A Systematic Review of Program Evaluation Studies in EFL: The Turkish Case

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Abstract

English language education has been provided at all levels of education for a long time in Turkey as well as in the rest of the world. In order to assess the objectives, content, expected target outputs, effectiveness or weakness of the language education given, program evaluation studies are carried out. In this study, a systematic review study was conducted in order to determine English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching program evaluation studies in Turkey published between 2017-2020, and to investigate the levels of these studies, research patterns and focus of the published articles. For systematic review, ERIC and Google Scholar databases were searched and the key words such as "program evaluation, EFL, Turkey" were used. When the results are examined, a total of 24 studies were found between the mentioned years, and most of the studies were conducted on university programs, and the majority of them were conducted as qualitative research. Based on the results, it was revealed that the program evaluation studies were not evenly distributed equally in terms of education level, and it was understood that the subfields of the program were studied rather than the general content. This undesired state revealed the need for more research on the general program content and lower education levels in program evaluation studies.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, Program Evaluation, Systematic review, Language Education, Turkey.

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İngilizcenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretiminde Program Değerlendirme Çalışmalarının Sistematik Bir İncelemesi: Türkiye Örneği

Öz

İngilizce dili eğitimi bütün dünyada olduğu gibi, Türkiye'de de uzun suredir eğitimin bütün kademelerinde yoğun olarak verilmektedir. Verilen dil eğitiminin hedeflerini, içeriğini, beklenen hedef çıktılarını, etkililiğini değerlendirmek için program değerlendirme çalışmaları kapsamlı olarak yapılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, 2017-2020 yılları arasında Türkiye'de İngilizce dili öğretimi program değerlendirme çalışmalarını belirlemek ve bu çalışmaların hangi seviyelerde yapıldığı, araştırma desenleri ve çalışma odak noktalarını belirlemek amacıyla sistematik inceleme çalışması yapılmıştır. Sistematik inceleme için ERIC ve Google Scholar veri tabanları taranmış olup, anahtar kelimeler olarak "program değerlendirme, EFL, Türkiye" kelimeleri kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar incelendiğinde, belirtilen yıllar arasında toplam 24 çalışma bulunmuştur ve çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu üniversite programları üzerine yapılmış olup birçoğunda nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucuna dayanarak, program değerlendirme çalışmalarının eğitim seviyesi olarak eşit dağılmadığı ortaya çıkmış olup program değerlendirmenin genel içeriğinden çok, alt-başlıklarının çalışıldığı anlaşılmıştır. Bu durum, program değerlendirme çalışmalarında genel program içeriğine ve alt kademe eğitim seviyelerine yönelik daha fazla araştırma yapılması ihtiyacını ortaya koymuştur.

Keywords: Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, Program değerlendirme, Sistematik inceleme, Dil Eğitimi, Türkiye.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Araştırma Problemi

Türkiye'de uzun yıllardır örgun eğitimde ilkokuldan, en yüksek eğitim kurumuna kadar İngilizce öğretimi zorunlu olmuştur. Ancak gerek alanda yapılan araştırmalar gerekse uluslararası derecelendirme kuruluşları, Türkiye'de İngilizce eğitiminde yeterli başarının olmadığını belirtmektedir. Bunun nedenlerinden biri yabancı dil öğretim müfredatı olarak görülmektedir. Sebeplerden biri müfredat gibi görünse de son yıllarda İngilizce program değerlendirme çalışmaları sistematik olarak gözden geçirilmemiştir.

