

Assessing First Stage Primary School Students' Achievement Level of Specific Objectives in English Courses

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Abstract

The problem statement of this survey is 'How far are the specific objectives of English courses achieved by the first stage state primary school students (4-5 grades) recently in Istanbul?' "Does the first stage state primary school students' achievement level of the specific English courses differ according to students' personal characteristics? Survey method was used in this study. Data collection instrument was a Personal Information Form with 6 items (gender, grade, mother's and father's education level, family income level, existence of a family member who can speak English) developed by Lect. Dr. Senem Seda SAHENK ERKAN. 'Assessing First Stage Primary School Students' Achievement Level of Specific Objectives In English Courses' was prepared by the researcher, Lect. Dr. Senem Seda SAHENK ERKAN. A 5-point Likert-type scale (Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Slightly agree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)) was used. This scale, which tests the specific objectives of the English courses that students study at the first stage of state primary school, included 30 items. The results of this study and recommendations will be provided in the full text.

Key words: Teaching English at the first stage of primary schools, Specific English course objectives.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education in primary level has become widespread in our country as it has in many other European and Asian countries, and in the USA. In most of the European Union countries teaching a foreign language in primary level requires professionalization, and it is a discipline which falls into different departments at universities. Similarly, foreign language teaching in our country is an important occupation which necessitates experts at this stage of education. In order to carry out English language courses successfully, it is very crucial to develop foreign language programs and methods appropriate for these schools and to educate qualified foreign language teachers.

English, which is one of the most commonly taught languages all over the world, is a recognized and popular language in our country too. Nowadays, teaching English at an early age has gained importance. Therefore, foreign language courses are compulsory in primary schools. Students are more successful in pronunciation and they develop their listening, reading, speaking and writing abilities better when they start learning a foreign language at an early age. Therefore, it is highly important to start foreign language education in primary school rather than starting in high school or university [1].

1.1. Problem

The problem sentence of this study can be expressed as "how far are the specific objectives of English courses achieved by the first stage state primary school students (4-5 grades) recently in Istanbul?"

1.2. Aim

The aim of this study is to determine first stage state primary school students' achievement level of specific objectives in English courses and to identify if there is a difference in achievement level in terms of students' personalities.

Within the framework of this aim, the answers for the following two questions are tried to be provided. According to students' English language abilities;

[1] How far are the specific objectives of English courses achieved by the first stage state primary school students (4-5 grades)?

- [2] Does the first stage state primary school students' achievement level of the specific English courses differ according to students' the personal characteristics (gender, grade, mother's and father's education level, family income level, existence of at least one family member who can speak English)?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Foreign Language Education in Primary Schools

Foreign language courses in first and second stages of primary schools must be practice-based. During foreign language courses in these schools using a variety of teaching techniques which will support students' language learning will contribute to class performance. Moreover, the activities listed below can be included. Kids and adults can improve both their language skills and creativity by means of singing, playing games, poetry, doing puzzles and craftworks during English classes. In primary level, English courses must include a communicative functional type of content which supports inclination for music and imagination [2].

The principals of the education and teaching programs of the courses, which will be taught in English, are determined by Ministry of National Education for primary, high and common-public education, and by The Council of Higher Education for higher education. After 8-year compulsory education was implemented, teaching of the first foreign language (English, German, French, and Arabic) in 4 and 5 grades was initiated. In addition, the second foreign language course was introduced as an elective course from the 6th grade. Department of National Educational Research and Development of Education in Ministry of National Education developed programs and prepared teaching materials for foreign language courses (Journal of Tebliğler (Official Bulletin of Ministry of National Education) October 1997, September 2011, volume 141). In volume 2481 (October 1997) of Official Bulletin of Ministry of National Education the justification to start teaching foreign languages in grade 4 and 5, general and specific objectives, course content, method and techniques were published.

Table 1: Weekly Program for Foreign Language Course in Primary Schools^[3]

English	4 th grade	5 th grade	6 th grade	7 th grade	8 th grade
Compulsory	3	3	4	4	4
Selective	2	2	2	2	Second Foreign language: 1

According to table 1, foreign language program in the first stage of the primary school includes 3 hours of teaching per week in one academic year. On the other hand, in the second stage of the primary school (6th-8th grades), 4 hours a week is allocated for the teaching of the first foreign language course. The selective second foreign language course is programmed to take 2 hours weekly.

