



Republic of Türkiye
Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University
Graduate School of Educational Sciences
English Language Teaching Master's Program

**THE EVALUATION OF THE 5TH GRADE INTENSIVE ENGLISH
CURRICULUM FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF EFL TEACHERS
IN BURDUR**

Sümeyye ÇETİN
A Master's Thesis

Thesis Supervisor
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Burdur, 2025

T.C.
Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi
Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı
İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı

**5. SINIF YOĞUNLAŞTIRILMIŞ İNGİLİZCE DERSİ ÖĞRETİM
PROGRAMININ BURDUR' DAKI İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN
BAKİŞ AÇISIYLA İNCELENMESİ**

Sümeyye ÇETİN
Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Tez Danışmanı
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Burdur, 2025



**MAKÜ EĞİTİM BİLİMLERİ
ENSTİTÜSÜ**

YÜKSEK LİSANS JÜRİ ONAY FORMU

M.A.K.Ü. Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü Yönetim Kurulu'nun 11.12.2025 tarih ve 594/3 sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından 25.12.2025 tarihinde tez savunma sınavı yapılan 2230461006 öğrenci numaralı Sümeyye ÇETİN'in "5. Sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Dersi Öğretim Programının Burdur'daki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi" konulu tez çalışması Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı'nda YÜKSEK LİSANS tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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25.12.2025

İmza

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Prof. Dr. Ali Karakaş, who believed in me unconditionally throughout my thesis journey. Even at moments when I felt discouraged and considered giving up, his motivation and encouragement helped me regain confidence. His valuable expertise, insightful perspective, and continuous guidance shaped this study, and his constant support made this process both meaningful and manageable.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their endless patience, trust, and support throughout my master's education and thesis process. I owe special thanks to my beloved spouse for standing by me with unwavering belief and for providing both emotional and practical support. I am also thankful to my children, family members, and friends for their understanding, encouragement, and sacrifices, all of which made it possible for me to complete this journey.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the esteemed faculty members who contributed to my academic development during my graduate program. I sincerely thank Prof. Dr. Mehmet Özcan, Prof. Dr. Mustafa Şevik, Prof. Dr. Ali Karakaş and Dr. Yusuf Emre Yeşilyurt for broadening my academic perspective and enriching my understanding through their valuable contributions. It has been a privilege to learn from each of them.

Finally, I would like to thank the participant teachers of this study. I am sincerely grateful for their willingness to participate, for openly sharing their thoughts, and for patiently and sincerely responding to the interview questions. Their voluntary contributions and the time they devoted to this research formed the foundation of this thesis.

THE EVALUATION OF THE 5TH GRADE INTENSIVE ENGLISH CURRICULUM FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF EFL TEACHERS IN BURDUR

(Master's Thesis)

Sümeyye ÇETİN

ABSTRACT

Aiming to develop its citizens' foreign language proficiency, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye has developed the current foreign language curriculum with many significant regulations and policies in recent times. As one of the latest policy changes, beginning from the 2017-2018 academic year in pilot schools determined across the country, an Intensive English Language Program (IELP) for the 5th grades has been implemented across the country. However, the previous studies related to the recent practice are limited as they were generally carried out in the pilot year to identify the shortcoming aspects. In this context, there is a need to conduct more research to explore the program's current strengths, limitations and long-term effects. Regarding this, the effectiveness of the IELP needs to be evaluated from EFL teachers' point of view, who are mainly in charge of the in-class practices on the current implementation. Therefore, the primary aim of the present study was to understand the perceptions of EFL teachers based on their experiences on the IELP, and offer suggestions for its weaknesses. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 EFL teachers involved in the IELP in Burdur, and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the participants were mainly satisfied with the recent practice, who reported several benefits for young learners such as improved communication skills, increased motivation, early-age learning advantages, and stronger long-term language outcomes. IELP was also found beneficial for EFL teachers with more opportunities for interactive activities, focus on language skills and professional fulfillment. Nevertheless, some persistent challenges were identified such as lack of course materials, heavy curriculum, crowded and mixed-ability classrooms, lack of sustainability and insufficient teacher training. Finally, EFL teachers made recommendations related to a better curriculum design, active learning environment, improved resources, stakeholder involvement, and needed in-service training.

Keywords: Curriculum Evaluation, EFL teachers, Foreign Language Education, Intensive English Language Program, Teacher Perceptions, Young Learners.

Number of Pages: 157

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ali KARAKAŞ

**5. SINIF YABANCI DİL AĞIRLIKLIL (İNGİLİZCE) ÖĞRETİM
PROGRAMININ BURDUR' DAKI İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN
BAKİŞ AÇISIYLA İNCELENMESİ**

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

Sümeyye ÇETİN

ÖZ

Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB) Türkiye’de, vatandaşların yabancı dil yeterliğini geliştirmek amacıyla son yıllarda önemli düzenlemeler ve politikalar doğrultusunda mevcut yabancı dil öğretim programını güncellemiştir. Bu düzenlemelerin en yakın örneklerinden biri olarak, 2017-2018 eğitim öğretim yılından itibaren pilot okullarda başlatılan 5. Sınıf Yabancı Dil Ağırlıklı (İngilizce) Öğretim Programı ülke genelinde uygulanmaya koyulmuştur. Ancak programla ilgili daha önce yapılan çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu pilot uygulama döneminde gerçekleştirilmiş olup, programın mevcut güçlü yönleri, sınırlılıkları ve uzun vadeli etkilerine ilişkin güncel araştırmalar sınırlı kalmaktadır. Bu nedenle, programın sınıf içi uygulamalarından doğrudan sorumlu olan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin bakış açısını temel alan çalışmalara ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın temel amacı, 5. Sınıf Yabancı Dil Ağırlıklı program kapsamında görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin programa ilişkin algılarını ortaya koymak ve mevcut uygulamaya yönelik önerilerini sunmaktır. Nitel durum çalışması deseninin kullanıldığı araştırmada, Burdur ilinde bu program kapsamında görev yapan 15 İngilizce öğretmeniyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmış ve toplanan veriler tematik analiz yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, öğretmenlerin genel olarak programdan memnun olduklarını göstermiştir. Katılımcılar, öğrencilerde iletişim becerilerinde gelişim, motivasyon artışı, erken yaşta dil öğrenme ve uzun vadede daha güçlü dil kazanımları gibi birçok olumlu etkiyi vurgulamıştır. Programın öğretmenler açısından da etkileşimli etkinliklere olanak sağlaması, dil becerilerine odaklanma ve mesleki tatmin sağlaması bakımından destekleyici olduğu belirtilmiştir. Buna karşın, materyal eksikliği, yoğun müfredat, kalabalık ve farklı seviyelerden oluşan sınıflar, sürdürülebilirlik sorunları ve yetersiz hizmet içi eğitim gibi bazı kalıcı sorunların devam ettiği görülmüştür. Son olarak, öğretmenler müfredatın geliştirilmesi, aktif öğrenme ortamları oluşturulması, kaynak çeşitliliğinin artırılması, paydaş işbirliğinin güçlendirilmesi ve ihtiyaç temelli hizmet içi eğitimler sunulması yönünde önerilerde bulunmuşlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce Öğretmenleri, Küçük Yaş Grubu Öğrencileri, Müfredat Değerlendirme, Öğretmen Algıları, Yabancı Dil Ağırlıklı Program, Yabancı Dil Eğitimi.

Sayfa Adedi: 157

Danışman: Prof. Dr. Ali KARAKAŞ

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

CPH: Critical Period Hypothesis

DynEd: Dynamic Education

EBA: Eğitim Bilişim Ağı (Education Information Network)

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELF: English as a Lingua Franca

ELT: English Language Teaching

EU: European Union

FATİH: Fırsatları Artırma ve Teknolojiyi İyileştirme Hareketi (Movement to Enhance Opportunities and Improve Technology)

FLE: Foreign Language Education

FLL: Foreign Language Learning

IELP: Intensive English Language Program

L1: First Language (In this context, Turkish)

L2: Second Language

MoNE : Ministry of National Education

PD: Professional Development

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

TBLT: Task-based Language Teaching

TPR: Total Physical Response

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is organized into seven main sections. It begins with the background of the study, which is followed by a clear description of the problem that leads to the need for the present research. The subsequent section clearly outlines the purposes of the study. In the next section, the importance of the research is explained in detail, by emphasizing its practical and academic contributions to the field. After that, the assumptions guiding the study and the limitations that may influence its overall results are discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief explanation of the key concepts.

1.1. Background of the Study

With the increasing role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and interaction between diverse countries and cultures in the global world (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2005), English language has gained importance in different fields such as education, business and social life. Consequently, facilitating communication among speakers who do not share the same mother tongue, learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has become more crucial than ever. Hence, the common recognition of ELF has put a pressure on non-English-speaking countries, including Türkiye, to enhance their citizens' English proficiency in order to keep up with the current developments (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021). Despite putting great importance on English learning, foreign language education (FLE) in Türkiye is failing according to the Education First report (2020), which acknowledged its English proficiency as 69th out of 100 countries. Additionally, even with increased instructional time and resources devoted to foreign language learning (FLL), students still struggle to communicate effectively in the target language (Dilekli, 2018).

Therefore, aiming to enhance the success of foreign language education and adapt the learners to the demands of the 21st century, Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has been implementing curriculum changes and improvements, particularly by focusing on teaching English to young learners (Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022;

Kırkgöz, 2007). Moreover, the beginning of foreign language instruction at an early age in European Union (EU) countries (Eurydice, 2008) also supports Türkiye's initiatives in this direction. In this regard, several key theoretical perspectives in the language learning field have also aligning views on early language development. For instance, the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), proposed by Lenneberg (1967), argues that language learning is most effective during early childhood, when neural plasticity is at its peak, which ensures more native-like pronunciation and fluency compared to older learners. Furthermore, Krashen (1973) also supported this point of view, arguing that young learners develop their language acquisition from early ages until adolescence. Another valuable perspective on early language learning is Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which highlights that learners acquire a language most effectively when they are exposed to input that is understandable and slightly beyond their current proficiency level.

Regarding this, several studies in Turkish and international contexts highlighted that early exposure to a foreign language enhances students' communication skills with better phonological skills, develops positive attitudes toward the language, and increases their overall academic achievement (Gül, 2019; Özkan et al., 2018; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2018; Spada et al., 2013). In addition, research from EU countries investigating the effects of early English instruction showed that the intensive exposure to the target language remarkably improves learners' communicative competence (Johnstone, 2018; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018). As a result, the relationship between young age and target language proficiency advocates Türkiye's attempts to value the early FLE with the logic of "the earlier the better", focusing on young learners as they show more curiosity and engagement during the learning process (Enever & Moon, 2009; Nikolov, 2016).

In an effort to enhance the country's overall English proficiency, the MoNE has implemented a series of reforms in the field of FLE, which shows that great importance has been attached to improve FLE in Türkiye (Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021). For example, in 2005, the primary school curriculum for English language teaching was updated, aligning with the principles outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR) regarding

the instruction of English to learners at various proficiency levels (MoNE, 2005; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). This updated curriculum focused on EFL teaching through communicative approach by also considering learner levels and needs. Moreover, in 2012, with the introduction of the 4+4+4 education system, English has been introduced as a compulsory subject starting from the 2nd grade aiming to improve English proficiency at younger ages (MoNE, 2012b). Those remarkable curriculum changes adopted constructivist and learner-centered approaches by focusing more on communicative skills (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022) to make learners achieve the desired level of English competency. In this sense, while those curriculum reforms highlighted balanced skill development, with especially improving listening and speaking skills, they also supported a motivating learning environment for language learners.

As one of the most recent policy changes on FLE in Turkish context, in 2017-2018 academic year, the pilot implementation for the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) in the 5th grade was initiated in 620 schools across 81 provinces, as determined by the MoNE (MoNE, 2017). With this new reform, weekly course hours for fifth graders in the selected pilot schools were increased from three hours to 15 hours in a week aiming to provide richer linguistic input for young learners and develop their interaction skills at an early age. On the other hand, the number of units for the English course was expanded from 10 to 40 which were structured to progress from simple to complex, concrete to abstract, and are designed to relate closely to students' everyday experiences (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022).

The objective of this intensive language curriculum was to enhance students' communicative competence through the application of communicative and eclectic approaches, guided by the principles outlined in the CEFR (MoNE, 2018a). Although 5th Grade IELP was intended to be implemented across all lower secondary schools in Türkiye (Aksoy et al., 2018), in the upcoming academic year (in 2018), the IELP curriculum was lowered to 36 units and continued to be practiced across the country based on voluntariness and the conditions of schools, changing from 11 to 18 hours per week (MoNE, 2018a). In this context, since its success will determine the future of the prepared curriculum, the effectiveness of the program needs to be evaluated so

as to see to what extent it is applicable in real classrooms, meets the expectations and contributes to language learning (Dilekli, 2018; Dündar & Merç, 2022).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The MoNE's efforts to provide students with adequate English proficiency have been ongoing in Türkiye for many years. Though several efforts to enhance the acquisition of a foreign language in its educational context, insufficient English competence has persisted as a major issue in Türkiye (Işık, 2008). For instance, despite the curriculum change in 1997 when the communicative approach was adopted for the first time, aiming to build learners' communicative competence, many students lacked acquiring the necessary oral skills to interact effectively in the target language (MoNE, 2013a). Moreover, so as to find the underlying reasons for this inadequacy in Turkish educational system, former changes in the English curricula have been investigated in previous studies that identified many issues preventing their effective implementation and overall success. It was concluded that large class sizes (Erkan, 2009; Tekin-Ozel, 2011), insufficient materials (Dincer, 2013; Er, 2006), learner prejudices (Ocak et al., 2013), limited lesson hours (Aküzcel, 2006; Yaman, 2010), use of traditional assessments (Kaya, 2018; Mersinligil, 2002), ignoring oral skills development (Gunes, 2009; Kozikoğlu, 2014), heavy content (Ormecı, 2009), and inadequate PD trainings (Erkan, 2009) were among common problems.

Those results showed that ongoing changes in the English curriculum along with many implementation challenges fall behind solving the FLE problems in Türkiye. Accordingly, there is a need to address those issues so that the existing curriculum can be carried out successfully with its objectives, rather than introducing new ones (Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Kaya, 2019). However, as a major reform in the Turkish educational context, MoNE recently designed the IELP curriculum in an effort to be cure for the persistent shortcomings in FLE field, by means of early and intensive target language exposure. To evaluate its success in FLL, IELP has been explored in some studies, especially in the pilot year of the implementation, from various perspectives, such as those of teachers, students, parents and school administrators (e.g., Dilekli, 2018; Dincer & Koç, 2020; Kalkan & Genç, 2023; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021; Özcanlı & İzci 2023). While those studies recognized that early

engagement with the target language had a positive influence on students' communicative abilities, four language skills, and motivation, many challenges have been encountered during the implementation. Mostly highlighted disadvantages in the related literature were reported as intense curriculum, mixed learner proficiency, insufficient school facilities, lack of resources and teacher quality (Berkant et al., 2019; Kaya, 2019; Yılmaz & İnce, 2019). Moreover, for overcoming the perceived challenges, stakeholders offered some improvements such as revising the curriculum, focusing on learner needs, preparing suitable materials and supporting teachers professionally.

Because the policy change and its implementation have recently taken place, the investigation of the related difficulties and uncovering the factors that may influence the success of FLL is of significant value (Dündar & Merç, 2022; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021). In this regard, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program will also demonstrate its success for future practice, which gives essential feedback to the curriculum developers. Furthermore, since previous studies on the recent implementation are limited and generally focus on initial experiences or curriculum assessment, there is a need for ongoing research exploring EFL teachers' current experiences and perceptions within the IELP context. This gap highlights the need for updated and comprehensive research that reflects the present conditions of the IELP. Therefore, since EFL teachers are the ones who are directly engaged with the classroom realities, their insights are essential for understanding whether the IELP achieves its intended goals, identifying the barriers that hinder its impact, and determining the improvements needed for its sustainability (Aksoy et al., 2018; Dündar & Merç, 2022; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021).

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this qualitative case study research is to understand the perceptions of EFL teachers who are involved in the 5th grade IELP. Their perspectives based on their experiences will provide valuable feedback regarding the effectiveness of the current implementation. Apart from the EFL teachers' general perceptions towards the program, this research study will identify its benefits for both teachers and learners,

and perceived challenges during its practice. By exploring the strengths and weaknesses based on their lived experiences, the study will identify the key areas for the development of the current curriculum and provide suggestions for improving the program's long-term impact on students' English language proficiency.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Although the IELP was initially regarded as a crucial reform for solving the FLE problems in Türkiye, the curriculum and its instructional framework have not been updated for almost eight years, despite remarkable changes in classroom dynamics, learner needs, and technological developments (MoNE, 2018a; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). Apart from reporting positive perceptions about the program, early studies highlighted challenges with the materials, curriculum, learner levels, infrastructure and teacher preparedness (Dilekli, 2018; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Sarışık et al., 2022), which may have been unsolved or intensified in recent times. Furthermore, more recent studies can also indicate whether there is some enhancement or the same problems are recurring despite nearly a decade of its implementation. In this sense, its applicability in current learning environments should be investigated so as to show the extent the existing curriculum meets its goals (Dündar & Merç, 2022).

On the other hand, considering that the related research (e.g., Dilekli, 2018; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021) mainly put an emphasis on the difficulties and short-term effects in the pilot implementation year, they may lack giving information about the program's continuity. Therefore, it is important to find out the long-term effects of IELP, which has been widely practiced for several years, by taking feedback from teachers who had an opportunity to observe IELP students over time. As teachers are mainly responsible for the implementation of the curriculum (Çankaya, 2015), they can report the classroom realities within the practice. Hence, a new investigation based on their recent experiences can give valuable feedback about the strong and weak aspects of the IELP process. Additionally, taking EFL teachers' opinions into consideration will also provide suggestions for future improvement to the key areas of the curriculum. Furthermore, as no existing study has examined how the IELP is implemented

specifically within the Burdur province, this research study will fill this gap by identifying its strengths and weaknesses in practice.

In addition, since much of the earlier research (e.g., Aksoy et al., 2018; Berkant et al., 2019; Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Kalkan & Genç, 2023) has overlooked the areas for PD opportunities available - or lacking - for teachers involved in IELP, the present study will define their needs for professional growth, which help them overcome the challenges encountered during their classroom instructions. As a consequence, the present study will contribute to the literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of IELP process and its improvement, understanding the current attitudes of EFL teachers, and providing suggestions for the policymakers and curriculum developers about the needs. In this sense, a detailed exploration of the participating teacher's perspectives may facilitate more effective problem-solving for researchers and MoNE concerning this educational reform (Dincer & Koç, 2020). Accordingly, the results of this study will offer meaningful insights for educators, future researchers, and curriculum designers by providing insights on the program's impact, teacher and learner needs, students' language development, and areas requiring further enhancement.

1.5. Assumptions

In this study, it is assumed that the EFL teachers involved in IELP practice in Burdur province will answer the interview questions in a sincere and objective way by explaining their genuine experiences on the current implementation. Moreover, the participants are assumed to take part in the research based on voluntariness. On the other hand, the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews will provide valid and reliable insights into EFL teachers' perceptions, who are assumed to have sufficient experience with IELP to evaluate its impact on learners. As the study covers all secondary schools implementing the IELP within the province, its results are believed to provide comprehensive and representative insights into common practices and challenges in Burdur. Overall, the findings of the study will provide valuable information to the policy-makers as a feedback to focus on the needs of the practice.

1.6. Limitations

This study includes some limitations that should be taken into consideration. The first limitation is that it is conducted with 15 EFL teachers working in the IELP practicing secondary schools in Burdur, therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to all contexts in Türkiye. As it is a qualitative study based on self-reported perceptions, the collected data may be subjective. The study also lacks classroom observations within IELP, which could not be included because of practical constraints such as teacher availability and time limitations. Another limitation is that the study lacks other stakeholders' perspectives such as students, parents, or administrators. Hence, it focuses on current teacher experiences rather than directly measuring learners' language proficiency or academic progress. Additionally, the participants' experiences may have been influenced by differences in the school infrastructure, class sizes, and parental or administrative support. When this study is implemented with a large number of participants including the EFL teachers from various regions in Türkiye, the results can vary. However, despite those limitations, its findings may provide a broader understanding of the IELP's effectiveness in light of previous research.

1.7. Definition of Key Concepts

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is the central governmental body responsible for regulating, supervising, and implementing educational policies in Türkiye. Main policy documents and curricular guidelines related to English Language Teaching are published and updated by MoNE.

The *Intensive English Language Program* (IELP) refers to a curriculum model in which students receive an extensive number of English lesson hours compared to the regular program. In the Turkish context, this language program aims to develop 5th grade students' target language with the extended exposure to English by mostly focusing on communicative skills and active language use (MoNE, 2017; MoNE, 2018a).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the teaching and learning of English in settings where the language is not used as a primary means of communication in daily life. Learners in EFL contexts encounter the target language usually by means of classroom teaching, where real-life opportunities outside the school are limited (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

The *4+4+4 education system* is an educational structure in Türkiye, which started to be implemented in 2012 by dividing compulsory education into three stages: 4 years of primary school, 4 years of lower secondary school and 4 years of upper secondary school (MoNE, 2012a; 2012b). Supporting gradual language development, this reform gave way to starting foreign language teaching from 2nd grades of primary school (MoNE, 2013a).

Communicative competence is the ability to use a language effectively in social interactions (Hymes, 1972). It is mostly mentioned with Canale and Swain's (1980) model that includes four components which are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

English as a lingua franca (ELF) refers to using English language as a common means of interaction among speakers who do not share the same first language. In EFL contexts, English acts as a communication tool in which meaningful interaction is more important than grammatical accuracy (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2001).

Young learners are children who are at the early stages of cognitive, social and linguistic development. In EFL context, they are defined as learning through play, movement, visuals and meaningful interaction rather than explicit grammar-focused teaching. Motivation, learning environment and frequent exposure to the target language play a key role in their language development (Cameron, 2001; Şevik, 2011).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an internationally recognized framework introduced by the Council of Europe (2001) to identify language learning, teaching, and assessment. It is commonly used in educational contexts for ensuring standardization while preparing curricula and developing assessment tools.

Target language refers to the language which learners aim to learn in an educational setting. In EFL contexts, English is the target language, which is encouraged to be used in classroom interactions to increase language exposure and develop communication skills (Ellis, 2008).

Language proficiency refers to a learner's overall ability to use a language effectively across different skills and communicative contexts. It requires accuracy, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, understanding and producing spoken or written texts in the target language, which typically are evaluated using standardized frameworks like CEFR (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of eight sections which provide a comprehensive overview for the current study by examining the key concepts and developments related to the field of English language education in the Turkish context. First of all, it starts with a discussion on the role of English as a Lingua Franca, followed by addressing the English language teaching practices within the Turkish educational system. Afterwards, the significance of early language acquisition is overviewed. In the following part, the major educational reforms regarding foreign language teaching in Türkiye are mentioned to present a policy-level perspective. Then, a special attention is given to the IELP implemented at the 5th grade level. Pen ultimately, international approaches to the intensive language programs are considered to make comparisons and provide insights into the nationwide practices. Finally, the chapter is concluded with a summary of the existing research on the IELP curriculum in the Turkish context. Together, these sections establish the background information of the present research.

2.1. English as a Lingua Franca

In the globalized world, the role of English as an international contact language has increased with the growing interaction among people from different countries and cultures (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2005; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). In this sense, English now functions as a lingua franca, enabling communication among speakers who do not share a native language. With the use of English for interaction in different fields such as education, business and social life, people have started to attach more importance to learning the target language. Also, the distances are getting shorter and contact among diverse nations has become easier thanks to technological developments. Hence, people in many countries feel obliged to acquire the most common foreign language skills to be part of the international relations for exchanging information (Kayabaşı & Köse, 2018). Similarly, one of the key competencies for life-long learning, as identified by the European Council, is the ability to communicate in

a foreign language (Eurydice Report, 2008), which reflects the necessity for foreign language proficiency in the development of countries.

Moreover, the agreed perception of the ELF has put a pressure on the non-English speaking countries, such as Türkiye, to improve English competency among their populations to follow the improvements of the global world (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021). Many significant regulations have been implemented in the educational field to make learners acquire the most essential qualification as having the target language proficiency (Güngör & Geçikli 2021; Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Therefore, the significance of English has also influenced government decisions regarding the selection of a foreign language and its teaching methods for practice (Kırkgöz, 2017). In other words, the recognized status of the English language has implications for the recent language policies in Türkiye with the special focus on effective teaching and learning of the universal contact language. In this context, Türkiye's primary aim has been to join the EU and gain a current position among developed countries by keeping up with the norms of the European nations in the 21st century, therefore many reforms are needed to be adopted in the English language instruction field (Salihoğlu, 2003). As a result, the need to study English nowadays has necessitated a more current and efficient language curriculum that can help learners improve their language skills for exchanging information and find themselves a place in the modern world.

2.2. English Language Teaching in the Turkish Context

FLL can be defined as the process of acquiring the necessary skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—to use a language effectively (Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Omaggio, 1986). Like many other countries, Türkiye is aware that meeting the requirements of the modern world can be only achieved through successful steps in ELT. In this regard, from past to present, learning and using English language effectively have been aimed through significant attempts and practices in foreign language curriculum (FLC), demonstrating the dedication to this vital component of global communication (Kırkgöz, 2007). Despite putting great importance on learning and teaching English language, research shows that students in Türkiye are unable to

demonstrate the expected foreign language proficiency (British Council & TEPAV, 2014; Demirtaş & Erdem, 2015). According to research conducted by Education First (2020), Türkiye ranks 69th out of 100 countries in terms of overall English proficiency. In addition, despite the allocation of additional time and resources to foreign language education, students continue to face challenges in effectively communicating in the target language (Dilekli, 2018). FLE falls short of meeting the expectations as learners are unable to demonstrate sufficient success in English competency.

However, in recent times, the MoNE in Türkiye, which is in charge of the curriculum development, and other educational policies aligning with national goals, has focused on young learners for ELT as a part of ongoing educational developments (Altan, 2016; Kırkgöz, 2009a, 2009b; MoNE, 2013a, 2017). Consequently, several policy changes related to language teaching have been carried out targeting to updating the curriculum and improving the quality of FLE based on the needs of young learners. Although the acquisition of a foreign language has been of great importance for many years, learning English at a younger age has gained significant attention under the principle of “the earlier, the better” (Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). In this respect, starting FLE at an earlier age in EU countries (Eurydice, 2008) also supports Türkiye’s efforts. In this respect, according to the Early Language Learning Project in Europe, educational implications, policies, and programs have been shaped by society’s needs for early language learning, and governments are taking steps to design curricula considering such approaches (Erkan, 2020). In a similar manner, MoNE is trying to increase the effectiveness of foreign language teaching by equipping young learners with target language competency.

2.3. Importance of Early Language Learning

Early language learning has been a subject of extensive research, with various views on how young learners acquire a foreign language effectively. Among them, it is essential to examine the key cognitive theories in the field of language learning to understand the efforts and innovations implemented by MoNE for the young learners. In this respect, foremost hypotheses relevant to the young learners’ language acquisition include Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), Vygotsky’s Sociocultural

Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Critical Age Hypothesis, and other supporting views on early language development.

