Primary School Second Grade English Language Teaching Program: Insiders' Views on Its Strengths and Weaknesses[1]

İlkokul İkinci Sınıf İngilizce Öğretim Programı: Programın Güçlü ve Zayıf Yönlerine Yönelik Uygulayıcı Görüşleri

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Abstract: The advents in technology, science and globalization have increased the need to communicate in a foreign language. In order to keep abreast of these demands of the global world and the local needs of individuals, curricula and teaching programs change constantly in formal education settings. In Turkey, English language teaching programs went through three major changes taking place in 1997, 2006 and 2013, the last of which was a major change known as 4+4+4 education system. Thus, this study was conducted to evaluate the 2013 2nd grade English Language Teaching Program (ELTP) from teachers' perspectives with a focus on its general characteristics, aims, outcomes, and content. To address this research objective, the data were collected qualitatively by employing in-depth interviews with 14 teachers who were implementing the 2nd grade ELTP in state primary schools in the city center of Denizli province. Inductive content analysis revealed that teachers mostly have positive opinions regarding the different components of the ELTP. The motivational quality of it, its emphasis on communicative competence with practical language use are considered as the best aspects of it while some concerns regarding the number of the outcomes, limited practice opportunities stemming from insufficient class hours, and the order of the content are reported.

Keywords: 2nd Grade ELTP, evaluation, program, 4+4+4 education system, primary school

Öz (Abstract in Turkish): Teknoloji, bilim ve küreselleşme alanlarında yaşanan gelişmeler yabancı dilde iletişim kurma ihtiyacını arttırmıştır. Bireylerin küreselleşen dünyanın taleplerinin ve yerel ihtiyaçlarının karşılanabilmesi için formal eğitim alanında sürekli olarak öğretim programlarının değiştiği görülmektedir. Türkiye'de İngilizce öğretim programı başlıca üç büyük değişime maruz kalmış ve bu değişimler sırasıyla 1997, 2006 ve sonuncusu ise 4+4+4 eğitim sistemi adı altında 2013 yılında gerçekleşmiştir. Bu çalışma, 2013 yılında uygulamaya koyulan 2. Sınıf İngilizce öğretim programını genel özellikler, amaç, kazanım ve içerik boyutları açısından öğretmen görüşlerine göre değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla veriler Denizli il merkezinde devlet okullarında görev yapan ve 2. Sınıf İngilizce öğretim programını uygulayan 14 İngilizce öğretmeniyle yüz yüze görüşme yapılarak toplanmıştır. Tümevarımsal içerik analizi sonucunda öğretmenlerin 2. Sınıf İngilizce öğretim programının genel özellikleri, amaç, kazanım ve içerik boyutlarına yönelik olarak çoğunlukla olumlu görüşlere sahip olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Programın öğrenciyi motive edici özelliği ile pratik olarak dili iletişimsel olarak kullanma vurgusu öğretmenler tarafından programın en güçlü özelliği olarak belirtilirken kazanımların sayısı, yetersiz ders saati ve içeriğin sıralamasından kaynaklanan sınırlı pratik yapma olanağı gibi hususlar ise programın zayıf yönleri olarak ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: 2. Sınıf İngilizce öğretim programı, değerlendirme, program, 4+4+4 eğitim sistemi, ilkokul

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INTRODUCTION

In language education, the term *program* refers to a set of linked courses which help learners gain linguistic and communicative skills so that they can successfully interact with people in various contexts (Lynch, 1996). Teaching programs usually specify the aims and objectives to be reached, map out a route to achieve them through content selection and sequencing, suggest methods and techniques to manage learning and teaching of the content and show ways to assess the outcomes. Thus, they are central to any educational system and activity.

In order to reach the desired outcomes, teaching programs need to be well-designed and implemented effectively. Yet, the ultimate success of programs depends on a number of factors including society, institution, teaching staff, learners, resources and so forth (Richards, 2001), all of which need to be researched thoroughly in order to make informed decisions regarding program reforms and revisions (Alderson & Beretta, 1992; Llosa & Slayton, 2009; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010).

The endeavor to understand and justify the effectiveness and efficiency of different components of teaching programs requires evaluation studies to be undertaken, which has always been regarded as a central issue in education since teaching programs need to be dynamic to keep abreast of the ever-changing context of human life and responsive to the needs of learners (Brown, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Owen, 2006; Weir & Roberts, 1994). Thus, evaluation studies are integral to program planning and implementation.