2.2. English Teaching in the First Stage of Primary Schools

Teaching program of English courses in primary schools (4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grades) was renewed after a commission decision on March 2, 2005. The specific course objectives of the English course for 4th grade were announced in volume 2481 in October in 1997 of Official Bulletin of Ministry of National Education [4]. The students are expected to be able to understand the meaning of the terms appear in an appropriate level of sentence, answer a clear and short question, communicate on simple daily topics at basic level, utter basic sounds, use intonation and stress patterns, understand and build up simple sentences used in everyday life, identify different sentence structures, recall numbers, commands, classroom objects, days of the week, colours, clothes, rooms of a house, pronouns and use all these in correct sentences, ask questions with question words such as who, what, where, how many, introduce Ataturk and his family in English, use singular and plural nouns, ask questions with plural nouns, use simple and common adjectives and possessives, enjoy learning English and practice simple daily conversations. The specific course objectives of the English course for 5th grade were announced in volume 2481 in October in 1997 of Official Bulletin of Ministry of National Education. These are to be able to understand the terms used in appropriate level of sentences, build up accurate sentences, greet others, answer the questions asking for name and surname, age, hometown, answer simple questions used in everyday life, use 'there is/are', build up sentences with singular or plural words, talk about the occupations, tell the time, days of the week, talk about the weather, use 'where' in questions, use some simple adjectives appearing in everyday conversations, ask questions, use simple adjectives in sentences, use 'can/can't' in sentences to talk about ability, understand simple present and present continuous tenses, build up sentences and make up simple dialogues in these tenses, count by tens up to 100, be eager to learn English.

III. METHOD

3.1. The Model of the Research

In this research which aims to determine first stage state primary school students' achievement level of specific objectives in English courses and to identify if there is any difference in achievement level in terms of students' personalities, general survey method is used. General survey method is a data collection tool mostly used in larger populations to make generalization about the population from drawn samples [5].

3.2. The Population and Sample

The population of this study is students studying in the first stage (4th -5th grades) of state primary schools in Kadıköy, Istanbul. The sample selected for this study includes 400 students studying in the first stage of the 8 state primary schools (Yeşilbahar Primary School, Göztepe Primary School, İlhami Ahmed Örnekal Primary School, Kalamış Primary School, Nurettin Teksan Primary School, 50 Yıl Cumhuriyet F. Primary School, 29 Ekim Primary School, Mustafa Aykın Primary School) in Kadıköy Istanbul.

3.3. Data Gathering Tools

3.3.1. Personal Information Form

To collect data about the subjects a personal information form including 6 items (gender, grade, mother's and father's education level, family income, existence of a family member who can speak English) was developed by Lect. Dr. Senem Seda SAHENK ERKAN.

3.3.2. The scale to assess first stage state primary school students' achievement level of specific objectives in English courses

The scale to assess first stage state primary school students' achievement level of specific objectives in English courses was developed by Lect. Dr. Senem Seda SAHENK ERKAN. A 5-point Likert-type scale (Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Slightly agree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)) was used. This scale, which tested the special objectives of English courses taught in the first stages of primary schools, included 30 items.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability tests of the study included 200 students of 4th and 5th grades, 118 of which were girls while 82 of which were boys. 112 of the students were 4th grade students whereas 88 of them were 5th grade students. In order to assess the validity of the research exploratory factor analysis was used. To assess whether the number of sample group is appropriate to carry out exploratory factor analysis on the data, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was applied. The result obtained was 0.829. Since the result is over 0.50, it indicated that it was appropriate to apply exploratory factor analysis. To determine the number of factors to extract Bartlett's test was used. Bartlett's test result was $\chi^2=11076,551$, $sd=435$ $p=0.000$. This result indicated that it was appropriate to apply factor analysis [6].