Araştırma Soruları

Bu çalışmada, literatürde yer alan program değerlendirme çalışmalarını incelemek için aşağıdaki araştırma sorularına yanıt aranmıştır:

1. Türkiye'de EFL program değerlendirme araştırmaları, hangi eğitim seviyeleri üzerine yapılmıştır?

2. Türkiye'de EFL program değerlendirme araştırmalarının odağı nedir?

Literatür İncelemesi

Hem Türkiye'de hem de diğer ülkelerde EFL kurumlarında yürütülen çeşitli çalışmalar bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmalar katılımcıların yaşlarına, seviyelerine, programın içeriğine, dil becerilerine, programın hızına veya zorluklarına göre farklılık göstermektedir. Örneğin, öğrencilerin, öğretmenlerin ve program koordinatörlerinin beklentilerine (Chan, 2001; Chang ve diğerleri, 2015) ve teknolojinin İngilizce öğretim programına entegrasyonuna (Peacock, 2009; İpek ve Mutlu, 2022) odaklanan çalışmalar bulunmaktadır. Gerede (2005) üniversite öğrencilerinin İngilizce müfredatına ilişkin ihtiyaç ve isteklerini araştırmışken, başka çalışmalarda, Topçu (2005), Şahin (2006) ve İlerten ve Efeoğlu (2021) benzer yaş grubunun program ihtiyaçlarına odaklanıldığı çalışmalar yapmıştır.

Yukarıda bahsi geçen EFL program değerlendirme literatürü incelendiğinde, veri toplama ve analiz gerektiren, hangi alanlarda daha fazla çalışmanın yapıldığı ve hangi alanlarda daha fazla çalışmaya ihtiyaç duyulduğu ve hangi alanlarda daha faz-

la yoğunlaşılması gerektiğini ortaya koyan bir çalışmaya ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Bu nedenle bu çalışmada aşağıdaki araştırma sorularının cevapları bilimsel bir yöntemle ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır:

1. Türkiye'de EFL program değerlendirme araştırmaları hangi eğitim düzeyinde yapılmıştır?

2. Türkiye'de EFL program değerlendirme araştırmalarının odak noktaları nelerdir?

Araştırma Deseni

Bu çalışmada, daha önce araştırılmış ve araştırma bulgularının derlenip sunulması olarak tanımlanan ve sonuçların akademik bir şekilde sunulduğu sistematik derleme araştırma yöntemi (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007) kullanılmıştır. Diğer araştırma tasarımları gibi sistematik incelemelerin de bir metodolojisi vardır ve araştırma boyunca belirli adımlar takip edilmelidir. Bu çalışmada Petticrew ve Roberts'ın (2008) yedi aşamalı sistematik inceleme deseni kullanılmıştır.

Sonuçlar ve Tartışma

İlk araştırma sonucuna baktığımızda program değerlendirme çalışmalarının daha çok üniversite düzeyinde yapıldığını görüyoruz. Üniversite düzeyinden sonra ilkokul, ortaokul ve lise program değerlendirme çalışmalarının eşit sayıda yapıldığı anlaşılmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmaların çoğunun nitel araştırma deseninde yürütüldüğü anlaşılmaktadır. Nitel araştırmalardan sonra karma yöntem ve nicel araştırma desenleri kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaların odak noktasını incelememizi sağlayan ikinci araştırma sorusunun sonuclarına baktığımızda, çalışmaların çoğunun program çıktılarına, hedeflere, kullanılan materyallere ve müfredatın güçlü ve zayıf yönlerine odaklandığını anlayabiliriz.

Introduction

From the first stages of education until the end of university education, English teaching has been a compulsory subject in all schools in Turkey for many years. However, it is also a fact that English language education in Turkey does not reach the desired level (Demirpolat, 2015; Polat & Erişti, 2019). In addition to many studies carried out locally, it is possible to obtain information about the place of Turkey at an international level. As stated in Akpur et al (2016), Turkey placed 43rd in 2015 in English language proficiency ranking list among 63 countries. In 2020, Turkey's place got worse that it took the 70th place among 112 countries (EPI, 2020). This undesirable result lead to program and curriculum studies of English as a foreign language (EFL) institutions. While there are various studies in the literature and implications suggested at the end of every academic paper, not much has changed in the achievement rates of Turkish language learners. This may be because research may be more concentrated in one aspect of EFL program and curriculum studies or the people in charge do not put the research results into practice. Therefore, a review of the current Turkish EFL program evaluation studies is conducted to see whether there is a balance in the content of the program evaluation studies.

