiye ranked 70th out of 112 countries (Education First, 2021). With this score, Türkiye falls far behind countries that are at the same economic and social level. Moreover, Türkiye's score and ranking have declined over the last five years. The report, released along with the rankings, claims that the country's priorities have changed since Türkiye's hopes of joining the European Union faded, that English instruction in schools focuses mainly on grammar and translation, and that secondary school graduates have very low English proficiency, often requiring intensive English preparation courses before entering University (Education First, 2019).

These results show that although a lot of effort and money has been invested in foreign language teaching, especially English, in Türkiye, the desired results cannot be achieved. In order to increase the effectiveness of English teaching in Türkiye, teachers must take responsibility. In order to create a high-quality and productive teaching-learning environment, teachers should reflect curriculum into the course, adapt teaching-learning processes to students' needs, prepare teaching materials, and develop appropriate assessment tools (UNESCO, 2017). However, the studies conducted in the field show that the teachers who implement the curriculum in schools have very limited curriculum knowledge (Doğan & Semerci, 2016), do not know how to implement the curriculum (Akdeniz & Paniç, 2012), cannot prepare appropriate environments for the objectives stated in the curriculum (Güneş & Baki, 2012; Erdoğan et al., 2015) and only use the curriculum to prepare annual plans (Dursun et al., 2017).

Teachers generally use textbooks which were supposed to be prepared according to the curriculum rather than the curriculum itself to guide the teaching-learning process, and they follow these books in their lessons. However, the English course books prepared and sent by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) are inadequate in many respects (Erdoğan et al., 2015; Dursun et al., 2017; Çelik, 2011; ERG, 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Büyükduman, 2005; Güven & Saracaloğlu, 2020; Öz & Erdamar, 2019; Özmat, 2017; Özer & Korkmaz, 2016; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015; EARGED, 2008). And the teacher's books that teachers relied on to teach were reported to be insufficient to guide teachers (Keleş et al., 2012; Çelik, 2011; Güven & Saracaloğlu, 2020; EARGED, 2008). Teachers mostly use teachers' books to write the topic on the class register which they require to fill in (Dursun et al., 2017).

The shortcomings of the English textbooks mentioned in the literature can be summarized as follows: they do not have connection with real life situations and do not contain language used in everyday life. The textbooks do not take into account the cultural characteristics of the target language (Çelik, 2011). The exercises in the books are insufficient (Büyükduman, 2005), the same throughout the book, and cannot promote critical, reflective and creative thinking (Çelik, 2011). They are not consistent with the objectives of the curriculum. The order of the subjects does not follow the principle of "from the known to unknown" (Büyükduman, 2005; Dursun et al., 2017).

Considering these shortcomings, teachers would prefer to use to additional supplementary books. However, it is forbidden and both ethically and economically inappropriate to make students buy these additional sourcebooks. Therefore, teachers who are responsible for teaching should select, organize, implement, and monitor external experiences according to the characteristics of students and the teaching-learning process (Senemoğlu, 2013). In other words, teachers should prepare their own teaching-learning processes. With their own teaching-learning processes, teachers not only free themselves from the limitations and

shortcomings of course books and teacher's books but also teach more effectively with the teaching-learning processes designed according to the characteristics and needs of their schools and students.

Based on these, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes prepared to fulfill the objectives of the 9th grade English curriculum. To this end, the following questions were asked.

1. What are the students' opinions about the teaching-learning processes in general?
2. What are the students' opinions about the teaching-learning processes designed to improve listening comprehension?
3. What are the students' opinions about the teaching-learning processes designed to improve reading comprehension?
4. What are the students' opinions about the teaching-learning processes designed to improve speaking skills?
5. What are the students' opinions about the teaching-learning processes designed to improve writing skills?

## METHOD

This study, aiming to investigate the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes prepared to fulfill the objective of the 9th grade English curriculum, was conducted as an action research. Action research, also known as teacher research, is a systematic research that aims to gather information about how teachers teach and students learn in teaching-learning environments (Mills & Gay, 2019). Action research aims to solve the problems that teachers encounter daily, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the instruction. These studies can be more meaningful when teachers want to improve their teaching, do something better, and fix a problem that occurs in the classroom environment (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In addition, if teachers plan and conduct their own action research, they may discover more effective ways to improve their skills. (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, action research is a useful tool for developing effective lesson plans and teaching-learning processes (Stringer, 2007; Stringer et al., 2010).

In this study, one of the researchers, who has been teaching for more than a decade, wanted to find a solution to a problem he encounters in foreign language teaching in Türkiye. In order to provide solutions to this problem, the researchers aimed to develop an action plan, conduct it, and present conclusions. Thus, through action research, the researchers developed and implemented teaching-learning processes that could be used and improved by others.

### Study Group

Convenient sampling was used to determine participants. Teachers can use action research to improve their students' knowledge and skills by developing student-centered and flexible teaching-learning processes (Stringer, Christensen, & Baldwin, 2010). Therefore, convenient sampling method is one of the most appropriate sampling methods for action research planned and conducted for this purpose. In the convenient sampling method, researchers work with a group that they can easily reach and collect information from (Creswell, 2007; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Mills & Gay, 2019). Thus, for this study, two 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes in "Konya Anadolu İmam Hatip" High School, the school where the teacher researcher teaches, were selected for the implementations. In order to determine the groups, a cognitive entry behavior test developed by the researcher was administered during the first week of the school year and two out of five equal groups were selected.

While one of the classes was taught by teacher researcher, an English who has a 17-year teaching experience taught the other class in order to maintain objectivity and avoid researcher bias. The other teacher was informed about the research and teaching learning processes to be implemented. Moreover, they met every other day, if not every day, to talk about the implementations.