According to the CPH developed by Lenneberg (1967), there is a critical period for effective language acquisition which is particularly in early childhood when the brain's neural connections are highly flexible. The theory suggests that younger learners are more advantageous for target language learning due to their brain plasticity that allows them to acquire native-like pronunciation and fluency more easily than older learners. However, the theory argues that after adolescence, the brain loses its plasticity, and it becomes harder to learn new languages (Lenneberg 1967, 1969). Moreover, Krashen (1973) also promoted the Critical Age Hypothesis on early language learning, which suggests that there is a critical period for language development (Williams & Burden, 1997), starting at a very young age and continues throughout adolescence. According to many researchers supporting CPH, although social and cognitive factors also have crucial roles, such as older language learners may have better grammar and vocabulary knowledge due to their cognitive maturity and use of diverse learning strategies, early and longer exposure to a second language leads to better pronunciation, fluency and syntactic mastery for young learners (Birdsong, 1999; Hakuta et al., 2003; Scovel, 1988; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). Additionally, some researchers argue that the effectiveness of early language learning depends on the quality of instruction, time of exposure, and opportunities for meaningful communication (Singleton & Pfenninger, 2018).

On the other hand, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory brought a new perspective to language development, which emphasizes the role of scaffolding and social interaction while learning a new language. He introduced the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), referring to the learner tasks that are accomplished with the guidance of a more experienced person or an adult. With the idea of scaffolding, or short-term support, learners can attain greater levels of competency than they could on their own, and eventually they can carry out their tasks individually (Lantolf et al., 2014). In the context of second language acquisition (SLA), the support provided by teachers or peers can be in various forms such as giving feedback, modelling, prompting etc. which enable learners to acquire the target language in social

interaction (Lantolf, 2000; Walqui, 2006). In other words, language learning is an interactive process in which scaffolding encourages learners to communicate with others in real-life situations. As a result, Vygotsky's theory (1978) underscores the improvement of language skills within their ZPD by providing the appropriate level of assistance, which eventually results in communicative competency in the target language.

As another remarkable theory related to early language learning, Input Hypothesis was proposed by Krashen (1985) which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. According to the theory, learners acquire a new language most effectively when they are exposed to meaningful and contextual input which slightly exceeds their current level of proficiency ($i+1$). Thus, this supports the idea that early language learning occurs in a more natural and implicit way as learners are exposed to the language in context, rather than through explicit grammar teaching. Krashen (1985) highlights the unconscious and natural process of language acquisition in which grammar instruction is not necessary. However, while supporting the natural learning process by focusing on receptive skills (listening, reading), Krashen is criticized in some aspects (Hassan, 2022; Kavanagh, 2006; Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). While some researchers argue that productive skills (speaking, writing) are neglected for developing fluency, others think that explicit teaching may be necessary for some grammar structures in advanced level (Gregg, 1984; McLaughlin, 1987). On the other hand, it is also believed that the hypothesis ignores individual differences as learners have different cognitive and social factors in their SLA process (Pienemann, 2011). Nevertheless, the effect of Krashen's Input Hypothesis with implicit exposure to the target language is undeniable for young learners as they are exposed to the foreign language unconsciously in effective classrooms such as learning a mother tongue in their natural environment.

Expanding the ideas of Krashen (1985) on the significance of comprehensible input in the process of language acquisition, Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1980, 1983, and 1996) underlined that language learning is facilitated through meaningful interaction. According to the theory, interaction, though not sufficient in isolation, is a necessary element of effective language learning (Tran, 2009). It highlighted the importance of

comprehensible input through interaction, in which new linguistic structures can attract learners' attention, as a result, they can internalize and produce them as new output (Gass & Mackey, 2014).

Regarding the SLA, classroom activities are helpful to turn the interaction into production with the use of group discussions and task-based language teaching (TBLT), particularly while teaching young learners. Similarly, other researchers also support the idea that early exposure to a foreign language enables children to become more fluent and develop higher native-like pronunciation (Spada et al., 2013). Alternatively, Nikolov (2016) claims that young learners show more attendance and curiosity during the learning process (Güngör & Geçikli, 2021). In addition, Yule (2016) points out that the age at which one begins learning a language and continuous interaction with the foreign language are key factors for successful language acquisition. According to the frequently stated benefits and importance of language learning at a young age (Johnstone, 2009; Pinter, 2017), the experience of learning a foreign language at an early age also significantly influences later success.

Moreover, many Turkish studies in the literature emphasized the impact of early exposure to a foreign language on communication skills, positive attitudes, and academic achievement (e.g., Akekmekçi, 2021; Gül, 2019; Kuru Atadere, 2012; Özkan et al, 2018; Yolaşığmazoğlu, 2008). In line with those ideas, research has also shown that children are better learners than adults as they learn through experience, and acquiring a foreign language has a positive effect on their identity development (Aslan, 2008). Furthermore, other research has shown that starting English education at an earlier age can lead to improved language outcomes, as young learners are more capable of acquiring language skills through immersive and contextualized learning experiences (Meriläinen & Piispanen, 2019).

On the other hand, several studies conducted abroad also highlight the advantages of early English learning claiming that while older learners may progress faster in the early stages due to their cognitive maturity, younger learners are more advantages for developing phonological skills with native-like accent (Daloiso, 2007; Mihaljevic, 2012; Nikolov & Djigunović, 2006; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2018; Spada et al., 2013). Hence, in European countries, an early start to learn the first foreign language has been

an essential part of their educational policy (Şevik, 2008). According to the Eurydice report (2008), recently in Europe, compulsory FLE begins much earlier, even in the first grades of elementary school, and lasts longer than in the past. Additionally, studies in European countries with early English instruction policies show that long-term exposure to the target language leads to better communicative competence (Johnstone, 2018; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018). As a result, based on the evidence supporting the relationship between age and language acquisition on higher fluency and proficiency, Türkiye's steps towards lowering the age of ELT reflects a growing recognition of the importance of early language learning.

2.4. Educational Reforms in Türkiye

With the globalization of ELF and the awareness of the importance of early language learning, significant educational reforms have shaped the ELT in Türkiye. The recent regulations in the FLE field should be overviewed historically to see the key steps for target language development and understand the influences of the global language on Türkiye's policy decisions. Language education policy and planning in Türkiye with latest reforms (1997, 2005, and 2013) have been designed to address linguistic, social, political, and economic objectives (Berkant et al., 2019).

To start with one of the significant reforms, in 1997, the eight-year compulsory education was implemented by MoNE with the introduction of English language as a compulsory subject for the fourth grades. The new curriculum for foreign language teaching at the primary level aimed at developing students' awareness, motivation and basic communication skills in target language (MoNE, 1997). While fostering a positive attitude on the English language, the main goals of the curriculum included raising awareness, encouraging willingness, recognizing linguistic differences, and using everyday expressions of it. Beginning with the 1997-1998 educational year, a communicative approach-based curriculum was adopted in FLE in the country for the first time (Kaya, 2019). Hoping to develop young learners' target language skills and help them meet the 21st century's requirements, English language instruction was provided for two hours per week in the 4th and 5th grades, while students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades received four hours of lessons each week (Aksoy et al., 2018). In

addition, the role of the teacher was identified as supportive and guiding, while a learner-centered approach was adopted for the implementation of the English courses (MoNE, 1997).

On the other hand, in 2005, the 1997 educational reform was replaced by a constructivist curriculum, which aimed to move away from the behaviourist approach with the focus on learner-centered teaching and process-oriented assessment (Haznedar, 2010; Dincer & Koç, 2020). In that way, conventional teaching methods that were for teacher-centered approaches were abandoned and a more contemporary curriculum was applied in terms of teaching methods and assessment processes (Kırkgöz et al., 2016). On the other hand, it adopted an eclectic approach by integrating skill-based, task-based, content-based, situational and structural approaches (MoNE, 2005). According to the latest curriculum, the use of English language was regarded as the medium of communication between students and teachers in the classroom, and its consistent use was recommended in the learning process. Meanwhile, the principles of the CEFR were followed to guide the teaching of English at different proficiency levels (Özcanlı & İzci, 2023) with the integration of more communicative approaches. In this way, it was believed that an effective learning environment could be supported through various activities based on the levels and needs of the students.

Further revisions in the Turkish educational system were made in 2012, when the MoNE introduced the 4+4+4 system, so compulsory education was extended to 12 years, and that educational innovation provided a new perspective for all primary education systems in Türkiye (MoNE, 2012a, 2012b). On the other hand, in 2013, the curriculum for foreign language teaching was regulated aligning with the requirements of the new policies, and the starting age for English language teaching was lowered to 2nd grades of primary school with the focus on communication (MoNE, 2013a). In addition, as a result of the new curriculum design, starting from the 2013-2014 academic year, the class hours for the 5th graders were reduced to three hours from four hours (Canlier & Bümen, 2018). In this context, the latest curriculum changes placed greater emphasis on teaching English with all its language skills, particularly highlighting listening and speaking as essential components of effective communication (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Yılmaz & İnce, 2019). Accordingly, with the

new regulations, the assessment of young learners changed, in which performance-based evaluations, productive activities, and portfolio studies are added to the process. Moreover, CEFR has been considered while designing the new curriculum for teaching English, which emphasizes improving a positive attitude toward English from an early age since language acquisition is a life-time process (MoNE, 2012a). Therefore, the latest reform aimed to establish a motivating and supportive learning environment where students can feel encouraged throughout their language learning process.

In addition, it can be expressed that the 2013 reform prepared the groundwork for the 5th Grade Intensive English Program. As the latest development in the 2012 curriculum change, the Board of Education and Discipline approved intensive foreign language education for fifth grade through its decision No. 22, dated 28.05.2013 (Canlier & Bümen, 2018). According to the decision, in the 5th grade, students must take Turkish, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Religious Culture and Ethics courses (20 hours) and at least four hours of elective courses. In suitable schools, up to 18 hours of foreign language instruction can be offered, considering students' readiness levels, based on the approved curriculum and lesson plans prepared by the teachers' committee (MoNE, 2013b). Thus, along with the educational decisions on recent regulations, Türkiye's efforts aiming to improve its foreign language education is remarkable. As part of the MoNE's attempts to enhance the quality of education, the goal is for lower secondary school students to effectively learn at least one foreign language, enabling them to communicate both in writing and speaking. (Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021). Overall, the new approaches in the field of education demonstrates that MoNE attaches great importance to target language proficiency and this has eventually influenced its policy decisions.

Over the past two decades, some other essential initiatives such as DynEd System, FATİH project and the 2023 Education Vision were practiced by MoNE, aimed to improve the quality of English language teaching. Introduced in 2008 as a computer-based English learning platform for primary and secondary education, DynEd (Dynamic Education) system was designed to increase learner motivation and provide individual practice opportunities (Baş & Kuzucu, 2009; Baş, 2010). However, DynEd system failed to provide long-term benefits due to limited infrastructure, insufficient

teacher expertise to integrate the program into the classroom instruction (Karakaş, 2021a). On the other hand, FATİH Project (*Fırsatları Artırma ve Teknolojiyi İyileştirme Hareketi*) was initiated in 2010 to integrate information and communication technologies into classrooms by equipping schools with interactive whiteboards and distributing tablets to teachers and students. Although its main objective was to promote a learner-centered, interactive and technology-enhanced instruction benefitting EFL teachers, some studies emphasized that it faced significant challenges such as frequent technical failures, insufficient teacher training, limited access to compatible digital resources (Akıncı, 2017; Güven & Akar Vural, 2017). Additionally, in 2018, the 2023 Education Vision was introduced by MoNE as a new roadmap to find long-term solutions to educational problems (Karakaş, 2021b). Regarding foreign language education, it highlighted differentiated instruction based on student level and school type, integrating digital resources such as EBA (Eğitim Bilişim Ağı) for communication skills, interaction with native speakers, and professional development of English teachers through international certification programs (MoNE, 2018b). However, the study by Karakaş (2021b) found that the vision was criticized for being overly idealistic, financially demanding, detached from classroom realities, and excluding teachers from decision-making process.

2.5. Intensive English Language Program (IELP) for 5th Grades

New educational programs continue to be designed in Türkiye to address the shortcomings in FLE by focusing on communicative models in foreign language curriculum for the students from 2nd to 8th grades. Recently, the English curriculum was revised in 2017 with all other subjects, highlighting the improvement of four key language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (MoNE, 2017). While the recent curriculum clearly supports methods such as communicative language teaching (CLT) which is based on communicative approach, it also puts an emphasis on values education (Aksoy, 2020). As another remarkable aspect, the curriculum strictly followed the principles of the CEFR by focusing on using the language in real-life communicative context. Additionally, as a fundamental reform, in 2017, the MoNE introduced the IELP for the 5th grades in pilot secondary schools. Starting from the

2017-2018 educational year, this implementation is practiced in selected 620 schools across 81 provinces.

In this program, students are expected to complete 550 hours (weekly 15 hours) of English instruction annually to achieve B1.1 level of English proficiency based on CEFR (Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). Also, those intensive English implementing pilot schools must remove some subjects like physical education, music and visual arts from the curriculum to add the extra hours for the English instruction (MoNE, 2017). On the other hand, the program's content has been significantly expanded to include 40 themes in pilot schools, which is 10 themes in other 5th graders in ordinary secondary schools, covering various themes related to everyday English usage. With those new topics and cultural elements integrated in the curriculum, learners can enhance their cultural awareness and interactive skills among other cultures (Dincer & Koç, 2020). Moreover, the increase in English lesson hours can be advantageous for providing greater exposure to input, more opportunities to practice language skills, and an improvement in language learning motivation and academic success (Berkant et al., 2019). As young learners are better language learners, linguistic skills can be easily developed by continuous and active use of the language structures.

In addition, the program aims to acquire language learners with the key competencies shaped by the European Commission, which are the shared goals of all English language teaching programs within the EU. The fundamental abilities that every citizen should accomplish during their formal education are mentioned in the new curriculum as “Traditional Skills (Communication in mother tongue and in foreign languages), Digital Skills (Literacy, Basic skills in math and science), and Horizontal Skills (Learning to learn, Social and civic responsibility, Initiative and entrepreneurship, Cultural awareness and creativity)” (MoNE, 2017, p. 5). Apart from the eight competencies of language education, there is a great emphasis on education of values during the learning process such as “Awareness of Environment, Awareness of Historical Heritage, Being Diligent, Cooperation, Family and Friendship, Generosity, Helpfulness, Mercifulness, Modesty, Self-confidence, Self-esteem, Sense of Justice and Being Just, Self-regulation, Patience, Respect, Responsibility, Patriotism and Sense of Freedom” (MoNE, 2017, p. 6). Benefiting from those essential

skills and social values incorporated into the themes and content of the English lessons, teachers are supposed to teach the language abilities by raising the awareness of cultural attitudes and beliefs.

Following the CEFR principles, with the introduction of the IELP, the improvement of young learners' English proficiency is aimed so that they are capable of being global citizens who can interact well with different cultures in their academic and professional life (MoNE, 2017). Moreover, to improve the quality of education, learners were supposed to communicate effectively in both verbal and written forms of at least one foreign language by using communicative and eclectic approaches (Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; MoNE, 2017). In this manner, the methods and techniques target to follow a blended structure which integrates the four key language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing- during the teaching process. Ultimately, 5th graders are expected to be equipped with advanced English proficiency who can successfully use the language in real-life interactions. According to the new language curriculum, a strong emphasis is given to improving learner autonomy and problem-solving skills through a communicative approach in English language teaching (MoNE, 2017).

It is evident that this initiative aligns with CLT as it regards the target language as a means of social interaction by focusing on meaning rather than linguistic features and grammatical structures (Paker, 2015). Similarly, according to the communicative approach, language learning is a natural process which is fundamentally based on meaningful communication by highlighting the fluency and creativity in classroom activities (Richards & Rogers, 2001). In other words, in the implementation process of IELP, with the increasing class hours, communicative competence is underlined in effective FLE.

Along with this increased exposure to the target language, learners are also provided with more opportunities to receive meaningful input in the foreign language. Thereby, a supportive environment is created for the natural language acquisition in line with the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) which emphasizes that language learning occurs when students are exposed to the comprehensible input in an unconscious way. On the other hand, as a part of the objectives of the intensive program, it is crucial that the learners have a positive perception on the target language from early ages in order to

reach the proficiency level by feeling comfortable and motivated. Since encouragement is a crucial element for the success of the students, the current implementation seeks to create a fascinating and enjoyable learning environment based on the changing needs of the students (Cameron, 2001). However, the program aims to teaching English based on authentic and real-world experiences to encourage beneficial impact on teaching and learning practices. In line with that idea, authentic materials, role-playing and drama, along with hands-on activities, are recommended to be used emphasizing the communicative aspect of English language (MoNE, 2017). In addition, instructional resources and classroom materials are taken from authentic resources to show the use of English in real contexts.

Moreover, the new curriculum attaches great importance to how to evaluate students' English proficiency. It is emphasized that learning, teaching, and assessment are interconnected elements and have dynamic relationships which shape the teacher's instructional decisions, learner approaches and parent perceptions regarding the essential educational practices. Following different kinds of techniques based on CEFR, focusing both mainly process-oriented and product-oriented ways are used to measure students' abilities in all four language skills during their learning process (MoNE, 2017). Including different ways such as self-assessment, productive and task-based assignments, quizzes, projects, written and practical exams, the assessment techniques intended to develop learners' experiences and make them more engaged with the language practices (Dincer & Koç, 2020; MoNE, 2017). According to the philosophy of the curriculum, to increase the effectiveness of the assessment and evaluation processes, covering all types of methods as summative and formative or product and process-oriented, the measurement tools should (MoNE, 2017, p 7):

1. cover four language skills and implicit assessment of language components;
2. vary in terms of learning styles and cognitive characteristics of the students;
3. be in consistent with the learning and teaching methodology depicted in the program;
4. be in line with the students' developmental characteristics;
5. create positive and beneficial wash back effect;
6. include self-assessment, reflection and feedback;

7. help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work.

In conclusion, it is highlighted that using a variety of the measurement techniques is necessary to measure language proficiency of learners, develop their experiences with the target language, and support the instructional process with the interactive use of English language outside the classroom. However, teaching, learning and assessment practices should be carried out coherently so as to have a positive impact on student motivation and teacher approaches.

Regarding the implementation of the latest English curriculum, several important principles are recommended to promote the communicative use of the language (MoNE, 2017, p.12). First and foremost, communication in the classroom is expected to be conducted primarily in English and should follow using the language in real contexts. In addition, learners are encouraged to use their developing English skills across all areas of learning while being consistently exposed to English along with audio-visual resources. The new implementation supports language learning with enjoyable methods such as Total Physical Response (TPR), drama, art, and crafts. Although L1 use is not forbidden, teachers are expected to create a supportive and understanding environment, using mostly English (and Turkish when needed) to communicate. Putting the emphasis on meaningful communication rather than completing the curriculum within a particular time, errors are not corrected immediately during the interaction process to avoid disruption but are noted for later reinforcement and practice. Additionally, while the motivation for language learning is fostered especially through difficult but achievable tasks, parental involvement is actively encouraged, and students are encouraged to improve their language skills by actively using the target language in purposeful activities.

As a part of this reform, in the 2018-2019 academic year, a new regulation was introduced to schools to provide up to 18 hours of English lessons per week for 5th graders, based on school administration approval and parental request (MoNE, 2018a). With this attempt, the expanding of the IELP throughout the country is aimed based on voluntariness and suitable conditions of the secondary schools. The most significant revision to the content of the 5th Grade IELP involved a reduction to the number of

thematic units. While the 2017 version comprised 40 themes, the 2018 update eliminated the final four themes, thereby reducing the total number of themes to 36. With the last innovation, a section for the 6th Grade IELP, intended to be practiced as 8 hours English course per week, was added following the section referring to the 5th Grade program. Other sections which give information on the program's philosophy, general objectives, key competencies, assessment and evaluation methods, program structure, and implementation guidelines remained unchanged (MoNE, 2018a). In this context, the growing importance of foreign language proficiency is continued to be recognized by MoNE, which has made another significant effort to improve the English language teaching practice in Türkiye for the 5th and 6th graders so as to make learners more exposed to the target language along with the expansion of information and communication technologies and international relations.

2.6. International Practices on Intensive English

While focusing on MoNE's educational reforms in the field of foreign language teaching, global perspectives on early English education with similar IELPs from different countries can provide insights into Türkiye's efforts. In this context, many studies on non-native language learners from Asian and European countries highlighted the relationship between age and exposure on target language competency. For example, a recent study by Jouinot and Howard (2024) explored the effectiveness of ten-month IELP practice in a French International School with 8-11 hours English instruction in a week. The implementation resulted in significant language proficiency in a relatively short time, particularly with the development of skills in speaking and writing practices for the 11- and 15-year-old language learners. While the idea that "the earlier the better" is emphasized for general language skills, learners aged 11 years developed higher fluency in communicative skills with the continuous exposure to L2. In addition, learners aged 15 showed remarkable proficiency for cognitive skills such as writing and solving problems. Meanwhile, the study found that learners' initial L2 proficiency had more impact on language acquisition than age and exposure, especially in vocabulary accuracy. On the other hand, strong focus on communication, teacher

feedback and teaching methods based on learner needs are regarded as essential elements for an efficient intensive program.

Additionally, the Canadian education system provides a valuable context for exploring the outcomes of intensive language instruction based on the relationship between age and language proficiency. In the 1980s, Canada introduced IELP which targets the 11-year-old learners guided by CPH (Jouinot & Howard, 2024). Offering approximately 350-400 hours of L2 instruction over a period of 5 to 10 months, that program focused on developing oral fluency, vocabulary, grammar and writing skills in the target language (Spada & Lightbown, 1989). Although young learners demonstrated slower improvement for grammar, the effectiveness of the program was highlighted with its short-term effects on their fluency in speaking and reading skills, as well as increased learner confidence. Other studies on intense language education also indicated significant development in learners' productive skills (speaking and writing), accuracy, vocabulary and everyday use of language (Collins & White, 2012; White & Turner, 2012). At the same time, those short-term but intensive programs highly regarded teacher quality supported by ongoing teacher training to provide learners with the ability to meaningfully communicate in the English language through effective instructional practices (Lightbown, 2012). In addition, they are advantageous for developing positive attitudes towards target language and different cultures (Peters et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, as another perspective from the Canadian context, Liu (2012) investigated 11–12-year-old elementary school students in an intensive ESL program in Quebec, emphasizing on the improvement of their vocabulary. Findings revealed that students made more significant progress in their written vocabulary than spoken vocabulary. However, their spoken vocabulary showed only some improvement in lexical richness. Overall, the study suggested that during the initial periods of SLA in classroom settings, students tend to advance more rapidly in writing skills than in speaking.

In the Spanish educational context, intensive language programs have been practiced in bilingual and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) elementary schools. The Bilingual Education Project (BEP) is an important initiative in Spain that

was agreed in 1996 by the French government, the British Council, and the Ministry of Education (Pérez Murillo, 2013). Thus, students from the first grade have a chance to be bilingual learners in Spanish and English or Spanish and French. Along with that emphasis, being fluent in the lingua franca has been regarded as crucial to their future life. Another focus of the Spanish education system is the implementation of CLIL which suggested that the content and language are taught and learned in a second language (Ruiz de Zarobe & Catalán, 2009). Consequently, English has been used as a tool to be the primary language of instruction so that learners' exposure with the target language is increased. Swanson (2015) observed that practices including CLIL, content-based and intensive programs make learners significantly exposed to the English language, and their foreign language competency increases comparatively along with the exposure time. According to the study, CLIL and IELP, which follow a communicative approach, are regarded as the most beneficial ones because the students become more proficient and fluent in the target language when compared to the conventional EFL classrooms. On the other hand, another study by Serrano and Muñoz (2007) analyzed three different language programs offering 110 hours of English instruction: the extensive (4 hours/week over 7 months), the semi-intensive (8–10 hours/week over 3–4 months), and the intensive (25 hours/week over 5 weeks in summer). Findings indicated that students benefit more from receiving English instruction in a shorter, more concentrated period - such as in semi-intensive or intensive formats - compared to spreading the same amount of instruction over a longer duration, as in the extensive program (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019).

In addition, in the ELIAS (Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies) Project, researchers from Belgium, England, Germany, and Sweden investigated the impact of early and intensive L2 exposure. The study dealt with preschool-aged children based on their second language acquisition, intercultural interaction, bilingual scientific understanding, and environmental awareness within bilingual settings (Kersten et al., 2010). The findings showed that consistent and intensive exposure to language input had a positive effect on children's understanding of grammar and vocabulary in the target language (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019). The study highlighted that language input only becomes effective when children are actively engaged and attentive. Importantly, young learners benefited most when EFL teachers

minimized reliance on the children's first language, encouraged learners to speak English, provided implicit corrective feedback, and gave them opportunities for meaningful interactions. These findings can offer valuable insights into how consistent and high-quality English language education affects young learners' linguistic development even at a pre-school age.

Another study conducted in a private preschool in Okinawa, Japan can serve as a model for the implementation of IELP (Sowers, 1996). It involved children aged 4 to 5 years participating in a six-week intensive summer English program, which encouraged to provide meaningful and English instruction suitable to their age with a native-like teacher. Additionally, its curriculum was specifically designed following the principles of the SLA methods such as CLT, TPR, and the Natural Approach. In this context, an interactive and enjoyable language learning is acquired through meaningful language input. After six weeks, the participants started to use the target language meaningfully. It can be concluded that, when learners are supported with developmentally appropriate methods, continuing exposure, and meaningful communication, SLA can be effectively fostered in even very young learners.

On the other hand, for the evaluation of the one-month intensive English program in Malaysia, low-performing secondary school students were investigated whether a short-term but intensive language implementation could develop learners' four language skills, grammar and vocabulary knowledge (Mukundan et al., 2012). The study was conducted as part of a school adoption initiative involving Universiti Putra Malaysia and MRSM Kuala Krai, a rural science-focused boarding school. A total of 30 students (aged around 16) with the lowest English scores were selected to take part in the Certified Intensive English Program (CIEP). Students received a total of 120 hours of language practice—equivalent to over half of the English courses they typically receive in an entire academic year. Within the practice, CLT was followed by emphasizing learner-centered activities, and active participation of the students. The results revealed a significant improvement in students' language proficiency, their motivation and participation. Furthermore, they were exposed to the authentic use of English through cultural visits and collaborative learning. The study suggests that even a short-term intensive program can effectively enhance students' target language

competence in language skills and facilitate meaningful language development provided that it is well-structured, immersive and communicative-based.

Overall, those studies conducted abroad on non-native language learners can provide insights into the effectiveness of intensive implementations similar to the Turkish EFL context. Individuals who begin learning a language at an early age are advantageous in language acquisition, depending on both their developmental stage and the time of their exposure to the target language. When the L2 input was appropriate to their age and contextually supported, they could use it meaningfully in their real life. Moreover, studies indicated that pedagogical knowledge of English teachers was emphasized during the process of SLA while providing meaningful input and classroom interaction. Although the learner's progress varies across different age groups, compared to traditional EFL instructions, intensive exposure to the target language leads to significant L2 improvement in a relatively short time (Jouinot & Howard, 2024). Additionally, young learners outperformed their peers on acquiring language skills and developed more fluency in communication by means of IELP practices. Globally, those time-efficient language programs serve as a model prepared to develop young learners' target language competency at an earlier age, and they can provide insights into evaluating the IELP in the Turkish context.

2.7. Previous Studies on the IELP curriculum

As a curriculum change directly affects educators, learners and other stakeholders in a community (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018), the intensive implementation for the 5th graders in Turkish context has been explored in several studies, each adopting various models and methodological approaches. Although the IELP is a current practice in Türkiye, its effectiveness has been investigated by many researchers so as to evaluate the curriculum from the opinions of the stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, administrators etc., emphasize its perceived challenges and benefits, and identify some recommendations for its improvement.