In academic studies, the researcher starts by stating why a subject is important, how little work is done on that subject, or by stating that the researched subject is not given enough importance by comparing with similar studies, and by opening a field that indicates the importance of the research. However, these statements are generally put forward as hypothetical and without evidence. Systematic reviews can reveal how important the field to be studied is and how often it is studied in the literature with numerical evidence. As a result, it is important to conduct systematic review studies in order to

understand the academic disposition of the subject, and how much importance is given to that specific field. Therefore, it would be appropriate to start with the definition of systematic review.

Systematic reviews have been defined as generally identifying and revealing previous studies (Newman & Gough, 2020). In addition, in the reviews, parts such as the methodology and results, as well as the focus of the study, can be given (Hart, 2018). As a result of widespread academic studies and research-based evidence gaining more importance, the use of systematic reviews has also increased considerably and has taken a scientific form. In this case, Gough et al. (2017) described the systematic review as "a review of existing research using explicit, accountable rigorous research methods" (p. 4). Similarly, Bearman et al. (2012) defines systematic reviews as "protocol-driven and quality-focused approach" (p. 625) in order to present empirical data for the existing literature. By these definitions, systematic reviews should be seen as a clear, understandable, and acceptable method of research.

Defining Program Evaluation

Program evaluation studies are an integral part of all education stages. After the curriculum is implemented, program evaluation studies provide us with data on what has been done correctly and not, what needs to be changed, or which subject has been successfully taught and should be continued throughout the program (Borich & Jemelka, 1981; Sanders 1994; Chyung, 2015). In order to understand the program evaluation process and its purpose, it would be appropriate to give a few generally accepted definitions found in the literature.

Schulberg et al. (1969) defines program evaluation as the process to investigate whether previously targeted outcomes have been achieved or not. Moreover, Franklin and Trasher (1976) describe the phenomenon as using scientific methods and doing empirical research for evaluation purposes. Similarly, Attkinson and Browskowski (1978) assert that it is the research conducted to make reasonable judgements about the program that has been

conducted. Such early scholars agreed on that the evaluation process follows a scientific procedure and there is not much change in definitions in the recent literature now (Astramovich & Coker, 2007; Usun, 2016).

There are various program evaluation studies conducted in EFL institutions both in Turkey and in other countries. These studies vary in their focus of age and level of the participants, the content of the program or the differences in their agendas such as language skills, pace of the program or the difficulties. For instance, there are studies that focus on expectations of students, teachers, and program coordinators (Chan, 2001: Chang et al., 2015) and technology integration into the EFL curriculum (Peacock, 2009; Ipek & Mutlu, 2022). In another study, Gerede (2005) investigated university students' needs and wants regarding the EFL curriculum at a university setting where Topcu (2005), Sahin (2006) and Ilerten and Efeoglu (2021) focused on the similar age group's program needs.

When the above-mentioned EFL program evaluation literature is examined, there is a need for an empirical study that requires data collection and analysis, in which fields more studies are carried out and in which fields more studies are needed and which areas should be more concentrated on in the EFL program evaluation literature. Therefore, this study investigates the answers to the following research questions with a scientific method:

1. In what level of education has EFL program evaluation research been conducted in Turkey?

2. What do EFL program evaluation research focus on in Turkey?

Method

In the current study, systematic review research method, which is defined as compiling and presenting the results of research findings that was researched previously and in which the results were presented in an academic way (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007) is employed. Systematic reviews, like other research designs, have a methodology and the steps should be followed

strictly throughout the review design. In this study, the seven-stage (see figure 1) review design of Petticrew and Roberts (2008) is used.
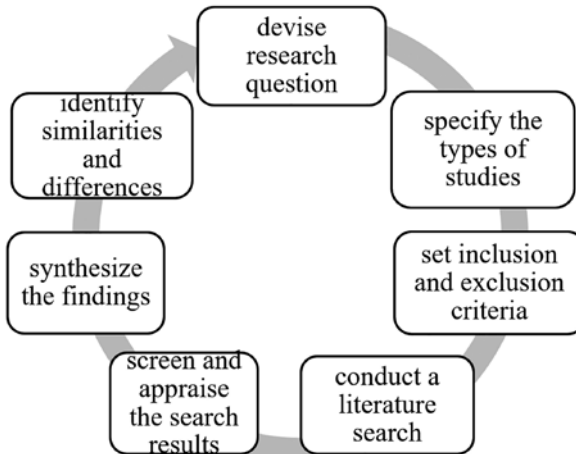

Figure 1. Systematic research design (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008)

In this study, firstly, the research questions are decided, and the study was shaped in the light of these questions. Afterwards, the types of studies to be reviewed are specified and customized. It was then decided which studies were included and excluded. Afterwards, a detailed literature review study was conducted, and then the results are given in the form of tables. Afterwards, the findings were synthesized using the data analysis method, and finally, similarities and differences with the other studies in the literature were identified in the discussion section.

Data Collection

It is aimed to determine in which education level the EFL program evaluation studies have been conducted in Turkey. For this reason, in the content of the studies, it is aimed to determine whether they are mostly at primary, secondary, high school or university level. For data collection, first, keywords were determined. In order not to make the systematic analysis

too broad or too narrow, only the words that were the focus of the study were selected and searched. As keywords, "program, evaluation, EFL and Turkey" are used. The studies existing in Google Scholar and ERIC databases which present rich and various research sources (Kaliisa & Picard, 2017) and published between 2017 and 2020 were included in the study. In 2017, MoNE prepared and implemented a new curriculum for K-12 level in Turkey. Therefore, this systematic study focused on studies conducted after 2017. In addition, as of 2020, a new paradigm, online education, has started to be implemented and program evaluation studies have gained a new dimension. Therefore, studies conducted after 2020 were not included in this study. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are given below:

1- Only program evaluation studies are included. Other subfields such as assessment, in-service training or teacher education are excluded.

2- Only English for general and academic purposes studies are included. English for specific purposes (ESP) studies are excluded.

3. Empirical studies have been included. Critical reflection, conceptual studies, book chapters, letters to the editor, proceedings or reports are excluded.

4- Studies in Turkey have been included in the study.

5- Studies published in Turkish language are excluded, only those published in English are included.

6- Studies published between 2017 and 2020 are included.

Data Analysis

In this review study, conventional content analysis (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002) has been used. In this type of data analysis, the codes are directly derived from the text or from the data obtained. In such an analysis, the researcher generally aims to explain a phenomenon. After the initial coding has finished, the researcher categorizes the codes and if necessary, division into sub-categories may be helpful. After that, the researcher may try to figure out the relationship between

these categories and sub-categories in order to address the research findings in the discussion section (Patton, 2002; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Findings

Findings showed us that there are totally 24 studies that investigated EFL programs at different levels. 11 of these studies were conducted at university level, five of them were conducted at high school level, six of them were conducted at secondary school and four of these studies were done at primary schools (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Distribution of studies according to the education level*

Education Level	Number	Author
University level	10	Aktas & Gundogdu, 2020; Polat et al 2020; Evisen, et al., 2020; Bayram & Canaran 2019; Erarslan, 2019; Genc & Kulusakli, 2019; Mutlu, 2018; Tercan, 2018; Efeoglu et al. 2018; Yukselir, 2018
High school level	5	Erarslan, 2018*; Ozturk 2019; Agcam & Babano-glu, 2018** Yastibas, 2020b; Yuce & Mirici, 2019
Secondary school level	6	Aksoy, 2020; Agcam & Babanoglu, 2020*; Erarslan & Topkaya 2019; Erarslan, 2018*; Ag-cam & Babanoglu, 2018** Agcam & Babanoglu, 2020***. Yastibas, 2020a; Erarslan, 2018*.
Primary school level	4	Cesur & Cinkavuk, 2018; Agcam & Babanoglu, 2020***;
Total	24	

* Studies with the Asterix mark searched for more than one education level in the same article.