### Data Collection Tool

In order to find out the students' opinions about the teaching-learning processes, a semi-structured focus group interview form was developed by the researchers. To develop the interview form, a question list that was appropriate for the purpose of the study and the level of the students was created. The question list, along with the problem statements of the study, was sent to English teachers, curriculum development specialists, and assessment and evaluation specialists to get their opinions. After receiving feedback from the experts, an initial version of the interview form was prepared. The initial version of the form was tested on five 9th grade students who were not part of the action research groups to determine if it was understandable and appropriate for the student's level. After the implementation, necessary changes were made and the form was given its final form.

### Data Collection Process

The teaching-learning processes implemented for the study were developed before the start of the 2021-2022 school year and expert opinions were taken regarding whether they are developed in accordance with the teaching-learning process development principles and were appropriate for the objectives of the curriculum. The intervention was implemented with two groups for 15 weeks by two teachers in each class. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted following the implementation.

Students were randomly selected for focus group interviews and four focus group interviews (six students each) were conducted. The interviews were conducted in an empty classroom assigned by school administrators and lasted 18-25 minutes. With the consent of the students, the interviews were audio recorded.

## Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by using a deciphering software. The researcher listened to all recordings sentence by sentence to correct any errors that occurred during the deciphering process. During this listening process, the researcher also performed pre-coding, also referred to as verbal coding by Bernauer (2015), which aims to identify important parts by listening to the audio recordings.

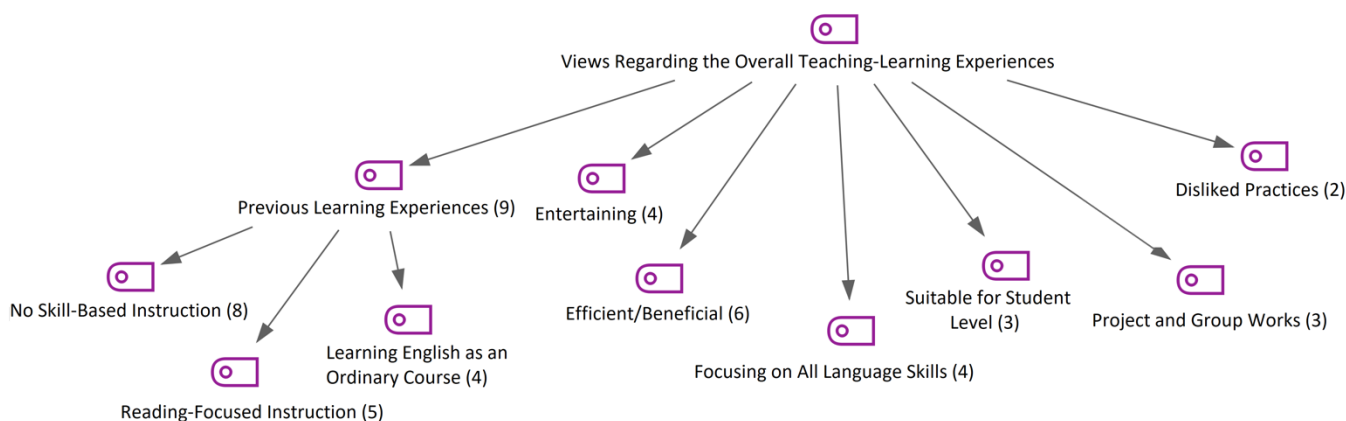
The transcribed and corrected data were uploaded into MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software and analyzed using descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis presents an organized data set to the researcher by categorizing the data at the basic level (Saldana, 2016). In the descriptive analysis, the data were categorized into predetermined themes such as research questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In the present study, data were analyzed under the listening, reading, speaking, writing, skills themes and the views regarding the practices in general. Furthermore, the data were supported with direct quotes. For direct quotes, participating students were ranked from one to 24 and given the code names S1, S2, etc.

To ensure the internal consistency and reliability of the study, the obtained data were coded by another coder and inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa. Inter-coder reliability is a comparison of codes independently coded by two coders. This agreement provides important information about the consistency and reliability of qualitative studies. Therefore, creating a coding table that informs the second coder about the research and codes can provide a more reliable and consistent study (Creswell, 2016). This study benefited from an adapted version of the code table developed by Guest et al. (2006) and suggested by Creswell (2016). In this code table, the name of the code, its description, and an example citation to the code were provided. In this way, a guide was provided to the second coder.

The data coded by the researcher and the second coder were combined in MAXQDA. The Cohen's Kappa inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated using this software and reported as 0.89. An agreement above 0.80 indicates perfect agreement between coders (Creswell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014).

## FINDINGS

### Students' Views Regarding the Overall Teaching-Learning Processes



**Figure 1. Students' views regarding the overall effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes**

As it can be seen from the model (figure 1) revealed at the end of the analysis, students mainly mentioned their previous learning experiences when they reported their views about the overall teaching-learning processes.

Regarding their previous learning experiences students stated their previous teachers had focused only on reading skill in the English classes and almost completely ignored other language skills. They also expressed that no skills-based instruction was provided and that this was the reason why their awareness of language learning was limited. Moreover, they mentioned that their learning experiences consisted of learning English out of the real-life context. They emphasized that language courses were conducted similar to other lessons rather than following the language acquisition procedures.