For example, Erdem and Toy (2017) evaluated the pilot implementation of the 5th grade IELP in İstanbul to identify the challenges, student needs and teacher

recommendations. They found that large class sizes, lack of a specific curriculum for the pilot program, and absence of proper course books challenged teachers the most. Regarding the student needs, speaking skills were perceived as the most essential but underdeveloped skill. As a result, teachers recommended focusing on all four language skills equally, with a great emphasis on speaking and listening. Additionally, they agreed that the curriculum needs to be improved with games, technology, and other courses like sports and music for the active involvement of the students. It is highlighted that the curriculum should meet the student needs and guide teachers during the implementation process for the successful language teaching. On the other hand, pedagogical challenges were found as related to the lack of in-service training prior to the practice of the new curriculum as they are considered essential for teacher preparedness and competency. In this context, while teaching young learners, EFL teachers were expected to be equipped with the necessary instructional techniques, communication and classroom management skills so that they can effectively cope with the implementation challenges.

Later, Aksoy et al. (2018) analyzed EFL teachers' perceptions of the advantages, challenges, and success factors for implementing the IELP at the 5th grade level. EFL teachers from 12 provinces agreed on the advantages like early exposure to English learning and improvement of four skills, but they also highlighted the disadvantages as lack of knowledge of other courses, insufficient teacher quality, lack of proper curriculum and efficient school facilities. The study emphasized that teachers face classroom implementation challenges as course books are not appropriate for the IELP, classrooms are too crowded for effective teaching, teachers are not innovative enough, and low-level students lose their motivation. Moreover, the teachers recommended that for a more successful implementation, more well-qualified teachers are required, who are provided with adequate and current in-service training such as CLT methods, using authentic materials and new approaches to teach young learners. To ensure the effective outcomes, EFL teachers offered that the curriculum needs to be supported with meaningful activities based on learner and teacher needs, and classrooms should be equipped with necessary technologies that ease the language teaching process.

Moreover, Canlier and Bümen (2018) analyzed the IELP by using different source data, i.e. document analysis method based on the principles of curriculum design. It concluded that the recent curriculum is well-structured but lacks flexibility for individual needs. In addition, it is stated that some themes, vocabulary knowledge and language functions are beyond the learners' cognitive level and readiness. Regarding the 40 units expected to be covered during the educational year, the intensity of the topics is criticized that there will be insufficient time allocated for developing speaking and listening skills. Furthermore, the article pointed to the imbalance in language skills and limited student-centered approaches. Although the 5th grade intensive English curriculum gives the autonomy to the teachers for adapting the materials according to the learner characteristics and school conditions, it seems to lack providing supplementary resources in line with the curriculum such as course books, materials and internet sources to support this adaptation. Besides, the curriculum is criticized as learners' assessment relies on traditional exams, ignoring their communicative abilities. As a result, the article recommends formative assessment methods, professional development opportunities for the teachers and simplifying the curriculum content so as to hinder the implementation challenges of the programme.

On the other hand, Dilekli (2018) evaluated the new curriculum introduced as a pilot practice in Aksaray province based on teacher opinions. The findings of the study emphasized that the number of objectives outlined in the curriculum are excessive and above the cognitive level of students, which prevent teachers' emphasis on productive skills. Instead of dealing with interactive speaking activities, EFL teachers expressed that they feel obliged to focus on the grammatical structures with the pressure of covering the whole curriculum in the limited timeline. Additionally, participant teachers thought that the program, with its intensity of units and learning outcomes, tends to deviate from its intended purpose, which ultimately hinders students from actively using the target language. Also, the curriculum's emphasis on the traditional assessment and evaluation methods resulted in teachers' ignoring listening and speaking skills. Some implementation challenges also occurred as schools were not prepared enough with their infrastructure, course books were delivered late, materials could not attract learner attention, and the classrooms were too crowded to address each language skill proportionally in an effective way. In spite of the challenges,

teachers supported following the IELP at the 5th grade level, emphasizing students' eagerness to learn a new language permanently and the benefits of extended exposure to the target language at a young age. As a result, the EFL teachers suggested that the program needs to be expanded and sustained more effectively, however, by incorporating level-based classes and voluntary participation due to the variation in students' levels of preparedness.

In a similar study conducted in Kahramanmaraş, Berkant et al. (2019) investigated the perspectives of EFL teachers regarding the new implementation. According to the findings, EFL teachers not only faced pedagogical, but also technical, psychological, and social challenges with the IELP, including infrastructure issues, curriculum misalignment, and reduced non-language subjects. However, they agreed on increased student participation and confidence. Teachers' suggestions included improving course materials, considering student readiness, involving teachers in curriculum design, and making the program optional for the students. Furthermore, the study by Kaya (2019), from Antalya province, aimed to compare the speaking skills of the students from the IELP curriculum with the students from the standard 5th grade English curriculum by focusing on the reasons behind their struggles. The results showed no significant difference between the two groups in terms of skills achievement, although IELP students received more English courses. The study found the main teachers-related reasons as lack of emphasis on communicative skills, focus on vocabulary and written assessments. In addition, student-related factors included low motivation, insufficient participation, and a lack of readiness. The findings also highlighted that before making a change regarding a specific curriculum design, the teachers to implement it should be informed, and they should be provided with in-service training so that they can start instructing it as planned.

Kayabaşı and Köse (2019) focused on examining the views of English teachers and school administrators regarding the pilot implementation in Antalya. The findings showed that while participants had positive attitudes towards the program, they also highlighted several areas to be improved, such as insufficient resources, lack of readiness for the pilot implementation, and challenges related to class sizes and teaching materials. Teachers also had some pedagogical problems as the curriculum

was beyond the student level, language classrooms were lacking for visual and auditory resources, the number of teachers was inadequate, and they were not provided in-service education related to the current program. According to the teachers and administrators, the program should be expanded to other schools in Türkiye by providing better preparation by means of more useful resources which are related to real life for meaningful learning. Other suggestions included that students should be grouped according to their language proficiency levels, and classrooms should be better equipped to support effective foreign language instruction, parental preferences should be taken into consideration, and the expansion of the program should be carried out gradually.

Another study by Yılmaz and İnce (2019) investigated the effects of the 5th grade intensive English curriculum, in Zonguldak, on students' academic achievement, their attitudes towards the English course, and their self-efficacy beliefs. They found that the new implementation increased the students' success and it improved their language skills. The findings indicated that students' positive attitudes towards learning English and their confidence in their language abilities improved as well. Moreover, the study identified no significant gender differences in academic achievement or self-efficacy of the students. However, individual factors like school location affected student self-efficacy or success.

Additionally, Dincer and Koç (2020) evaluated the implementation and effectiveness of the intensive language program for 5th graders in Erzincan province. While EFL teachers generally had positive attitudes towards the program, pointing to the improvements in students' language skills and motivation to learn English, they faced some challenges including insufficient teaching materials, crowded classrooms, and limited professional development opportunities for teachers. Findings indicated that the units of the curriculum are overloaded, EFL teachers were not supported during the implementation process, in-service training were deficient, so they were demotivated while teaching young learners. Therefore, teachers suggested revising the curriculum to make it more suitable for young learners by narrowing down the units, and establishing effective English language classrooms.

The article by Dündar and Merç (2021) evaluated the 5th grade English Language Teaching (ELT) from the perspectives of parents on standard and intensive curriculum. Results showed that parents were not satisfied with the standard curriculum as it only covered basic language skills by ignoring speaking skills. In contrast, the intensive curriculum met parents' expectations with additional class hours, use of smart boards, and supportive materials, and improving learners' language abilities. In addition, parents suggested more practical activities for learners, guidance to motivate students and the need to be involved in the curriculum development process to enhance the program's effectiveness. Although many parents were unfamiliar with the contents and materials of the program, since the IELP curriculum excludes subjects such as music and art, some parents proposed incorporating these courses into the program in English to address their absence. Additionally, many participants recommended extending the implementation beyond the 5th grade and continuing it throughout secondary school to achieve more effective outcomes.

On the other hand, Güngör and Geçikli (2021) aimed to examine the affective factors influencing students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language in Iğdır province by contrasting regular and IELP implementing secondary schools. It also analyzed whether gender, parental support, and other affective variables affected students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English. The results showed that female students exhibited a stronger willingness and greater effort in L2 learning compared to male students. They concluded that affective factors play a crucial role in language learning. Although students in pilot schools tended to have more positive attitudes towards English lessons and language learning than their counterparts in regular schools, this difference was not found to be statistically significant. However, students' levels of foreign language anxiety were generally low. Findings indicated that teachers expressed concerns about the inadequacy of the learning environments for implementing student-centered approaches, primarily due to the limited physical resources available in schools.

The study by Kambur and Demirbulak (2021) investigated the opinions of EFL teachers working in IELP implementing secondary schools in Istanbul. The findings showed that teachers had moderately positive opinions towards the curriculum. Most

teachers were satisfied with the curriculum in terms of its goals, objectives, assessment and evaluation. However, certain problems like lack of resources, crowded classrooms, traditional classroom environment, inadequate in-service training and lack of teacher involvement in the curriculum development process hindered its effectiveness.

Another study by Küçüktepe and Kerimoğlu (2021) aimed to explore IELP's effectiveness from the opinions of EFL teachers in İstanbul province. Overall, the majority of teachers expressed positive views regarding the 5th grade intensive practice. They reported that the instructional strategies, techniques, materials, and assessment tools were generally aligned with those recommended in the curriculum. Although teachers think that the program was beneficial in providing students with a strong foundation in English, they highlighted challenges such as the need for more appropriate instructional materials and professional support. Some teachers also noted several problems, including heavy content and grammar-focused learning objectives that were beyond students' proficiency levels.

Furthermore, Yolcu and Dimici (2021) analyzed the pilot implementation in Hatay from the perspectives of students, teachers and administrators by means of surveys and interviews. It was concluded that there was a focus on communication during the classroom practices as suggested in the curriculum. However, interactive activities were not successfully and meaningfully implemented as they were generally carried out by asking and answering questions instead of authentic and daily-life conversations. Due to the use of insufficient methods for listening and speaking skills, learners could not develop them. As a result, it was found that students feel more competent in reading and writing, so speaking and listening activities were reported as the most challenging for students. On the other hand, according to teachers, the curriculum content was dense and inappropriate for learner levels. Because of the large classroom sizes, teachers could practice individual activities rather than group activities. Also, the late arrival of materials, teachers' late access to the content, and lack of efficient training on IELP affected its successful implementation.

In addition, Gelen and Akekmekci (2022) investigated the perspectives of English teachers, learners, and parents about the 5th grade IELP, with a focus on language

abilities (reading, writing, speaking, listening), content, main goals, implementation process, and assessment and evaluation. The study conducted in the South-eastern region of Anatolia concluded that there were contradictions between the opinions of teachers, learners, and parents, with parents and learners generally having more positive attitudes than teachers about the current implementation. Teachers felt that literacy skills (reading and writing) show greater development compared to oral communication skills (listening and speaking) across the four language abilities. EFL teachers were not satisfied with the accomplishment of oral skills claiming that they believe the curriculum can only partially meet the established goals for developing students' speaking proficiency. However, according to the parents and pupils, speaking skills were improved the most regarding intensive foreign language instruction that promotes interactive, practical learning experiences during class practices.

On the other hand, Dündar and Merç (2022) identified the opinions of English teachers, advisors, and a member of the Curriculum Development Committee of the MoNE about the regular 5th grade and IELP curriculum. They found that teachers faced various challenges in implementing both curricula, including overloaded content, limited class hours, dissatisfaction with course books, and the influence of high-stakes exams. The advisors and the committee member highlighted the need for ongoing professional development for teachers to understand the curriculum and effectively implement it in their classroom.

Furthermore, the study by Özcanlı and İzci (2023) examined the opinions of English teachers regarding the recent practice. It aimed to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program, identify the challenges and offer recommendations for its improvement. The participants believed that the implementation could solve the foreign language learning problem in Türkiye with an early exposure to the English language. However, teachers faced challenges such as lack of course materials, inadequate in-service training, and insufficient technological infrastructure in some schools. For the effectiveness of the intensive English program, teachers suggested better curriculum preparation, more resources, and extending the class hours in the following grades.

Sarışık et al. (2022) focused on evaluating the IELP implemented in 5th grade secondary schools based on teachers' opinions. The teachers were generally satisfied with the program highlighting its potential to enhance FLE in Türkiye. However, they identified some areas for improvement, such as better teaching materials and a stronger emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Most of the participants had positive attitudes and suggested making the program mandatory across the country to standardize English language instruction and overcome the challenges in the Turkish educational context.

A recent study by Coşkun (2023) explored the issue of boredom experienced by 5th graders in IELP classrooms based on the perspectives of both students and teachers. The causes of boredom are found as repetitive and intensive language lessons, challenging grammar topics, and teacher-centered methods. The students showed boredom by doodling, yawning, and restlessness. In addition to the findings, to reduce boredom in language classrooms, the study highlights the need for active engagement of the learners and learner-centered teaching approaches by reducing the focus on grammar. Lastly, another current study by Kalkan and Genç (2023) aimed to assess the impact of the 5th grade IELP from the students' point of view based on their grade levels (involving 6th, 7th and 8th graders) and gender in Diyarbakır province. In addition to the mostly positive opinions of the students, the study found that female students showed a higher level of desire and effort to learn English compared to male students. Also, students in lower grades tended to have more positive attitudes towards the program. Although the majority of students found the practice beneficial and effective, they also suggested some improvements to better meet different learner needs.

To summarize, each of the mentioned studies above evaluated the current curriculum from different stakeholder's perspectives, such as teachers, parents, administrators and students, with the aim of exploring how well it is applicable in real classrooms, meets the expectations and contributes to the language learning. The key findings mainly focus on the strengths and weaknesses regarding IELP curriculum by suggesting ways to improve it according to learner and teacher needs. However, as the policy change and its implementation is relatively recent, there is limited research to understand its effectiveness. In addition, they were mainly carried out during the initial years of the

practice, specifically during the pilot year, and were based mostly on curriculum evaluation and the short-term effects of the 5th grade IELP program. Indeed, it will be significant to evaluate the program's long-term impact on language education from EFL teachers' perspectives who should play a key role for evaluating the curriculum regarding their in-class practices, and who closely witness the target language development of the students. Moreover, there is no research exploring the effectiveness of the current practice in Burdur province along with its advantages and disadvantages. Meanwhile, many of the previously conducted studies are deprived of exploring the opportunities for teacher training regarding IELP. Therefore, this research will also analyze EFL teachers' classroom implementation challenges and specify their professional development needs. Hence, the findings of the current study will provide valuable feedback to the educators, researchers and curriculum developers about the impact of the process, improvement of learners' language proficiency, and the needs for further improvement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Including six sections, this chapter describes the methodological framework of the present study which aims to investigate the EFL teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the 5th grade IELP in Burdur. It begins by explaining the research design adopted for the study. Then the chapter outlines the research questions that guided the research. The third section addresses the sampling strategy and the information about the participants to clarify the context of the study. The next section discusses the data collection tools and procedures in detail, followed by an explanation of the methods utilized for the data analysis. The chapter concludes with the measures taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, to gather in-depth insights from EFL teachers who have been experiencing the 5th Grade IELP implementation in Burdur province. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for deeply exploring humans' lived experiences, beliefs, and interpretations in a natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this regard, rather than relying on quantitative data, it constructs a rich and detailed narrative by presenting participants' perspectives through descriptive language. Moreover, according to Creswell (1997), this approach enables researchers to develop a comprehensive and detailed view of a given issue. As also emphasized by Duff (2002) and Creswell (2012), qualitative research supports the exploration of phenomena within their real-life contexts, offering contextualized and holistic insights into the experiences of particular groups. This makes it especially valuable in educational research, where the complexity of classroom practices, teacher beliefs, and experiences requires close attention to context and meaning. In this regard, as the aim of the present research is not to generalize the findings but to gain an in-depth understanding of the intensive language practice within a real-life setting, the qualitative design aligns well with the objectives of the current study.

As a type of qualitative research, a case study design is a commonly used way to explore and describe existing situations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that case study research approaches are used across many fields, especially evaluation, where the researcher conducts an in-depth analysis of a specific case, such as a program, event, activity, process, or individuals. Additionally, a case study approach is particularly valuable when the phenomenon under investigation cannot be easily separated from its surrounding context, allowing for a detailed and holistic understanding within real-life settings (Yin, 2009). This design supports Merriam's view (1998) that case studies are discovery-oriented in nature as they emphasize understanding the process, context and the meaning rather than focusing solely on measurable outcomes. In a case study, the researcher focuses on the "why" and "how" questions by concentrating on the reasons and processes behind the case to gather detailed data about the situation being examined (Stake, 1995; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this study, the "case" can be defined as the implementation of the IELP at the 5th grade level in selected secondary schools in Burdur. As the aim of the study is to understand the perceptions of the EFL teachers on the benefits, challenges and effectiveness of the practice from their point of view, this qualitative case study design can investigate the implementation process of the recent program in-depth. By means of the rich descriptive data collected from the participants who are directly involved in the process, various factors affecting the practice will be uncovered, and comprehensive understanding of this particular educational context will be provided.

3.2. Research Questions

In the present study, the perspectives of EFL teachers regarding their experiences about the effectiveness and challenges in the context of IELP are explored based on the following research questions:

1. What are the general perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the 5th Grade Intensive English Language Program (IELP)?

- 1.a. What are the advantages of IELP for the students and teachers?

1.b. What challenges do EFL teachers encounter while implementing this program?

2. What suggestions do EFL teachers propose for improving the impact of the program?

3.3. Sampling and Participants

The present case study was conducted during the 2024-2025 educational year in the context of the IELP for the 5th graders in Burdur province, Türkiye. Since the practice has been implementing in only four state schools in the city, 15 EFL teachers who have experience with IELP were chosen as participants of the study. The participants were identified through purposeful sampling strategy, in which they were selected based on their specific traits or experiences with the main issue being studied (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). This sampling method was considered appropriate for the qualitative research design, based on a case study approach, since purposive sampling enables an in-depth examination of cases that are likely to provide rich and diverse data (Patton, 1987, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Similarly, Creswell (2012) and Patton (2002) noticed that deliberate selection of the participants can offer meaningful and relevant insights in accordance with their experience and knowledge relevant to the research objectives.

In this regard, following the official approval taken from the Burdur Provincial Directorate of National Education (see Appendix 1), the EFL teachers within those IELP implementing secondary schools, who have at least one year of experience with the program were invited to participate in the study. As participation was based on voluntary consent, only 15 teachers who agreed to take part formed the study sample, which ensured that the data was collected from individuals with both the required experience and a willingness to share their perspectives in detail. In addition, the diversity intended for understanding experiences from different secondary schools was provided. The study group was also categorized according to the demographic features such as gender, age, teaching experience, IELP experience and class size, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Demographic Features of the Participants

Variables		f	%
Gender	Female	12	80
	Male	3	20
Age	27-29	2	13.33
	30-39	5	33.33
	40-49	8	53.33
	50 or above	0	0
Teaching Experience	1-5 years	1	6.67
	6-10 years	1	6.67
	11-15 years	5	33.33
	16-20 years	2	13.33
	21 years or above	6	40
IELP Experience	0-2 years	2	13.33
	3-5 years	3	20
	6-8 years	10	66.67
Class Size	20-25	4	26.67
	26-30	3	20
	31-35	8	53.33

As seen in Table 1, the study group consisted of 12 females (80%) and 3 males (20%), which can be considered as a noticeably imbalanced gender distribution. However, the reason that most of the participants are female may be due to the fact that the teaching profession in Türkiye, particularly in the field of language education, is predominantly occupied by women (Kırkgöz, 2008), making the distribution quite typical. On the other hand, in terms of age, the table reveals that, more than half of the participants (53.33%) were between 40-49 years old, followed by 33.33% in the 30-39 age group, and the least age group was in the 27-29 range with 13.33%. It can be inferred that many of the participants were experienced teachers in the middle of their careers.

Regarding their teaching experience, most of the EFL teachers had remarkable professional backgrounds while 40% of them had 21 years of experience, and 33.33% having between 11-15 years. The teachers who are in their early years of profession are in the minority on the evidence that only 2 participants (13.34%) had less than 10 years of teaching experience. As for their experience with the 5th Grade IELP, the majority (66.67%) had between 6-8 years of practice, indicating familiarity with the

implementation in the long-term. Only 2 people had less than 3 years of experience (13.33%) in the context of the program. Lastly, class sizes varied from 20 to 35 students according to Table 1. While more than half of the participants (53.33%) were teaching crowded classes around 31-35 students, solely 4 teachers (26.67 %) taught classes of 20-25 students. The large class sizes reflect the typical classroom conditions in Turkish state secondary schools, which may influence both the instructional practices and perceptions of the current implementation. To sum up, although most of the participants are female, they are quite experienced teachers in their mid-career. Importantly, their mostly long-term engagement with the IELP implementation in crowded classrooms is another common feature of the study group.

3.4. Data Collection Tools

In this qualitative study, data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. That type of interview was considered appropriate for this study because it can enable the researcher to obtain both structured responses, and comprehensive insights that may emerge unexpectedly during the conversation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Büyüköztürk et al. (2012), semi-structured interview forms offer participants the opportunity to express their thoughts and experiences more freely. Particularly, in this kind of interview, the questions are developed in advance based on the objectives of the study; however, the researcher has the flexibility to ask additional questions during the interview process as needed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). This flexibility allows for a deeper exploration of the participants' perspectives while maintaining a structured framework in line with the research goals. As a matter of fact, it was thought that semi-structured interviews may offer the flexibility to explore diverse aspects of the participants' views regarding the implementation of the 5th Grade IELP.

The interview questions (see Appendix 2) were developed by the researcher based on the research questions to elicit responses related to teacher perceptions, encountered challenges, perceived benefits, curriculum and materials, PD opportunities, and suggestions for future improvements in the context of the practice. In the first phase, the teacher interview form was prepared as a draft with 10 items. Subsequently, expert feedback was obtained from the thesis supervisor. Depending on the suggestions

received, such as removing the repetitive items and rephrasing certain expressions, necessary revisions were made in the interview form. Later, the revised version was piloted with three EFL teachers working at schools implementing IELP. During the pilot interviews, it was realized that teachers tended to give brief or surface-level responses to some questions (see Appendix 2, Interview question 3, 6, 8, 11). Following those interviews, in order to obtain more detailed responses, the researcher added more follow-up questions under those items in the interview form. These revisions aimed to guide the participants toward providing more in-depth and comprehensive answers regarding their views and experiences. As a result, the questions were finalized in line with the researcher observations and the expert views. The final version of the teacher interview form consisted of 13 questions.

In the first part, the semi-structured interview included some questions to elicit some information regarding the demographic features of the participants such as gender, age, teaching experience, IELP experience and class size. Subsequently, there were 13 open-ended questions regarding general perceptions, advantages, disadvantages, recommendations towards the improvement of the program. While the interview questions were prepared in advance, a set of potential follow-up questions were also determined to ask further when necessary. Meanwhile, to ensure clear communication and avoid possible misinterpretations, all interview questions were prepared in the native language of the participants, which is Turkish, and the interviews were carried out in the same way.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

For the data collection process, first of all, the ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University so as to make sure that study meets the required ethical standards to initiate the research (see Appendix 3). Following the ethical approval, since the study group was the EFL teachers working in 5th grade IELP implementing four secondary schools in Burdur, the official permission to conduct research was taken from the Provincial Directorate of National Education in Burdur (see Appendix 1). Then, the principals of the selected secondary schools were informed about the purpose, content and the voluntary participation

process of the research. After EFL teachers were invited to be voluntary participants, interview appointments were scheduled at convenient times for them. The data collection process lasted in May and June of 2025. Before conducting the interviews, participants were clearly informed about some issues. The research was conducted with the official approval of MoNE, their participation was entirely voluntary and based on an informed consent, their identities would be kept strictly confidential, and they might withdraw from the research at any stage without facing any negative consequences (see Appendix 4). Participants also provided their consent for audio recording, which was necessary for accurate transcription and thorough data analysis.

Although it was planned to have interviews with 12 participants for the present study, the researcher ultimately reached 15 English teachers. Reaching more participants was considered beneficial, as it allowed for the collection of a broader range of perspectives, and increased the richness and diversity of the data. Regarding the interviews, they were either held at participants' schools or convenient places such as their homes, depending on their preferences. While most of the interviews were conducted through face-to-face interactions, to accommodate participant preferences and facilitate the data collection, some interviews were carried out via online platforms such as *ZOOM* meetings. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Additionally, they were all conducted in Turkish to ensure that participants could express their views more comfortably without any misunderstandings. The researcher directed a set of pre-determined interview questions and, where necessary, asked follow-up questions to elicit more in-depth responses based on the participants' answers. Importantly, throughout the interview process, ethical principles were taken into consideration. The researcher abstained from asking leading questions or giving suggestive prompts. However, when participants needed clarification, additional explanations were offered to support their understanding. These strategies, along with other careful measures, were carried out to reduce potential bias and maintain a neutral, non-directive interviewing process.

3.6. Data Analysis

For analyzing the data collected through semi-structured interviews, qualitative thematic analysis will be used, which is a widely utilized method for identifying, organizing and interpreting qualitative data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) outlined that this approach provides the researcher with a structured framework for systematically analyzing qualitative data. Furthermore, this method was supposed to be appropriate for the present study, as the researcher could have the flexibility to identify and interpret the emerging themes directly from the data in an inductive way, instead of relying on predetermined themes (Patton, 2002). In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis, the analysis process involved the following steps:

1. **Familiarization with the data** - Reading the transcripts again and again to immerse in the data and note initial observations.
2. **Generating initial codes** - Create labels for meaningful units of data that reflect key ideas or repeated patterns.
3. **Searching for themes** - Grouping related codes together to identify candidate themes that show significant aspects of the data.
4. **Reviewing themes** - Refining and validating the themes by checking their consistency against the coded data and the entire dataset.
5. **Defining and naming themes** - Clearly defining the scope and meaning of each theme to ensure they align with the research questions.
6. **Producing the report** - Integrating the final themes into a coherent narrative that reflects the participants' perspectives and supports the overall research aims.

Since the researcher recorded the interviews, based on the participants' consent, during the data collection process, they were transcribed using *Google Cloud speech-to-text service* in order to provide the accuracy and efficiency in the transcribing phase. However, automatic transcription was not excellent quality, so the researcher listened to the recordings one by one, reviewed each transcript carefully, and corrected some parts such as missing words, wrong expressions or lacking punctuations to ensure their

relevance to the original recordings. Following the transcription process, individual documents were created for each interview question including all corresponding answers from all participants. The responses were compiled and listed along with a particular number for each participant (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3). This step was taken to facilitate a more organized and efficient coding process while analyzing the data. Following the organization of the raw data, the researcher carefully read the transcriptions multiple times to gain familiarity with the content and started the coding process. Instead of using a specific software, the researcher carried out a manual coding procedure in which a color-coded system was used to enable the initial coding. The similar ideas were highlighted with the same color and some notes were taken (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994) until the initial set of codes appeared.

Afterwards, the researcher explored the data to identify emerging themes and repeating patterns within significant data segments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). So, similar codes were grouped together into broader categories in order to identify potential themes. Those themes were related to teachers' perceptions, implementation challenges, observed benefits, and suggestions for improvement. Once the relationships among the themes were identified, their meanings were interpreted accordingly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Then the researcher reviewed these thematic structures carefully and refined them repeatedly until a coherent and satisfactory framework emerged. Throughout the analysis, a data-driven (inductive) approach was followed, in which the themes appeared naturally from the data rather than putting the data into a certain framework. The distribution of final themes, subthemes and codes were demonstrated in frequency tables as they provide a clearer overview of the collected data and support the interpretation of the qualitative findings. Meanwhile, the selected quotations from participants were translated into English by the researcher for the purpose of reporting.