When it was determined that the sample group was large enough and the instrument was applicable to factor analysis, factor analysis was applied. 4 factors were extracted. The factor load of the first factor was 20.008 explaining 66.695 of the variance. The factor load of the second factor was 1.907 explaining 6.385 of the variance. The factor load of the third factor was 1,389 explaining 4.629 of the variance. The factor load of the last factor was 1.197 explaining 3.991 of the variance. Except for the 2nd and 3rd items, all the other items loaded above .60 on the first factor. Item 22 loaded on both the first and the second factor and the difference between the two was less than .10. Items loading on two factors with a difference less than .10 were eliminated [7]. Item 30 loaded on all three factors. Since the first factor had load of 10 times greater than the other factors, and except two items all the other items loaded on the first factor, there could have been one dimension. There for items 2, 3, 22, and 30 were eliminated and factor analysis was repeated. In the second factor analysis, the result obtained by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was .891. Bartlett's test result was $\chi^2=9767,988$, $sd=325$ $p=0.000$. It was determined that the sample group was large enough and the instrument was applicable to factor analysis, factor analysis was applied. 3 factors were extracted. The factor load of the first factor was 19.233 explaining 73.972 of the variance. The factor load of the second factor was 1.112 explaining 4.135 of the variance. The factor load of the third factor was 1,017 explaining 3.910 of the variance. Factor load of each item is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Factor Loading

Items	1. Factor	2. Factor	3. Factor
Item 11	.954		
Item 20	.949		
Item 9	.933		
Item 6	.932		
Item 18	.931		
Item 25	.926		
Item 21	.918		
Item 27	.904		
Item 17	.891	.301	
Item 8	.883		
Item 16	.882		
Item 15	.880	-.327	
Item 1	.875		
Item 24	.872		
Item 7	.871		
Item 13	.866		
Item 12	.863		
Item 5	.854		
Item 10	.843		
Item 28	.838	.316	
Item 26	.814		-.366
Item 29	.761		
Item 4	.753		
Item 19	.752	.316	.426
Item 23	.704		.487
Item 14	.621		.381

As it is shown in table 2, all items had a factor load of over .60 on the first factor. Some other items (17, 15, 28, 26, 19, 23, 14) were included into the first factor since they had a factor load over .60 on the first factor and the difference with others was higher than .10. As a result, only one factor was retained. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was conducted in order to test the reliability of the instrument with 26 items. The result of this reliability test was .98. This was a very high result which was very close to the ideal result [8].

IV. FINDINGS

In this part the findings of the study are presented.

Table 3: Gender and Grade Distributions of the Subjects

Variables		f	%
Gender	Girls	213	53.2
	Boys	187	46.8
Total		400	100.0
Grade	4 th grade	194	48.5
	5 th grade	206	51.5
Total		400	100.0

According to table 3, 213 (53.2 %) of the students participated in the study were girls while 187 (46.8%) of them were boys. 194 (48.5 %) of the students participated in the study were in 4th grade while 206 (51.5 %) of the students participated in the study were in 5th grade.

Table 4: Mother's and Father's Education Level of the Subjects

Variables		f	%
Mother's education level	Primary School	93	23.2
	High School	141	35.2
	University	166	41.5
Total		400	100.0
Father's education level	Primary School	76	19.0
	High School	130	32.5
	University	194	48.5
Total		400	100.0

According to table 4, 93 (23.2 %) mothers were primary schools graduates while 141 (35.2%) of them were high school graduates. The number of university graduates was found to be 166 (41.5 %). On the other hand, 76 (19 %) fathers were primary school graduates while 130 (32.2 %) of them were high school graduates. The number of university graduates was 194 (48.5 %).

Table 5: Income Level of the Families of the Subjects

Income		f	%
Income Level	Low	10	2,5
	Middle	289	72.3
	High	101	25.3
Total		400	100.0

According to table 5, 10 (2.5 %) students participated in the study were from low-income families while 289 (72.3 %) of them were from middle-income families. The number of students from high-income families was 101 (25.3 %).

Table 6: Existence of a Family Member who can Speak English

Existence of a Family Member Speaking English		f	%
Is there at least one person in the family who can speak English?	Yes	320	80.0
	No	80	20.0
Total		400	100.0

In table 6 it is shown that 320 (80 %) students participated in the study have at least one family member who can speak English. The number of students without a family member who can speak English was 80 (20 %).

Table 7: The Results of the Independent Sample T-Test of the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives In English Course' Scale By Gender

Gender	N	Mean	sd	t	p
Girls	213	89.3	29.7	.781	.435
Boys	187	91.5	26.1		

According to table 7, there is no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses.