Program evaluation (henceforth PE) as an area of research in education and in language teaching agenda has gained momentum in the last two decades in Turkey with the massive educational reforms and restructuring movements taken place in 1997, 2006 and 2013. These changes within the Turkish educational system also resulted in major changes in English language teaching programs, the last of which took place in 2013 as part of the educational reform known as 4+4+4. This reform marked a turning point in the teaching of English as a compulsory school subject for it lowered the learning of English to 2nd grade level.

Since its introduction in 2013-2014 teaching year, the 2nd grade ELTP has been evaluated through the lenses of different stakeholders in some studies (see Alkan & Arslan, 2014; İyitoglu & Alci, 2015; Yıldıran &Tanrıseven, 2015). However, there is a growing need to understand whether this program meets its intended purposes, to learn about positive and negative issues related to its design and implementation and to evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, this current study aims to evaluate the 2nd grade ELTP with regard to some of its components, i.e. general characteristics, aims, outcomes, and content, by exploring the opinions of practicing teachers since the quality of support given by these people has a direct effect on the success of programs (Topkaya & Küçük, 2010).

English Language Teaching at Primary School Level and Teaching Programs in Turkey

Although teaching English as a compulsory school subject in state educational system in Turkey has a long history, its introduction at state primary school level is a fairly recent issue starting in 1997 with the educational reform that extended compulsory primary education from five to eight years. As a result, students started learning English at grade 4 rather than at grade 6. The 1997 ELTP primarily aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards language learning, increasing learner motivation and interest and building language awareness. Besides, it emphasized the acquisition of basic communicative skills through the integration of fours skills, which is usually considered a turning point in the history of English language teaching since it was the first time that communicative language teaching approach was introduced to the teaching program (Kırkgöz, 2005; MoNE, 2001; Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban, 2012).

In 2005-2006, the 1997 ELTP was revised extensively, resulting in changes in the suggested methods and techniques that embraced a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Although the 2006 ELTP still followed the principles communicative language teaching, the new approach shifted the focus of language education from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness by promoting learner autonomy to be provided through hands-on

activities, project-based instruction and strategy training in which the role of English language teachers was defined as facilitator and guides (Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban, 2012).

In 2013, yet, a new three-tier education system known as 4+4+4 with 4 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary education, and 4 years of high school education was introduced by the state with the basic aim of increasing the period of compulsory education from continuous eight years to discreet twelve years and improving the quality of education by helping learners develop themselves with regard to their needs, skills and interests (Gün & Başkan, 2014). The new system, therefore, claimed to allow "for the grouping of students on the basis of different curriculums and school types" (Kasa & Ersöz, 2016, p. 2). Since its inception, however, the 2013 educational reform movement has been questioned in several ways in that the 4+4+4 education system is politically biased especially with a specific emphasis on religious education and that its legalization process was completed in a rush without involving all stakeholders and public debate and a sound piloting period (Gün & Başkan, 2014; Kasa & Ersöz, 2016).

In terms of English language education, the 2013 educational reform also introduced some major changes especially in primary school language education. Initially, it has lowered the starting age for learning English to 6.6 years of age and to the second grade (MoNE, 2013). Next, the new ELTP is based on the principles and descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which emphasizes learner centeredness, learner autonomy, communicative competence as well as intercultural competence. Within this general framework, the program emphasizes listening and speaking skills and mainly aims at creating a love of and desire to learn English in young learners. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of turning students' learning into a real-life practice and language use in an authentic communicative environment. In order to establish communicative competence, the program focuses on communicative functions such as greeting and meeting people, giving personal information, apologizing, asking for permission, expressing likes/ dislikes, making simple suggestions which will help learners in their daily lives as delineated by MoNE. Using an eclectic mix of instructional techniques that require interaction in the classroom among peers, teachers are suggested to play games, sing songs, and apply Total Physical Response to teach the language. In delivering the content of the program, MoNE advocates teachers to make use of narrative materials (cartoon, fairy tales), informative materials (picture dictionaries, posters etc.) and interactive materials (cards, notes etc). In assessing students' progress in learning the language, the program suggests teachers utilize alternative assessment techniques and observe 2nd graders in the classroom to capture meaningful experiences and use them as assessment moments rather than testing them directly.