3.7. Reliability and Validity

Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021) suggest that the *trustworthiness* of a qualitative study is assessed through concepts like credibility, transferability, dependability, and verifiability. These criteria provide that the findings are convincing, contextually

relevant, supported by clear evidence, and consistent throughout the process. To ensure the *reliability* and *validity* of the current study, many issues are taken into consideration in every phase of the research. According to Yin (2011), ensuring *validity* involves carefully collecting and interpreting data in a way that accurately represents the real-life phenomena being studied. In this sense, to support the *validity*, the researcher tried to conduct the study based on the context and meaning of participants' experiences, ensuring that the outcomes are both trustworthy and relevant for similar educational settings (Merriam, 2009). First of all, since this study is grounded in a qualitative case study design, the participants were informed about the research process and analysis procedures to promote *transparency* and ensure *dependability*, as suggested by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021). Meanwhile, during the data collection process, the researcher made a conscious effort to avoid asking biased or leading questions to the participants. To ensure the *trustworthiness* of the findings, the interviews were conducted in participants' native language (Turkish) so that they could express their thoughts comfortably and accurately.

Furthermore, with the aim of strengthening the *credibility* of semi-structured interviews, the researcher not only engaged extensively with the participants, but also carried out member checking by re-listening to the voice recordings for the purpose of confirming accurate understanding of their responses (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). On the other hand, systematically documenting the research process, including data collection tools, transcription procedures, steps for coding and theme development, contributed to the *dependability* of the present study. Additionally, the fact that the data organization was supported by separate documents for each participant and each interview question facilitated a more transparent and consistent analysis. As for *transferability*, it is promoted by providing a detailed description of the research setting, and the demographic features of the study group. The research context and data analysis process were also clearly and thoroughly described to allow future researchers to follow and evaluate the study, and potentially apply it to similar educational contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Besides, the researcher adopted a self-evaluative stance throughout the analysis so as to minimize possible biases and ensure that the interpretations are aligned with the participants' perspectives and the data itself. In this context, the researcher took reflexive notes and

analytic memos to critically reflect on interpretations and decisions made throughout the data analysis process.

In qualitative research, *validity* refers not only to the accuracy of the findings but also to the extent to which they are credible and acceptable within the research community (Creswell, 2016). This means that the interpretations drawn from the data should be supported by sufficient evidence and reflect the participants' perspectives faithfully. In this regard, participants' perspectives were directly reflected by means of selected quotations to support the *reliability* of the findings. In addition to developing *credibility* and *transparency* of the analysis, using direct quotations also provided contextual evidence for the presented themes, and allowed the participants' voices to be heard authentically (Shenton, 2004). Meanwhile, reaching more people than expected, regarding the participants, contributed to the *credibility* and depth of thematic analysis since more participants across various school contexts presented information about their experience more comprehensively. In sum, during the data analysis, rigorous qualitative procedures were followed to derive comprehensive and credible findings concerning EFL teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the 5th grade IELP. As a result, the researcher's adherence to the criteria specifically established for qualitative studies enabled that the findings are credible, dependable, transferable and confirmable.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the qualitative findings from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 EFL teachers regarding their experiences with the 5th Grade IELP. The analysis is organized around the research questions and supported by themes, subthemes, codes and frequency tables to provide a detailed summary of the collected data. Additionally, direct quotations from the participants are added to support the findings. The participant teachers are coded numerically to maintain confidentiality.

4.1. General Perceptions of EFL Teachers towards IELP

As seen in Table 2, under the main theme of *General Perceptions towards IELP*, four subthemes are uncovered. Those subthemes are *Positive attitudes*, *Conditional Satisfaction*, *Objectives of IELP*, and *Extent in Goal Achievement*.

Table 2.

Theme 1: General Perceptions about IELP

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	f
General perceptions about IELP	Positive perceptions about IELP	Long exposure to English	7
		Improvement of four skills	6
		Ideal early age	5
		Motivation and engagement	4
		Long-term effect	1
	Conditional satisfaction with IELP	Material and curriculum issues	3
		Lack of sustainability	1
		No placement exam	1
		Crowded classes	1
		Lack of practice	1
	Perceptions on the objectives of IELP	Mastery of four skills	10
		Developing communication skills	7
		Real-life use of English	5
		Intercultural awareness	3
		Early language learning	3
		Confidence and motivation	3
		21 st century skills	1
	Extent in goal achievement	Partially successful	6
		Mostly successful	5
		Indecisive	2
		Not successful	2

4.1.1. Positive perceptions about IELP. The majority of the interviewees held positive perceptions about the 5th grade IELP, with the most frequently mentioned views on students' *long exposure to English* and *improvement of four language skills*. Nearly half of the teachers considered the current program beneficial since learners can improve their target language proficiency as they are intensely *exposed to the English language* (f: 7). Some quotations can be provided below to support this reason:

Participant 3: Since intensive exposure is necessary for teaching English or any other foreign language, we started with 15 hours of intensive English in the 5th grade as a pilot practice, then it continued as 11 hours per week. And after seeing the progress of our students, yes, I do find this implementation useful.

Participant 6: I generally conduct in-class communication in English. Compared to the beginning of the year, since they were constantly exposed to the target language, even the weaker students have improved.

Regarding the implementation's impact on the balanced *improvement of four skills* (f: 6), several participants highlighted that learners' active participation in the lessons and the extended number of class hours contributed to the holistic development of main language skills. Exemplary quotations can be stated as follows:

Participant 9: In the previous or regular program with three hours per week, for example, the focus was more on reading comprehension and tests since we were in a rush to cover the topics and could only teach grammar. However, in this program, now we are able to teach all four skills with ease, as a result, the students can take part more actively in speaking and listening activities. In that sense, my attitude is positive regarding its contribution to developing all four skills.

Participant 13: In terms of duration and intensity, the program is particularly effective, and it is highly suitable for acquiring and using the four basic language skills.

Regarding the *ideal early age* (f: 5), five participants noted that early-age instruction makes language acquisition more effective for learners since the communicative nature of the program promotes easier target language learning without any prejudices against it. The viewpoints drawing attention to the advantage of early language learning can be indicated below:

Participant 6: At a young age, children's brains are more receptive. They can absorb whatever we give them.

Participant 9: When considering language instruction at the 5th grade level, it can be regarded as an early stage of learning. At this age, children do not yet possess negative self-perceptions that might hinder language acquisition. As a result, their attitudes towards English and their level of interest are generally positive.

As seen in Table 2, another reason for participant teachers' favorable perceptions about the current implementation is the high level of *motivation and engagement* (f: 4). It was highlighted that with the increased number of class hours, EFL teachers were able to cover the topics more comfortably, and conduct their lessons in more interactive way. Moreover, Participant 11 reported that although students had some concerns, they developed self-confidence and motivation during the process. These statements can be found below:

Participant 8: I can say my attitude is entirely positive. Due to the increased lesson hours, we do not experience pressure to rush through the curriculum. We enrich our lessons with numerous games and activities, making the classes more enjoyable for both us and the students. This also provides opportunities for interactive and productive learning.

Participant 11: When we were told that we would teach the IELP class, initially, students expressed complaints such as 'What will we do for so many hours? How will it work?' But as the lessons progressed and they were continuously exposed to English, they began to gain self-confidence, saying things like 'Oh, the lessons are good, we are learning, it's not difficult, we can do it.'

On the other hand, one of the participants mentioned about program's *long-term effect* (f: 1) and evaluated the process positively by focusing on student achievement in English learning. That statement can be explained in the following quotation:

Participant 5: Considering the eight-year period, I believe we have generally made successful progress with the students. Moreover, observing our students' achievements in subsequent years and their aptitude for languages, I truly regard this program as successful.

4.1.2. Conditional satisfaction with IELP. As can be seen in Table 2, some responses reflected *conditional satisfaction* regarding IELP. For instance, some participants highlighted concerns about *material and curriculum issues* (f: 3) claiming that the intensive class hours are not enough, and they have lack of official resources particular to the current practice. Regarding this, teacher statements are as follows:

Participant 1: The program is very beneficial and effective, but the lesson hours are insufficient. Eleven hours are not enough; it should be at least over 20 hours.

Participant 14: We do not have a textbook provided by the Ministry of National Education specifically for the intensified English program. If we were to continue using the textbooks from the regular national curriculum, which are designed for three hours per week, the content from those books would be insufficient for the 11-hour schedule, and we require additional resources.

Apart from this, an interviewee stressed on the *lack of sustainability* (f: 1) of the program, claiming that the sharp decrease of the English hours in the following grades avoid learners from further developing their target language:

Participant 1: In the 5th grade, students receive intensive English, but in the following year the number of hours suddenly decreases to three. Since there is no continuation, this creates a gap for the students, and they are unable to build upon what they have learned.

In addition, another participant stated that there is *no placement exam* (f: 1) related to IELP. Participant 2 marked that students could be grouped according to their abilities and interests, which would reduce the burden on less-prepared learners and make the program more effective. The idea is indicated below:

Participant 2: Prior to placement, students should take a placement or proficiency exam and be placed according to their interests and abilities. Not every student has foreign language aptitude. If students were placed based on their knowledge and skills, or if there were a kind of specialization, working with students who are genuinely interested in and capable of learning a foreign language would make the program much more effective.

On the other hand, while Participant 7 put forth that *crowded classrooms* (f: 1) hinder effective implementation of the classroom activities, Participant 12 noted that students' limited opportunities result in *lack of practice* (f: 1) at home. The quotations below can show the insights into these ideas:

Participant 7: Our class sizes are over 30 students, and this significantly affects the efficiency of our teaching. Due to the crowded classrooms, I believe we are unable to carry out the activities effectively.

Participant 12: We implement this program here, but we do not know to what extent English is used within the students' families. For instance, in subjects like science, mathematics, or social studies, parents can support their children. However, in English, since parents themselves do not know the language, they cannot provide much support.

4.1.3. Perceptions on the objectives of IELP. Upon analyzing the participant responses on the first theme as *General Perceptions*, another recurring theme was *perceptions on the objectives of the program*. Findings showed that most of the interviewees think that the program primarily aims to help learners' *mastery of four language skills* (f: 10) as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Regarding this issue, the following participant quotations can be provided:

Participant 3: The goal is to acquire the target language and to reach a level where students can speak, write, understand what they hear, and comprehend what they read. In short, we can say that the aim is to master the four basic skills of the target language.

Participant 11: In addition to using the language actively, the program aims at developing skills such as reading comprehension, speaking, listening and writing. Although not all of them may have been fully achieved, I believe the program's main objective is to improve students' language skills.

On the other hand, nearly half of the participants underlined that the program aims at *developing communication skills* (f: 7) by providing frequent exposure to the target language. It is noted that the improvement of their communicative competence help them participate in classroom activities and express themselves without anxiety. Some quotations can be shared below to support the findings:

Participant 5: The aim of the program is for students to be able to express themselves in the target language, to overcome their prejudices towards it, and to be exposed to it. In this way, students can gain effective communication skills, and we encourage them to use the target language actively.

Participant 9: If we consider it in terms of communication skills, the exposure is quite high. Therefore, I believe this has a positive effect on their ability to understand, such as following

simple instructions, comprehending dialogues, and speaking. The children are able to express themselves better and without fear.

As seen in Table 2, another emphasized objective of the IELP was *practical use of English in real-life situations* (f: 5). The participants reported that the program's primary goal is not only equipping students with the ability to communicate effectively, but also helping them integrate English into their everyday lives. Some example teacher statements can be found below:

Participant 14: The goal is for children to explain themselves when they go abroad or meet a foreigner. They can express their needs without difficulty or fear. I see this as the primary goal.

Participant 11: In my opinion, the main aim of the program is for students to be able to integrate English into their daily lives and use it.

Intercultural awareness (f: 3) showed up as another important perceived aim of the implementation. In addition to supporting speaking practice, the current practice also develops intercultural awareness as students are exposed to different cultures. The views of Participant 13 are indicated below:

Participant 13: The program ensures active use of speaking skills. The children are also exposed to intercultural interaction through texts and dialogues. This program helps them to understand other cultures.

In a similar vein, *early language learning* (f: 3) has also emerged as another objective of the program. Some participants pointed out that the intensive exposure has a significant advantage on young learners. The statement by Participant 7 show this idea:

Participant 7: There is a curriculum provided to us, aiming to develop children's language skills at an early age; their intensive exposure can be considered an advantage.

Moreover, improving *confidence and motivation* (f: 3) emerged as another stated aim of the program. A few participants agreed that IELP helps them overcome the fear of speaking the target language and develop a positive attitude towards it. An example quotation can be provided as:

Participant 4: Some of our students have very low motivation, so the aim is to increase their motivation. It also involves teaching them that speaking in front of an audience is not embarrassing, particularly when speaking English, and to help them develop a positive attitude towards language learning.

Finally, one participant drew attention to the program's target as developing *21st century skills* (f: 1) by enhancing collaboration, communication and problem solving and advanced thinking skills among students. The regarding statement can be seen below:

Participant 10: An objective has been set in accordance with international language learning standards (CEFR). Fundamentally, if we also consider 21st-century skills, the programme aims to develop students' collaborative and communication skills, project-based problem-solving abilities, and general problem-solving skills.

4.1.4. Extent in goal achievement. Thematic analysis indicated that EFL teachers generally agreed on the aims of IELP such as developing 5th grade students' communicative competence, holistic four language skills, intercultural awareness, and positive attitudes towards target language. However, Table 2 shows that they reported various opinions on the extent to which IELP's objectives have been achieved. On the one hand, many participant teachers are not fully satisfied claiming that though the program sets specific goals, these goals are only *partially successful* (f: 6) due to contextual factors such as classroom challenges and learner differences. Some supporting statements can be shared as:

Participant 3: The plan includes objectives such as developing students' communication skills in the target language and using the language in real-life contexts. However, of course, we only achieve these objectives partially. There are many factors that hinder the program from achieving its objectives. Students are expected to graduate at approximately a B1 level, but not every student reaches this level. Not every student learns at the same pace, and students may have different levels, interests, and abilities.

Participant 11: Although the intended objectives may appear sufficient in terms of lesson hours and curriculum, in my opinion, due to factors such as classroom realities and the students' proficiency levels, the program may not always fully achieve its goals.

On the other hand, although several participants argued that the program generally meets its objectives particularly in developing four basic language skills, they considered the aims as *mostly successful* (f: 5). It was emphasized that there are some external factors such as class size, materials, motivation and parental support, which

can act as barriers to the objectives. Some direct quotations can be added below to support the findings:

Participant 5: Considering the previous 5th grades, with only three hours per week, we could not even cover the curriculum provided to us. With this program, we have overcome these issues. Overall, I believe the program mostly achieves its objectives. However, the lack of a textbook from the very beginning inevitably affects the achievement of objectives. Since we do not have such a resource, we try to create our own materials and find activities, which may leave gaps.

Participant 6: Achieving the objective also depends on factors such as the students' situation and the parents' attitudes. If these three components—teacher, student, and parent—are aligned, the objectives can actually be met. However, I am not sure how this could be implemented in classes with over 30 students. My class size is ideal, and I can say that we are able to achieve the stated objectives.

Moreover, a small number of participants expressed their *indecisive opinions* (f: 2) on its goal achievement. One of them claimed that only a few students seem to benefit from the program in the long term since they lack opportunities to practice the target language in everyday life. The following statement can be presented as an example:

Participant 1: I am not sure whether the program fully achieves this goal. Based on what we observe in the following years, the success rate appears very low; in each class, it seems that only 3–4 students benefit. That's probably due to the lack of practice; students can't apply the target language in their daily lives.

Similarly, two participants proposed that the current practice is *not successful* (f: 2) in meeting its objectives. For instance, Participant 12 asserted that the program cannot reach its goals due to insufficient resources, which force teachers to prepare their own materials to compensate for gaps:

Participant 12: No, I do not think it achieves its objectives. We have limited resources. We definitely try to support it with additional materials we prepare ourselves, such as presentations and other resources.

4.2. Advantages of IELP

Regarding the sub-research question on the advantages of the IELP implementation, the findings are exhibited in Table 3 based on the interview findings. Under the main

theme of *Advantages of IELP*, two subthemes which are *benefits for students* and *benefits for EFL teachers* emerged.

Table 3.

Theme 2: Advantages of IELP

Theme	Subtheme	Code	f
Advantages of IELP	Benefits for students	Improved communication skills	11
		Positive effect on future life	10
		Increased motivation	9
		Increased learner participation	8
		Constant language exposure	8
		Holistic 4 skills development	8
		Early language learning	7
		Positive effect on instructional issues	7
		Enhanced self-confidence	6
		Active use of language in real life	6
		Much stronger L2 acquisition	6
		Overcoming trauma and prejudices	5
		Increased cultural and language awareness	4
	Benefits for EFL teachers	Opportunity for interactive activities	11
		Professional satisfaction	8
		Being up-to-date	8
		Recognition from peers and parents	7
		Useful PD opportunities	6
		Motivation and fun	5
		Active language use	4
		Fostering teacher-student relationship	4
		No rush to cover curriculum	2

4.2.1. Benefits for students. As for the IELP's advantages on learners, EFL teachers mostly expressed that it helped to *improve students' communication skills* (f: 11). For example, Participant 2 observed that former students who experienced the program showed impressive speaking fluency in high school. As discussed by Participant 9, the intensive exposure not only contributed to improve their listening and speaking abilities, but also encouraged students to communicate effectively. Similarly, Participant 3 emphasized that speaking skills showed the most significant progress, and even low-level students developed their oral skills because of the intensive exposure. The following statements can show the related views:

Participant 2: Some of my former 8th-grade students, now in high school, visited the school and told me that their high school English teachers were surprised by their speaking skills, asking them where they had learned such fluent English.

Participant 9: I realize that it contributes positively to students' communication skills since children learn the language at an early age. As children succeed, their interest in the lesson increases, and their interest in speaking grows. They can speak fluently and listen effectively in English.

Participant 3: In my opinion, there is improvement in all skills. However, there is definitely a significant increase in speaking. Speaking skills have improved noticeably because of the intensive exposure to the English language. Even students with poor reading, weak pronunciation, or weak listening can still make progress. I believe that the intensive English program has certainly taken speaking skills to a higher level.

To continue with the advantages of the IELP practice for the students, a great number of the participant teachers stated their views on its *positive effects on students' future life* (f: 10). Participants found the program beneficial in the long term, in which learners gain a strong foundation, which supports them in their later school life. Another future impact on students was considered as an exam advantage particularly for LGS which is conducted for the entrance of high schools in Türkiye. Additionally, it was argued that students' interest and language proficiency in the target language affect their career choices and lead them to foreign language-related departments. The related participant perspectives can be presented below:

Participant 6: I already have students who are in high school now and I receive positive feedback from some of my students regarding their foreign language achievements there. They say to me, 'Teacher, you taught us everything, we're not learning anything new.' I think this alone is a great advantage for them.

Participant 11: If we consider the middle school curriculum in relation to the LGS exam, I don't think students will struggle. After the intensive English in grade five, they do not have difficulty with the content in grades six, seven, and eight. In fact, they gain speed, understanding texts better and interpreting them more effectively.

Participant 3: In later years, I see those who continue their foreign language education, for example by choosing departments such as translation and interpreting or English language teaching at university. Some even return to me and share that they have taken placement tests at private institutions and have been placed at levels such as B1, from which they can progress to higher levels.

Moreover, more than half of the participant EFL teachers stated that the program *increased their motivation* (f: 9), which is considered as a remarkable gain for 5th grade students. For instance, Participant 13 emphasized that this implementation gives

students more opportunities to actively use the language, which makes the discouraged students more enthusiastic. Similarly, Participant 4 also reported that when lessons are enjoyable, students are naturally more motivated to speak. According to Participant 14, students become curious and enthusiastic to use the target language while communicating with the foreigners, which also increases their motivation. The regarding quotations can be seen as follows:

Participant 13: Perhaps the most significant benefit has been with students who initially disliked English or were discouraged by it. Through this program, I observed that they began to enjoy learning English. It provided them with opportunities to use the language. In essence, the program gave students the chance to engage with the language, which encouraged and motivated them.

Participant 4: After a certain point, they also become naturally motivated to speak. We try to make the lessons enjoyable, and students come to realize that it is not actually very difficult.

Participant 14: I can say that student motivation has increased with this program... Since it is a new language for children, the idea of someone speaking in a foreign way sparks more interest in them. We even brought Erasmus students into the classrooms before. When such people came, the students felt a greater sense of warmth toward them and made more effort to speak with them.

As another remarkable benefit of the IELP on students, many participants drew attention to the *increased learner participation* (f: 8). The interview results showed that learners actively participate in intensive English classes which include lots of interactive and enjoyable activities. As Participant 9 argued, especially when learners realize their progress and success, they start to develop positive perceptions about language learning, which directly increases their engagement. Participant 11 also stated that intensive class hours which initially appeared as a source of challenge and boredom turned into a positive motivator by making learners more willing to participate in the learning process. Those regarding quotations are seen below:

Participant 9: As some students improve their language skills, as they begin to understand and achieve certain things, their interest in the lesson increases positively. This, in turn, positively affects classroom participation.

Participant 7: With the program, almost all of the students participate in lessons. This is, of course, due to the high number of lesson hours. Our lessons are full of activities and are very enjoyable, which also helps them love the English language.

Participant 11: At first, when students saw that they would have 11 to 14 hours per week, they thought it would be too much. However, with fun and engaging activities such as games and songs, I noticed that they no longer saw the time as a burden, and instead, the lessons became enjoyable and passed quickly. What I had perceived as a disadvantage turned into an advantage, making the process fun.

Additionally, *constant exposure to the target language* (f: 8) was put forth as one of the remarkable benefits of the implementation. The interview findings indicated that learners' intensive exposure to the target language creates not only direct but also indirect learning opportunities for them. Participant 1 claimed that even those disinterested learners show some progress as a result of the inevitable exposure. Similarly, Participant 11 mentioned that intensive exposure to the target language supported learners' permanent learning and development of their language skills. The regarding quotations can be indicated below:

Participant 1: Even if students are not interested or never do their homework, they are at least exposed to English by ear. Before this implementation, they had 3 hours of English, but here it's eleven hours. So, being exposed to the language more becomes inevitable.

Participant 11: The greatest advantage for students is their constant exposure to the language. In our school, they study English on almost four days of the week. Even if they tend to forget, this frequent exposure results in more permanent learning. I observed significant improvement in students' reading comprehension, speaking, and nearly all skills from the beginning to the end of the year.

Furthermore, several interviewees identified *holistic four skills development* (f: 8) as another remarkable benefit for the students. As participant 7 stated, with the current implementation, EFL teachers have sufficient time for all language skills as a result of the intensive class hours. In this respect, EFL teachers can effectively plan their lessons by focusing on each skill in a balanced way. In addition, Participant 15 pointed out that the continuous exposure leads to a simultaneous progress in both receptive and productive skills. The exemplary statements can be found as follows:

Participant 7: The most important advantage is that we are now able to teach all four skills. In the past, when we had limited lesson hours, at least one of these skills was left incomplete, but currently, we do not face such a problem. I think the program improves all language skills in general because we can dedicate more time to each of them.

Participant 15: The greatest advantage is that the program is based on all four skills. We can plan our lessons comfortably by focusing on skills, and we are able to allocate time simultaneously to speaking, listening, grammar, reading, and writing. Because it is an intensive program, students are exposed to all four skills. Therefore, a holistic improvement takes place.

On the other hand, *early language learning* (f: 7) was emphasized as another essential benefit of the program. Some participants stated that earlier age is an advantage for young learners as they can acquire language learning habits more easily and permanently. For example, Participant 14 underlined that 5th grade students are more enthusiastic and encouraged compared to the older students. In this sense, even though they had negative experiences from primary school, they become eager to learn a new language. Similarly, Participant 9 drew attention to cognitive and emotional readiness of younger students, which supports their permanent language learning. The related statements suggest young learners' motivation and readiness:

Participant 14: Since it is a new language, fifth grade students are, by nature of their age, very eager and enthusiastic to learn. At this age, they are also very open to learning and have almost no prejudices against the language. If there are any negative perceptions from primary school, in fifth grade they start to enjoy the language again and develop a positive attitude toward both the subject and the teacher.

Participant 9: I believe that the earlier a child starts, the more important it is for language proficiency to develop. At this age group, children are very open cognitively. When they are more exposed to the target language, learning becomes more effective and permanent because they are cognitively more ready. Also, since they do not have any negative feelings or prejudices about foreign languages beforehand, they approach the process positively, which makes them emotionally open to learning as well.

The interviewees also expressed their opinions on IELP's *positive effect on learners' instructional issues* (f: 7). According to Participant 3, although levels and abilities of the students vary, the program provides opportunities for academic success and language development for almost all learners. Similarly, it was also highlighted that the program supports permanent learning through practical, interactive and enjoyable activities. As Participant 8 underlined, fun and engaging activities with lots of practice not only increase motivation but also ensure lasting learning. The related expressions can be presented below:

Participant 3: This program is quite effective in terms of academic achievement and language proficiency. Of course, we have students at different levels, but I believe they all benefit positively from it. Apart from improving the high-achieving students, I even observe progress in students who seemed unlikely to adapt to the class at the beginning of the year. We also see a remarkable increase in their scores in quizzes and exams.

Participant 8: It is very effective, because we immediately put a language structure or grammar point into practice. Through dialogues or partner work in our lessons, students directly apply what they learn, which also ensures better retention. Especially games, competitions, and songs are very beneficial. Because when they learn in an enjoyable way, it stays in their memory much longer.

Additionally, many participants stated that the program *enhanced learners' self-confidence* (f: 6). For instance, Participant 13 emphasized that even though students cannot fully master all four skills, they start to realize their potential and develop positive attitudes towards English. The implementation also helped students overcome their fear of making mistakes while using the language, as a result, they could communicate with more encouragement. Moreover, their confidence even extended beyond the classroom, and some students reported their happiness on their successful interactions with foreigners. Some direct quotations can be outlined below, which can give insights into these views:

Participant 13: Even if students cannot fully master all four basic skills, the program changes their perspective toward the language. At the very least, it helps them gain self-confidence, realize that they are capable, and understand that they should not fear the language or be discouraged by making mistakes. In this sense, the program provides valuable support.

Participant 2: The contribution to students is mainly in terms of developing self-confidence, because knowing a language gives them a sense of privilege. For example, I once had a student from the 5th grade who told me, 'Teacher, I spoke with a foreigner online, and I was able to chat.' When they see that they can actually use this skill, they become much happier.

The interviewees also highlighted that IELP supported students' *active use of English language in real life* (f: 6). On this issue, Participant 13 expressed that students were encouraged to use the English language actively in real contexts as a result of the extended time and opportunities. Similarly, Participant 15 noted that the emphasis on the everyday use of language in their classrooms enabled them to transfer the acquired skills into real-life contexts. Additionally, it was argued that apart from maintaining

English in their lives through interactions with foreigners, learners integrated the target language into their lives by means of music, movies or books. The mentioned statements can be found below:

Participant 10: Since students are given more time and opportunities to use the language, whether through writing or speaking, students inevitably tend to actively use the language in daily life. This, in turn, encourages them. As a result, our students make space for a foreign language in their lives in one way or another. Some of them communicate with foreigners with their fluent English, others watch movies, read books or listen to music.

Participant 15: When the objectives outlined in the curriculum are things that children can apply in their daily lives, they become more engaged and their classroom motivation increases. By covering all four skills, we can somewhat away from an exam-oriented focus and instead guide students more toward actually using the language.

In a similar vein, *much stronger L2 acquisition* (f: 6) was reported as another advantage for learners. It was highlighted that the insufficient lesson hours in the previous curriculum of the 5th graders hindered full language acquisition with limited improvement of four skills. However, the current implementation enabled a more consistent engagement with the target language, which supports an overall development of learners' English proficiency in the long term. The following statements can be indicated as examples:

Participant 9: In the former program, full language acquisition could not be achieved because there was not enough time for all skills. In this program, however, they are inevitably exposed to the language. With the progress of all skills, children acquire a much stronger language development.