*"...Since we were solving multiple choice questions previously, I mean, you know the word and you answer the question. There was no such speaking, writing, listening. This year was pretty good..." (S18)*

*"...You know we separated (the language) like speaking, writing, listening, it wasn't like this in the secondary school. We didn't write at all or didn't do presentations. This year, when we did it in this way we studied them in a pretty detailed way, spared time for each (of the skills)..." (S17)*

*"...In eighth grade, we were studying textbooks and it was completely exam-focused and (we felt) as if it had not been English but a different lesson. I mean, it was not like a language but when we started ninth grade, I felt that English is a language..." (S8)*

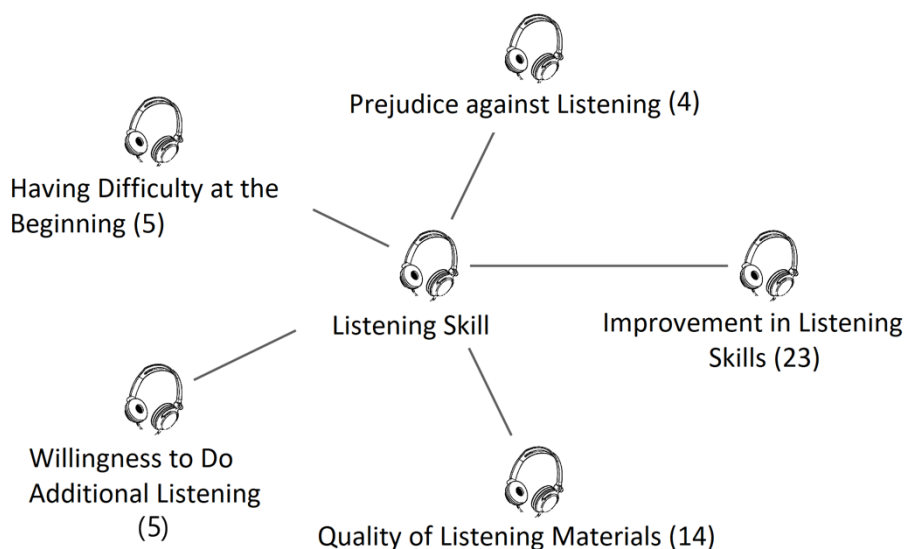
The results revealed that students' views regarding the overall teaching-learning processes were positive, their English proficiency was improved, and they started to love learning English. They stated that the teaching-learning processes implemented were efficient/beneficial, entertaining and suitable for level. Students also expressed that conducting a skills-based English lesson contributed to their development, and they learned better in this way. Moreover, students said that the project works were also important in terms of improving their language proficiencies.

*"... I think, I need to learn English very well for my future and conducting the lessons in this way has been very good for us. It would be quite be quite ordinary if we followed MoNE book. But this is better..." (S11)*

*"...the project studies, theaters (role-plays), presentations... I really had a very good term. We had lots of fun with our friends..." (S14)*

In summary, it was found out that students generally liked the implemented teaching-learning processes and these practices helped them develop a positive attitude toward English. Students compared these practices with their previous learning experiences and they argued that previously they learned English in a way similar to other subjects and they did not focus on language skills other than reading.

### Students' Views Regarding the Teaching-Learning Processes for Listening Skills



**Figure 2. Students' views regarding the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes for listening skills**

As can be seen in the results of the analysis, almost all of the students think that their listening skills were improved with the implementations that were carried out. They shared their prejudice against listening skill which dates back to their secondary school experiences. Students mentioned that although they thought understanding listening materials was impossible no matter how hard they tried, their views started to change as the implementations progressed and they realized that they can do it. Participants indicated that listening skill was neglected in their previous language learning experiences. However, after the implementation of the teaching-learning processes they began to watch movies in their original language with subtitles, moreover they started watching the videos that teenagers frequently watch such as unboxing videos without using any subtitles or translation apps. Some of the views of the students are as follows:

*"...My listening skill has developed greatly, I feel it. For example, I watch movies in English. Even when I use Turkish subtitles, I remember those words all the time, I mean I (can) understand now..." (S2)*

*"...In listening sometimes, they speak fast or so. At first, I get confused, but then when I start understanding, it feels good. That sense of understanding (you know), it makes me so happy..." (S11)*

Students indicated that they had difficulty at first because they did not engage enough in listening in their daily lives, but they explained that this difficulty disappeared as they continued to listen.

Students cited the quality of the listening materials as a reason for their enjoyment of the listening activities and the development of their listening skills. They reported that in their previous listening experiences the sound was muffled, the pronunciation of the recorded people was poor, not enough attention was paid to intonation, so they were bored by the monotonous speech, and last but not least, an authentic context for listening was missing. However, the listening materials that were presented in this intervention were recordings of native speakers whose pronunciation and intonation was good. Therefore, the students were engaged in listening, and they paid better attention while listening. Some of the views of the participants are given below;

“...they were speaking as if they were forced to speak in the listening materials in the books distributed by the school. They were speaking as if the microphones had been in their throat. But in the listening activities we did (this year), it is a more natural English and more listenable English. I understand, and such, it is a very good feeling...” (S7)

“...Sir, they were speaking as if they had been reading a text, like they had been reading a plain text. But in the ones in this year, the intonations and such were quite natural. They were like the speech from the people in the real life...” (S9)

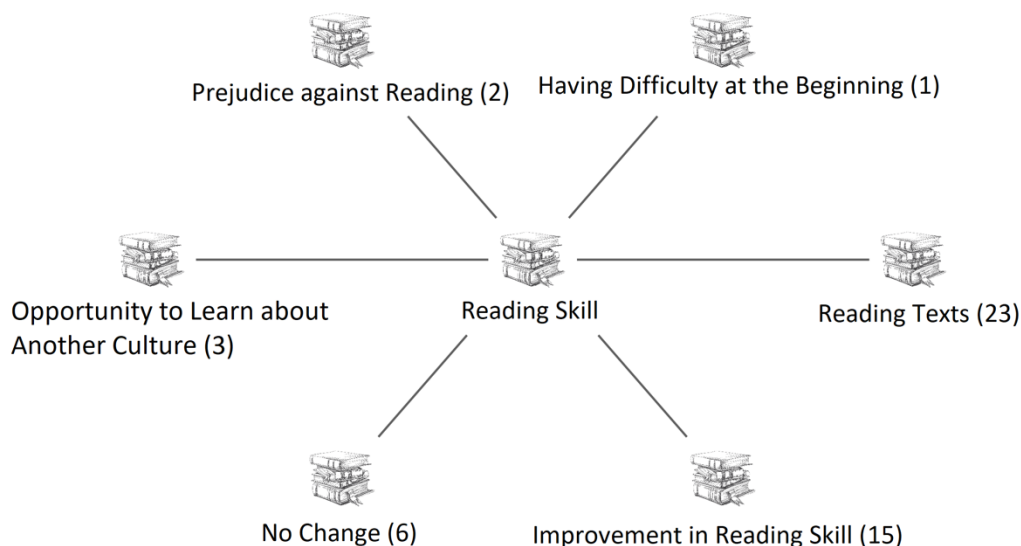
Several students expressed a constant desire to listen to English, and do additional listening exercises as they began to understand what they were hearing in the listening exercises conducted as part of this study and enjoyed it.