Moreover, findings showed us that 11 studies have qualitative designs. On the other hand, the number of mixed method designs was seven. However, there were only two research conducted in quantitative design (see table 2).

Table 2. *Distribution of studies according to their research designs*

Design	Number	Author
Qualitative	11	Agcam & Babanoglu, 2018; Agcam & Babanoglu, 2020; Aktas & Gundogdu, 2020; Polat et al. 2020; Evisen, et al., 2020; Yastibas, 2020a; Ozturk 2019; Erarslan, 2018; Erarslan (2019); Yastibas, 2020b; ; Yuce & Mirici, 2019
Quantitative	2	Erarslan & Topkaya 2019; Genc & Kulusakli, 2019
Mixed	7	Yukselir, 2018; Tercan, 2018, Mutlu, 2018; Bayram & Canaran, 2019; Aksoy, 2020; Efeoglu et al. 2018; Cesur & Cinkavuk, 2018

When we look at the findings of the second research question, the focus of these studies varies. Yukselir (2018) focused on optional university preparatory department students' expectations studied one-year English language education. In another study, Aktas and Gundogdu (2020) conducted case study research on university level EFL language program. Both lecturers and students were the participants of the study. Genc and Kulusakli (2019) investigated the effectiveness of EFL curriculum outcomes of a university preparatory institution in Turkey. Erarslan (2019) investigated the change phenomenon of the EFL program at a higher education institution. The change process from progressive to modular program was researched in this study. Moreover, Tercan (2018) investigated the systematic aspect of EFL curriculum designed at a Turkish university English preparatory department. The data was collected from both students and teachers. Similarly, Mutlu (2018) conducted research at a university preparatory department in order to find out aims, course content and materials and assessment. Moreover, Bayram and Canaran (2019) investigated the strengths and weaknesses of university level EFL curriculum. Besides, Efeoglu et al. (2018) conducted research on the university level English preparatory department using Utilization-focused evaluation approach. Polat et al., (2020) investigated the writing complexity aspect of the EFL curriculum of a university in Turkey. Another different aspect of EFL program evaluation emerged in Evisen et al. (2020). This was one the first studies that investigated the online program of EFL at a university preparatory school.

On the other hand, Aksoy (2020) investigated content and components of the latest curriculum update in K-12 level. Also, Agcan and Babanoglu (2020) investigated the curriculum conducted after 2017 in the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Turkey. More specifically, they evaluated the 2nd and 8th grade EFL curriculum in terms of writing practices by using document analysis procedures. Moreover, in another study, Agcan and Babanoglu (2020) conducted research on both secondary and high school EFL program. They specifically compared the two programs regarding their learning outcomes in terms of acquiring higher and lower order skills. Cesur and Cinkavuk (2018) published an article investigating 2nd grade EFL curriculum of MoNE in Turkey. The participants were the teachers, and the objective was to explore the general characteristics, content, objectives, and assessment. Yastibas (2020a; 2020b) conducted two research regarding program evaluation. One of them was about EFL program in terms of peace education and the other one is about the human activities for sustainable world. Moreover, Ozturk (2019) studied 9th grade's English language program in terms of information and communication technologies. Erarslan (2018) investigated the components of the K-12 curriculum. In the study, it is aimed to find out the strengths and weakness of the curriculum. In a quantitative study, Erarslan and Topkaya (2019) developed a scale in order to evaluate the primary school 2nd grade EFL curriculum.