Participant 5: Thanks to this program, children actually gain language proficiency to some extent, and this is sufficient for our students in the long run. They encounter many structures, including grammar fundamentals that they will later see in high school. Both the students and parents we meet express great satisfaction, saying that the children have built a solid foundation.

In addition, the implementation was also identified as beneficial for *students' overcoming their trauma and prejudices* (f: 5). It was highlighted that students' negative perceptions about learning a new language can be reduced in the early years of secondary education. On this issue, Participant 6 argued that IELP helped learners break their prejudices, improved their language skills, and even made English as their favourite subject. In a similar vein, Participant 3 emphasized that even some students

who were earlier questioning the learning of English developed positive perspectives towards it. The following remarks are given below on this issue:

Participant 6: I had 3–4 students who came to primary school with a negative experience of English, even avoiding the class. Now, English is one of their favorite subjects. They have made significant progress in speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. If the class had been only three hours, they probably would not have understood, and their prejudices would have persisted. I believe the program helped to break those biases.

Participant 3: Students often have prejudices against learning a foreign language. Some of them start the program with anxiety about not being able to learn. They may think, ‘Why should we learn it? Let them learn our language instead.’ However, through this program, we are able to break such preconceptions at an early age. Considering the class as a whole, most students change their perspective toward English and like it.

Another benefit of the current practice for the students emerged as *developing language and cultural awareness* (f: 4). EFL teachers drew attention to the fact that learners realized that English is more than a school subject and they became more curious about other cultures, which encouraged them to make cultural comparisons. As Participant 10 stated, some of them even started learning new languages with the dream of going abroad. It was also argued that students were also eager to take part in international experiences such as Erasmus Exchange programs, where they are able to use the target language effectively and confidently in real-life contexts. The following quotations can present some teacher views apparently:

Participant 10: Students began to see English not just as a subject, but as a tool for communication. Culturally, their curiosity also increased, as they started to question what exists in other countries and compare it with what we have in Türkiye. Overall, they developed an awareness of learning foreign languages. Now they want to learn other languages and even dream of going abroad. With this awareness they go on, and now our former students are learning languages such as Italian, Spanish and Russian.

Participant 2: The program is highly advantageous for students’ language development because they become very eager to participate in exchange programs such as Erasmus. For instance, last year our school joined an Erasmus project under the Ministry of Education’s consortium. Students competed to take part, and we selected them by assessing their speaking skills through a committee. Many of them spoke English impressively well, and when they went abroad, they were able to express themselves and meet their needs with ease thanks to their English knowledge.

4.2.2. Benefits for EFL Teachers. Regarding the benefits of the program for EFL teachers, the most frequently referred advantage was uncovered as *opportunity to implement interactive activities* (f: 11). Most of the participants reported that with the increased lesson hours they can practice more creative and interactive activities in their English classes, which no longer focus only on grammar teaching. In this program, they can enrich their instructional practices by incorporating videos, songs, games, dialogues and role-plays, which makes their lessons more interesting and engaging for the students. Participant 4 also claimed that students even lose the track of time as learning becomes more enjoyable. Similarly, Participant 9 highlighted that the program encouraged teachers to go beyond course book-based teaching by integrating digital media and various activities into their lessons. The following quotations illustrate the related teacher views:

Participant 10: Previously, our preparations before lessons were mostly based on test materials or grammar exercises. However, with this implementation, we now have the opportunity to go beyond that and broaden the range of activities with more creative ones.

Participant 4: Since we support the lessons with songs, games, and interactive activities, students become more motivated and they do not get bored. Also, the efficiency of the lesson increases. Sometimes I use drama, sometimes competitions. This variety increases students' participation in the lesson. Thanks to these activities, students often say, 'The lesson finished so quickly.'

Participant 9: From the teachers' perspective, the program is beneficial because it encourages us to use digital media and incorporate more digital content. This also motivates us to find different activities, which in turn allows us to apply innovative teaching methods and activities including games in our lessons.

Another highlighted benefit of IELP is the sense of *professional satisfaction* (f: 8) it provides. Some of the participants emphasized that it strengthens teachers' passion for their profession and reinforces the importance of English education. Similarly, Participant 3 reported that observing their students' progress and success in English increases their motivation for teaching and gives them a sense of fulfillment in their professional roles. Quotations presented below show insights into teachers' viewpoints:

Participant 1: For teachers, it increases their love for their profession, encourages them to give more importance to English education, and helps them understand the significance of their role.

Participant 3: I believe I am genuinely satisfied with English language teaching. I feel professionally fulfilled because the students are happy, and I am happy as well. I also observe that some students achieve an advanced level of English. I notice their progress throughout the year, and their successes bring me joy.

In addition, the program was also perceived as a valuable tool for teachers' *staying up-to-date* (f: 8). While adapting their lessons to students' changing interest and abilities, EFL teachers are encouraged to remain current in their teaching methods and resources. The interviewees also stated that as they constantly explore new techniques to focus on specific language skills, such as speaking and listening, it strengthens their instructional practices and professional development. The following remarks present the mentioned teacher views:

Participant 5: We also try to keep ourselves up-to-date. For instance, students from eight years ago are not the same as current students; their interests and abilities differ, and their access to resources is different as well. We strive to remain current alongside them, adapting and planning lessons according to their interests, finding activities, and actively engaging them in class. This process also helps our professional development and staying current in our field.

Participant 15: I believe we also develop ourselves at the same time. By focusing solely on speaking, listening, or skill-based activities related to a specific outcome, I believe it also helps us improve professionally. Directing our attention to what else we can do further develops us.

Along with this, participants drew attention to the fact that IELP enabled EFL teachers a feeling of *recognition from peers and parents* (f: 7). Several interviewees mentioned that many parents and colleagues acknowledged and appreciated their efforts on learners' increased enthusiasm for English. It was argued that parents are aware of the benefits of early language learning and support this program. Additionally, Participant 10 stated that favourable parental perceptions resulted in their preference of IELP schools. Some example statements can be presented below:

Participant 6: When parents hear comments in other settings such as exams or from other teachers in private courses saying, 'Your child's English is very good, what school does he or she attend?' They express their thanks, which also makes me happy. I think they are very satisfied.

Participant 10: We even occasionally receive positive feedback from parents, such as: 'Teacher, my child loved English thanks to you, may God bless you.' For them, the fact that their children can learn a foreign language at a young age is truly valuable. And this has been a reason why the

school has been preferred for the past eight years. They often say, ‘Teacher, I wish there were the same amount of English lessons in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades as well.’ Many parents are aware of this opportunity and express their gratitude, even years after graduation.

Furthermore, EFL teachers mentioned some *PD opportunities which supported them while implementing IELP* (f: 6). Although they were not specifically designed for the current practice, those formal teacher trainings were found to be useful in that process. Many of the participants reported on “English Together” Project meetings which provided EFL teachers with practical ways to integrate Web 2.0 tools, new teacher methods, and skill-based teaching techniques into their classrooms. With this experience, they could collaborate and share ideas with their colleagues, so these in-service trainings were found as valuable and applicable in the context of IELP, especially in supporting learners’ speaking and writing skills. The related statements can be presented as follows:

Participant 13: Actually, I used to attend all the trainings organized by the Ministry of Education. Under the name of English Together, I took general trainings on teaching English with Web 2. 0 tools, on methods and techniques, and on language skills. They were useful in the context of IELP. We benefited from those trainings in some way by adapting certain things or taking ideas from them.

Participant 6: There were project trainings called English Together. Here, English teachers came together to share ideas, learn teaching methods and techniques for different skills, and we also learned many Web 2. 0 tools. I think I learned useful things that could be applied in practice, especially for speaking and writing. I try to use them in my classes.

Another frequently addressed advantage of the program is its positive effect on *motivation and enjoyment* (f: 5) not just for learners but also for the teachers. It was found that increased lesson hours and opportunities to use the target language actively encouraged greater participation, which made the lessons more fun with interactive games and activities. In addition, Participant 5 signified that students begin to value English lessons more, and as teachers witness students’ enthusiasm and engagement, they become more motivated and devoted to teaching. The quotations below demonstrate example teacher perceptions:

Participant 4: Because our lesson hours are intensive, there are many lessons, and since you are constantly speaking English, when you receive feedback from students in the same way you speak to them, you become highly motivated. They also become enthusiastic and speak more.

Since our lesson hours are long, we try to incorporate activities through games, which makes teaching enjoyable. The more actively they participate and learn, the more motivated I become.

Participant 5: Students value our lessons, which makes us feel good and motivates us as teachers. Seeing their progress also boosts our motivation and gives us a genuine sense of fulfilling our teaching role through this program.

Moreover, other participants emphasized that the intensive implementation promoted continuous and *active use of English* (f: 4) for EFL teachers. According to Participant 14, since EFL teachers are frequently engaged in communicative activities in the classroom, they are able to develop their language proficiency by revisiting their forgotten knowledge. Having similar views, Participant 13 explained that while encouraging learners for active language use rather than exam focus, EFL teachers also maintain their own language skills. The following statements show these ideas clearly:

Participant 14: Most importantly, we do not forget the language. In preparatory classes like the 5th grade intensive program, teachers and students are actively using the language while developing communication skills, which prevents forgetting. It also allows us to revisit and recall what might have been forgotten. Ultimately, teaching students through an intensified program provides a clear advantage for us in this regard.

Participant 13: We organize and plan the lessons according to the students' interests and try to find activities that suit them. We try to engage them actively in the lessons. We move a bit away from the exam-oriented approach and focus more on encouraging them to use the language. This actually helps us actively use the language ourselves and prevents us from forgetting it.

Another uncovered advantage of the implementation is that it fosters *teacher-student relationships* (f: 4) as teachers are actively engaged with the students. For example, Participant 11 believed that they create a positive relationship with the students while designing their lessons, and creating interactive activities based on learners' interests and needs. In line with this view, Participant 8 emphasized that spending more time with students reinforces teacher–student relationships and creates a more engaging learning environment. Some remarks are presented below as examples:

Participant 11: The advantage for teachers is that you are constantly thinking about what to do for your students, how to engage them effectively in lessons, or searching for enjoyable activities such as games and videos. For me, the benefit lies in the satisfaction of continuously trying to foster a love for English. It is not just about teaching a topic and leaving; rather, you establish a connection with the students.

Participant 8: After primary school, they spend most of their time with us; at times, we even become like their classroom teachers, as we know them best. We don't just deliver the content and move on — we also have fun through activities, which helps us build better communication with the students.

Lastly, the interviewees also considered EFL teachers' *having no rush to cover the curriculum* (f: 2) as another advantage. Two participants noted that thanks to the extended English lesson hours in IELP, they are able to teach the topics thoroughly without any rush. In this regard, they can more effectively plan their lessons and conduct more skill-based activities. However, it was mentioned that this gained advantage in the 5th grade turns into a disadvantage with the reduced lesson hours in the subsequent grades:

Participant 7: We no longer have the rush to cover the syllabus as we have more lesson hours. We can complete our topics comfortably with lots of additional activities. So in that sense, we are in an advantageous position in Grade 5. However, when students move to Grade 6 and lesson hours drop to three per week, we suddenly find ourselves at a disadvantage.

4.3. Challenges Encountered

Regarding the sub-research question on the challenges encountered during the IELP implementation, four subthemes emerged as *materials*, *curriculum*, *structural barriers*, and *learner-related issues* under the main theme *challenges in IELP*, which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Theme 3: Challenges in IELP

Theme	Subtheme	Code	f
Challenges In IELP	Materials	Lack of standardized course books	11
		Dependence on supplementary materials	10
		Insufficient resources	9
		Difficulty in finding and preparing materials	7
		Late arrival of course materials	5
	Curriculum	Heavy curriculum	10
		Not suitable for student level	8
		Inconsistent and isolated outcomes	7
		Curriculum mismatch with resources	7
		Inconsistency with regular curriculum	5
		Unfamiliar structures to L1	3

	Causing loss of interest	3
Structural Barriers	Lack of teacher trainings on IELP	11
	Lack of sustainability	9
	Large class sizes	7
	Lack of infrastructure	5
	Reduction in class hours	2
	Lack of placement criteria	2
Learner-related issues	Mixed proficiency levels	9
	Boredom	9
	Lack of motivation	8
	Underdeveloped writing skills	6
	Lack of student readiness	5
	Prejudices	5
	Lack of real-life exposure	5
	Academic regression	4
	Limited family support	3

4.3.1. Materials. The participants identified *the lack of standardized course books* (f: 11) as a major challenge in the context of IELP. Most of the EFL teachers reported that MoNE was not able to provide an official textbook, which created significant difficulties. It is emphasized that although there is a defined curriculum for the intensive program, they were only provided with the insufficient course books designed for the regular 5th grades. The following quotations can be exemplary for this challenge:

Participant 5: The biggest challenge we face is still not having a course book. We have a curriculum but no book, which affects us in every sense, including our motivation and the students' motivation. Students ask why we don't have a book despite so many lesson hours.

Participant 3: At the preparatory level, there is really a resource problem. The government did not send any resources to students for this program. The materials we received were only designed for 3 hours of English.

Another recurring challenge was *dependence on supplementary materials* (f: 10) due to the absence of official course books. According to the interviewees, they tried to choose the cheapest materials since foreign-published books became a financial burden for the parents. Whereas it was difficult to find affordable and quality supplementary materials, they do not fully align with the IELP curriculum. The regarding statements are as follows:

Participant 7: We have to think every year about which book to assign. Until last year, we were using books from foreign publishers, which were of higher quality and more beneficial in terms of pronunciation. However, we have now shifted toward Turkish-produced ones because the

foreign ones became financially burdensome for parents. It is difficult to find sources that are both affordable and of good quality.

Participant 1: So necessarily, we try to assign students whichever supplementary resource is the cheapest economically. These books do not fully match the given curriculum, but they are sufficient in terms of general skills. We try to adapt them to the curriculum with extra activities.

The participants also highlighted *insufficient resources* (f: 9) provided from the Ministry. EFL teachers drew attention to the EBA digital platform, which lacks interactive and sufficient content for the extended program. Additionally, Participant 11 reported that the existing content on the platforms is for the regular curriculum, and they had challenges in creating and using interactive content. In this context, the direct quotations can be added as:

Participant 11: In terms of teaching materials, we do not receive any resources. There is only the curriculum program, but there are no accompanying books or suitable content on the EBA digital platform. The materials available are only designed for the regular 3-hour weekly program. Therefore, we face difficulties in creating and using interactive resources.

Participant 5: Our resources are insufficient, and support from EBA is very limited, with almost no interactive content. The support materials provided to us are very few, and EBA mostly offers resources prepared for the 3-hour weekly curriculum.

On the other hand, many participants expressed that they faced *difficulties in finding and preparing materials* (f: 7) suitable for the IELP curriculum. Participant 4 underlined that they struggle finding materials which are appropriate both to their student levels, and also to the themes they are covering, which leads to extra workload and reduces their motivation. Additionally, Participant 12 noted that constantly preparing and adapting materials is time-consuming and tiring. The quotations below show the teacher views clearly:

Participant 4: It is difficult to find proper resources online that are suitable for students' level, aligned with the theme we are teaching, and compatible with the vocabulary we cover in IELP. Because of this, we often have to go off-topic and give extra explanations. We constantly need to prepare daily plans, find resources, materials, and activities. Honestly, this continuous effort lowers our motivation after a while.

Participant 12: We constantly tried to find materials from foreign language websites and the internet. Having to think of and prepare materials every single day was truly an exhausting process, and creating materials as teachers takes a lot of time.

Lastly, *late arrival of course materials* (f: 5) in the pilot year of IELP implementation was another frequently mentioned disadvantage. The participant teachers remarked that delayed arrival of textbooks forced teachers to find alternative resources, as a result, official books did not benefit them. Regarding this issue, teacher views can be illuminated as:

Participant 10: When this program started as a pilot in 2018, our textbooks were delivered around December. During this period, we solved the problem with our own methods, with support from parents who helped us purchase resources for the students. Unfortunately, the late-delivered textbooks were of no use.

Participant 1: We were given a curriculum but no textbooks. Only one book was delivered in the middle of the first year, but we couldn't use it much since we had already purchased resources with parental support. That year, we only actively used storybooks. Apart from that, and in the following years no books were provided.

4.3.2. Curriculum. Under the main theme *curriculum*, thematic analysis uncovered *heavy curriculum* (f: 10) as the most frequently addressed challenge. A major number of the participant teachers emphasized on the intense IELP content, and the difficulty about covering it effectively on time. Participant 8 stated that they need to skip some outcomes, otherwise it causes stress for teachers and confusion for students. Similarly, Participant 1 pointed out that insufficient time leads to coverage of the topics without enough practice. Additionally, Participant 13 expressed that superficially covering the topics prevents permanent learning. The statements can be found below:

Participant 8: We struggle to cover the learning outcomes because the content is too dense. When we focus on the topics, we need to reduce activities. We rush through lessons just to reinforce the material. This creates anxiety for us. For students, the amount of information becomes overwhelming and may cause confusion.

Participant 1: The number of class hours should be higher, because it is not enough—we cannot keep up. The topics are too dense, and they remain superficial since we have to move on to a new unit without doing enough practice.

Participant 13: A curriculum of 36 units is too intensive. A school year already has 35–36 weeks. One unit per week is simply not enough time for students to retain all language skills in

that unit, even if they are older. The content is already too heavy. Inevitably, you must do a lot of activities; otherwise, students forget.

Another mostly referred challenge is that the curriculum is *not suitable for student level* (f: 8). EFL teachers noted that they either adapt the heavy content, or skip some of them because they are above learner's level. Participant 5 also claimed that as the IELP curriculum focuses mostly on grammar, which is developmentally challenging for 5th graders who struggle with abstract thinking. Regarding this issue, participant quotations are as follows:

Participant 4: Some topics are really dense and can be difficult for students' level. We try to adjust them to their level and explain in the simplest way possible. Instead of giving the rules directly, sometimes we try to contextualize them.

Participant 5: I think the program curriculum is slightly above the students' level. Fifth graders cannot think very abstractly due to their age. The program is heavily focused on grammar. Of course, we try to focus on speaking and listening, but without grammar, students cannot really understand what they read or develop writing skills either.

Participant 8: If the student level is good, the curriculum can be completed. But if the level is lower and the student does not put in much effort, it becomes very difficult to keep up with the curriculum. We have to skip some skills.

Many participants drew attention to *inconsistent and isolated outcomes* (f: 7) in the IELP curriculum. It was argued that the curriculum lacks coherence and continuity, which prevents learners from building on their prior knowledge. The following remarks can be examples for this issue:

Participant 5: When we look at the lesson plan, the topics are very disconnected from each other. The learning outcomes are separate, the language structures are separate, and I don't think it progresses in a spiral way. In some units, the vocabulary is very dense and abstract, and we are forced to teach words that are not very commonly used.

Participant 12: The first units are very suitable for the student level, but towards the later units, they become disconnected from each other. It feels like jumping from one topic to another.

On the other hand, the interviewees highlighted *curriculum's mismatch with resources* (f: 7). It was signified that even available materials lacked full alignment with the IELP curriculum and they had some missing parts, which limited their usefulness in practice and forced teachers to constantly adapt or supplement. Exemplary quotations are provided below:

Participant 7: There are points where it matches the curriculum, but there are also cases where we need to make extra additions. I don't think there is any resource in the market that fully matches the curriculum and its topics.

Participant 15: The resources we asked students to buy don't really follow the curriculum much. They are generally compatible, but sometimes we cannot find the exact equivalent of a required learning outcome in the book, and that creates difficulties. This is something we encounter quite often.

Moreover, some participants argued that there is an *inconsistency between the IELP and the regular 5th grade curriculum* (f: 5). It was emphasized that IELP students become disadvantageous in mock exams since these exams were prepared based on the regular 5th grade curriculum. EFL teachers stated that this situation makes students confused and EFL teachers criticized by parents and administrators. An example statement can show this idea:

Participant 5: The practice exams at our school are prepared according to the 10-unit curriculum of regular 5th graders, but our curriculum does not match with the topics of these exams. During the exam periods, we try to teach those missing topics to our students, which causes confusion as we jump from topic to topic. As a result, while IELP students fail to perform in these exams, regular 5th graders often achieve better results. Parents and administrators then question us, saying, 'These children study much more English, so why can't they succeed?' This situation puts us under pressure.

In addition, learners faced difficulties as the IELP curriculum contains *unfamiliar structures to LI* (f: 3). According to the participants, some grammatical or lexical items do not exist in students' native language, which affects their learning process negatively. For instance, the following quote can be presented to support the idea:

Participant 7: In the curriculum, there can be structures that children cannot understand. We are obliged to cover them, but students sometimes encounter things that they have never come across even in their mother tongue and therefore struggle to grasp them. There are also structures without a Turkish equivalent, such as present perfect tense, which makes it difficult for them.

Lastly regarding curriculum, some interviewees mentioned that highly academic or unfamiliar content causes *students' loss of interest* (f: 3) since there are students of different levels in the classrooms. It is considered that when they cannot relate their learned topics to everyday experiences, their engagement with the target language can be reduced. Below can be found an example statement:

Participant 13: Some topics are too simple, some too difficult. This can cause students of different levels to become bored and lose interest, depending on the activities in the materials. Also scientific contents in some units, which children do not usually encounter in daily life, can bore them. As a result, they may develop prejudices against the language.

4.3.3. Structural barriers. Participants also reported some *structural barriers* in the context of IELP. To start with, most of the interviewees argued that they have received *no formal teacher training regarding the recent practice* (f: 11). For instance, Participant 11 reported that they were not specifically trained for the orientation or implementation of IELP, so they felt unsupported and relied only on their previous teaching experiences. In addition, Participant 10 emphasized the importance of continuous professional development, and was disappointed at the lack of support and collaboration in the context of the recent program. The following statements can illustrate the related views in detail:

Participant 11: We received no training at all. We only learned in September, at the beginning of the seminar period, that we would be implementing the intensive program that year. We just directed ourselves based on our previous teaching experiences. But no information or training session was given to us.

Participant 10: Unfortunately, we did not receive any professional training within the scope of this program. Yes, we are competent and motivated teachers who love our profession. But I was introduced to this program after many years in my career. At least there could have been idea-sharing, exchanging views, or getting expert support. Because just as learning is a process for students, teaching is also a process for us, and we also need to constantly update ourselves and share our experiences with each other.

Additionally, *lack of sustainability* (f: 9) of the intense class hours is also frequently mentioned by EFL teachers as another challenge. More than half of them found it difficult to maintain progress due to the reduction of English lesson hours to three hours in the 6th grade. It was emphasized that the initial advantage of intensive language teaching turns into a disadvantage in the following grades. The statements can be presented below:

Participant 3: The fact that this program does not continue in the following years is a major disadvantage. You spend a whole year trying to get them used to a foreign language and adapt

them to it, bringing them to a certain level. Three hours in 6th grade are not enough. Students forget what they learned, and we have to start over.

Participant 1: Since there is no continuation, the program seems to have little long-term effect. It needs to continue.

Another stressed challenge was *large class sizes* (f: 7) which was claimed to limit the effective implementation of in-class activities. According to EFL teachers, it becomes impossible to focus each learner individually when the class is overcrowded even though they have long class hours. The regarding quotations are showed as follows:

Participant 1: Having crowded classrooms negatively affects teaching efficiency. The class sizes are too large, and we cannot carry out activities.

Participant 7: When the number of students is above 30, when we do speaking-focused activities, all the children want to take turns and participate in dialogues. If you give just one minute to each student, it would already take 30 minutes. But due to the large numbers, we cannot give everyone a chance at the same time. Even if we had more lesson hours, it becomes really difficult to devote time to each student in crowded classrooms.

Moreover, *lack of infrastructure* (f: 5) was identified as another structural barrier of the implementation. Several participants argued that IELP lacked the necessary foundational preparation which was introduced in a top-down manner without sufficient infrastructure or resources. The regarding idea can be clarified with an exemplary quotation:

Participant 10: It cannot be said that the program was fully prepared, because the necessary foundational work had not been completed. Honestly, it was somewhat a top-down implementation. For example, in the first year, we were not provided with the required textbooks; we were told they would be sent, but they did not arrive until December. We were given a 40-unit draft program. We started the implementation with drafts and uncertainties. The program lacked proper infrastructure and began with difficulties.

On the other hand, some participants also indicated that *reduction in class hours* (f: 3) limited learner exposure to the target language. Participant 3 noted that the most effective learning environment is the classroom, where shorter lesson hours mean weaker outcomes. The exemplary quotation can be found below:

Participant 3: Also, the fact that lesson hours are reduced little by little each year has honestly made our job harder. When it was 15 hours, I could have students do a lot of listening activities during class. At 13 hours, the difference was not strongly felt, but at 11 hours, we really noticed

a serious impact. At home, we try to send supportive materials and links via the internet, but not every household can implement these. However, when the child is with you in class, you can make them listen, speak, write, and read. As the lesson hours decrease, this exposure decreases as well, and the outcome correspondingly becomes weaker.

Lastly, interviewees drew attention to the *lack of placement criteria* (f: 2), which led to mixed-level classrooms where even learners with special learning needs were included. It is signified that this situation makes it highly challenging to meet the objectives of the program. In this context, a sample remark can be given:

Participant 10: On the other hand, in our time, students were placed into the intensive foreign language program according to their level or a certain achievement criterion. The classes were more homogeneous. But in our case, sometimes there were very advanced students in one class, while other classes were composed of very weak students. In addition, students with special learning difficulties who needed support education were also in the same class. Of course, achieving the set objectives while keeping all these together was not easy, especially since we were inexperienced in the early years.

4.3.4. Learner-related issues. Among encountered challenges, EFL teachers also put emphasis on *learner-related issues*. Under this subtheme, one of the most frequently cited challenges was *students' mixed proficiency levels* (f: 9). According to Participant 3, different student levels negatively influenced the learning process for all since students with different interests and abilities cannot progress at the same pace. Similarly, Participant 5 claimed that there are both academic and motivational differences in IELP classrooms, where low achievers can lose their attention and prevent other students' learning. Additionally, Participant 13 highlighted that although EFL teachers are trying to adapt their classes depending on students' level, they can face some difficulties. The following statements can present the related ideas:

Participant 5: With our mixed-level students, the good ones progress very well, but the weaker ones tend to give up and become even more disengaged. For the low achievers, this situation often leads to demotivation, disrupts the flow of the lesson, and can even hinder those who genuinely want to learn.

Participant 13: Having students at different levels affects us. It affects us negatively because fast learners can get bored, while if you move quickly, lower-level students fall behind and, frankly, may lose interest in the language.

Participant 3: When we consider it, there are student groups of varying levels within the classes, which can be challenging for us. Not every student completing our program reaches the same level. Not every student learns at the same pace, and students may have different levels, interests, and abilities.

Moreover, another mostly referred challenge among participants was *students' boredom* (f: 9). EFL teachers pointed out that the intensive English lessons sometimes make students lose their interest and get bored. On the other hand, Participant 10 emphasized two aspects of boredom, which are developmental needs and level differences. While limiting students' playful and creative subjects such as PE, Music and Art creates boredom, advanced learners may also get bored because of repeating the same topics. The example statements are showed below:

Participant 6: Perhaps having too many class hours can, after a certain point, cause problems for small groups focusing on the same subject all the time. They can get bored. I think this is the biggest problem.

Participant 10: These children get tired, they get bored. They are at an age where they need to play. They miss subjects like physical education, art, and music, and this inevitably leads to complaints. At the same time, students with a good level also sometimes react when we try to re-explain topics for weaker students, saying things like 'Oh, the same topic again,' or 'When are we going to move on to a new topic?'