Table 8: The Results of the Independent Sample T-Test of the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Grades

Grade	N	Mean	sd	t	p
4 th grade	194	95.8	25.5	3.819	.000
5 th grade	206	85.2	29.5		

According to table 8, there is a significant difference between 4th and 5th grades students in terms of achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses ($p < 0.05$). The mean of the 4th grade students was 95.8 while it was 85.2 for 5th grade students. 4th grade students were more successful in achieving the specific course objectives in English courses than 5th grade students.

Table 9: ANOVA Result of the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Mother's Education Level

Mother's education level	N	Mean	sd	F	p
Primary School	93	71.6	27.7	93.629	.000
HighSchool	141	81.0	27.1		
University	166	108.7	15.8		

According to table 9, mother's education level has a significant influence on the student's achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses ($p < 0.05$). Scheffe test was conducted in order to determine the differences between the groups.

Table 10: Scheffe Test of Significance on the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Mother's Education Level

Mother's education level		Mean difference	p
Primary School	HighSchool	-9.4	.010
	University	-37.1	.000
HighSchool	University	-27.7	.000

According to table 10, the mean scores of the students whose mothers are graduates of primary school are significantly lower than those whose mothers are graduates of high school or university ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the mean scores of the students whose mothers are graduates of high school are significantly lower than those whose mothers are university graduates ($p < 0.05$). As a result, it is determined that as the education level of the mothers gets higher, the students' performance to achieve the specific course objectives in English courses get better.

Table 11: ANOVA Result the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Father Education Level

Father's education level	N	Mean	sd	F	p
Primary School	76	66.7	25.2	130.253	.000
High School	130	77.6	26.9		
University	194	108.1	15.9		

According to table 11, there is a significant mean difference between the students whose fathers are primary school, high school or university graduates in terms of the achievement level of specific course objectives in English courses. In order to determine where the mean differences lie, Scheffe test was conducted.

Table 12: Scheffe Test of Significance on the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Father Education Level

Father's education level		Mean Difference	p
Primary School	HighSchool	-10.9	.003
	Univeristy	-41.4	.000
HighSchool	University	-30.5	.000

According to table 12, the mean scores of the students whose fathers are graduates of primary school are significant lower than those whose fathers are graduates of high school or university ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the mean scores of the students whose fathers are graduates of high school are significant lower than those whose fathers are university graduates ($p < 0.05$). As a result, it is determined that as the education level of the father increased, the performance of the students improved.

Table 13: Kruskal Wallis Test Results of the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Income Level

Income level	N	Mean	sd	Mean rank	X ²	p
Low	10			69.35	120.890	.000
Middle	289			168.20		
High	101			305.90		

According to table 13, there is a significant difference between the students from families from different income groups ($p < 0.05$). In order to determine the differences between groups, Mann Whitney-U test was conducted.

Table 14: Mann Whitney-U test Results of the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students' Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Income Level

Income level	Mean rank	z	p
Low	66.00	3.152	.002
Middle	152.91		
Low	8.85	4.977	.000
High	60.67		
Middle	160.30	10.503	.000
High	296.23		

According to table 14, the mean scores of the students from low income families are lower than the students from middle or high-income families. Similarly, the mean scores of the students from middle-income families are lower than the students from high-income families. As a result, as the income level of the families gets higher, the students' achievement of the specific course objectives in English courses improves.

Table 15: The Results of The Independent Sample t-test of the Mean Scores Obtained in 'First Grade Primary School Students' Achievement Level of the Specific Objectives in English Course' Scale by Existence of a Family Member who can Speak English

Any family members who can speak English?	N	Mean	Sd	t	p
Yes	320	98.5	24.4	14.356	.000
No	80	57.5	15.2		

According to table 15, there is a significant difference between the students with and without a family member who can speak English. The mean score of the students who have a family member who can speak English is 98.5 while it is 57.5 for those who don't. As a result it is determined, that students who have a family member, who can speak English, are more successful in achieving the specific course objectives in English courses.

V. CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussions

"Perceptions of primary school English teachers' on English teaching program" developed a survey about the general characteristics of the English teaching program of grades 1-5, analyzed the data collected through this survey and discussed the results. Both in my research and in my study, it was determined that students studying at grades 1-5 couldn't achieve the desired objectives. In addition she stated in her study that the primary school English teachers complained that the students couldn't achieve the desired objectives [9].