Parallel to these major educational reforms, there has also been an increased interest in research on teaching programs in the last few decades. Several studies have explored different components of them through the lenses of various stakeholders. Since the 1997 ELTP was the first teaching program that introduced English to 4th and 5th grade levels within the 8-year compulsory education, the studies done on this program comprise the evaluation of mainly 4th and 5th grade ELTP (see Mirici, 2000; Tok, 2003; Yüksel, 2001)

Related to the 1997 ELTP, İğrek (2001) and Büyükduman (2005) conducted an evaluation study focusing on teachers' views while Tok (2003) evaluated the program with regard to the purposes, goals, content, instructional strategies and assessment based on the perceptions of students. İğrek and Büyükduman found that there was a significant difference in the actual implementation of the curriculum than the planned curriculum due to crowded classes, inadequacy of classroom resources and limited class hours. Tok (2003) found that in both school types, aims and content of the programs were identical with regard to student motivation but as for outcomes, results differed significantly in that private school students attained language skills far better than the students in the state schools. The studied which evaluated the 1997 ELTP showed that it had some weaknesses and program components either partly or the program as a whole needed revision since it did not yield the desired results.

In terms of 2006 program, on the other hand, Zincir (2006) and Öztürk (2006) elicited primary school English language teachers' opinions on curriculum objectives and other components of the 2006 ELTP. The results of each study showed that teachers were not content

with the objectives of the curriculum stating that they needed to be revised and changed. Additionally, lack of in-service training, competence of English teachers and too much work load as well as material aspect of the curriculum were found to be problematic by the teachers. Similarly, Topkaya and Küçük (2010) conducted an evaluation study on the 4th and 5th grade ELTP with regard to its general characteristics, aims, outcomes and content. Their findings revealed that teachers had positive opinions related to program components. However, the study also showed that there were some inefficient points which required to be revised. Other studies (Er, 2006; Örmeci, 2009; Sak, 2008) revealed similar findings related to the 2006 ELTP and ineffectiveness of this curriculum gave way to the recent 2013 ELTP change.

Related to 2013 ELTP, the studies conducted are scarce and mainly focus on the 2nd grade ELTP. Related to 2nd grade ELTP, to our knowledge, there are limited number of studies undertaken (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; İyitoglu & Alci, 2015; and Yıldıran & Tanrıseven, 2015). All these studies aimed at evaluating the 2nd Grade ELTP based on the opinions of English teachers implementing the program by focusing on different components as objectives, content, teaching and learning process of the program. Results of these studies were mostly identical in that Alkan and Arslan (2014), İyitoglu and Alcı (2015) and Yıldıran and Tanrıseven (2015) found that the teachers had positive opinions about the different components of the program as well as age and level relevance, teaching techniques and vocabulary teaching, while expressing negative opinions related to in-service training provided by MoNE, the sufficiency of the materials such as course book, class hours and physical conditions in terms of the implementation of the 2nd grade ELTP.

In order to gain a deeper insight into and evaluate some of the components of the 2nd grade ELTP, this study seeks to identify the opinions of English language teachers who are the main agents in delivering the program.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design and the data were collected through semi structured, one-on-one interviews with English language teachers implementing the program on-site at schools. In program evaluation studies, in-depth interviews involve conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents associated with the program to explore their perspectives, experiences and expectations relating to program planning, implementation, processes, and outcomes (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Thus, in this study, a qualitative approach through interview technique was employed to gain insights into teachers' perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the 2nd grade ELTP in relation to their own experiences in the implementation of the program.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in 14 state primary schools in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 teaching years in the city center of Denizli. A total of 14 teachers, 10 female and 4 male, teaching English to 2nd graders participated in the study voluntarily. Their ages ranged from 28 to 36 years with a teaching experience of between 4-17 years. While 13 teachers were graduates of English Language Teaching departments, one of them had a BA degree in Economics. Finally, none of the participants reported to have had in-service training or introductory seminars regarding the 2nd grade ELTP.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The participants were interviewed face-to-face in their free time at their schools and all interviews were audio taped and transcribed with their written consents (see Appendix A for the interview questions). The duration of the interviews varied from 8.18 minutes to 19.58 minutes.

The data obtained through the interviews were first transcribed and then analyzed through inductive thematic analysis by the two authors of the study in order to identify codes,

categories and themes. After repeated categories and codes were merged, all interviews were analyzed by another researcher to ensure that the codes and interpretations were in line with the primary analysis. To determine if there was an agreement between the raters, Cohen's κ was run. There was substantial agreement between the raters' coding, κ = 0.70, $p < .005$.

