

PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS OF
FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADERS AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS ON
VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF FUTURE IN-SERVICE TRAINING (INSET)
PROGRAMS

İLKÖĞRETİM OKULLARINDA 4. VE 5. SINIFLARA DERS VEREN
İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN GELECEKTE AÇILACAK
HİZMET İÇİ EĞİTİM PROGRAMLARININ FARKLI BOYUTLARINA
İLİŞKİN GÖRÜŞLERİ

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of primary school English language teachers of fourth and fifth graders on various dimensions of future in-service training (INSET) programs for improving their English Language teaching skills.

The subjects of this study were English language teachers at various primary schools in the city center of Bolu. During the study, the quantitative data was collected by means of an opinionnaire developed by the researcher.

The results of this study highlighted that the objectives of future INSET programs should be mainly on the teaching of four basic language skills and on the effective use of visual course materials. The results related to the content of future in-service training programs indicated that these should be on how to improve the cognitive and affective characteristics of fourth and fifth year students and on how to implement visual course materials and language teaching activities while teaching English. The results indicated that the learning situations of future INSET programs should keep a balance between the theoretical and application dimensions of the topic areas and that evaluation procedures of future INSET programs should be made at the end of the programs and should especially emphasize the theoretical aspects of the program implemented.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, ilköğretim okulu birinci basamağında 4. ve 5. sınıflara ders veren İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğretimi becerilerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik ileride açılacak hizmet içi eğitim programlarının farklı boyutları ile ilgili görüşlerini incelemektir.

Çalışmanın örneklem grubunu Bolu il merkezindeki ilköğretim okulu birinci kademesinde 4. ve 5. sınıflara ders veren İngilizce öğretmenleri oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada niceliksel veriler araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bilgi formu ile toplanmıştır.

Çalışmanın sonuçları, ilköğretim okullarında 4. ve 5. sınıflara ders veren İngilizce öğretmenleri için gelecekte açılacak olan hizmetiçi eğitim programlarının içereceği hedeflerin aşağıdaki alanları kapsamı gerektiğini göstermektedir: İngilizce dört temel dil becerisi, görsel ders araçlarının İngilizce öğretiminde etkili kullanımı, ilköğretim okulu 4. ve 5. sınıf öğrencilerinin bilişsel ve duyuşsal alan özelliklerinin İngilizce öğretiminde nasıl kullanılabileceği, İngilizce derslerinin işlenmesi sırasında yabancı dil öğretimiyle ilgili etkinliklerin düzenlenmesi ve işitsel ders materyallerinin etkili kullanımı. Bu çalışmada ayrıca programın eğitim durumlarında çalışılan konuların kuram ve uygulama boyutlarının dengeli bir biçimde olması gerektiği ve hizmet içi eğitimi programının program bitiminde yerinde değerlendirilmesi ve bu değerlendirmede programın kuramsal boyutuna ağırlık verilmesi vurgulanmaktadır.

INTRODUCTION

Making eight years of basic primary education-

compulsory, which refers to the first eight years of

school education, is regarded and acknowledged as

one of the most important reforms in the history of Turkish National Education System. One of the most important motives for this reform is the fact that foreign language learning and teaching begin when the primary school pupils are at the first level which includes the 4th and 5th graders. The pupils in these classes have to take the foreign language courses (English language) 2 hours a week (MEB, 1997) (The Official Gazette, August 18, 1997-4306). By means of Compulsory Basic Primary Education, as Cordan (1997) states in his paper, it is believed that pupils will be able to learn and master at least one foreign language effectively. However, the literature concerning teaching English at these grade levels reports some problems. Some of these can be listed as follows:

Başçı (1983) states difficulties in motivating the pupils at these grade levels to learn a foreign language in crowded classes. Başçavuşoğlu in her paper (1983) expresses her belief that problems at these grade levels are mostly related to teachers' lack of knowledge, not only of the contemporary approaches, methods and techniques used and implemented in the teaching of foreign languages but also of measurement and evaluation procedures.

According to Özkardeş (1996), the problems can be listed as influences and/or pressures received from publishers upon the school management and foreign language teachers concerning the selection of the books to be followed during the academic year, and the disconnection between the foreign language course books and other course materials to be followed during the academic year; the ineffectiveness of university teacher training programs for teaching English at primary school level; undergoing just a few in-service training (INSET) courses and/or opportunities to improve their skills in teaching English; the lack of knowledge on the part of foreign language teachers about the implementation and maintenance of current approaches, methods and techniques for teaching English at primary school level and the selection of topic areas to be covered during the academic year.

Moreover; Pekmezciler and Durukafa (1996) perceive the limited time allocated to foreign language courses, and insufficient use of recent technologies in foreign language teaching as some of the barriers to

effective foreign language teaching at these grade levels.

In his study, Aşıcı (1993) reveals the fact that teachers at various primary schools are not sufficiently competent in terms of their qualifications and there are not enough teachers to be employed. Therefore, it is clear that the problems related to the teaching of English at this level of primary schools could best be solved by means of effective in-service training (INSET) programs organized by the Ministry of National Education for improving the foreign language teaching skills of English language teachers. Öztürk (1996) states that teachers should attend courses organized by the Ministry of Education professionals in cooperation with university instructors, knowing the problems concerned, in order to improve their knowledge, performance and teaching techniques in the classroom. Within this framework, the INSET programs should be perceived and considered as a necessary and essential means not only to increase the effectiveness and quality of foreign language instruction at the first level of primary schools, and to solve the problems of the English language teachers, but also to struggle for a successful and effective Eight Years of Compulsory Basic Primary Education.

