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TURKISH STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE CURRICULUM FOR INTERACTIVE AND TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED ENGLISH AS A FOREGIN LANGUAGE

Çağla TAŞÇI*

Abstract

Thanks to the communicative language teaching, interaction in English rather than teaching grammar rules has become the main goal of English classes. Technological equipment and the Internet have been widely benefited to reinforce interaction through the authentic materials they provided. This study investigated English as a foreign language students' perceptions towards the use of communicative approach and technological resources at a state university in Turkey. Turkish EFL students' perceptions towards communicative activities were analyzed with questionnaires comparing the statistical data based on their gender and proficiency. Statistically significant differences were found in terms of the gender and proficiency level of the students.

Key Words: *Interaction, English as a Foreign Language, Perception*

TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN İNTERAKTİF VE TEKNOLOJİ DESTEKLİ INGİLİZCE'NİN YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRETİLDİĞİ MÜFREDAT HAKKINDAKI GÖRÜŞLERİ

Özet

İletişimsel yöntemin kullanılması ile İngilizce sınıflarında sadece dilbilgisi kurallarını öğretmekten çok İngilizce iletişim kurmak esas amaç haline gelmiştir. İletişimi pekiştirmek için teknolojik araçlardan ve internetten sağladıkları gerçek materyallerden büyük ölçüde faydalanılmaktadır. Bu çalışma Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesindeki İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin iletişimsel yaklaşıma ve teknoloji kullanımına yönelik algılarını incelemiştir. İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin görüşleri istatistiksel verilerin cinsiyet ve dil seviyelerine göre kıyaslama yapılmasıyla analiz edildi. Analiz sonucunda öğrencilerin cinsiyetleri ve dil seviyeleri açısından istatistiksel olarak önemli farklılıklar bulundu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İletişim, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce, Algı*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the interactionist approach into second language acquisition, and communicative language movement meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning have become the goals of the EFL/ESL language classes. Communicative language teaching has been interpreted in various ways and put into practice with communicative language curricula, meaningful communicative activities and materials. Many textbooks and course books have been written based on this approach, and instructors have been following them for their teaching practices. Especially in EFL settings, the course books with CDs and some videos which are authentic or created for pedagogic practices have been made use of by English language instructors. In addition, various authentic materials such as TV series, films, advertisements, internet sources have received great acceptance to provide authentic ways of introducing a language in especially EFL classrooms. Application of teacher led discussions, group work, peer feedback, dialogue practices to achieve some functions of the target language is a common method used in English language classes.

In Turkey, the communicative language methods and practices have also been practiced in many contexts (Kaya; 2007; Sert 2005). Students are first introduced English at primary education and continue learning English in upper levels of formal education. Unlike some other EFL settings like Taiwan or China (Chung and Huang, 2009; Savignon &Wang,

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2003) in Turkey English language proficiency is not tested in university entrance exams. Only students, who will study foreign language, take it in university entrance exam. However, at most of both state and private universities, there is a one year preparatory class of English where English skills are taught intensively at various levels. Students first take proficiency exam, and if they fail in it, they take placement exams, and placed into classes depending on their appropriate levels. At the end of the preparatory classes, they take an achievement exam as well as other summative and formal assessments to evaluate the performance of students during the whole academic year. The students who pass the preparatory class go on their education in their first year classes. There are a few universities who are English medium in their academic courses and others are usually Turkish medium though students have to attend preparatory classes. There are some others who provided some introductory courses in English or business English but the rest of the courses are in Turkish.

In the context of the study, the preparatory class was established two years ago by the School of Foreign Languages. Last year the university administration decided to make the education as English medium in two faculties; Economy and Administrative Sciences and Engineering Faculties. In some introductory courses, initially providing a preparatory class for one year to prepare students for the courses of the following years in English and ideally to enable them to use English communicatively in their continuing life after school. In most of the classes, the multimedia, computer, DVD and the internet exist to enhance the quality of English language education. The director of Foreign Languages provides some in service training to the faculty who teaches at the preparatory classes in order to enhance the practice of communicative language teaching and use of the technology in the classes during weekly meetings and separate workshops. The current study investigates the teaching of English in listening and speaking classes from the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the communicative curricular activities such as group and pair work activities, peer and teacher feedback, use of the internet and other technological resources in the classes, watching some authentic materials such as films or TV series. However, the computers with the internet access is mostly in termediate level classes; therefore, the perceptions of those students' in intermediate level classes have been sought in the current survey study.