RESULTS

Since the research question guiding this study seeks to reveal how four different components of the 2nd grade ELTP, namely general characteristics, aims, outcomes and content, are perceived and evaluated by teachers implementing the program, each of these components is taken in separate sections below and the findings are presented. While reporting the findings, the participants were coded as T1 through T14 to ensure their anonymity.

Findings related to the general characteristics of the 2nd grade ELTP

The participants were first asked their opinions about the general characteristics of the 2nd grade ELTP. The analysis of their answers revealed two major aspects of the ELTP, which are labeled as *motivational quality* of the program and *child development principles* that it addresses (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Teachers' opinions regarding the general characteristics of the 2nd grade ELTP (N=14)*

	Themes & Categories	Participant codes
	Motivational quality	
	Learner centeredness	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6,
	Participation rate	T8, T9, T10, T11, T13,
General	Communicative aspect	T14
Characteristics	*Adherence to child development principles*	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6,
	Affective development	T9, T10, T12, T13,
	Cognitive development	T14
	Psychomotor development	

As Table 1 shows, the participants thought that the 2nd grade ELTP had high motivational quality manifesting itself primarily in *learner centeredness,* which is also linked to the second category, i.e. *increase in learner participation*. A majority of the participants reported that the program achieved to activate learners in the classroom through several different activities suggested in the ELTP. For instance, T10 stated that *"… program activates them through different enjoyable activities. They sing, move in the classroom, and do several hands-on activities. The more active they are, the more motivated they become".* Another category emerging from the analysis was the *communicative aspect* of the program which was also considered as a characteristic augmenting the motivational quality of it as almost all teachers (T2, T3, T4, T5, T9, T10, T12, T11, T14) indicated that students were encouraged to use the language they learnt in different units through different activities which made them eager to communicate in English. One of the teachers stated that *"Whenever we get together, they start using English available to them… from a simple 'Good morning' to "Hello, how are you today?"…I think the program motivates them to speak English"* (T14)*.*

The second most salient characteristic of the ELTP reported by the participants was its *adherence to child development principles*. To start with, the *starting age* to learn English was believed to fit students' *affective development*. T14 pointed out that *"…children at this age are curious to learn, they have this natural tendency to explore new things"*, which she thought that *"… the program is capable of nurturing interest through game-based, fun activities". Low self-consciousness and inhibition* were also reported to be facilitative characteristics of children at this age that accelerated the process of language learning (T1, T2, T3, T10, T13). Additionally, T3 and T10 reflected on the importance of helping learners *develop positive opinions regarding themselves, their own culture and other peoples* and *cultures*. For instance, T3 believed that *"they need to coexist with others regardless of race, gender, identity…and … starting language learning*

early is the best way to develop this idea... I think the ELTP does it by stressing the intercultural elements whenever possible". As for *cognitive development*, those cognitive characteristics such as *short attention span, learning by doing and playing* were found to be well addressed in the ELTP (T5, T10, T12). The variety in topics, activities and materials suggested in the program were all regarded as the manifestation of this quality of the ELTP. Although T12 believed that some young learners were challenged by the cognitive load of language learning, the data analysis revealed that most teachers had the opinion that the cognitive aspects of the program were well thought out. Lastly, a majority of the participants stated that the fact that the program did not emphasize writing was appropriate for learners' *psychomotor development* since learners at this age might not use fine motor skills and have less small muscle control.

Findings related to the aims of the 2nd grade ELTP

The participant teachers were asked to share their opinions regarding what they thought the major aims of the program were and whether these aims were achievable or not. The analysis of the data revealed two major aims labeled as *motivation to learn* and *willingness to communicate* (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Teachers' opinions regarding the aims of the 2nd grade ELTP* (*N*=14)

	Themes & Categories	Participant codes
Aims	*Motivation to learn*	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T14
	Activating a desire to learn	
	Creating a sense of achievement	
	Willingness to communicate	T2, T4, T5, T6, T13
	Being open to experience	
	Peripheral learning	