Another learner-related difficulty was emphasized as *lack of motivation* (f: 8). Several EFL teachers remarked that unmotivated and low-achieving students are very problematic, whose lack of interest eventually disengages them from language learning. Additionally, those learners were mentioned as negatively affecting the learning environment. Participant 4 also expressed that some learners question the purpose of learning the English language, which can cause anxiety and low enthusiasm. Those ideas are found as follows:

Participant 5: The biggest challenge I face is motivating students who are unwilling and have low motivation, helping them realize that they can succeed, and teaching them to be confident. But with some low-achieving students, we cannot manage this. Over time, these students become problematic, and they lose interest in the language and become alienated from it. It is not easy to recover them in the following years. I think they waste their time and get even more discouraged from language learning. Because 11 or 14 hours of lessons turn into torture for them. This also negatively affects us and the classroom atmosphere.

Participant 4: Students can sometimes feel anxious because they do not have a clear purpose when speaking English. They may ask, ‘Where will I use this? How will it help me? English is not our native language.’

Furthermore, interview results also showed that *writing skills were underdeveloped* (f: 6) in the context of IELP. Several participants believed that writing competence is the least improved skill based on low writing skills in L1, prejudices, lack of motivation, difference in learner levels and crowded classrooms. For example, Participant 3 emphasized limited L1 writing, developmental immaturity and large class sizes as reasons for this challenge. On the other hand, Participant 6 said that individual writing tasks lead to disengagement and boredom among students. These viewpoints can be found below:

Participant 3: Writing is harder to develop than other skills, especially since students are still very young and have not fully developed their writing even in Turkish. Unlike speaking, writing requires stronger control, grammar knowledge, and conscious practice, which takes time. Because classroom hours must be shared across all skills, writing often receives less attention especially in crowded classrooms. When the program had 15 hours per week, progress in writing was better, but with fewer hours, expectations had to be lowered.

Participant 6: I believe that writing skills remain underdeveloped. Rather than focusing individually on writing, I aim to facilitate learning through communication skills. I try to implement group activities, and I consider that students learn in a more interactive way through such practices. However, in individual writing activities, students tend to lose interest and get bored.

According to the findings, many participants reported on *students’ lack of readiness* (f: 5) as another challenge. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that students lack basic grammar knowledge in their mother tongue, which makes them struggle learning similar topics in the target language. Similarly, Participant 10 pointed out that students’ weak skills in their native language prevent their FLL. The regarding quotation are showed below:

Participant 1: From primary school, students come without knowing grammar concepts such as adjectives and subjects, so they have shortcomings when we move into grammar topics. They should come a bit more prepared knowing terms in their mother tongue. But since they don’t know what subject, verb, or predicate means in Turkish, it makes it harder for them to understand the content.

Participant 10: Some students do not have mastery in their mother tongue or lack expression skills in their native language. On top of this, we are trying to teach them a second language, a foreign language. In this sense, I personally had difficulties teaching.

On the other hand, some participant teachers stated that *prejudices* (f: 5) also affect students' academic performance and motivation, which often creates disengagement from English lessons. For instance, Participant 3 indicated that even parents sometimes question the necessity of learning English. In this context, the statements are as follows:

Participant 4: There is always a prejudice, like: 'This is not my native language, why should I learn it?' Also, when children carry the constant fear of not being able to succeed, it inevitably affects their performance in exams, lowers their grades, and decreases their interest in the subject.

Participant 3: You may face difficulties with some students in terms of accepting English. Since it is a foreign language, students often ask why: 'Why do we have so many English lessons?' or 'Why am I learning their language, they should learn Turkish instead.' Learning a foreign language does not mean being dominated by that language, but we have students—and even parents—who feel this way. When such questioning comes from either the student or the parent, our job becomes more difficult.

Other participants underlined *the lack of real-life exposure* (f: 5) outside the classroom, which prevents students from practicing the target language and reinforcing their input. It was argued that although students develop some communicative competence at school, they lack authentic opportunities. Some exemplary remarks can be presented below:

Participant 14: There are shortcomings in practice. Since students do not use the language in real life and are not exposed to it outside the classroom, they cannot apply what is taught. Once they leave school, they tend to forget it and can only learn English within the classroom.

Participant 8: I observe approximately an 80% success rate in students acquiring communication skills or being able to use them in real-life contexts. They have insufficient opportunities to practice. They cannot apply the target language in their daily lives, meaning they are not sufficiently exposed to it.

In addition, another challenge was uncovered as *academic regression* (f: 4) of the low-level students. Participants stated that when students feel that they fall behind, they lose their confidence and withdraw themselves. In that way, they lose their interest in learning English and it continues throughout their educational life. As Participant 11

reported, the gap between higher-level and lower-level students expands as topics get harder over time. The following quotations can indicate the mentioned ideas:

Participant 12: A student who falls behind inevitably withdraws, saying, ‘I’m already behind. If a child says, ‘I didn’t understand these two topics,’ then being left behind discourages them even more from learning the language.

Participant 11: Toward the end of the first term, as the topics get more difficult, differences between students begin to emerge. To motivate lower-level students, I try to include easier activities in class. But after a while, of course, we have to move on to more intensive topics. At that point, some students get bored or lose confidence and eventually stop following the lessons.

Lastly, *limited family support* (f: 3) was considered as an important challenge. It is specified that when parents are insufficiently involved, students’ learning progress is affected negatively. For example, some parents ignore necessary practice outside the classroom and they fail to support their children. The statement by Participant 3 can be found below:

Participant 3: For language exposure, students need to be exposed to listening frequently, and this needs to continue at home. Sometimes we send supportive materials and links online, but not every parent understands that these should be used or that they will benefit the student. Therefore, although we provide them, they are sometimes never applied. So, sometimes, we cannot get the needed support from our learners’ parents.

4.4. Suggestions for Improvement

As presented in Table 5, *suggestions* for the development of IELP can be seen based on the interview results. Under this main theme, five subthemes were uncovered which are *program design*, *materials*, *learning environment*, *stakeholder involvement*, and *PD needs*.

Table 5.

Theme 4: Suggestions for IELP

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Suggestions for IELP	Program Design	Continuity in upper grades	10
		Simplifying the intense curriculum	7
		Interaction with in-field teachers	4
		Student placement by ability	4

	Involving regular 5 th grade curriculum	3
	Interdisciplinary content coherence	2
	More instructional hours	2
Materials	Content-rich course books	10
	Free and official course books	9
	Coherent with student level/interest	9
	Interactive resources	8
	Skill-based course books	7
	Fun and engaging	6
	Variety of materials	5
	Digital tools (EBA, Web 2.0, free AI)	5
Learning Environment	Smaller class sizes	8
	Skill-based teaching	5
	Language classrooms	3
	Active learning environment	2
	Coherent assessment system with IELP	1
Stakeholder involvement	Parental support	5
	Individual learner efforts	4
	Informing parents about IELP	2
Need for in-service trainings	Effective use of technology	13
	Material development	6
	Teaching English to young learners	6
	Developing communication skills	5
	Up-to-date teaching methods	3
	Collaborative training sessions	2

4.4.1. Program design. To begin with the recommendations on *program design*, participants mostly suggested the *continuity of the program in upper grades* (f: 10). Most of them emphasized that sudden decrease in class hours after 5th grade weakened the long-term effectiveness of IELP. EFL teachers proposed that English hours should be gradually reduced in the following grades so as to maintain the continuity. The regarding statements can be found below:

Participant 6: The biggest drawback of the program is that the 11 hours suddenly drop to 3 in sixth grade. Language education does not progress in a balanced way, which causes students to lose motivation. The program should actually continue gradually with a decreasing number of hours. Instead of dropping to 3 in grade 6 and 4 in grade 7, it could be 8 in grade 6, 5 in grade 7, and then 4.

Participant 11: In my opinion, if the hours are to be reduced from grade 5 onwards, this should be done gradually. A sudden drop to 3 hours has a negative impact on the students. A student who is used to seeing me four days a week suddenly has classes with me only twice a week, and as a result, we forget topics and cannot reinforce them adequately.

Another recurring suggestion from the experienced EFL teachers was *simplifying the intense curriculum* (f: 7). Nearly half of the participants offered that the heavy

curriculum should be simplified by eliminating abstract, academic or rarely used contents. Instead of them, more practical and engaging topics were suggested to develop learners' communicative competence. The exemplary quotes are indicated as follows:

Participant 4: The curriculum intensity definitely needs to be reduced. Topics that are not much related to daily life could be removed and replaced with more entertaining topics. They can be made simpler, in my opinion.

Participant 13: The curriculum needs to be simplified. Some rarely used words or grammar structures that do not exist in the students' native language should be removed. This way, students will overcome their prejudices against the language and learn to use it more actively in daily life. At this age, they don't need to learn academic-level vocabulary or structures. I support the idea that they should gain self-expression and communication skills. Instead of topics like the Northern Lights, short dialogues, idioms, and animations reflecting daily life would be much more effective.

In addition, the participants highlighted that *the views of EFL teachers practicing in the field should be taken into consideration* (f: 4) for the development of the curriculum. The static nature was criticized by some participants who recommended constant improvement based on teacher feedback, which could make the program more student-centered and effective. In this sense, some direct quotations can be stated as:

Participant 10: Program developers and authorities should go into the field and increase interaction with teachers to identify student needs more closely. Based on this, the program should be renewed each year. It has remained unchanged for eight years, and unfortunately teachers have many shortcomings.

Participant 9: My advice to program developers and authorities is that they should gather opinions from teachers working in the field. They should consider teachers' experiences, especially regarding how to make students more active. For the program to run effectively, teaching materials, content, and activities should be redesigned by incorporating the views of teachers working directly in classrooms.

On the other hand, there were some suggestions on *student placement by ability* (f: 4). The interviewees claimed that interest and ability is crucial for language learning and a placement test was recommended so as to select capable and motivated students. Similarly, Participant 5 offered a dual system within schools, including both regular

and intensive 5th grades, which can increase program's efficiency. The related remarks are given below to show insights into the teacher views:

Participant 2: If there were a kind of placement exam, since foreign language is somewhat a matter of ability, instead of worrying about not being able to reach every child, it would be better to focus only on the students who are truly motivated and talented.

Participant 5: Students should join this program based on their interest and skills. I'm not saying they should be selected individually, but a school could have both an intensive program and regular 5th grade classes. In this way, uninterested students would not enter the intensive program and cause inefficiency.

Furthermore, EFL teachers proposed the *involvement of the regular 5th grade curriculum within IELP* (f: 3) since they are not aligned with each other. According to the participants, this situation causes gaps in mock exams, which creates loss of motivation. An exemplary statement will be indicated below:

Participant 3: I wish the curriculum of this 11-hour program actually included the ten units of the regular 5th grade, enriched a little more. Having a larger number of themes makes sense, but the fact that the curricula are separate turns into a disadvantage for us in practice exams. Students who are exposed to this intensive program fail to achieve the expected results in practice exams due to missing topics, and this can be demoralizing.

A few participants also expressed the need for *interdisciplinary content coherence* (f: 2) to increase the effectiveness of IELP. For example, as Participant 15 stated, without prior knowledge in other fields, some topics seem too abstract for learners and they have difficulties to comprehend them:

Participant 15: If the topics in the curriculum were aligned with other subjects such as Turkish or Science, it would be more effective. For example, when we teach pronouns in English, the student first needs to know what a pronoun is in Turkish. If the student hasn't learned them yet in Turkish lessons, it remains abstract and difficult to grasp. In this sense, having content coherence across different subjects would be much more useful.

Finally, *more instructional hours* (f: 2) were recommended by a small number of participants. They noted that the reduction from 15 to 11 hours limited the opportunities for supporting learners individually and better focusing on each skill. For better learning outcomes, interviewees offered to increase their lesson hours. An example quote can be pointed out as:

Participant 3: To me, the number of class hours should not have been reduced. We started with 15 hours but it was cut to 11. In fact, it should be between 11 to 18 hours, depending on the school administration's decision. We should not decrease the hours, because when we have more class time, we can give one-on-one attention to students, focus on each skill, and achieve much better results.

4.4.2. Materials. Based on the interview findings, the most recurring suggestion on materials was *content-rich course books* (f: 10). EFL teachers emphasized that children at this age need books with interactive and engaging activities. While Participant 9 noted that various activities for differentiated learners are essential, Participant 14 underlined that course books should include modern tools like QR codes and digital connections which help students access the related content. The regarding quotations can be illustrated below:

Participant 9: The content of the teaching materials should be enriched. Differentiated activities could be provided for different learner levels. Listening and speaking could be supported with appropriate videos and exercises. Course books also should include some lecturing notes and exercises which can give students opportunities for reinforcement and practice at home. In addition, more practice-oriented activities that encourage children to use the language should be included.

Participant 14: In the past, when we gave listening passages as homework, children couldn't complete them. Such content should be included in the textbooks, and students should access them. Not only listening but also stories or songs related to the vocabulary in each unit could be accessed by scanning QR codes. In addition to this, materials could be linked with digital activities, for example by creating connections with EBA, we could contribute in a more active way.

Another most frequently mentioned suggestion was the development of *free and official course books* (f: 9) that align with IELP. As Participant 3 expressed, either free official course books should be provided or EFL teachers should have full autonomy in choosing materials. In addition, Participant 1 offered that state-supported books could improve efficiency and reduce parents' financial burden. Below are provided the reported teacher remarks:

Participant 3: We have a program but no proper materials. It has been years, and by now there should have been a standardized resource that could be sent free of charge to every school.

Otherwise, English teachers should be given complete freedom. We should be able to adopt suitable materials for our students without any fear or concern.

Participant 1: If this system is going to be implemented, first of all, materials appropriate to the plan should be provided to us. There should at least be one state-supported book that can guide both teachers and students. This would be more efficient for the children and would also ease the burden on parents, since they wouldn't have to buy extra resources.

Furthermore, participants also mostly stated that course materials need to be *coherent with learner level and interest* (f: 9). For example, Participant 3 suggested that age-appropriate and real-life content can capture students' curiosity. On the other hand, Participant 4 emphasized that materials should be visually engaging including everyday topics, which are suitable for their level and interest. The viewpoints are indicated below to support the findings:

Participant 3: Materials should match the students' level and interests... They should be more related to their daily lives, things they know and can apply. For example, children are very interested in characters. It would be great if certain characters continued across each unit with story-like content about their lives. This way, things would become more concrete. Otherwise, children do not feel any emotional connection. But if it were in a story format, with recurring characters, students would be curious about what happens next.

Participant 4: A sourcebook should be chosen that is suitable for the students' age group, fun, and visually appealing in terms of colors, pictures, and design. Topics from daily life could be included, along with songs.

Additionally, more than half of the participants proposed *interactive resources* (f: 8) for the effective implementation of the program. It was stressed that interactive opportunities increase student engagement and hands-on activities on smartboards enable learning with fun. Similarly, Participant 12 recommended that instead of visuals, interactive videos could be used since today's children learn best through game-based and interactive tools. In this regard, some quotations can be found as follows:

Participant 14: I would like the resources to be prepared interactively. But, for example, when we call a child to the board and they move something or do a matching activity themselves, they enjoy it much more.

Participant 12: These children are the generation of tablets, TVs, and phones. They want to learn by touching, swiping, and playing games. Since they are essentially play-oriented, if our books were made interactive with games, lessons would be much more attractive and enjoyable

for them. If these visuals in the books were turned into videos or made interactive, they would be much more effective and instructive.

On the other hand, EFL teachers made frequent recommendations on *skills-based course books* (f: 7). For example, Participant 5 suggested the development skill-specific materials, which can progress each skill in a balanced way, noting that some skills such as writing and speaking are sometimes ignored. The related statement is given below:

Participant 5: I think the books should also be separated by skills. In fact, instead of one teacher per class, even two or three teachers could take part in the lessons. Ideally, there could be two teachers—one for the main lessons and the other for skill-based lessons. Our books also need to be separated by skills; otherwise, some skills such as writing and speaking are treated superficially and can be neglected.

Among offers related to materials, many participants suggested *fun and engaging course materials* (f: 6). It was emphasized that creative, colorful and entertaining resources which include animations and songs could be more motivation for young learners. An example quotation can be supported for this perspective:

Participant 13: When asked whether materials or resources are tools or goals, in my view they are tools. But these tools can be strengthened. They could be more creative, more interactive, more engaging, and more concrete. With more colorful and entertaining content, materials could become more appealing for children. For example, resources could include short animations, fun songs, and interactive books.

Moreover, another emphasized suggestion from the participants was *variety of materials* (f: 5) in the context of IELP. It was emphasized that MoNE should provide a variety of resources, including interactive and engaging content on online platforms such as EBA, in order to help students reinforce what they have learned. The related statement can be presented as follows:

Participant 8: The number and variety of resources suitable for the intensive curriculum should be increased. There could be more ready-made interactive content for us teachers. Of course, we already use games, but more materials that capture children's interests should be produced, for example in EBA, so that they can also benefit outside of class. This way, they can reinforce what we cover in lessons at home.

Lastly, several interviewees offered the improvement of *Digital tools such as EBA, Web 2.0, or free AI platforms* (f: 5), which can provide students opportunities to

practice English outside the classroom. Participant 6 suggested that those platforms can compensate for learners' limited exposure to native speakers:

Participant 6: We use EBA but it needs to be enriched with interactive content. I believe that useful Web 2.0 tools or applications could be created. Artificial intelligence is now widespread, and I think it is especially important to create free platforms where children can practice speaking. Children need opportunities to practice English with native speakers outside the classroom. In my view, a free AI-supported speaking platform for both students and teachers would be highly beneficial.

4.4.3. Learning environment. Regarding the learning *environment*, the most commonly stated suggestion emerged as *smaller class sizes* (f: 8). EFL teachers agreed that large class sizes hinder the effectiveness of their lessons in the context of IELP. According to Participant 13, in crowded classrooms, it becomes difficult to carry out activities effectively. Similarly, Participant 3 recommended reducing the class sizes in order to ensure active engagement and individual attention for each student. In the following quotations, the mentioned teacher views can be seen:

Participant 13: Our classes are generally 30 students or more. In crowded classrooms, we cannot implement every activity effectively. The class size really needs to be reduced by almost half.

Participant 3: Class sizes need to be reduced. We cannot do enough activities or give individual attention to each student. If a class had 15 students, every child would have more opportunities to participate repeatedly, and we would make greater progress. But with 30 students, unfortunately, there isn't enough time for everyone.

On the other hand, another recurring suggestion was *skill-based teaching* (f: 5). As Participant 5 noted, spending long hours with the same classroom can be exhausting for both teachers and learners, so having different teachers for each skill can help balanced development of the main skills. Additionally, Participant 9 offered that having multiple teachers could increase learner motivation and engagement. The regarding statements are found below:

Participant 5: Teaching 11 hours to the same class can be tiring for both the teacher and the students. If lessons were divided by skills, each teacher could prepare content according to that skill, and skill development would progress simultaneously. Otherwise, it is difficult to focus equally on all skills.

Participant 9: Different teachers could teach the four skills. The child currently sees only one teacher for 11 hours. Maybe that child doesn't connect well with us, but if there were other teachers, it might be more effective—especially for weaker students. They might like another teacher more, which could help us re-engage them in the lesson.

Moreover, some participants recommended *dedicated language classrooms* (f: 3) for the effective IELP implementation. It was highlighted that in these classrooms, EFL teachers could easily organize their materials, and enable a more interactive and motivating learning environment for their students. In this sense, an example statement can be presented as:

Participant 7: I think we should have a dedicated language classroom. Storing all the materials we use there would make our work easier. We could prepare lessons comfortably in that space. Instead of a traditional seating arrangement, if we had a classroom designed specifically for English lessons, students could sometimes work in groups, play games, or do interactive activities. I believe it would make lessons more engaging and effective.

In addition, a small number of interviewees suggested *an active learning environment* (f: 2), where students could have more opportunities for movement and learner-centered activities. Participant 9 stated that teacher opinions should be taken into consideration about promoting students' active participation:

Participant 9: While teaching a language, our students should be able to move around, join different groups, or come to the board and do something. There shouldn't be a teacher-centered instruction where students sit still. I think curriculum developers should gather insights from teachers in the field and focus on how to make students more active.

Finally, only one participant offered *a coherent assessment system with IELP* (f: 1) as there is an inconsistency between the program's skill-based approach and the existing assessment system. It was pointed out that the current assessment system fails to measure learners' real language proficiency. The related statement is as follows:

Participant 10: I think the assessment system does not align with the program. We are expected to follow a skill-based and inductive approach in lessons, but the exams don't reflect that. For example, we cannot ask students to write a composition; listening exams are conducted at a very basic level, and students often memorize answers for speaking tests, which limits authentic evaluation. Moreover, since the system is grade-based, this weakens our overall effectiveness. To implement the program successfully, we have to be lenient with grading. Therefore, the assessment and evaluation process needs improvement.

4.4.4. Stakeholder involvement. According to the interview findings, among suggestions on *stakeholder involvement*, EFL teachers most frequently offered *parental support* (f: 5). It was highlighted that parental involvement is crucial for learners' motivation and effective language development in the context of IELP. Whereas Participant 7 argued that parents should encourage learners' exposure to the target language, Participant 9 pointed out that consistent collaboration with parents plays a vital role in encountering the challenges during the implementation. The regarding statements can be found below:

Participant 7: If the child is supported by the family—by watching English movies, listening to music, reading books, and following up on their learning—they can develop all four skills together. As I mentioned, it depends on both family support and the child's personal interest.

Participant 9: Language development is a long process, and our program is quite intensive. This process needs to be managed with parental support and collaboration. Sometimes students experience regression, distraction, or even loss of motivation. In such cases, I believe it's important to communicate with parents, as cooperation can make our efforts more effective.

On the other hand, the interviewees recommended that *individual learner efforts* (f: 4) are essential for continuous language development. For example, Participant 5 stated that apart from their English lessons, learners need to make their individual efforts such as reviewing lessons, reading books or actively using the language. In addition, Participant 10 suggested that long-term success in language learning depends also on students' own practices:

Participant 5: Language learning is a delicate process. If the student doesn't revise the topics, repeat vocabulary, or add something extra—such as reading books, listening to music, watching films, or using the language actively—their progress will be limited. Lessons alone are not enough; the student must also make their own effort to improve.

Participant 10: After a certain point, language development depends on students' individual effort. We show them the methods and examples in class as much as we can, but later, they need to continue improving through their own practice. Only then can the long-term positive effects of the program be sustained.

Lastly, a minority of the participants recommended informing *parents about IELP* (f: 2) regarding its expectations and intensity. It was observed that many students who have low interest and limited language ability enter the program, which leads to their loss of motivation. An example statement is outlined below:

Participant 14: Parents who choose these schools need to be informed beforehand. Can the child handle 11 hours of English a week? Does the child even want this? Sometimes the student enrolls without either the parent or the child knowing how intensive the program is. If the child already has limited interest, they may lose motivation completely once they realize the program's intensity.

4.4.5. Need for in-service trainings. Based on the findings, most of the participants emphasized *the need for in-service training*, especially which focus on *effective use of technology* (f: 13) in foreign language teaching. For instance, Participant 15 suggested PD opportunities on artificial intelligence and digital tools so as to increase learner engagement and participation. Similarly, Participant 13 expressed that they need to have trainings on how to design effective and interactive lessons with digital tools. The related statements can be presented below:

Participant 15: Since technology-integrated activities attract students' attention greatly, it would be beneficial to receive hands-on training on how we can actively use artificial intelligence in our lessons.

Participant 13: I think seminars supported by information technology would be much more effective. Personally, I would like to prepare more materials that appeal to students' interests in digital environments, such as the internet or computer-based tools. I would appreciate training that helps us design visually and audibly engaging materials for them.

Additionally, many EFL teachers underlined the need for PD in *material development* (f: 6) for designing effective resources in the context of IELP. On the one hand, Participant 5 suggested trainings on creating content or activities based on themes or topics. On the other hand, Participant 9 emphasized that they need in-service trainings on digital material development such as creating interactive games and resources. These views can be seen below with exemplary quotations:

Participant 5: We could receive training on material development — such as creating or finding activities and designing content related to lesson themes — so that we can conduct our classes more efficiently.

Participant 9: Training could focus on developing digital materials. I would like to learn how to produce digital content and educational games. Receiving such training would contribute positively to my teaching practice.

Moreover, the interview results also showed that many participants need trainings on *teaching English to young learners* (f: 6). It was argued that practice-oriented PD opportunities on this specific age group will be useful to understand their developmental needs and interests. EFL teachers highlighted that, in this way, they can bridge the gap between theory and practice. Provided below are some direct quotations regarding this view:

Participant 2: We did take theoretical courses about teaching to young learners, but theory alone isn't enough. It would be helpful to have refresher trainings that remind us of this age group's characteristics and demonstrates how to teach or use materials effectively for them.

Participant 13: I would definitely like to receive training on teaching English or language skills specifically to 5th graders. Knowing their interests, learning styles, and how to approach them accordingly would provide great advantages for their learning.

On the other hand, PD needs for *developing communication skills* (f: 5) were also emphasized by many participants. It was suggested that so as to maintain target-language instruction, EFL teachers should be supported with trainings on planning and implementing effective speaking lessons, especially in large classrooms. Regarding this issue, an example quotation can be found below:

Participant 6: There could be training on effective lesson planning for speaking skills. Since the aim of the program is to promote instruction in the target language, we sometimes face difficulties as teachers — or communication with students becomes challenging. Especially in crowded classes, it's not always possible to conduct lessons fully in English.

The interviewees also emphasized the importance of continuous PD in *up-to-date teaching methods* (f: 3) for meeting the needs of today's learners. It was pointed out that, for reaching students effectively, EFL teachers need to follow new methods and approaches in language teaching. To support this findings, the statements of Participant 10 can be presented below:

Participant 10: We live in an age of technology and information. That's why we should learn about up-to-date teaching methods to keep ourselves current. In language teaching, it's important to follow new approaches to reach students effectively. What we learned at university is not completely outdated, but it definitely needs to be enhanced with new developments.

Among PD needs, some participants also made recommendations on organizing *collaborative training sessions* (f: 2). It was suggested that teacher collaboration will

be beneficial with in-service trainings where EFL teachers can share their experiences and exchange ideas on IELP implementation. The following quotation can show this opinion:

Participant 2: In-service trainings related to IELP could be organized where teachers come together to share ideas and exchange opinions, or even receive expert guidance. Just as learning is a process for students, teaching is also a process for us. We need to constantly update ourselves and share our experiences with one another. It would be very beneficial for English teachers to act collaboratively.



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter compares and contrasts the qualitative findings of the present study with the previous research, focusing on EFL teacher's perceptions on the 5th grade IELP in terms of its perceived benefits, faced challenges and their suggestions for its improvement. The analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data based on the teacher interviews are conducted and presented in correspondence with the research questions. Additionally, in the conclusion part, the main points explored from the data are summarized based on the overall results, emphasizing the study's contributions to the field of English language teaching in Türkiye. In the subsequent section, the pedagogical implications are presented in the context of IELP while offering practical recommendations for policy makers, educators and future researchers so as to improve the effectiveness of intensive language implementations.

5.1. Discussion

In the discussion part, the findings based on interview results are interpreted with regard to the research questions, while also demonstrating the current study's alignments and inconsistencies with the previous literature. This study aimed to explore EFL teachers' perspectives on the advantages, challenges, and improvement suggestions regarding the implementation of the 5th Grade IELP in Turkish secondary schools. While contextualizing EFL teachers' experiences and reflections, a broader understanding of the program's effectiveness and sustainability within the Turkish educational system can be provided. Moreover, the discussion in this chapter is organized in accordance with the research questions. In each section, the qualitative data are analyzed and interpreted systematically with respect to the theoretical perspectives and related research in literature. First of all, the overall teacher perceptions about IELP are discussed to have an insight into how the implementation is regarded in practice. Following this, a detailed interpretation of the perceived advantages and challenges of the program are provided. Finally, EFL teachers' suggestions for improving the effectiveness and sustainability of IELP are examined

to offer valuable implications for curriculum designers, policymakers and practitioners.