As students gain competence in English, they get more motivated to participate in interaction during the class and gain autonomy using more authentic sources such as the internet and watching movies. In my experience, students who attend university with English language learning background have been more motivated to learn English and the use of interactive and authentic materials have increased students' motivation. Kaya's (2007) study also reveals some perceptional differences in various proficiency groups. So in this study, whether there is a perceptional difference in terms of their proficiency levels in this Turkish EFL context, too. In addition, in my own personal experiences with Turkish English language learners, female students have usually been more motivated and more volunteer to participate in the communicative activities. According to a research into attitudes towards computer and internet usage, males have more experience with computers and usually have more positive attitudes towards computers and the internet (Shumacher Morahan-Martin 2001; Tekinarslan 2009; Aydın, 2007). In Aydın's study on EFL learners in Turkey, there were significant differences in terms of gender of the students' attitudes towards the internet. Male students had more positive attitudes towards the function of the internet for cultural exchange and more motivated to have information about the internet than female students. On the other hand, females put their emphasis on the leading role of the internet to get more prepared knowledge. Therefore, in the present study, whether gender differences affect students' perceptions on the internet usage as well as communicative activities has also been investigated.

The following research questions have been investigated:

1. How do the intermediate students feel about the interaction types in listening-speaking classes in an EFL context?

2. How do the upper intermediate students feel about the interaction types in English listening- speaking classes in an EFL context?

3. How do the upper intermediate students feel about the technological materials in their classes and what are their general perceptions towards the use of the internet?

4. Is there a difference between the attitude of the male and female students towards the overall activities, interaction types and internet use?

In this paper, in order to answer the questions posed above, related literature has been reviewed in terms of the theoretical considerations of interaction in the second language classes, the research studies conducted in this field, group work activities and the role of feedback and peer feedback, and the research into group work and pair work as well as teacher-led classrooms, feedback and peer feedback, the use of authentic materials such as the films, the Web, and students' perceptions of them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Interaction in the second and foreign language classes

With the advent of communicative approaches, classes are not dominated with rote learning methods and mechanical output anymore. Classrooms have become places where students and teachers try to interact with each other to learn and teach English as in natural first language acquisition environment. For more than three decades English teachers have been using a variety of techniques and methods to enhance student interaction in the classroom. "In the era of communicative language teaching, interaction is, in fact, the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about….Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other " (Brown, 2001: 165).

Interaction and the input theory have been widely discussed in the literature of second language acquisition. As Savignon (1991: 270) suggests "better understanding the strategies used in the negotiation of meaning offers a potential for improving classroom practice of the needed skills". In order to better understand the importance of interaction in classroom activities, it is best first to begin the theoretical background of second language acquisition with the input theory. Krashen (1993 cited in Ellis 1997: 47) suggests that a second language is most successfully acquired when conditions are similar to those present in first language acquisition: that is, when the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than form; when the language input is a little above the proficiency of the learner, for example, if a learner is at a stage 'i', then acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to 'Comprehensible Input' that belongs to level 'i + 1' (i.e., learners are a little more advanced than the current state of the learner's interlanguage.) when the students are given the opportunity to engage in 'meaningful use' of that language in a stress-free environment. Krashen puts great emphasis on comprehensible input as a source of acquisition, supports the view that comprehensible input is necessary for language acquisition to occur.