Firstly, all teachers stated that the program could create a love of and desire to learn English, which is also referred to as one of the major aims in the program booklet itself (MoNE, 2013, p. VII). For instance, T1 stated that "*through this program, students really love English, because, they listen to songs repeatedly, they participate in various tasks and activities, which are fun*". Similarly, T2, T3, T10 and T14 also reported that the classroom atmosphere created through games and songs increased student motivation by boosting their interest in learning the language. In a similar vein, T3 indicated that "*the learning atmosphere in English classes is different for the students when it is compared to other classes; there is no punishment or exam system, so children do not regard English lessons as language learning classes. For them, it is activity time*". The next recurring category under the same theme was found to be *sense of achievement* created by the 2nd grade ELTP. Several participants stated that the program aroused higher motivation on the part of the learners by creating a sense of achievement (T3, T4, T5, T6, T8, T11, T12, T13). For instance, T4 said that "*...the more students feel successful in the classroom, the more they participate in the activities and this enhances their motivation to learn the language*". Likewise, another teacher reported that "*The students feel happier when they see they can speak English and learn things and as a result they join the activities more*" (T8).

The second main theme emerged was *willingness to communicate*, which is also emphasized in the ELTP the program booklet as a major aim (MoNE, 2013, p. II). The teachers stated that the students used English wherever and whenever possible. For instance, T5 stated that "*Children try to speak English everywhere they see you* [the teacher]; *at the cafeteria, in the school yard, even outside the school*". They believed that this stemmed from the fact that learners at this age were open to new experiences since they had no fear of failure (T2, T5, T6, T13). The participants also indicated that children's motivation to communicate helped them learn a lot of language without paying specific attention to it. They emphasized that since children used language as a means to interact with their environment, *peripheral learning* took place. T2 said "*I noticed the children learn a lot of things unco"nsciously. A word or a phrase pops up suddenly although we have not studied it explicitly in the classroom. Through songs and the language, I use*

for communication they seem to learn more than we aim to teach". Lastly, all the participants stated that the general aims they thought the program emphasized were achievable.

Findings related to the outcomes of the 2nd grade ELTP

With regard to the outcome component of the program, the data analysis yielded three positive themes grouped under *structure of and relations between outcomes*, *latent outcomes, practical language use* and two negative ones grouped under *excessive number of outcomes* and *lack of enough practice opportunity* (see Table 3).

Under the first major theme, s*tructure of and relations between outcomes*, two categories were identified and labeled as *sequencing* and *pacing.* Firstly, all teachers stressed that they found the outcomes of the program attainable since they were graded and presented in a sequence that enabled learners to attain them easily and use them for communication. For instance, T2 said that "*the students have progressed a lot in English; in expressing colors and numbers, expressing themselves, introducing themselves with simple sentences… In a step by step fashion we have been able to build these communicative skills that complement one another. So the outcomes are well-sequenced".* Another aspect which was pointed out by the teachers was *pacing.* Except T6, T7, T10 and T12, most teachers reported that the students received and practiced the basic language forms and functions without rushing. T11 stated that "*The outcomes are well-distributed among the units. The students are given the opportunity to revisit most of them all through the teaching year. Since it is limited, basic, everyday English, we do not need to hurry".* T5 also stressed that "*…the outcomes can easily be attained since the number of the outcomes is not excessive and also there is enough time for revision".*

Table 3. *Teachers' opinions regarding the outcomes of the 2nd grade ELTP* (*N*=14)

		Themes & Categories	Participant codes
Outcomes	**Positive**	*Structure of and relations between outcomes*	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T14
		Sequencing	
		Pacing	
		Latent outcomes	T6, T10
		Language awareness and attentiveness	
	Negative	*Practical language use*	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T14
		Emphasis on everyday language	
		Excessive number of outcomes	T6, T7, T10, T12
		Lack of enough practice opportunity	
		Limited weekly class hours	

The next theme was found to be *latent*-or emergent- *outcomes.* The participant believed that the use of language for real communication and also exposure to it through songs and different activities led to peripheral learning without any explicit instruction which created learning that was not stated in the outcomes of the program openly (T10). The most recurring category was the change in learners' *language awareness* of and *attentiveness to English*. In this regard, the participants said that some students paid attention to the structures although a holistic, inductive approach was used to present the language (T6, T10). Likewise, they claimed that students were curious to know the meanings of English words they heard not only in the classroom but also in real life such as on TV shows or the signboards of the shops in the streets. Related to this, a teacher expressed that "*It is not stated in the program but ….they* [students] *have developed awareness to English words they come across in and outside the classroom. They catch them and then ask me what they mean"* (T12, T14).