“...This year, as we constantly listen, I developed a desire to listen. I always listen to English songs, podcasts, YouTube videos and such. I pay attention to the pronunciation in these and try to pronounce myself as well. I look up the words and such...” (S16)

“...You recommended BBC podcasts, I downloaded them, and I listen to them when I am on the bus to or from the school. It makes me happy to understand a content that is produced in different countries...” (S4)

In summary, it was found out that students do not have enough previous listening experience and since the materials or recordings they listened were lower quality materials, they developed a prejudice during their secondary school education. This led them to have difficulties in listening activities at first. However, as they proceeded with listening activities and noticed that they can understand these, their prejudice against listening disappeared, their listening skill improved, and their willingness to do additional listening increased. Students mentioned the quality of the listening materials as the reason for this.

### Students' Views Regarding the Effectiveness of the Teaching-Learning Processes Reading Skills



**Figure 3. Students' Views Regarding the Effectiveness of the Teaching-Learning Processes Reading Skills**

As can be seen from the model above, reading skills were the least improved area according to the students. Even though they felt they had made progress, they indicated that this progress was not as visible as other skills. Students explained this by saying that they did reading activities in secondary school, and since the other language skills were not emphasized enough their time was used for reading as well. Another important point mentioned by the students was that the High School Entrance Exam (HSEE) only measured reading comprehension. Therefore, they mainly focused on this skill throughout their eighth grade. Some of the students claimed that there was no change in their reading comprehension. Similarly, the reading skill was the skill that they experienced the least difficulty at the beginning of the instruction under the scope of this study. Some of the views of the students on this issue are as follows:

“...Actually, we did reading during the secondary school education, that is, there was not big difference, when you understand the main idea of the text you can answer the questions easily...” (S17)

“...Because we have been doing this (reading) since the secondary school it was not difficult for me, I am already good at this. Therefore, from my point of view nothing much has changed...” (S21)

Some of the students stated that they improved in terms of reading skill although it was not as much as the other skills. These students said that previously they used online dictionaries while using social media or the Internet, but now they do not need to do so. They added that understanding a foreign language while reading created a sense of satisfaction for them. The students who felt that their reading skills had improved compared to last year commented as follows:

“...I have never read English books, but I enjoyed reading the English story books you sent a lot and I felt that I understand (them)...” (S8)

“...I follow the current TV series, and there are websites where theories (on TV series) are shared. Of course, these are not in Turkish. First time ever, this year, I noticed that I understand these. I was able to read them without using translation (tools)...” (S12)

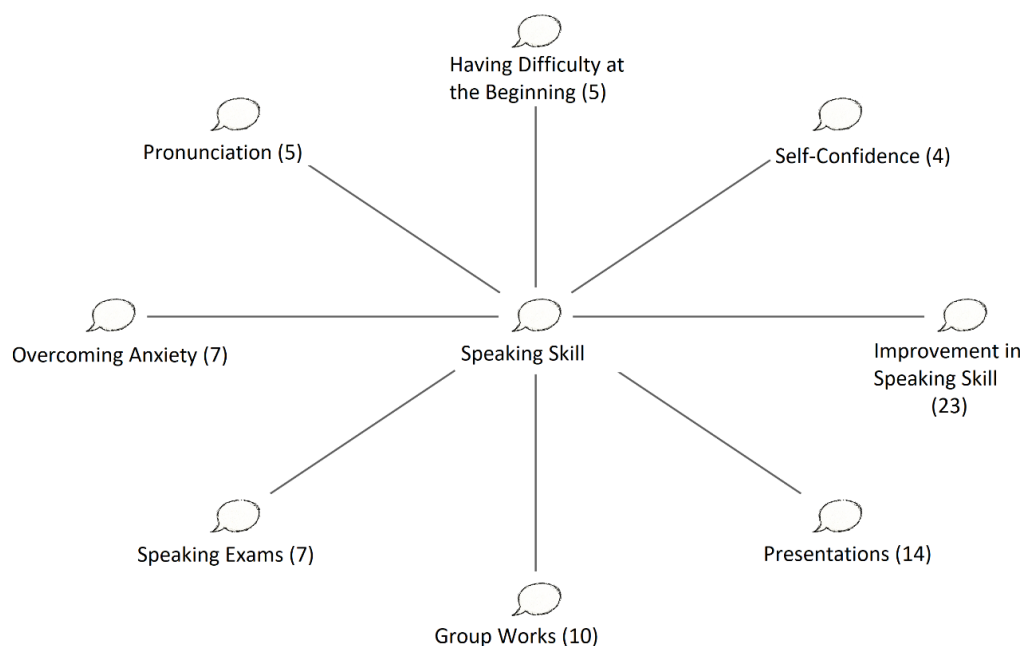
Students who shared their views on the reading texts used in the teaching-learning processes, expressed that the texts they read in secondary school were too easy and not fluent so the reading process was not fun. However, according to students, the texts used in this study were interesting, entertaining, fluent, and engaging. Students asserted that as the books were written by the native speakers of the target language, they had the opportunity to learn about another culture as well. They mentioned that the texts were slightly above their level, and this was a challenge that led them to study more and improve more. Their views about the texts are as follows:

“...As you know, I came (to this school) two weeks later with additional placement and we had already started the book at the school I came from. So, when I compare the reading passages in the book with the ones you brought, there is a quite obvious difference in the quality. The reading passages you brought were more fun and engaging...” (S9)

“...The texts you brought were more difficult, therefore they encouraged us to learn. Also, they gave us the opportunity to learn about different cultures...” (S11)

In Summary, reading comprehension is the skill that students thought they experienced less difficulty at the beginning and it is also the domain that they felt they improved the least. This can be attributed to the dominance of reading skill in their previous learning experiences as well as to the HSEE. Students thought the reading passages used in the teaching-learning processes were enjoyable, interesting, and challenging. They also stated that they had the opportunity to learn about different cultures.

#### Students' Views Regarding the Effectiveness of Teaching-Learning Processes for Speaking Skills



**Figure 4. Students' views regarding the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process for speaking skills**

As shown in the model extracted at the end of the data analysis, almost all of the students thought that their speaking skills improved. Students reported that they struggled and were anxious at the beginning because they did not focus on speaking skill in their previous learning experiences. However, as the speaking skill activities progressed, they figured out that they could form longer sentences, felt more relaxed in speaking, and they could speak with more confidence in both prepared and unprepared speaking contexts. According to students, as they experience the feelings of expressing themselves in another language and being able to maintain a conversation in that language, they got a sense of satisfaction and their willingness to speak increased. Some of the students' views that support this finding can be found below:

“...Speaking activities really work well. For example, you cannot speak a language that you don't know in front of a few people. But, in speaking, we were making presentations there, also we were stating opinions on the topic. At first, it was difficult for me but later it was easier. I mean, our speaking became better...” (S2)

“...At first, I was stuck like errrr, I mean I couldn't say anything. But recently, in an event, I told whatever came to my mind, I noticed that I was quite able to speak...” (S5)

Other points that students mentioned in terms of speaking skill were being able to control their anxiety at the beginning stages, and feeling more confident. They stated that in the exercises on speaking skills they overcame the anxiety they experienced at the beginning and they felt more relaxed while speaking. They revealed that as a result of the development of speaking skills and the relief, their self-confidence increased, and they were able to speak without being scared of making mistakes. Some of the related student views are as follows:

*"...For example, when we made presentations for the first time everybody was so excited that even one of our friends' hands were shaking and such. One of our friends left the presentation unfinished and such. But now we are quite relieved, we go and speak there..." (S17)*

*"...At first, I was stressed when making a presentation or when I am speaking. Because, we shouldn't read (from the PowerPoint), we are expected to speak ourselves. I was definitely stressed at the beginning, but later I wasn't stressed, I mean I was relieved. So, it turned out to be quite good..." (S20)*

*"...These activities are good in terms of our self-confidence as well. I had so much fun in all activities..." (S14)*

Students' view varied regarding pronunciation, an important subskill of speaking skills. Several students stated that their pronunciation had improved significantly. On the other hand, there exist students who accepted that they still make mistakes in the pronunciation of the majority of the words, and they wished this issue to be further addressed in the following courses.

*"...Our pronunciation was also developed quite thanks to the presentations, role-plays, speaking in the lesson..." (S8)*

*"...Our pronunciation, for example, is better compared to the beginning of the year, but I wish it was a little better (than now). (I wish) we had done more studies on this topic..." (S19)*

*"...I still think that my pronunciation is very bad..." (S7)*

The most favored application by the students among the teaching-learning activities conducted to achieve the speaking skill objectives was making presentations. In the focus group interviews students revealed that those presentations greatly improved them. Accordingly, they mentioned that they improved their public speaking skills and that their English communication skills also improved. Students shared the contributions of the presentations they did as they researched different topics and cultures in the target language, they did writing practices before expressing their thoughts, and also they had lots of fun during these presentations.

*"...We were making presentations, for example, sir, it was very good. It improved as a lot, I think it prepared us to the university and such..." (S13)*

*"...By making presentations, we presented a movie or we introduced the culture of a different city. We did quite a research on that topic. We had lots of fun both during the preparation and the presentation..." (S16)*

*"...For example, the presentations we made improved us a lot. It was very nice to speak in front of people in a language that we don't know. We were also doing writing while preparing the presentations. Also, for example, at first, I was trying to memorize, in the last one I got ready, went there and spoke. That turned out very good..." (S21)*

Another issue on which students reported varied views was group work. They stated that group work was highly beneficial, and they learned how to work as a team. They shared their opinions as they took responsibility in group work and worked well in groups. According to their views, they were able to accomplish many tasks that they wouldn't be able to do individually and collaborated to compensate for each other's deficiencies. Students who preferred individual work to group work, on the other hand, expressed that reaching a consensus in a group was difficult; they had difficulties in scheduling meeting times when they had to study after school hours. These students also reported that they would feel guilty if they made any mistakes in group work, because the consequences affect the whole group. Some of the views can be seen below:

*"...I prefer individual study. Because when I make a mistake, it affects the whole group and I feel that I violate the rights of my friends. I mean, if I make a mistake (in individual study), only I am affected. For example, in the first group study I couldn't make the presentation because of my excitement..." (S5)*

*"...I cannot work when it is individual. I (just) can't, I always postpone. But in group work, I take responsibility. My friends make up for my deficiencies. I make up for their deficiencies..." (S8)*

Another point students mentioned regarding speaking skills was the speaking exams that were administered before and after the study in addition to the ones done as follow-up exams. The students asserted that as they did not take any similar exams before, they were quite stressed during these exams, and they felt bad. Among the factors that bothered them, the students included the audio recording during the exams and the fact that the teacher who administered the exam was the same teacher who taught the classes. Below are some of the students' opinions about this