METHOD

The main question addressed by this study is "What are the perceptions of primary school English language teachers teaching at first level (4th and 5th graders) concerning various dimensions of future in-service training (INSET) programs for improving their English language teaching skills?". In relation to this main question, the following sub-questions are examined.

- a) What are the perceptions of primary school English language teachers teaching at first grade level related to the objectives of future INSET programs?
- b) What are the perceptions of primary schools English language teachers teaching at first level concerning the content of future INSET programs?
- c) What are the perceptions of primary school English language teachers teaching at first level concerning the learning situations of future

INSET programs?

- d) What are the perceptions of primary school English language teachers related to the evaluation procedures of future INSET programs?

The subjects of this study were primary school English language teachers (n=20) at first level at various primary schools in the city center of Bolu. 85% of them (n=17) were females and 65% of them (n=13), in terms of their teaching experience, have been teaching between 0-5 years; 50% of them (n=10) were graduates of various education faculties and 50% of them (n=10) were graduates of various faculties such as the faculties of engineering, management and administration. In terms of their professional status 55% of them (n=11) were regular teachers.

During the study, a 5-point Likert-type opinionnaire was given to the teachers. For the preparation and development of the opinionnaire, research studies in this area by Demirel (1989), Smith (1989), Ekmekçi (1992) and Doğuelli (1992) had been reviewed and the critical views of the subject specialists had been taken into account.

After the necessary legal permission had been taken from the Bolu authorities, the opinionnaire was given to the teachers in order to obtain their perceptions concerning various dimensions of possible future in-service training programs.

For the analysis of the data, the SPSS Program for Windows was used. By means of the SPSS program, the frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation scores for each item in the opinionnaire were calculated.

RESULTS

From the findings related to possible objectives of the future INSET programs, it may be observed that 75% of the teachers (n=15) stated that knowledge of how to teach four basic language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing) of English language, and the knowledge of how to use various visual course materials during the class hours should be objectives for the future INSET programs. Also, 70% of them (n=14) identified knowledge of the various English language teaching techniques that lead to the active

participation of learners as an objective for future INSET programs. In the meantime, 65% of the teachers (n=13) agreed that knowledge of teaching vocabulary and of using audio course materials should be objectives for future programs. Training in the use of various technological means such as TV., video, and computers was noted as the objectives for future programs by 60% (n=12). Moreover, 50% of teachers (n=10) stated that knowledge related to the use of the cognitive domain characteristics such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation of students in foreign language teaching, teaching grammar and the selection of books to be followed should be objectives of future INSET programs for primary school English language teachers.

When the results related to the content of future INSET programs are considered, it is observed that 55% of teachers (n=11) stated that the programs should emphasize the implementation of the cognitive and affective characteristics of primary school pupils. At the same time 55% of teachers (n=11) agreed that the programs should emphasize the implementation of various language teaching activities and of various visual course materials during the course hours as the content of future programs. In addition to these, 50% (n=10) pointed out that teaching of four basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the use of various audio course materials and of various technological means should be included in the content of future INSET programs.

Turning to the findings related to the learning situations of future INSET programs, it is observed that 65% of the teachers (n=13) agreed that issues on the structure of programs (i.e. the time-tables, the number of participants, the length of the programs, etc.) have to be taken into account. 60% (n=12) stated that during the class hours of the programs the theoretical dimensions of the topic areas and their applications must be emphasized simultaneously. Also noted were the essence of the following points: meeting the professional and individual needs of the participants, and experiencing the latest teaching approaches, methods and techniques that lead to the active participation of the students in the classroom settings (55% (n=11)). Meanwhile, 50% of the teachers (n=10) stated that

while the programs are organized, the adult learning theories and the learning situations that lead to the acquisition of new professional skills, behaviors and attitudes when the programs are over should be considered.

Concerning the evaluation procedures of future INSET programs, it is observed that 65% of the teachers (n=13) stated that the evaluation should be made when the program is over emphasizing the theoretical dimensions. 55% (n=11), meanwhile, expressed that the evaluation should be made by the end of each course hour or of each topic area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the results stated above, the following recommendations concerning the objectives, the content, the learning situations and the evaluation procedures of future INSET programs for improving the teaching skills of the primary school English language teachers teaching at the first level could be made.

The contents of future INSET programs need to increase the English language teachers' awareness on teaching of four basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, using various visual course materials, teaching vocabulary, making use of the cognitive characteristics of students, teaching grammar, selecting the course books and materials at primary school level.

The contents of the future INSET programs need to emphasize the knowledge of teachers concerning the implementation of cognitive and affective characteristics of students at primary school level, the implementation of various foreign language teaching activities, the use of audio and visual course materials and the use of technological means while teaching English at the primary school.

The learning situations of the future INSET programs need to keep a balance between the theoretical and application dimensions of the topic areas to be covered, meet the professional and individual needs of participants, need the participants to provide opportunities for experiencing the latest approaches, methods and techniques in teaching English, and need to provide the acquisition of new professional skills, attitudes and behaviors.

The evaluation procedures of the future INSET programs need to be made at the end of the programs emphasizing the theoretical dimension of the topic areas covered during the programs.

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