Lastly, all the teachers expressed that the program focused on the *daily use of language.* Most of the participants indicated that since the students were young learners and true beginners, the language they learnt was *practical*, in other words functional and meaningful and they were able to have basic conversations as written in the program (T6,T7, T9, T10, T12).

Again, a number of the teachers (T6, T9, T12, T14) also expressed that due to this aspect of the program, the outcomes were attainable. In this respect, for instance, one of the teachers stated that "*the outcomes can easily be attained because students use the language in and outside the class to communicate meaningfully…They* [outcomes] *are mostly related to simple things like asking questions and students use them in life with their parents, siblings and friends*" (T14).

Besides these positive opinions, some negative views were also voiced by some participants, which were grouped under two main themes as *excessive number of outcomes* and *lack of enough practice opportunity.* Although the number of the outcomes was regarded positively by many teachers, T6, T7, T10 and T12 were of the opinion that there were too many outcomes for a 2-class hour course. These two interrelated aspects of the ELTP were also regarded as barriers to successful outcome attainability. For instance, T10 reported that "*The outcomes of the program should be reviewed… There are many of them and we have only 2 hours a week. Most of the time we move from one unit to the other with little to no time to revisit the outcomes regularly*".

Findings related to the content of the 2nd grade ELTP

As for the content of the program, three positive and a negative themes emerged (see Table 4). While the positive ones were labeled as *vocabulary, chunks and fixed patterns* and *context*, the negative opinions were all found to be related to the *order of the content.*

Table 4. *Teachers' opinions regarding the content of the 2nd grade ELTP* (*N*=14)

		Themes & Categories	Participant codes
Content	**Positive**	*Vocabulary*	
		Use of Cognates	T3, T7, T8, T9, T10, T12, T13, T14
		Selection of vocabulary	
		Order of vocabulary	
		Chunks and fixed patterns	T3, T4, T7, T8, T9, T10
		Facilitating communication	
		Association with immediate context	
		Context	T5, T9
		Attractiveness	
	Negative	*Order of the content*	T1, T11, T13, T14
		Difficult Vocabulary	

The *vocabulary* strand was considered as the most positive aspect of the content by the majority of the teachers. Their responses showed that the *use of cognates* in the program helped the students learn the vocabulary items easily (T3, T7, T8, T9, T10, T12, T13, T14). While T9 stated that "S*tudents start to learn their first vocabulary items with the ones they already know such as broccoli or ambulance. This accelerates their learning speed",* T7 also pointed out that the use of cognates aroused learners' interest in the language and made them think they already knew English and as a result they developed positive attitudes towards the language. Similarly, the participants also reported that the *selection of core vocabulary* was appropriate for this level and addressed learners' needs in terms of making daily conversations (T3, T7, T8, T9, T10, T12). The *order of the vocabulary content was* another feature that was identified as being successful (T7, T8, T10, T12). T8 expressed that "*The vocabulary content is designed perfectly. The most basic and frequently used structures are given priority in all units. It gets slightly difficult and more demanding as the units proceed".*

The other theme identified was related to *chunks and fixed patterns* promoted in the content. Most participants stated that the program's emphasis on them rather than words in isolation facilitated students' communication skills (T3, T4, T7, T8, T9, T10). For instance, T10 stated that "*… students learn chunks and start using them with us and their friends easily*

conveying full meanings rather than discreet ideas at a time". Additionally, some teachers also indicated that this helped them achieve fluency and accuracy in the use of language (T3, T8, T9). Similar to the views about the selection of core vocabulary, the participants shared the opinion that the chunks and fixed expressions were all based on the immediate context of the students and connected to their daily life. The final positive aspect was found to be the *attractiveness of the content*, which was related to the pragmatic value of the ELTP. Two teachers stated that learners at this age wanted to express themselves, talk about their own families, schools, friends and the content of the 2nd grade ELTP helped them do so. Thus, they found it attractive (T5, T9).