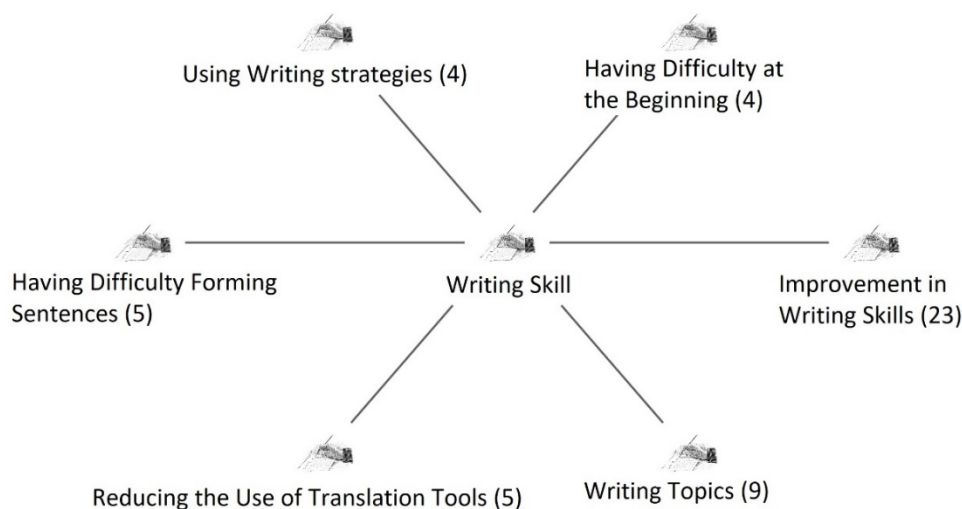
*"...I was very excited when you first did the speaking exam. In that huge room only you and me. You are audio recording and such. I was overly anxious. I felt myself bad..." (S10)*

*"...I was so stressed that, you are, like, in front of me, asking something, I mean, even if it is in my mind, at that time it goes away from my mind because of the excitement..." (S17)*



In summary, in terms of speaking skills, the students stated that they were improved, they overcame their excitement, and their self-confidence increased thanks to the activities conducted to achieve the objectives of the speaking skill. They reported varying opinions on pronunciation. Some of the students reported that their pronunciation improved, while some others said that they couldn't improve themselves enough in this field and they needed further activities. Group work was found as another controversial topic among the students. Some of the students declared that group work was better and beneficial, whereas, some other students revealed that they would prefer individual work. In terms of speaking the most disturbing situation for students was speaking tests. They expressed that they were stressed out and felt nervous.

#### Students' Views Regarding the Effectiveness of the Teaching-Learning Processes for Writing Skills



**Figure 5. Students' views regarding the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes for writing skills**

As shown in the extracted model for writing skill, at the end of the analysis, almost all students indicated that their writing skill had improved. According to the students, they had difficulties at the beginning; they could not gather their ideas, or express these ideas using the correct structures of sentences. However, as the implementation proceeded, they were pleased with the research processes, presenting a product at the end of the research process, and the fact that this product belongs to them made them happy as well. They added that they progressed a lot compared to the beginning of the implementation processes, and they started to like writing after the implementation processes. Some of the student views can be seen below:

*"...I think that my English including all skills improved this year, but the skill that I most improved and progressed is the writing skill. At first, I experienced difficulties, but (later), for example, you made a quiz and I wrote easily, and I got a good grade. This made me very happy. I was excited by this..." (S17)*

*"...I love writing too much. I enjoy it a lot. Producing something, and doing it myself felt much better. Feeling that you can produce is very good..." (S11)*

Students indicated that they did very little or no writing during their secondary school years. They also said that they had difficulty organizing their ideas and forming sentences at first. They recounted their experiences as they used translation tools similar to what they did before because of these difficulties at the beginning. However, as they progressed with the implementation process, they started to dislike the sentences suggested by the translation tool and found that the sentences that they had written were better. The views of the students on the difficulties at the first stages and the use of translation tools are below:

*"...As we didn't write at all previously, I didn't know what to do. I wrote a text in Turkish and translated through a translation tool and of course you've noticed this. But, the fact that you didn't get angry with me and provided guidance encouraged me to write..." (S4)*

*"...At the beginning stages I was always using translation tools, and I noticed the last time I wrote I didn't feel the need to use translation tool at all. I wanted to check one sentence, and I didn't like it (translation) so I decided that the one I wrote was better..." (S7)*

Some of the students who explained that they made progress in terms of writing, that they felt more relaxed and wrote better, attributed the reason to the techniques they were taught. Students stated that these techniques helped them organize their ideas as well as in terms of how and where to write.

*"...with the techniques you have introduced our writing got easier. Previously, we didn't know where to start or how to write..." (S12)*

*"...In the last topic, for example, our teacher drew clusters on the board and connected the topics to each other. In fact, this gave us clues in terms of how to write and how to organize the topics..." (S21)*

Students asserted different opinions about the writing topics provided to them. A specific topic could be interesting for some students while others found it boring or expressed that they were having difficulties. Additionally, students mentioned that they would rather have written about a topic that requires a research process before writing than the topics that require sharing ideas. They revealed that they felt more comfortable with these topics, and they were also satisfied more. Some of the students' views can be seen below:

*"...For example, we wrote about movies or we introduced the cities. These were very good but I had difficulties in the unit which was about nature. I mean, I couldn't write..." (S10)*

*"I think, I write better in topics where I do research before writing. I think, I write longer and better texts when you (I) do research like this..." (S15)*

In summary, the students stated that although, at first, they experienced difficulties regarding writing skills and couldn't even make sentences without using a translation tool, as they did more writing activities their writing skills improved and they started expressing themselves better in writing. Moreover, students said that the techniques they learned for writing helped them a lot and made the process easier