Interactionist theories of L2 acquisition acknowledge the importance of input as well as learners interaction with its environment and their internal mechanisms (Ellis 1997: 44). Vygotsky's social-cultural theory has had an influence in the second language acquisition theories to a great extent. According to Vygotsky, social interaction plays an important role in the learning process and proposed the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where learners construct the new language through socially mediated interaction. Vygotsky (1978: 86) states that "ZPD is the distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". Zones of proximal development are created through interaction and thereby negotiation of information between or among knowledgeable peers. Hatch (1979, cited in Pica 1994), in line with Vygotsky's interaction theory, claims that interaction is important in the linguistic and cognitive features of L2 process as well as the social features. Swain (1985, in Pica 1994) points out that learner production of modified output

is important as well as comprehensible input for second language acquisition. Long (1985) and Pica (1987: 5) analyze the interaction between native speaker and non native speakers, and suggest what makes input comprehensible is modified interaction. Negotiation of meaning promotes language acquisition. For example, clarification requests during the interaction require or at least encourage learners to produce improved output. Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987), in their analysis of excerpts of native and non native interaction, both the premodified and the negotiated input improved learner's comprehension, there was a significant difference in enabling comprehension. (Pica, 1994: 514) states that "Through feedback negotiation brings learners' attention to L2 versions of their interlanguage utterances and heightens their awareness of their own interlanguage system." In this way it prevents learner's errors caused by their interlanguage fossilization. In addition, analysis of the excerpts in Pica (1993, 1992 cited in Pica 1994) reveals many learners produced modified sentences when they interact with native speakers. Overall negotiation enables the learners to get modified comprehensible input, modify their own output, and access L2 form and meaning (Pica 1994: 520). Myers (2000) also found Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory practical to apply in language classes. In his study he found that students who negotiated meaning and form in groups collaboratively benefited from it. Aljararfrah and Lantolf (1994) found that negative feedback which learners tell the ungrammaticality of their peers' language uses and modified input can help learners to acquire language within the ZPD as Vygotsky (1978) proposed. As these studies indicate, classrooms act as communication contexts in which students communicate using language in specific ways.

Most of the researchers who conducted research in the field of second language acquisition agree that negotiation of meaning and pushed output promotes communication, it helps acquisition of at least concerning vocabulary, clarification requests facilitate learners to produce modifications (Ellis 1994; 1997; Long 1984: Pica 1994). During the interaction the feedback learners' receive can help learners to notice gaps in their inter-languages. Application of interaction in the classroom has been widely discussed in the literature. Rivers (1987: 4) states that "through interaction students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material or even the output of their fellow students in discussions, skits, joint problem-solving tasks, or dialogue journals". The use of games, role plays, pair and other small-group activities has gained acceptance and is now widely suggested to include in language teaching programs (Savignon, 1991). Similary, Richards & Rodgers (1986: 80) acknowledge that social interaction activities in a second language classroom includes conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues, role plays, games, and simulations. Pair and group work are suggested for the encouragement of using and practicing functions and forms. In communicative language teaching classes "activities in the Communicative Approach are often carried out by the students in small groups" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 132).

Grouping students within *small groups*, *whole class, pairs* and *individuals* is seen as an aspect of balanced lesson planning by Mc Kay and Tom (1999: 18). The authors point out different grouping techniques should be employed. For example, if pair work is the only technique, "the students miss out a sense of class unity" (Mc Kay and Tom, 1999: 18). They urge that in order to achieve a more balanced class, the class begin with a whole class oral activity then the students generate their ideas individually and then share them in a small group. Through the small group activities, students are involved in meaningful and authentic language use instead of mechanical language practice (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). The interaction between students and teacher, students and students, and teacher and student-students has been regarded as shaping the "patterns" of communication by Johnson 1995. Also Kaya (2007: 18) made a comprehensive literature review of communicative and interactive activities and called the group, pair and whole class activities as "*interaction types*" and states that " type represents the general structure held in common by the tasks, practices, or activities carried out in pairs, groups or as a whole class, namely that interaction is required".

The underlying structure of teacher fronted classroom language has been characterized as following pattern of acts: an *initiation* act by teacher, a *response* act by a student and an *evaluation* act by teacher which is called IRE (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975 and Mehan 1979 cited in Johnson 1995: 17). Most of the student-teacher interaction follows this interactional sequence. Analyzing the interaction pattern in the student-teacher interaction transcripts, (Johnson, 1995:10) found that the IRE sequence dominates the patterns of communication, and the teacher evaluates an incorrect response then moves on to the next initiation. Besides controlling the patterns of communication, the teacher controls the content of the lesson. Student-student interaction is another aspect of interactive language classes. Again analyzing the classroom student-student interaction with excerpts, (Johnson, 1995:111) points out that student-student interaction has an important role both in shaping the patterns of communication in second language classrooms and in creating opportunities for students to use language for classroom learning thereby acquiring the second language. She further states that students potentially can have a control over the structure and content of student-student interaction based on their previous experiences, interactional competences and individual personality traits.