On the other hand, the interview data yielded two negative themes. Firstly, some teachers expressed their concerns about the overall design of the content. According to them, the content was not structured from known to unknown or from simple to complex (T1, T11, T13, T14). For instance, T11 stated that "*if the program was carefully designed, it would start with simple things like colors, alphabet, but it does not*" while T14 claimed that the content was difficult and presented in an unfamiliar way by saying "... *we try to teach everything together with no sequencing at all. Colors with the structure like/dislike or animals and verbs with can/can't. Everything is in the same basket*". Likewise, T1, T11, T13 and T14 were of the opinion that the vocabulary content for the 2nd graders was difficult to learn for the students. T1 stated that "*the vocabulary items have to be changed, we start with the ones* [vocabulary] *some of which we do not even teach in 6th and 7th grades. It can start with colors, numbers or the alphabet. But we have none of them in the content.*"

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to understand how the 2nd grade ELTP was perceived by practicing teachers in relation to four components of it, i.e. general characteristics, aims, outcomes and content. To this end, a small scale qualitative study was undertaken. Overall, the findings revealed that the participant teachers had positive opinions regarding these four aspects of the ELTP.

To start with, this study showed that the motivational quality of the 2nd grade ELTP and its adherence to child development principles were the two positively perceived general characteristics of the program. The former quality is also emphasized in the program document, which claims to develop students' communicative competence by boosting their interest and creating in them a love for and a desire to learn the language (MoNE, 2013, pp. VII). Thus, this result indicates that the program delivers what it promises to deliver in terms of motivational aspects. As motivation, specifically intrinsic one, is regarded as a key factor to success in any task undertaken (Dornyei, Ibrahim & Muir, 2015), it may not be wrong to assume that the following generation of learners may be able to develop better communicative competence in English. Definitely, this assumption requires new longitudinal evaluation studies to be done to gather data on the impact of the ELTP on students' language learning performance in the following grades.

The most important aspect of any teaching program which is designed for young learners should be the extent to which it takes child development principles into consideration. In this regard, this study found that the 2nd grade ELTP is well designed in relation to the cognitive, affective and psychomotor developmental levels of children. Several other earlier studies also revealed this aspect of the program as one of the strengths of it. For instance, Alkan and Arslan (2014) reported that the teachers in their study supported the program due to its adherence to children's developmental characteristics. According to the findings of some other studies (Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykin, 2014; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014), the program addresses students' level of readiness to learn the language. On the other hand, few participants in this study raised concerns about the cognitive load the program comes to bear on learners' achieving the aims of the program. In an earlier study Bozavlı (2015) found that some 2nd grade students struggled more in learning English, which might be related to the cognitive load of the program. In other words, it might be an indicator of a mismatch between children's cognitive development and the program's cognitive learning outcomes or it might be a case that cannot be

generalized for 2nd grade classrooms. In either case, this contradictory result warrants further investigation and might be considered together with a potential need to revise the outcomes of the program where the cognitive load can be observed more. Additionally, although teachers in this study considered the program as applicable in their context, in some studies it was found that teachers regarded the program as inapplicable throughout the country (Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Tosuncuk, 2016) implying that while general characteristics such as communicative strand or taking the child development principles were found to be the sound features of the 2nd grade ELTP, some studies revealed that top-down process employed by MoNE for the implementation of the program was regarded as one of the weak points.

As for the outcomes of the program, the participant teachers highlighted both positive and negative aspects. Firstly, the sequencing and pacing of the outcomes and their emphasis on everyday language use were stated as the positive features of them. Moreover, the program was reported to have a specific latent outcome related to language awareness. As literature shows, language awareness is a strong predictor of language learning as it raises consciousness facilitating student learning (Svalberg, 2007; Svalberg, 2012). Furthermore, students with an increased language awareness are reported to be more autonomous learners (Benson, 2007). Thus, the 2nd grade ELTP, unlike 1997 and 2006 ELTPs, may pave the way to create autonomous learners with heightened language awareness. Definitely, this underlying outcome reported by the small group of participants in this study needs to be researched more including not only 2nd grade learners and the program but other grade levels and programs as well since language awareness is a developmental process that teachers should cultivate in all educational levels. These further studies may also focus on classroom practices regarding how it can be promoted at different age and proficiency levels.

On the other hand, some participant teachers in this study regarded the number of the outcomes as a negative aspect of the ELTP. As Arı (2014) states, different studies show that the number of the outcomes in all primary school ELTPs in Turkey is generally found to be high lowering the quality of language education. On this account, there seems to be an urgent need to carry out studies to analyze the outcome attainment of the 2nd grade students, which may help program designers make critical decisions regarding program improvements. In relation to the number of the outcomes, the teachers reported class hours allotted for teaching English as a limitation for the attainment of the outcomes. This finding is among the most commonly reported deficiencies related to the 2nd grade ELTP (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aybek, 2015; Dinçer, 2016; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Yıldıran & Tanrıseven, 2015). Consequently, it can be stated that the mismatch between the number of the outcomes and class hours appears to be a major problem to be tackled by program designers on a micro level and educational language policy makers at a macro level for the decisions to be made about it is related with the place of English language teaching and learning in general public education.