5.1.1. EFL Teachers' general perceptions about IELP. This particular section discusses and interprets the collected data related to the first research question "What are the general perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the 5th Grade IELP?". The interview findings indicated that EFL teachers are *generally satisfied* with the recent implementation, who stated different reasons for their *positive perceptions*. It can be argued that long hours of English lessons not only provide students with inevitable exposure to the target language, but they also have a remarkable effect on language skills and learner motivation. The present findings align with the previous literature that also draws attention to EFL teachers' positive attitudes towards IELP (Dilekli, 2018; Dincer & Koç, 2020; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). However, Gelen and Akekmekci (2022) drew a different conclusion claiming that parents and learners have more positive opinions than EFL teachers, which reflects that there may be disagreement between the stakeholders' views who have direct or indirect experiences within IELP. Additionally, it was found that the implementation was considered as a valuable opportunity for 5th grade students who can *acquire English language more naturally and effectively at a young age*. These ideas are consistent with the previous research which emphasize that *early and intensive exposure* to the foreign language facilitates language learning and communicative competence (Lightbown, 2012; Spada et al., 2013; Yule, 2016). Meanwhile, many research studies in the Turkish context align with the findings, emphasizing the advantage of early language learning (Akekmekçi, 2021; Aslan, 2008; Kuru Atadere, 2012; Özkan et al, 2018). In this respect, Dilekli (2018) also found that IELP is considered as promising by EFL teachers who highlighted that learning a new language is quite lasting because of the intensive exposure at a young age. Regarding the motivation and engagement, early age can be both ideal and advantageous, when learners have cognitive flexibility and enthusiasm, which also coincides with the CPH by Lenneberg (1967) advocating young age as critical time for acquiring a new language (Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Nikolov, 2016).

Despite this overall satisfaction, some participant teachers expressed *mixed perceptions regarding the program* because of structural and practical limitations. A few participants noted their concerns about *insufficient materials* and *intensive nature of the curriculum*, which may affect their classroom practices. Following these, the EFL teachers also complained about *lack of continuity*, as they felt that the advantage with the intensive exposure may turn into a disadvantage in the following grades with the sharp decrease in lesson hours. Other reasons such as *lack of placement criteria* and *crowded classrooms* were also believed to hinder equal progress among students of varying proficiency levels. Similar views were cited in literature as barriers to effective IELP implementation on the issues with curriculum and materials (Aksoy et al., 2018; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021), crowded classrooms (Kalkan & Genç, 2023), placement criteria (Dincer & Koç, 2020), need for sustainability (Dündar & Merç, 2021).

Regarding the teacher perceptions on the *objectives of IELP*, participants mostly expressed opinions on the *mastery of four skills*, which is followed by *communication skills* and *real-life use of English*. It is clear that EFL teachers are mostly aware of the objectives of the recent curriculum, which supports CLT method by following the CEFR principles that also focus on active use of the target language (MoNE, 2017; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Sarışık et al., 2022). However, instead of considering the development of main skills as its foremost goal, the program aims to integrate them in the teaching process so that learners become equipped with the target language to use in everyday contexts. Furthermore, as for *intercultural awareness* and *early language learning*, though stressed by a few participants, they were also attributed as key competencies of the program which aims for students to interact well with different cultures at an early age with increased awareness (MoNE, 2017). On the other hand, a few teachers indicated *confidence* and *motivation* as objectives, also consistent with the recent curriculum which values feeling comfortable and motivated as crucial for developing a positive attitude towards the target language.

Related to the participant views on the *extent in goal achievement* in the context of IELP, it can be concluded that EFL teachers were *mostly satisfied* claiming that the program achieved most of its objectives. Similar to the present findings, several studies

(Dilekli, 2018; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021) also reported that the objectives of the IELP curriculum were generally satisfactory and attainable within classroom practices. However, it appeared that *partial success* of the implementation was attributed to several contextual factors, including classroom realities, varying learner levels, and a lack of materials and motivation, which are complement elements that may lead to gaps when provided insufficiently. A similar finding was apparent by Gelen and Akekmekci (2022) which highlighted that the program partially meets the established goals for developing learners' speaking skills because of various factors such as unbalanced focus on language skills, lack of materials and real-life experiences.

On the other hand, the minority of the participants in the current study were *not satisfied* with the program's goal achievement due to lacking real-life opportunities and insufficient resources. It can be argued that while the lack of authentic practice can prevent learners from transferring their linguistic knowledge into real use of language, insufficient materials can limit TBLT activities that can hinder the full realization of its goals in practice. This finding also echoes with another study (Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022) that revealed the lack of authentic classroom environments for communication, where students can feel comfortable and motivated. What is more, MoNE (2017) also recommended authentic materials, such as role-playing and drama, and real-life experiences for the improvement of communicative skills.

5.1.2. Advantages of IELP. In this part, the findings related to the sub-research question "What are the advantages of IELP for the students and teachers?" are interpreted in detail. The interview results revealed that the participants expressed overwhelmingly positive views about *IELP's benefits for both students and teachers*. Most of them highlighted that the *constant exposure* to English language developed learners' *communication skills* naturally as they have more opportunities for *actively and meaningfully using the target language*. This finding aligns with the objectives of the IELP curriculum that follows CLT principles during English lessons, which puts a great emphasis on authentic communication and meaningful input to develop target language fluency (Hymes, 1972; MoNE, 2017; Richards & Rogers, 2001). The results are apparently consistent with MoNE (2017)'s aims which prioritizes the active use of

English as a means of instruction for natural development of communication skills. It can be also argued that the positive effect of increased lessons hours on learners' communicative competence strengthens Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) which considered the language acquisition as a natural and unconscious process. In a similar vein, some previous studies also found that IELP encourages active language use, develops communicative competence and fluency (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Sarışık et al., 2022).

On the other hand, EFL teachers agreed that the program offered opportunities for all language skills simultaneously, which supports *students' holistic language development*. It can be argued that the increase in lesson hours allows teachers to plan their lessons effectively, allocate sufficient time for each skill, and contribute on both receptive and productive skills. That conclusion mirrors many studies which came up with the idea that this program definitely supports the *progress in four language skills* (Aksoy et al., 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Dündar & Merç, 2021; Yılmaz & İnce, 2019). However, Gelen and Akekmekci (2022) demonstrated a contrasting finding on the issue of language skills. While participant teachers claimed that oral skills cannot be improved as much as literary skills due to limited authentic interactions, parents and students indicated speaking is the most developed skill.

Another important finding of the present study is that IELP has *a long-lasting impact on students*, not only fostering their *future academic success* but also guiding their *professional orientation*. In this sense, the program builds a solid linguistic foundation for their academic progress such as high school or LGS exams, and their interest in English language shapes their dreams like going abroad or studying foreign language departments. However, only a few studies (e.g., Dincer & Koç, 2020; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021) emphasize IELP's impact on building a strong foundation in English and its benefits for learners' future life. Therefore, this conclusion is highly valuable as it fills the gap in the literature, which is the program's long-term effects on students' future life. As previous studies generally focus on IELP's shortcomings in the pilot implementation process, the effects in the long term may have been overlooked.

Along with this, it was revealed that the program has increased *students' motivation and active participation* in English lessons. It is remarkable that the extended target

language exposure with enjoyable and interactive activities has a positive impact on learners' enthusiasm and engagement. These findings are consistent with Berkant et al. (2019) which highlighted the increase in motivation and participation as an important advantage of IELP. Other studies also advocated that the program affected students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English (Aksoy et al., 2018; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Yılmaz & İnce, 2019). Moreover, coinciding with Özcanlı and İzci (2023), the current study observed that along with motivation for language learning at a young age, the 5th graders made a *noticeable progress* in their English lessons. Other studies also reflect that a noticeable improvement has been observed in students' academic performance (Berkant et al., 2019; Sarışık et al., 2022; Yılmaz & İnce, 2019).

Moreover, it can be underlined that *constant and early exposure* to the target language has an important role in their *permanent learning* and *academic success*. Findings showed that affective factors such as willingness and confidence have a crucial role in *much stronger language acquisition*. Regarding this, the benefits of early and constant language exposure are in line with CPH, which concludes that target language exposure at a young age can help more natural and effortless language development especially with better pronunciation and fluency compared to the adults (Lenneberg, 1967). As the current program provides learners with extensive language exposure in the first years of their secondary education, this enables them to learn the target language structures more inductively. Supporting this finding, Dilekli (2018) found that young learners are more motivated and eager to learn a foreign language, which also mirrors some conclusions on the benefits of early intensive practice (Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). In that respect, the current program may be promising in solving the issue of FLL in Türkiye, which was also foreseen in previous research (Özcanlı & İzci 2023; Sarışık et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Kaya (2019) comparing IELP and regular curriculum in terms of speaking skills concluded that it made no difference due to student-related and teacher-related implementation problems.

Following these, it was noted that *communication focus* in IELP encourages learners to use the target language in everyday contexts, which increases their *self-confidence*

and helps them overcome the common fear of making mistakes. As also suggested in the curriculum by MoNE (2017), the program contributes learners to be capable and confident users of English, which is a necessity of the modern world where ELF has a global role of interaction among various nations and cultures. While ELF emphasizes intelligibility and meaningful interaction over native-like accuracy (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011), the present results showed that IELP creates opportunities for flexibility in classroom interactions by ignoring the mistakes and encouraging the learners to be more comfortable and confident using the target language. This observation also supports other studies (Berkant et al., 2019; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Yılmaz & İnce, 2019) which emphasized the benefits of early communicative exposure for reducing anxiety and developing positive attitudes towards English language. Similarly, in some studies, IELP-experiencing students had more positive opinions towards the target language than their peers in regular schools (Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kalkan & Genç, 2023). In addition, students can *overcome their prejudices* and they become more *aware of the importance of language learning* as a result of their early engagement. This implication is parallel to some research which argued that IELP supports *intercultural competence and language awareness* in young learners (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021).

Regarding *IELP' benefits for teachers*, the participants were mostly satisfied with the current implementation which *positively affected their own professional practices and attitudes*. Thanks to the increased lesson hours, EFL teachers could plan more *interactive and student-centered activities* with more focus on *communicative instruction*. These results also echo with the previous literature that revealed positive teacher views on the current curriculum in terms of content, objectives, materials and teaching strategies (Dilekli, 2018; Dincer & Koç, 2020; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021; Sarışık et al., 2022). In a similar vein, Canlier and Bümen (2018) evaluated the IELP curriculum and highlighted its focus on student-centered learning, communicative orientation, and development of language skills.

Based on the findings, it can be expressed that the program *reduced the pressure to rush through the curriculum* as EFL teachers have more time for different skills and activities. This idea also supports the findings of some studies that put an emphasis of

the satisfactory lesson hours of IELP, which enable sufficient focus on language abilities (Dündar & Merç, 2021; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). Nevertheless, another study by Canlier and Bümen (2018) criticized the intensity of the curriculum content, which can prevent the improvement of speaking and listening skills as there will be insufficient time for them.

Moreover, it can be argued that IELP experience highly contributed to *teachers' professional fulfillment* since learners' progress and engagement make them more satisfied and motivated to teach. In this regard, the study by Dincer and Koç (2020) also found that the current practice supported teachers' job satisfaction with an increase in their motivation. Additionally, although the participants lack enough resources as a disadvantage, looking on the bright side, it enables them flexibility *and autonomy* to design their lessons based on learner needs and interests. What is more, their constant efforts to enrich their teaching practices by integrating games, videos, and role plays not only make their lessons more engaging for learners, but also turn into an *opportunity for their PD*. In line with this, pointing to the lacking in-service training and experience for IELP, studies also mentioned about initial teacher anxiety, which ultimately turned into autonomy for adapting their instructions depending on learner needs (Canlier & Bümen, 2018).

Since EFL teachers try to use current methods and resources to make their lessons appropriate for learners, IELP encourages them to *stay up-to-date* with technology-based and activity-oriented teaching approaches. Aligning with these findings, other studies concluded that IELP contributed remarkably to EFL teachers' PD by providing them a flexibility for enhancing their teaching abilities along with self-evaluation (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Vural & Şenel, 2018). As a result, EFL teachers viewed IELP as a valuable *PD opportunity* which provides them continuous learning, reflection and *stronger relationships with their students*.

5.1.3. Perceived challenges. In this part, *encountered challenges* within IELP regarding the second sub-research question “What challenges do EFL teachers encounter while implementing this program?” will be interpreted in detail. Despite IELP's successes and advantages, the findings revealed that *significant challenges*

hindered the effective implementation of the program. Regarding the *course materials*, EFL teachers mostly complained about the *lack of standardized course books*, which made them consequently dependant on supplementary materials, which was also evident in previous research (Erdem & Toy, 2017; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). In addition to being a burden for parents to buy extra materials, teachers reported that they faced difficulties in finding, preparing and adapting resources that are suitable for both the IELP curriculum, learner levels and needs. The issue with *inadequate course materials* and resources was also frequently addressed in literature which concluded that the teachers were not content with the accessible resources that were not suitable and interesting for the students (Aksoy et al., 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Kalkan & Genç, 2023; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021). Some researchers claimed that the responsibility for providing materials has been placed on the teacher (Canlier & Bümen, 2018), and the available resources do not cover the four skills in a balanced manner (Sarışık et al., 2022).

In addition, the fact that the MoNE did not provide *any supplementary books or online materials on EBA*, except for the late-delivered textbooks in the pilot year, indicates that teachers were left on their own regarding the implementation of the intensive curriculum. Although course materials are intended to serve as supporting tools rather than primary goals in educational contexts, their deficiency can considerably affect the teaching process and the overall effectiveness of the program. Supporting these findings, whereas Yolcu and Dimici (2021) emphasized on the difficulties with late arrival of the materials, others highlighted that the additional online materials were not adequate for the 5th Grade IELP (Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Dünder & Merç, 2022). Moreover, as discussed in some studies, the late arriving course materials were not suitable for students' level and interest, and teachers were not able to cover all the topics efficiently in the allocated time (Dilekli, 2018; Dincer & Koç, 2020; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021).

Another primary concern was about the *heavy and intense curriculum* that was not believed to be appropriate for students' cognitive and linguistic levels. In spite of the long class hours, EFL teachers struggled to cover all the curriculum, or they could tend

to ignore some learning outcomes, especially those about the development of oral skills. Supporting these views, the common problem with the content and density of the IELP curriculum which had *poor design, intensive content* and *unsuitable objectives above student level* was also signified in previous studies (Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). As a result, there is a structural misalignment between IELP's communicative goals and its actual design, since allocating time for meaningful interactions through communicative tasks are essential in CLT (Littlewood, 2004). Nevertheless, as teachers struggle to cover the excessive number of contents within their limited weekly lesson hours, they may move away from achieving IELP's aim as developing communicative competence. On the other hand, TBLT also suggests detailed activities encouraging real-life use of the target language (Ellis, 2009). However, the results indicated that the dense curriculum enables very limited time for those tasks, which eventually hinders learners' practicing oral skills. Similar to those views, Küçüktepe and Kerimoğlu (2021) also pointed out that the dense curriculum resulted in the abundance of several objectives by the teachers.

On the other hand, EFL teachers believed that the curriculum outcomes were too *inconsistent and isolated*, making it difficult to achieve coherence and continuity among the themes. This finding aligns with some research highlighting its *absence of a spiral progression in content*, and incompatibility with learners' proficiency levels and interests (Dilekli, 2018; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). However, drawing a different conclusion, Canlier and Bümen (2018) found that themes, content, and learning outcomes in the recent curriculum were organized from concrete to abstract, general to specific, known to unknown, and simple to complex. In a similar vein, a minority of the previous studies considered the IELP's learning objectives as concrete and suitable for learner level (Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Sarışık et al., 2022).

Additionally, the intensive content of the curriculum was found to *focus excessively on grammar structures*, deviating from its main objective as developing communication skills (MoNE, 2017). Nevertheless, according to the present study, it is evident that 5th grade learners mostly had *difficulties with abstract grammatical knowledge* particularly those which are *unfamiliar to their L1*. According to the *theory*

of cognitive development, the reason for this challenge might be their developmental stage that is *the concrete operational stage*, during which they can only think logically about tangible and observable concepts rather than abstract reasoning (Lumentut & Lengkoan, 2021; Piaget & Cook, 1952). Aligning with this, Cameron (2001) emphasizes that young learners benefit more from contextualized and meaningful language input instead of explicit grammar teaching. Therefore, the intensive curriculum's focus on *grammar-oriented content with abstract learning objectives* may not be appropriate for learners' cognitive abilities, which is also consistent with the literature (Berkant et al., 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Dincer & Koç, 2020).

On the other hand, as observed by EFL teachers, the 5th grade students' developmental incoherence with IELP's instructional design caused *learners' lack of interest in English lessons* in which they do not feel engagement with the target language. This is in line with Pinter (2017) who noted that effective language learning for children requires activities that are concrete, playful, and interactive, where grammar and vocabulary are acquired implicitly through communication rather than formal explanation. Furthermore, the present findings are parallel with many studies that complained about the *inadequate implementation of the four skills* in English courses because of the heavy grammar focus (Dündar & Merç, 2022; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Kalkan & Genç, 2023; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021).

Moreover, EFL teachers insistently complained about the *curriculum's mismatch* with both *reachable resources* and *regular curriculum*. Apart from being time-consuming, it may require extra workload for the teachers to cover the missing topics in the supplementary materials. Furthermore, although the curriculum encouraged communicative skills, the course materials were not adequate to cover all the four skills (Dilekli, 2018; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021). Therefore, teachers focused on form rather than language use by neglecting the communicative skills, which was also emphasized in previous studies (Kaya, 2019; Sarışık et al., 2022). Besides, the mock exams covering regular curriculum topics may be disappointing for the learners of IELP whose parents are not satisfied with low English results. Similarly, the traditional assessment system was also criticized by Canlier and Bümen (2018), which ignores evaluating the interactive skills.

Regarding the *structural barriers*, EFL teachers mostly identified their unpreparedness for the program with the absence of specific in-service trainings, large class sizes and insufficient infrastructure. As teachers were not provided with necessary training opportunities for IELP, they felt unsupported and had to rely on their individual experiences. Similarly, some studies also focused on the *lack teacher trainings within IELP* as an important deficiency (Erdem & Toy, 2017; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kaya, 2019; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). According to the findings, there is a *lack of communication between MoNE and EFL teachers* since they were not involved in the process of curriculum development, and they were not sufficiently informed about its practice. Although they felt anxious at the beginning of the implementation, the EFL teachers believed that they were qualified enough for teaching young learners in spite of their lacking IELP trainings. However, studies identified challenges regarding PD as low curriculum literacy (Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021), lack of guidance (Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021), lack of teacher quality (Aksoy et al., 2018) and difficulty with teaching young learners (Dincer & Koç, 2020).

The present study also indicated that IELP was put into practice in a top-down manner in *crowded classrooms*, with *lacking infrastructure and resources*. It can be concluded that both EFL teachers and school conditions were not prepared for the effective implementation process. Especially, *traditional classroom design* and *lacking language-specific classrooms* were not found suitable to carry out the curriculum activities sufficiently. In line with this, some researchers drew attention to inadequate physical conditions such as lack of infrastructure, technological facilities, English classrooms as the reasons for the teacher-centered activities and loss of student interest (Aksoy et al., 2018; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kalkan & Genç, 2023; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Previous research also highlighted the crowded classrooms as a major challenge causing classroom management problems and hindering the effective implementation (Berkant et al., 2019; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021; Sarışık et al., 2022).

Moreover, although intensive English hours were an advantage in the 5th grade, the program was considered to have little long-term effect *without its continuity in the*

following grades. Aligning with this finding, some studies also focused on *the lack of sustainability* as an important shortcoming affecting its success (Dilekli, 2018; Dündar & Merç, 2021; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). On the other hand, it was also found that the *reduction of instructional hours* from 15 to 11 hours negatively influenced learners' engagement with the target language and teachers' effective lesson planning. These findings are similar with some studies which concluded that class hours are insufficient to cover the curriculum effectively (Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Sarışık et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Dilekli (2018) highlighted the sufficiency of lesson hours. Another barrier was believed to be the *absence of clear placement criteria* in IELP which brings about *mixed-level classrooms* where the incoherence between high and low-level learners may hinder the overall class achievement. This finding is evident in some studies that advocate level-based or volunteer placement since these hybrid classes may have negative effects in the long-term (Berkant et al., 2019; Dilekli, 2018; Dincer & Koç, 2020). However, Sarışık et al. (2022) contrasted this view suggesting that only mandatory IELP implementation can overcome the language education problems in Türkiye.

The present study also indicated *learner-related challenges* as students' mixed proficiency levels, boredom, and lack of motivation. Since there are differences in learner's proficiency level, motivation, and ability in *mixed classrooms*, it may not be reasonable to expect a collective language learning progress. It was also found that, when prejudiced learners *lose their engagement*, they may get bored and even disrupt the learning flow. Aligning with the findings, some researchers signified low motivation of learners towards target language because of their inadequate readiness (Kaya, 2019; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Moreover, these difficulties teachers experienced in balancing their teaching in mixed-ability classrooms can also be explained through theories of individual differences in SLA, which emphasized that learners vary significantly in terms of ability, motivation, background information and learning speed (Dörnyei, 2006; Hummel, 2021).

EFL teachers also observed that some learners experienced *academic regression* or *disengagement* due to the intensity of the program, while others with low readiness level struggled to keep up. This finding can be also understood from the perspective

of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) which suggests that when low-level learners feel anxious, bored or incapable to keep up with their high-level peers, their affective filter rises and their progress with the comprehensible input is prevented. Consistent with this hypothesis, in the present study, EFL teachers noted those learners with low proficiency levels felt frustration, loss of confidence and disengagement in their learning process. It can be argued that IELP's heavy and challenging curriculum design could not accommodate those learner differences, resulting in lack of participation and gaps between high- and low-achieving students. These results mirror some studies, which pointed out that the grammar-focused intensive curriculum resulted in learners' boredom and lack of interest (Dilekli, 2018; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021). Following these, Coşkun (2023) also found that challenging and teacher-oriented activities cause learner boredom.

In addition to learner differences, the reason for the *motivational challenges* may also be their developmental needs. The findings showed that the *lack of some enjoyable and creative courses* such as P.E., Music and Art in the IELP curriculum was stated as the reason for the lack of motivation towards language learning. Regarding this issue, some researchers highlighted that the willingness of the students towards learning English also diminished because lack of other courses such as Art and Physical Education demotivated them (Berkant et al., 2019; Dündar & Merç, 2021; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). Additionally, Canlier and Bümen (2018) indicated that the IELP curriculum lacks student-centered activities and ignores individual differences.

On the other hand, motivational and learner-level differences were identified as reasons for *underdeveloped writing skills*. EFL teacher emphasized that 5th grade learners are *developmentally immature* for writing competencies, they can also *get easily bored* and disengaged from writing activities. It can be argued that those young learners, who have even limited L1 writing abilities, have great difficulties with using the abstract grammar structures in L2, which hinders holistic skills development that is among IELP's objectives (MoNE, 2017). However, inconsistent with the current findings, a few studies found that learners are more competent in literacy skills (reading and writing), claiming that IELP lacks meeting its goals for communication

skills (Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). This focus on reading and writing abilities may be because of the traditional exam-focused assessment methods which cause teachers' ignorance of oral skills, which is also remarkable in many studies (Berkant et al., 2019; Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Dilekli, 2018; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023).

Furthermore, EFL teachers reported *lack of family support* and *limited opportunities for real-life use* as common barriers for overall target language development. Findings revealed that being exposed to target language opportunities at school is inadequate for putting the language into practice. It can be argued that as authentic opportunities for foreign language learners are missing in the context of Türkiye, and learners cannot overcome the problem with communicative competence. This issue with lacking daily-life conversations in L2 language was also highlighted in many studies (Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). That study by Güngör and Geçikli (2021) also pointed out that, besides not living in an English-speaking country, families lack providing enough support to improve students' English language skills.

Additionally, the study concluded that *parental support* is also lacking within IELP, which is necessary for both developing positive learner attitudes towards learning a new language and providing learners with extra practice outside the school. In a similar vein, some researchers noted that parents have an essential role in developing learners' target language competence, however, their support and collaboration is insufficient during the implementation process (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Dünder & Merç, 2021). There are many studies signifying the role of parents in actively motivating learners for language learning and supporting their academic success by recognizing the contributing factors (e.g., Nikolov, 2009; Partin, 2017). Nevertheless, Güngör and Geçikli (2021) found that parental involvement has no significant influence on developing positive attitudes towards English because of their lacking abilities and real-life opportunities.

5.1.4. Suggestions for improvement. This part interprets the findings regarding the second research question “What suggestions do teachers propose for improving the impact of the program?”. EFL teachers made numerous constructive recommendations

for the improvement and sustainability of the IELP implementation. These *suggestions* were grouped under several categories, including program design, materials, learning environment, stakeholder involvement, and teacher training.

To start with the recommendations related to the *curriculum design*, the *continuity* of the extensive English class hours in the following grades was frequently emphasized for its long-term outcomes. It can be argued that without sustained target language exposure and practice, learners may not gain permanent learning. This idea is consistent with the previous studies which suggested the gradual sustainability of the program claiming that language learning is a gradual and continuous process (Dündar & Merç, 2021; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). Some studies also recommended expanding the implementation with better preparation in all Turkish secondary schools to overcome the challenges in ELT (Dilekli, 2018; Sarışık et al., 2022).

Moreover, the present study suggested the *simplification of the intense curriculum* based on learner needs and their cognitive levels by narrowing the themes and reducing the abstract grammar focus. In line with Piaget's (1952) theory, many studies also concluded that a sustainable curriculum should be created by adding meaningful and authentic tasks (Aksoy et al., 2018; Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Coşkun, 2023; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023). On the other hand, it was noted that EFL teachers should have an *active role* in the process of *curriculum development* to enhance program's effectiveness. This was also evident in the literature recommending needs analysis for the policy changes by taking the opinions of stakeholders (Berkant et al., 2019; Dündar & Merç, 2021; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021).

Among suggestions for improvement, EFL teachers also proposed *student placement based on ability and interest* so that a more successful and homogenous learning environment is provided. Consistent with the findings, while some research studies made recommendations on *volunteer implementation* for both students and teachers (Berkant et al., 2019; Dilekli, 2018; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021), others suggested a *placement test* to divide learners according to their proficiency levels (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Further solutions to improve the IELP included

integrating the regular 5th grade curriculum and having interdisciplinary topic coherence, which can support learners comprehend abstract topics and motivate them for learning a new language. Apart from the present findings, previous studies also drew attention to incorporating the lacking courses to IELP (i.e. Physical Education, Music, Art) for the active involvement and motivation of learners (Dündar & Merç, 2021; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Yolcu and Dimici, 2021). Additionally, a small number of EFL teachers suggested *more English hours* to provide more individual opportunities for learners, which is also coinciding with the findings of some earlier studies (Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Sarışık et. al., 2022).

Regarding the *course materials*, EFL teachers strongly highlighted the need for standardized, content-rich and engaging course books which are appropriate for *learner level and interest*. It can be argued that lack of official course materials can lead to inconsistency and inefficiency in foreign language teaching. These findings align with the previous recommendations on providing *free and official materials* based on students' learning styles so that they are more interesting and effective for language teaching (Aksoy et al., 2018; Berkant et al., 2019; Dilekli, 2018; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Kalkan & Genç, 2023). However, in contrast to the idea of centralized course books, another study claimed that teachers should be given opportunities to choose their course books (Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021).