## DISCUSSION

When commenting on the implementations, students mentioned their previous learning experiences and indicated that they learn English as an ordinary subject rather than a language. The studies conducted in Türkiye on the problems of English Language Teaching (ELT) also show that one of the most common problems in ELT is the problem of teaching English as an ordinary subject and not as a language, or as a means of communication (Özer & Korkmaz, 2016; Paker, 2012; Tatar, 2010). Moreover, students expressed that English courses in secondary school were not designed to teach four language skills and were only based on reading, grammar, and vocabulary. In secondary school, especially in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, because of the high school entrance examination, teachers were expected to focus on this exam. This causes teachers to ignore other skills. However, students' views show that students were not pleased with this teaching approach which is thought to be their own good and they want to learn English as a communication language with all skills. Students also revealed that since the lessons cover all four skills, their motivation to learn English has increased and they have become aware that they are learning a language.

Students expressed positive opinions regarding the teaching-learning processes designed to teach listening comprehension, and almost all students feel that their listening comprehension skills have improved. Some students reported that at first, they had difficulties, prejudices, and anxieties about listening because they were taught listening comprehension skills in secondary school. However, after a while, when students realized that they could understand the audio and video materials used in the listening activities, their anxieties decreased and disappeared. In his input hypothesis, Krashen (1989; 1995) stated that the more students are exposed to comprehensible input, the more their anxiety will decrease, and language acquisition is eventually accompanied by the reduction of the affective filter, which is the main obstacle to language acquisition. Furthermore, the teaching-learning processes prepared by teachers should be appropriate for the level of the students and arouse a sense of satisfaction in them (Ertürk, 2017/1972; Tyler, 1969). Therefore, they could motivate students to learn by giving them a sense of achievement.

The most highlighted issue regarding the teaching-learning processes used to teach listening comprehension skills is the quality of the listening materials. The students asserted that they weren't able to understand the speaker, that the pronunciation of the speakers was not understandable, that the dialogues were very artificial and had nothing to do with real life situations. Therefore, they did not enjoy the listening activities. However, about the listening activities they participated in this semester, they reported that the pronunciation and intonation of the speakers were very good, that they had no difficulty understanding the listening materials and that the materials were authentic. The studies that have been conducted in the field of listening comprehension have revealed that the listening comprehension skills of students improve significantly when students deal with authentic listening materials (Sabet & Mahsefat, 2012; Putri et al., 2018; Woottipong, 2014; Dewi, 2018; Miller, 2003; Morley, 2008). Moreover, neglecting the authenticity leads to neglecting spontaneity (Ur, 1992). Since the listening materials that lack spontaneity do not attract students' attention sufficiently, it may become difficult to improve students' achievement. Furthermore, authentic materials create awareness of the culture in which the language is spoken (Peck, 2008), and allow students to be exposed to the daily use of the target language (Peacock, 1997).

A well-prepared listening material should attract students' attention (Brown, 2006), be entertaining for them to pay attention, include the culture of the language, be appropriate for their level and improve them, have proper accent, pronunciation, and intonation, have high sound quality, and have a right amount of input (Wilson, 2008). Nowadays, there are many high-quality and educational listening materials created by many official and unofficial institutions, and various content providers. Teachers should find, adapt, and use these materials while preparing their own teaching-learning processes. Teachers, therefore, could increase the quality of their teaching by using interesting and authentic materials that are appropriate to the objectives, instead of the materials that do not arouse students' interest and do not motivate them to listen and learn.

The skill that students improved the least was reading comprehension skill. This is primarily due to the fact that students had language instruction focused on reading comprehension in their previous learning experiences. In order to increase students' high school entrance exam scores, teachers are forced to focus on reading comprehension skill and the grammar and vocabulary sub-skills, especially in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the expense of neglecting other skills. This increases students' reading skills while decreasing others.

Reading texts are the most frequently mentioned topic when it comes to the teaching-learning processes designed to teach reading comprehension. Students expressed that the reading texts were high quality, original, and challenging, and they enjoyed reading because the texts were interesting. Studies have shown that original texts used for foreign language instruction improve reading skills more effectively than simplified texts (Beresova, 2015; Berardo, 2006; Guo, 2012; Namaziandost et al., 2022). In addition, original texts have a positive effect on students' reading motivation (Taboada & Buehl, 2012; Marzban & Davaji, 2015).

Students stated that reading texts gave them the opportunity to learn about another culture. Language and culture are integrated and form an inseparable whole (Brown, 2007). Therefore, students should know the culture of the language they are learning, and reading texts are a good way to teach culture (Nelson, 1987; Byram & Kramersch, 2008; Genç & Şenel, 2017). Moreover, increasing students' cultural awareness may increase their intercultural competencies (Beresova, 2015) and students better understand the texts written in the culture they are familiar with (Nelson, 1987; Byram & Kramersch, 2008; Floyd & Carrell, 1987).

Almost all the students commenting on the teaching-learning processes designed to achieve the speaking skill objectives asserted that their speaking proficiency has improved and that their motivation to speak English and their self-confidence in speaking English have increased. They reported that the presentations they prepared and presented are of great importance in this increase. The achievement in learning a foreign language is assessed with the ability to communicate verbally in that language (Nunan, 1999). When appropriate activities are used in the classroom environment, speaking activities increase students' motivation towards learning and make the classroom a more fun place (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Among the various communicative methods used to improve speaking skills, presentations are of great importance because they give students the opportunity to deliver a speech about a topic for which they have prepared (Sirisrimangkorn, 2021), and to communicate in the target language in a natural setting (Brooks & Wilson, 2014; Thornbury, 2005). Moreover, presentations bridge the gap between learning a foreign language and using that language, and give the students the opportunity to use all four skills holistically (King, 2002). A well-prepared presentation activity allows students to read and write in order to research the topic they are going to talk about (Brooks & Wilson, 2014). While preparing their presentations students used various presentation software to visually enhance their presentations. This gave students the opportunity to improve and utilize their technological skills, which is one of the most important skills and requirements of our time. Presentations also help to increase class interaction and interest in learning, and they improve the communication skills and the ability to deliver a speech along with their proficiency in English (Girard et al., 2011).