In terms of the content component, vocabulary content together with its emphasis on cognates and chunks was identified as the positive feature of the program by the majority of the participants. According to the findings, the content enables students to learn basic vocabulary in English which in turn increases their motivation and interest in English. Additionally, the link between the content choice and its relation with everyday life of the students was reported to attract students' interest augmenting their motivation towards and participation in the lesson. This result overlaps with the findings of İyitoğlu and Alcı's study (2015), which explored the vocabulary aspect of the 2nd grade ELTP and reported similar results.

Conversely, the order of the content and existence of difficult vocabulary were regarded as the weak points of the content component of the program. Similar results have also been reported in earlier studies. For instance, while Alkan and Arslan (2014) found that the order of the content was not arranged from simple to complex in addition to the complexities included in the content, Ekus and Babayiğit (2013) reported that some teachers requested simplification in the content of the 2nd grade ELTP. Likewise, Bayraktar's study (2014) showed that the 2nd grade ELTP included content irrelevant with each other and the number of the vocabulary items was high in addition to being difficult for learners to grasp. As can be understood, the findings of this study and other related studies indicate that although the content of the program is favorable

due to its vocabulary coverage, the order of it and vocabulary selection need to be reevaluated and improved.

Overall, the findings of this study revealed more positive perceptions with regard to all the components of the program under investigation, which may be considered as a promising sign regarding the outputs the program may produce, i.e. more willing, more motivated language learners with better communicative skills. As is the case in Turkey, despite the frequent changes in ELTPs, it is difficult to claim that quality learning and standards of language instruction have been ensured. Different statistical data from different sources appear to support this thesis (English Proficiency Index, 2017; Test and Score Data TOEFL, 2017). For instance, the total mean for the English test 8th graders took in 2017 at the Transition from Primary to Secondary Education (TEOG) exam was announced to be 57.315, which is the second lowest mean average after mathematics (MoNE, 2017). Thus, a language program which delivers what it promises needs to be evaluated well so that to-the-point revisions for better results could be done. In other words, evaluation studies need to be conducted in order to inform all stakeholders from policy makers to curriculum designers, from teachers to parents so that its effectiveness can be maximized.

Furthermore, since the 2013 2nd Grade ELTP has been in practice for nearly five years now, there is still a need for a large volume of research on needs analysis, program design, and impact evaluation in order to explore and expose what particular needs the program should further address, which design features need to be revised, and whether it brings about the intended learning outcomes or not. As stated by Kırkgöz (2008), there is usually a discrepancy between what is planned at the macro level and what is implemented by teachers at the micro level in program design and delivery. To bridge this gap, more studies need to be undertaken. In this particular case, the evaluation of the 2nd Grade ELTP is significant in that it is the first program shaping the first encounters of the primary school students with English language and laying the foundations of language learning in the following grades.

Lastly, it needs to be acknowledged that this study focused on the four components of the 2nd Grade ELTP excluding methodology, materials and assessment and evaluation of student learning, which might have led to limited descriptions and evaluations with regard to the program features in depth. However, the confines of a paper this length would not allow the authors to present all the findings in enough detail even if they had collected data for all the components of the program. Thus, further research may include the other aspects of it excluded in this study for practical reasons.

Last but not least, the data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, which may have limited the scope of the study. Further research is, thus, suggested to include classroom observations, focus group interviews with stakeholders such as teachers and students as well as families. Additionally, this study was a small scale one conducted only one city center in Turkey; thus, it is suggested to conduct such an evaluation study regarding the 2nd grade ELTP in various other contexts with changing features such as cities or towns in various regions across Turkey.

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APPENDIX A. Interview Questions

1- What are your opinions related to the general characteristics of the 2nd grade ELTP?

2- What are your opinions related to the aims of the 2nd grade ELTP?

3- What are your opinions related to the outcomes of the 2nd grade ELTP?

4- What are your opinions related to the content of the 2nd grade ELTP?