Following these, participants' suggestions for the development of better materials which are *more interactive and supportive for digital sources* such as *EBA* and *AI tools* are also in line with the literature (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Özcanlı & İzci, 2023; Sarışık et al., 2022). In addition, findings revealed that *skill-based and authentic resources* should be improved that mostly focus on communication skills for meaningful learning, which also directly reflects the results of other studies (Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021). Overall, these suggestions indicate that course materials that include real-life tasks, games, videos and songs can make lessons more effective and increase student engagement in the context of IELP.

As for the *learning environment*, EFL teachers recommended *smaller class sizes* where they can have more focus on speaking practice. In this way some challenges may also

be hindered such as overcoming classroom management problems, ensuring active engagement and caring about individual learners, an issue also echoed in previous studies (Dilekli, 2018; Kalkan & Genç, 2023; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu). On the other hand, some participants also suggested *skill-based teaching* which can allow more focused and balanced development of main skills with different teachers who can raise student engagement and motivation. However, while many studies emphasize either an equal focus on all language skills (Dündar & Merç, 2022; Erdem & Toy, 2017; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021) or greater attention to communicative abilities (Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Kaya, 2019; Sarışık et al., 2022), the issue of having multiple teachers has not been a primary concern for IELP classrooms.

Among suggestions for providing appropriate physical conditions for effective English instruction, some participants highlighted *dedicated language classrooms* that are equipped with technological devices, necessary auditory and visual materials. In this way, a more learner-centered teaching environment can be created for *interaction and active engagement of learners*. These findings are consistent with some research studies which agreed on a more equipped and realistic classroom where the design and seating is arranged to facilitate communication (Aksoy et al., 2018; Coşkun, 2023; Gelen & Akekmekci, 2022; Kambur & Demirbulak, 2021; Kaya, 2019; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Moreover, *a coherent assessment system* aligned with the communicative purposes of IELP was offered by the participants as traditional methods ignore assessing all four skills. This also reflects previous studies which suggested formative assessment methods for the program (Canlıer & Bümen, 2018; Dündar & Merç, 2022; Güngör & Geçikli, 2021).

On the other hand, participants emphasized *the role of stakeholders*, especially parents, for overcoming the challenges within IELP. It can be concluded that *parental involvement* is necessary for maintaining learner motivation and supporting target language exposure outside the classroom. In this sense, whereas Güngör and Geçikli (2021) considered parental support as a key element for learner motivation, Dündar and Merç (2021) suggested parental involvement in the curriculum development process. Apart from this, the present study found that *parents should be informed* about

the program's expectations so that they can guide their children accordingly to IELP based on their ability and interest. Aligning with this, some studies highlighted on parental preferences which should be considered for voluntariness (Dincer & Koç, 2020; Kayabaşı & Köse, 2019). Moreover, *individual responsibility of learners* was also found as crucial for their continuous language development, particularly with real-life interactions, self-study and other activities such as watching movies or reading books in target language. It is also consistent with the literature drawing attention to the learner desire and effort for enhancing the effectiveness of IELP (Güngör & Geçikli, 2021; Kalkan & Genç, 2023).

Finally, EFL teachers expressed the importance of *need-based PD opportunities*, mostly desiring to attend in-service trainings on *effective use of technology, developing materials* and *teaching young learners*. Especially planning their lessons with interactive tools for today's digital learners will increase motivation and engagement. That's why, EFL teachers should seek for ongoing and practice-oriented PD opportunities which help them achieve the intended learning outcomes of IELP along with *up-dating themselves* to meet young learners' needs. Consistent with the results, previous studies strongly emphasized the need for effective and frequent teacher trainings to guide them with policy changes, support their lesson planning and raise qualified teachers who are capable of teaching young learners (Aksoy et al., 2008; Dincer & Koç, 2020; Kaya, 2019; Küçüktepe & Kerimoğlu, 2021; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021).

It was also found that EFL teachers need to *develop their oral skills* so as to conduct effective speaking lessons in especially crowded classrooms. These findings support earlier studies which suggest more PD opportunities for useful instructional techniques for classroom management and communication skills in the context of IELP (Canlier & Bümen, 2018; Erdem & Toy, 2017). In addition, the participants requested *collaborative training sessions* where they can have a chance to share their experiences with colleagues and improve their teaching methods. Similarly, Dincer and Koç (2020) emphasized on the need of colleague cooperation programs in which teachers can interact and exchange their in-class experiences.

5.2. Conclusion

In the present study, EFL teachers' opinions with regard to the 5th grade IELP were explored in detail by focusing on the perceived advantages, challenges and recommended suggestions for the enhancement of the program. The findings not only provided comprehensive insights into EFL teachers' professional experiences, but also their evaluations of the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

The overall results indicated that participants generally held positive perceptions towards the practice which was considered as beneficial for both students and teachers. Through increased target language exposure and interaction in IELP classrooms, the program made a significant contribution to learners' communicative competence in addition to improving their four language skills. Apart from those, the early start to language learning not only helped them develop positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language, but also increased their motivation, self-confidence, and cultural awareness. Considering the critical period for easier language acquisition (Long, 1990; Yule, 2016), IELP for 5th graders has a positive effect almost on each learner's future life, albeit to varying degrees, in terms of developing language skills, increasing academic performance and motivation. When viewed from another perspective, the recent practice has also been a valuable opportunity for EFL teachers to further develop their professional competencies. With increased lesson hours, they could use the target language actively, teach English in a more interactive, engaging and innovative classroom environment, which makes them professionally satisfied.

Although the program's advantages seem to be promising for enhancing language proficiency at an early age, the present study also revealed some challenges that limited its effectiveness in the long-term. The mostly identified challenges were about the curriculum design, instructional resources and learner-related issues that can directly hinder the successful achievement of IELP's intended goals. It appears that the recently encountered challenges are similar to the initial years of the practice, including lack of standardized materials, heavy curriculum content, large class sizes, insufficient facilities and absence of ongoing teacher trainings within IELP. Additionally, the lack of placement criteria and voluntary enrollment result in mixed-level classrooms where overall progress becomes uncertain, since students with low

motivation or ability often withdraw from the learning process and negatively affect more engaged learners. While limited parental support is inadequate for maintaining motivation, real-life exposure and academic success, its lack of sustainability in the higher secondary grades also concerns about maintaining its gained benefits in the subsequent years.

Consequently, to overcome the perceived difficulties and support successful language teaching at a young age, EFL teachers offered many practical suggestions for IELP's improvement. First of all, they agreed that free and official course books should be provided by MoNE, which are coherent with an applicable curriculum suitable for learners' levels and interests. Meanwhile, to increase student interaction and engagement in the learning environment, smaller and more skill-focused classes should be designed with appropriate seating and technological facilities. On the other hand, it was recommended that the continuity of the program across upper grades is necessary for its long-term effectiveness. Moreover, the results drew attention to EFL teachers' need for professional guidance in areas such as using digital tools, preparing engaging materials, implementing current teaching methods, and improving their oral skills, which can help collaboration among colleagues and strengthen their interaction with young learners. Furthermore, active parental involvement was also believed to play a key role for supporting learners' with motivation and real-life opportunities in the language learning process.

In conclusion, EFL teachers' suggestions indicate that there is a strong desire for more coherent, better prepared, learner-centered, and technology integrated IELP implementation, ensuring continuity and practicality. Based on their insights, it can be argued that while the program provides a valuable foundation for early language acquisition, its overall success depends on sufficient resources, interactive classrooms, involved stakeholders and supported teachers who are equipped with updated competencies.

5.3. Implications

The findings of the present study, which give important insights into IELP's impacts in the long run, have several pedagogical, curricular and policy-focused implications for improving the shortcomings and effectively implementing the program in Turkish secondary schools. Though the program has a positive impact on learners' target language competence and motivation, its structural and pedagogical limitations should be addressed to ensure its long-term benefits on learners' developmental and cognitive needs.

As EFL teachers are in charge of the in-class practice of IELP curriculum, their experiences are crucial as they directly face the challenges during the implementation process. From a pedagogical point of view, while designing English lessons for young learners, their developmental needs should be taken into consideration. As 5th grade students are mostly around 10-year-old, which is the concrete operational stage (Piaget & Cook, 1952), instead of grammar teaching with abstract structures, learners should be provided with contextualized and meaningful input to learn them inductively. In this regard, teachers should realize their cognitive abilities and enable communicative and task-based opportunities for them by using appropriate resources. Rather than considered as a lesson, the English language should be regarded as a tool for classroom interaction, which can help learners overcome their prejudices and become more motivated to use the target language. With the extensive exposure throughout the lessons, practical opportunities can also be created in the classroom context.

On the other hand, the findings implied that there is a need for an updated curriculum that is more coherent with the regular 5th grade curriculum and the accessible resources, and more balanced for assessing skills including communicative competence. Instead of providing intensive input at 5th grade, its continuity should be ensured in the upper grades. Considering the learners' needs and interests, its learning objectives could be revised and simplified by also integrating interdisciplinary themes so that learner engagement is promoted and permanent language learning is supported. The present study indicated that despite the ongoing challenges and problems reported in the literature, no revisions or updates have been made to the IELP curriculum over the past eight years, apart from the removal of the last four units. Therefore, since EFL

teachers can observe students' language learning process firsthand, they should be actively involved in the curriculum development process by providing insightful feedback for curriculum designers. Moreover, the intensive exposure should be balanced—without boring or tiring the students, and without depriving them of other social subjects such as Art, Music, and Physical Education.

As an implication for the policy level, if the introduced curriculum by MoNE would be coherent with course materials that are provided freely to the IELP implementing schools, they could both guide the learners and teachers in the language learning process. Additionally, less crowded and learner-centered classrooms may offer students more effective learning environments, which can also enable individualized feedback for teachers. Apart from those, continuous needs analysis by taking stakeholders' views can evaluate the program's impact and lay the ground for taking necessary actions to address the deficiencies of IELP. Moreover, the results implied that PD opportunities for EFL teachers are crucial for ensuring the success of the IELP and overcoming the challenges encountered during its implementation. In-service trainings related to the program should be designed focusing on effective use of technology, interactive material development and teaching young learners so that teachers meet the needs of 21st century learning environments.

5.4. Recommendations

Based on the interpreted findings and provided implications regarding the present study, many recommendations can be proposed for MoNE, curriculum designers, EFL teachers, other stakeholders and future researchers. To start with the suggestions for policy-makers and curriculum developers, the MoNE should continue the IELP implementation in the upper grades (6th-8th) to maintain learners' target language exposure and support their English competency. However, to hinder the negative impacts such as boredom, demotivation or academic regression in the learning environments, students should be involved in the program voluntarily based on their ability and interests. Moreover, the IELP should be implemented nationwide in Turkish secondary schools through a dual system that offers both regular and intensive programs, while selecting the capable and motivated students for the intensive program

based on a placement test. In this way, IELP can be more effective since its objectives can be easily achieved in homogeneous classrooms.

Importantly, in addition to revising the curriculum by reducing the heavy content, communicative learning objectives and regular 5th grade curriculum should be included in the program. MoNE should also prepare standardized, content-rich and interactive course materials that are appropriate for learners' cognitive levels, engaging and freely provided to all IELP implementing schools. It is also recommended to reduce the class sizes to ensure learners' active participation and individual learning experiences. Furthermore, as the traditional assessment system focuses on grammar-based evaluation, a coherent assessment system should be offered that is suitable for the communicative nature of IELP. Regarding the social subjects such as P.E., Music and Art, which help learners to be motivated and engaged, they should also be included in the IELP curriculum. Lastly, instead of leaving EFL teachers to rely on past experiences during their IELP practices, MoNE should enable them necessary PD opportunities which make them feel supported and motivated while coping with the encountered challenges. Apart from conducting ongoing needs analysis for in-service trainings, MoNE should actively interact with EFL teachers and take their opinions while designing a new curriculum.

It is advisable for EFL teachers to actively use the target language in their classrooms, not only by giving instructions but also while emphasizing daily communication with dialogues, role-plays, TPR-based real interactions, collaborative tasks, and songs, which also increase learner participation and motivation. Thus, EFL teachers can allocate time to all skills without neglecting speaking and listening. On the other hand, other stakeholders such as administrators, and parents are recommended to be involved in the IELP process. Parents should be informed about the expectations of the implementation so that they can guide and support their children's language learning outside the school. Moreover, EFL teachers, who are responsible for effective IELP implementation, should continuously improve themselves professionally by recognizing their areas of weakness and keeping themselves up-to-date through participating in regular in-service trainings. Those PD opportunities can also encourage collaboration among colleagues by sharing their teaching experiences,

developing materials together and supporting themselves to cope with the difficulties in IELP. As discussed before, they need to be competent in certain areas such as teaching young learners, active speaking skills, and effective use of technology. So as to create more engaging and learner-oriented lessons, they should make use of digital tools and interactive platforms including EBA, Web 2.0 tools, AI-supported applications.

There are also some suggestions for future research within the IELP context. Although the present study focuses on IELP's current strengths and weaknesses particularly in the long run, it was carried out in a certain province with limited participants in a qualitative design. Therefore, its results cannot represent the overall perceptions about the program across the country. In this sense, future studies could be conducted with longitudinal or mixed-method designs to explore the long-term effects of the program on students' English proficiency, general attitudes towards English lessons, success in high-stake exams, real-life experiences, motivation and participation. While doing this, various data collections tools can be included such as classroom observations. Moreover, other stakeholders such as students, parents or administrators could be involved in future research studies, whose perspectives would also indicate more holistic insights into IELP's effectiveness and sustainability. On the other hand, comparative research studies across different provinces and regions of Türkiye would also provide broader feedback to the policy makers and curriculum developers about the needs, and contextual factors that influence its success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Official Research and Implementation Approval by the Ministry of National Education



T.C.
MİLLÎ EĞİTİM BAKANLIĞI
ARAŞTIRMA UYGULAMA İZNİ BELGESİ



Başvuru No: MEB.TT.2025.025570.01

T.C. Kimlik No: 32*****58

Adı Soyadı: SÜMEYYE ÇETİN

Araştırmanın Adı: The Evaluation of the 5th Grade Intensive English Curriculum from the Perspectives of EFL Teachers in Burdur / 5. Sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Öğretim Programının Burdur'daki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi

Araştırmanın Niteliği: Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Araştırmanın Örneklem / Çalışma Grubu: Öğretmen

Veri Toplama Aracının Başlığı: 5. sınıf yoğunlaştırılmış yabancı dil programında derse giren İngilizce Öğretmenleri için görüşme soruları

Araştırma Uygulama İzninin Kabul Tarihi: 06.05.2025

Araştırma Uygulama İzninin Bitiş Tarihi: 06.05.2026

Yukarıda kimliği yazılı araştırmacı "Araştırma Uygulama İzinleri Genelgesine (2024/41)" göre belirtilen kapsamda araştırmasını yapmayı taahhüt etmiştir. Araştırmacının bilgi ve belgelerinin uygunluğu kontrol edilmiş olup aşağıda ifade edilen bilgiler kapsamında araştırma uygulama izni Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı ilgili birimleri tarafından onaylanmıştır.

Uygulama Yapılacak İller	Uygulama Yapılacak Birimler	Uygulama Yapılacak MEB Teşkilatları	Uygulama Yapılacak MEB Teşkilatının Kurum Kodu
BURDUR	İmam Hatip Ortaokulu	Abdi Özeren İmam Hatip Ortaokulu	976475
BURDUR	Ortaokul	Şeker Ortaokulu	702577
BURDUR	Ortaokul	Şehit Akif Altay Ortaokulu	702579
BURDUR	Ortaokul	Suna Uzal Ortaokulu	702607

Not: Okul/kurum yöneticileri tarafından "Araştırma Uygulama İzni" belgesinin ve veri toplama araçlarının (araçlardaki maddelerinin) modülde yer alan belge ve araçlarla aynı olduğu kontrol edilmelidir. Belgeler aynı olmadığı durumda araştırma uygulama izni verilmeyecektir.

Doğrulama Kodu: 70fda23e3cf78b1e8f758973fd87b1fb0a7594de13fae9461f2e0b6eb6cb44c4
Doğrulama Adresi: arastirmaiznleri.meb.gov.tr/belge-dogrula
Serhat Mah. 1290. Sokak No.8/B 06374 Yenimahalle/Ankara TÜRKİYE
Telefon No: (0312) 413 43 00, Belgegeçer No: (0312) 413 45 12
e-posta: ttkb_arastirmaiznleri@meb.gov.tr, internet adresi: ttkb.meb.gov.tr



APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions

5. sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Öğretim Programı'nda Derse Giren Öğretmenler için Görüşme Soruları

Cinsiyet: _____

Yaş: _____

Mesleki tecrübe: _____

5. sınıf uygulaması tecrübesi: _____

Ortalama sınıf mevcudu: _____

Öğretmenlerin Tutumları

1. 5. sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Programı hakkındaki genel düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
 - 1.a. Programa karşı tutumunuz olumlu mu, olumsuz mu? Neden?
2. Müfredatı kapsamında programın dil öğrenme sürecindeki hedeflerini nasıl tanımlarsınız?
 - 2.a. Sizce program, belirlenen hedeflerine ulaşmada ne kadar etkili? (iletişim becerileri, kültürlerarası etkileşim, dili gerçek hayatta kullanma vb.)
 - 2.b. Programın hedeflerine ulaşmasını engelleyen faktörler nelerdir?

Karşılaşılan Zorluklar

3. Bu programı uygularken karşılaştığınız en büyük zorluklar nelerdir?
 - 3.a. Bu zorluklar sınıf içi etkinliklerinizi ve verimliliğinizi nasıl etkiliyor?
 - 3.b. Bu zorluklar öğrencilerinizin öğrenme sürecini nasıl etkiliyor?
 - 3.c. Bu zorlukları aşmak için hangi stratejileri kullanıyorsunuz?

Avantajlar

4. Deneyimlerinize dayanarak, sizce bu eğitim programının en önemli faydaları nelerdir?
 - 4.a. Programın öğrenciler için sağladığı avantajlar nelerdir?
 - 4.b. Programın öğretmenler için sağladığı avantajlar nelerdir?
5. Öğrencilerin motivasyonunda veya derslere katılımında olumlu/olumsuz ne gibi değişiklikler fark ettiniz?
 - 5.a. Sizce bunun sebebi ne olabilir?

Dil Yeterliliği Üzerindeki Etkisi

6. Sizce bu İngilizce Programı, öğrencilerin İngilizce dil becerilerini geliştirmede ne kadar etkili?
 - 6.a. Programın en fazla etkilediğini düşündüğünüz dil becerileri hangileridir? (Dinleme, konuşma, okuma, yazma) Neden?
 - 6.b. Bu program hangi beceri için yetersiz kalıyor? Bu durumun sebepleri nelerdir?
7. Programın öğrencilerin akademik başarıları ve dil yeterliliği üzerindeki uzun vadeli etkileri hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?
 - 7.a. Farklı seviyelerdeki öğrenciler bu durumdan nasıl etkileniyor?

Müfredat ve Materyaller

8. Programda kullanılan müfredat içeriğini ve öğretim materyallerini nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
 - 8.a. Müfredatın öğrencilerin seviyesine uygunluğu hakkında görüşünüz nedir?
 - 8.b. Kullanılan materyaller yeterli mi? Neden?
 - 8.c. Materyal eksikliğine karşı ne tür önlemler aldınız?
9. Müfredat ve materyallerin geliştirilmesi için ne gibi önerileriniz var?
 - 10.a. Nelerin değiştirilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorsunuz? Neden?

Hizmet içi Eğitim

10. Bu program kapsamında ne tür mesleki eğitimler aldınız?
 - 10.a. Eğer aldıysanız, aldığınız eğitim karşılaştığınız zorluklara hazırlıklı olmanız için yeterli oldu mu?
 - 10.b. Almadıysanız, programı uygulamak konusunda kendinizi eksik hissettiğiniz yönler oldu mu?
11. Programın daha etkili uygulanabilmesi için hangi hizmet içi eğitim faaliyetleri size faydalı olurdu?
 - 11.a. Uygulama sürecinde mesleki gelişim açısından hangi alanlarda desteğe ihtiyacınız var?
 - 11.b. Dersi İngilizce yürütmek, dil becerileri kazandırma, materyal geliştirme, eğitimde teknoloji/yapay zekâ kullanımı, sınıf yönetimi, erken yaşta çocuklara dil öğretimi, verimli konuşma/yazma etkinlikleri gibi konulardan hangisinden eğitim almak isterdiniz? Neden?

Programın Geliştirilmesi

12. Programın, öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerin ihtiyaçlarını daha iyi karşılayabilmesi için hangi yönlerinin değiştirilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorsunuz?
13. Uzun vadede bu uygulamanın etkisini artırmak için program geliştirme uzmanları ve yetkililere hangi tavsiyelerde bulunursunuz?

APPENDIX 3

Approval from MAKU Research Ethics Committee



Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar Etik Kurulu
Kararı

Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics
Committee Decision

Toplantı Tarihi / Meeting Date : 16.04.2025 Çarşamba
Toplantı No / Meeting No : 2025/3
Karar No / Decision No : GO 2025/1273

Sorumlu araştırmacısının DOÇ.DR. ALİ KARAKAŞ, yardımcı araştırmacısının SÜMEYYE ÇETİN olduğu, 'The Evaluation of the 5th Grade Intensive English Curriculum from the Perspectives of EFL Teachers in Burdur / 5. Sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Öğretim Programının Burdur'daki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi' başlıklı araştırmanın gerekçe amaç yaklaşım ve yöntemleri dikkate alınarak incelenmiş olup, araştırmanın fikri, hukuki ve telif hakları bakımından sorumluluğu araştırma ekibine ait olması koşulu ile etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.

After evaluating the justification, purpose, approach, and methods of the study titled 'The Evaluation of the 5th Grade Intensive English Curriculum from the Perspectives of EFL Teachers in Burdur / 5. Sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Öğretim Programının Burdur'daki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi', conducted by the principal investigator DOÇ.DR. ALİ KARAKAŞ, co-investigator SÜMEYYE ÇETİN, the study was deemed ethically appropriate, provided that the research team assumes full responsibility for the idea, legal, and copyright aspects of the study.

PROF.DR. Oğuzhan DALKIRAN
Başkan / Chair

DOÇ.DR. Deniz SAY ŞAHİN
Başkan Yrd. / Vice Chair

DOÇ.DR. Sibel ŞENTÜRK
Raporör / Reporter

DOÇ.DR. Aysun GÜZEL
Üye / Member

DOÇ.DR. Gökmen ARSLAN
Üye / Member

DOÇ.DR. Mehmet Haşim AKGÜL
Üye / Member

DOÇ.DR. Sezgin KORKMAZ
Üye / Member

DOÇ.DR. Mehmet ULAŞ
Üye / Member

DOÇ.DR. Alper BÖREKÇİ
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Serap ÖZDEMİR BİŞKİN
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Nurdan ORAL KARA
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Dilara AKÇORA YILDIZ
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Mahmut ATEŞ
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Dilşad Tülgen ÇETİN
Üye / Member

DOÇ.DR. Derya CAN
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Mustafa İŞLEYEN
Üye / Member

DR.ÖGR.ÜYESİ Funda UYSAL
Üye / Member



Bu QR kod, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar (GOKA) Etik Kurulu'nun onayı ile GOKA online başvuru sisteminde oluşturulmuştur. QR kod, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi'nin resmi web sitesi olan GOKA online başvuru sistemi üzerinden görüntülenebilir.

This QR code has been generated through the approval of the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (GOKA) of Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University via the GOKA online application system. The QR code can be viewed through the GOKA online application system, which is the official website of Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University.

APPENDIX 4

Informed Consent Form

AYRINTILI BİLGİLENDİRME VE GÖNÜLLÜ KATILIM FORMU

Sayın Katılımcı,

Aşağıda ayrıntılı bilgileri yer alan araştırma T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığının izni ile gerçekleştirilmektedir. Araştırma uygulamasına katılım tamamıyla gönüllülük esasına dayalı olmaktadır. Araştırmaya katılıp katılmamakta özgürsünüz. Araştırma herhangi bir istenmeyen etki ya da risk taşımamaktadır. Katılımınız tamamen sizin isteğinize bağlıdır, reddedebilir ya da herhangi bir aşamasında ayrılabilirsiniz. Araştırmaya katılım sağlanamaması veya araştırmadan ayrılma durumunda okul ile ilgili ilişkileriniz etkilenmeyecektir. Araştırmada sizden kimlik belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplar gizli tutulacak ve sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Araştırma uygulamaları, kişisel rahatsızlık verecek sorular ve durumlar içermemektedir. Ancak, katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz cevaplama işini yarıda bırakıp çıkmakta özgürsünüz. Araştırmaya katıldıktan sonra istediğiniz an vazgeçebilirsiniz. Böyle bir durumda veri toplama aracını uygulayan kişiye, araştırmayı tamamlamayacağınızı söylemeniz yeterli olacaktır. Araştırmaya katılmamak ya da katıldıktan sonra vazgeçmek size hiçbir sorumluluk getirmeyecektir. Onay vermeden önce konu ile ilgili herhangi bir sorunuz varsa aşağıda iletişim bilgileri verilen araştırmacıya sorabilirsiniz.

Araştırmacının Adı Soyadı	Sümeyye ÇETİN
Araştırmacının İletişim Bilgileri	
Araştırmanın Adı	The Evaluation of the 5th Grade Intensive English Curriculum from the Perspectives of EFL Teachers in Burdur / 5. Sınıf Yoğunlaştırılmış İngilizce Öğretim Programının Burdur'daki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısıyla İncelenmesi
Araştırmanın Amacı	Bu çalışmanın temel amacı 5. sınıf Yabancı Dil Ağırlıklı Eğitim Programı yürütülen ortaokullardaki İngilizce öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerine dayanarak programın uygulanabilirliği hakkındaki düşüncelerini almak, uygulanmakta olan programın güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini araştırmak ve uygulamanın geliştirilmesine yönelik öneriler sunmaktır.

Yukarıda bilgileri bulunan araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ediyorum. .../.../....

İmza:

Katılımcının Adı Soyadı:

Ses / Görüntü Kaydı Onamı

- ☐ Yalnızca ses kaydı alınmasına izin veriyorum.
- ☐ Görüntü kaydı alınmasına izin veriyorum.
- ☐ Ses ve görüntü kaydı alınmasına izin vermiyorum.

Herhangi bir katılımcı, ses/görüntü kaydının alınmasını onaylamadığı takdirde katılımcıdan kayıt alınmayacaktır.

APPENDIX 5

CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name Surname: Sümeyye Çetin

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Master's Degree: Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University

Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Foreign Language Education

Master's Program with Thesis in English Language Teaching (2025)

Bachelor's Degree: Fatih University

Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature (2014)

Double Major: Fatih University

Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Languages Education

Program of English Language Teaching (2014)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Ministry of National Education, English Language Teacher

Kemal Özalper Ortaokulu, Gürün, Sivas (2014-2017)

Şehit Akif Altay Ortaokulu, Burdur (2017-2023)

Şeker Ortaokulu, Burdur (2023-present)

PUBLICATIONS

Çetin, S, & Doğan, K. (2024). Examining the Perspectives of Turkish Foreign Language Educators on Job Perceptions, Professional Requirements, and Self-Devement Activities. *Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University 2nd International 21st Century Educational Research Congress (INER CONGRESS 2024)*. Abstract only. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1En71kYgnzhgo94qjSsGzr-7ZHv2bJ49g/view>

Çetin, S, & Doğan, K. (2024). Navigating challenges, embracing benefits: Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions on the new assessment and evaluation system. *Konin Language Studies*, 12(1), 9-33. <https://ksj.konin.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/KSJ-121-9-33-Cetin-Dogan.pdf>