"An Evaluation of English Curriculum in 4th and 5th Grade Primary Schools", evaluated the objectives, content, teaching, learning and assessment process of English teaching programs of 4th and 5th grades. In Er's (2006) and the present study it was determined that students studying at grades 1-5 couldn't achieve the desired objectives. In addition, he stated that teachers and the inspectors complained that 4th and 5th grades students couldn't achieve the desired objectives. For instance, students had great difficulty in achieving some of the objectives such as '*intonation and pronunciation in English, 'phonetics', and 'building up sentences to practice the structures they've learned'*'. Inspectors stated that students couldn't achieve some of the objectives at all such as '*understanding language structure, functions and concepts', 'imperatives', 'building up dialogues'*'. On the other hand, teachers participated in the study stated that students could achieve the objectives such as '*counting in English', 'telling the time' and 'days of the week [10]*'.

"Teachers' Perceptions of the 5th grade English Course Curriculum", investigated the perception of the teachers on the English teaching program of the 5th grade in primary schools. In Güneş (2009) study and the present study, it was stated that 5th grade students couldn't achieve most of the English specific objectives and English teachers were aware of that situation [11]. The study, which was conducted by Pekkanlı Egel (2009), aimed at investigating several dimensions of primary school students' language learning styles and the ways in which certain styles are shaped and favored by teachers' teaching styles. As in my study, in this study, the students prefer to study English through these activities: games, songs and dialogue. In addition, they have some difficulties in listening, writing and reading, but they find speaking activities easier than the other activities like writing, listening and reading [12].

The study, which was conducted by Altunay and Bayat (2009), aimed at investigating the relationship between autonomy perception and classroom behaviors of students learning English as a foreign language. As in my study, in this study, both the primary students and the university students are unwilling to speak in the target language during the class hours and don't prefer reading magazines or books in the target language or making use of individual learning opportunities [13].

5.2. Results

The following results are obtained in this study:

- [1] There is no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses.
- [2] There is a significant difference between 4th and 5th grades students in terms of achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses.
- [3] Mother's education level has a significant influence on the student's achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses. The mean scores of the students whose mothers are graduates of primary school are significantly lower than those whose mothers are graduates of high school or university. Similarly, the mean scores of the students whose mothers are graduates of high school are significantly lower than those whose mothers are university graduates. As a result, it is determined that as the education level of the mothers gets higher, the students' performance to achieve the specific course objectives in English courses gets better.
- [4] Father's education level has a significant influence on the student's achievement level of the specific objectives in English courses. The mean scores of the students whose fathers are graduates of primary school are significant lower than those whose fathers are graduates of high school or university. Similarly, the mean scores of the students whose fathers are graduates of high school are significant lower than those whose fathers are university graduates. As a result, it is determined that as the education level of the father increases, students perform better.
- [5] There is a significant difference between the students from families at different income levels. The mean scores of the students from low income families are lower that the students from middle or high-income families. Similarly, the mean scores of the students from middle-income families are lower than the students from high-income families. As a result, as the income level of the families gets higher, the students' achievement of the specific course objectives in English courses improves.
- [6] There is a significant difference between the students with and without a family member who can speak English. As a result it is determined that students who have a family member who can speak English are more successful in achieving the specific course objectives in English courses.

5.3. Recommendations

The recommendations for the Ministry of National Education are listed below:

- [1] In order to be able to improve the efficiency of English teaching in primary schools, the class size should be lowered to international standards.
- [2] English teaching in primary schools should start in grade 2.
- [3] English courses in primary schools should be at least 5 hours a week.
- [4] Course books, materials, audio-visual equipment used in primary schools should be enriched.
- [5] Professional development programs must be organized for language teachers so that they can follow the latest innovations in teaching English, and national and international trainers should be invited to these programs to train teachers.
- [6] In light of this study, the followings are recommended for the other researchers who study in that field:
- [7] Researchers should work on the specific course objectives determined for English courses in the first and second stages of the primary school.
- [8] Researchers should work on the specific course objectives determined for English courses in the second stages of the primary school.
- [9] Researchers should improve subjects in teaching English to the first stage primary school students and carry out research in this subject.
- [10] Researchers should work on teaching of different foreign languages in their studies.

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BIOGRAPHY



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