Lastly, Yuce and Mirici (2019) investigated the 9th grade Efl program using CEFR proficiency descriptors. In this qualitative research, it is found out that the program is compatible with the CEFR descriptors while it is stated that teachers faced problems because of the materials and the class hours.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study is to present a compilation of program evaluation studies related to English language education in Turkey. For this purpose, it has been determined at what level academic publications are concentrated on and which topics of program evaluation are researched more. The publications to be included in this study were identified by focusing on inclusion and

exclusion criteria. In addition, it is ensured that the intended studies should be published between 2017-2020. The reason why this systematic review started from 2017 is because the latest curriculum changes in MoNE took place in 2017. In addition, since program evaluation studies have evolved into online dimension from face-to-face education since the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the deadline has been considered as 2020 publication year.

When we look at the first research findings, we see that the program evaluation studies are mostly carried out at university level. It is understood that secondary school, primary and high school program evaluation studies were carried out in equal numbers after university level. It is also understood that the majority of the studies were conducted in a qualitative research design. After the qualitative studies, mixed method and quantitative research designs were used. When we look at the second research question that allows us to investigate the focus of the studies, we can understand that most of the studies focused on program outputs, objectives, materials used, and strengths and weakness of the curriculum.

It can be uttered that although there are studies reviewing other fields of EFL, program evaluation review studies could not be found in recent years. In terms of systematic reviews conducted regarding other subjects in EFL, there are several studies. For instance, Gulecoglu and Ozturk (2021) reviewed the motivation in EFL in Turkish context, Macaro et. Al. 2017 conducted a review study on the English medium education at universities, Ali (2020) investigated the action research in EFL classrooms, Lin and Lin (2020) reviewed mobile-assisted language learning in terms of vocabulary teaching, while Yang et al. (2021) reviewed the studies investigating technology and vocabulary learning. Moreover, Selvaraj and Aziz (2019) reviewed the studies about the writing skills in English as a second language (ESL), Ansary and Babaii (2020) conducted a systematic review on characteristics of EFL textbooks used in the curriculum, Jia and Hew (2021) investigated the listening skill in EFL, Arslan (2020) and Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020) reviewed the flipped learning literature, and Yuvayapan and Yukselir (2020) reviewed the studies

conducted about corpus-based studies on academic writing skills in English.

According to Manion and Morrison (2011), it is a must to carry out education-oriented studies and the tasks, target outputs and goals in the education content should be determined accordingly. Therefore, in order to see what is missing in the program evaluation studies, it is important to review other review studies in the literature. In their proceeding paper, Polat and Erdem (2019) conducted a review study on the holistic view of program evaluation. They found 153 studies (96 theses and 57 articles totally) whose key words were curriculum evaluation, foreign language curricula, foreign language curriculum evaluation, foreign language program evaluation, language course evaluation, program evaluation which is similar but has more key words than the current study. There are also several review studies conducted in the other parts of the world. In their systematic review, Sahlan et al. (2021) stated that there are four major areas researched in EFL field which are computer-assisted language learning, mobile-assisted language learning, student-centered learning and teacher-centered language learning. It can be implied that program evaluation studies are not one of the top four among other subjects in EFL. Moreover, Alsowat (2017) asserted that more than two thirds of the EFL studies were conducted at university level and the rest is in the K-12 level which shows parallel findings with the current study. Moreover, it is also found out that there is a limited number of studies that deals with the holistic view on the EFL program evaluation. It is stated in the research that mostly researchers studied specific fields such as language skills.

In conclusion, if Turkey wants to reach higher levels in foreign language education in international platforms and in the ranking of rating institutions, and if it wants long-term English language teaching to be successful, program evaluation studies should focus more on the K-12 level among the other educational degrees. In addition, while examining more specific areas of the curriculum, studies should also be conducted to evaluate the holistic content of English language programs.

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