Regarding group work, students expressed different opinions. While some students think that group work is not beneficial because of the reasons such as the difficulties in meeting with the group members to study, and not being able to contribute enough to the group work and letting their friends down, others think that group work is very beneficial. Presentations, especially those done in group work, allow students to use the target language collaboratively while planning, preparing and presenting their presentations to the other members of the classroom (Brooks & Wilson, 2014). Group work creates a harmonious atmosphere in the classroom, encourages collaboration, and provides more opportunities to use the target language. Furthermore, group work helps students to be more autonomous by allowing them to make their own decisions within the group (Harmer, 2013).

According to Ur (1996), group work allows teachers to walk among groups to help them evaluate the individual performances of the students, note student errors to provide feedback, and devote more time to slow learners. In addition, with group work, students learn from each other and teach each other. This creates an opportunity for peer learning and peer teaching. Group work reduces students' speaking anxiety because it encourages interaction among students and allows the less anxious students to help the more anxious ones in pronouncing certain words and finding suitable vocabulary (Aulia, Lengkanawati, & Rodliyah, 2019).

Another point students indicated about the teaching-learning processes used to teach speaking skills was that it reduced their speaking anxiety and increased their self-confidence. Anxiety is a major problem for the students who have little opportunity to use English in everyday life, and it hinders language learning, especially the development of speaking skills (Liu, 2007). Krashen (1995) stated that a stressful classroom atmosphere, which causes anxiety in students, leads students to build a barrier towards language learning and thus hindering language acquisition. Most students are reluctant to participate in speaking activities because they are anxious (Liu, 2007). The speaking anxiety stems from the factors such as worrying too much about grammar (Jackson, 2002), fear of making mistakes (Horwitz et al., 1986), negative self-evaluation (Mak, 2011), low English proficiency, lack of opportunities to practice, fear of speaking in front of the class (Jackson, 2002; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999), competitive classroom atmosphere (Bailey, 1983), and fear of being laughed at by their classmates (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986).

In order to overcome foreign language anxiety, in particular, speaking anxiety, teachers should create an unthreatening, sincere and supportive atmosphere (Lozanov, 1978). Moreover, by stating that anxiety can occur during speaking and is natural, teachers should make their students aware that this anxiety will decrease and self-confidence will increase when their vocabulary improves and they have the opportunity to prepare better and practice more.

Writing skill is one of the skills that students believe they have made the most progress on. This result shows that the teaching-learning processes designed to fulfil the writing objectives stated in the curriculum serve their purpose. Examining their previous learning experiences, it is seen that students have not received enough writing instruction. Writing is a neglected skill in most countries (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham et al., 2013). This neglect stems from the fact that writing is a skill that is difficult to acquire even in the mother tongue (Richards & Renandya, 2002) and the exam-oriented instruction given especially in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. However, with the writing instruction, this difficulty could be overcome and students' writing skills could be improved (Tsiriatakis, et al., 2020; Chen, 2002; Graham et al., 2013; Fidalgo & Torrance, 2017; Cer, 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Sasaki, 2002).

Students mentioned the importance of the instruction which taught them about the writing strategies and reported that they could organize their thoughts better by using these strategies. The studies conducted on writing instruction reveal that the teaching of strategies for writing improves the writing skills of students (Chen, 2002; Silva & Graham, 2015; Plonsky, 2011; Chien, 2012). With the writing instruction, students learned and applied the techniques to better organize their thought. Moreover, it could be said that the language skills improved through the practices led to the improvement of writing skills.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study, investigating the students' views on the teaching-learning processes designed to achieve the objectives in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade English curriculum, concluded that students were satisfied with the teaching practices. It was found that students improved their productive skills more, that is, their writing and speaking skills improved greatly. It is believed that this improvement is due to the fact that these skills were neglected in primary and secondary school. As for the receptive skills, namely reading and listening, students improved more in listening skills than in reading. This can be attributed to the reading-oriented instruction they received in their previous learning experiences. Most of the students said that it is the first time they have had an English course that covers all four language skills and even though they had difficulties at first, they said they enjoyed learning English a lot this semester. Because they have been taught English Having been taught English as a language that can be used for communication tool rather than an ordinary course increased students' sense of satisfaction and motivation to learn a language.

Regarding the listening instruction students mainly mention the quality of the listening materials and regarding the reading instruction, they said that the reading texts were interesting. This confirms the long-standing idea which states that more authentic listening materials should be vocalized by native speakers. The fact that students found the reading texts taught this semester more interesting shows that the reading texts in the course books provided by MoNE do not appeal to the interests of students. The study also concludes that in terms of the speaking skills, presentations and group work attracted students' attention that these kinds of practices could be more beneficial to meet curricular objectives to get the most out of speaking classes.

The results of the study reveal that in order to ensure high quality and effective foreign language teaching, teachers should prepare their own teaching-learning process according to the objectives set in the curriculum rather than following the course books and materials provided to them. Therefore, teachers not only free themselves from the limitations and shortcomings of course books and teacher's books but also teach more effectively with the teaching-learning processes designed according to the characteristics and needs of their schools and students.

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## Statements of publication ethics

We hereby declare that the study has not unethical issues and that research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

## Researchers' contribution rate

The study was conducted and reported with equal collaboration of the researchers.

## Ethics Committee Approval Information

This study was conducted under the permission of Hacettepe University Ethics Committee with the approval no: E-35853172-300-00001708813.

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