There are some other studies which mainly focus on both the teacher-student and student-student interaction or only one of them and their benefits in the language classrooms. Anton (1999) investigated the socio-cultural perspectives on teacher-learner interaction comparing the interaction in learner-centered and teacher-centered discourses in second language classes. In her experimental study, she observed and analyzed the interaction in two separate classes; one traditional teacher fronted and centered classroom which no interaction between student and teacher occurs, and one more learner centered class where teacher and students engage in interaction as well as in peers and groups. She found that traditional teacher centered class teacher discourse did not provide enough opportunities for negotiation while the group engaging in negotiation and communication with their teacher and peer through scaffold assistance have more negotiation skills. Soler (1999) investigated the pragmatic learning in socio-cultural perspectives both in student-student and teacher led interaction. Both the learners' collaborative language learning condition and the teacher led interaction on requests have been beneficial. (David, 2007) carried out observations on student-teacher interaction in terms of teacher initiated questions and its effect on the students' participation and involvement. He found that especially display questions enabled enhanced participation of the students. The researchers also suggested workshops and seminars for the training of the instructors in terms of the questioning techniques.

Pair work is a kind of group work between two students. (Brown, 2001:182) states that short, linguistically simple, and structurally controlled tasks is *more suitable* for pair work. These tasks are provided by (Brown, 2001: 182) as follows:

1. Dialogue practicing with a partner
2. Simple question-and-answer exercises
3. Performing certain meaningful substitution drills
4. Quick brainstorming activities
5. Checking written work with each other
6. Preparation for merging with a larger group

Group work has been an important aspect of the communicative classes in the light of interaction studies. Many advantages of group activity have been reported in the literature. While students feel that they are part of a community working together in groups (McKay and Tom 1999: 26), their autonomy increases as they can make their own decisions in the group (Brown 2001: 178). Pair and group work enables students more opportunities to talk than does a teacher-fronted class, and also provides an informal and potentially non-threatening environment (McKay and Tom 1999: 26). "Small groups provide opportunities for student initiation face-to-face and practice in negotiation of meaning, extended conversational exchanges, and student adoption of roles that would otherwise be impossible." (Brown, 2001: 178). Overall,

student-student interaction is an important dimension of classroom communication that should be given emphasis in second language classrooms.

(Brown, 2001: 183) emphasize that selecting appropriate tasks is the first step to promote successful group work. He gives some example group work activities such as games, role-play and simulations, drama, projects, interview, brainstorming, information gap, jigsaw, problem solving and decision making, opinion exchange. McDonough (2004) investigated the effectiveness of pair and small group activities and students' perceptions of them. He found that when students negotiate meaning through information gap and opinion exchange activities in groups, their production of some targeted grammar patterns improve. Although students did not perceive group activities as useful their performance of using if clauses after the group activities was higher. Similarly, Storch (1999) also investigated the relationship between pair work and grammatical accuracy. He concluded that collaboration in pair work had positive effect on certain grammatical items. Sert (2005) also points out the beneficial effects of pair work in a first year ELT department in Turkey. Another study was conducted by Leeser (2004) to investigate the effect of proficiency level on the pair work. Leeser suggests that proficiency level of the students should be considered when designing pair work activities. He found that students benefit most when low-level students paired with higher level students in a mixed proficiency classes.

(Brown, 2001: 187) acknowledges group work can be unsuccessful without adequate introduction to the task itself. Therefore, instructors should follow some "rules" for successful implementation of a group technique after selecting a suitable type of activity. First of all teachers should briefly explain the technique. Then sometimes teachers may feel the necessity to tell the students about the importance of the group work for successful completion of a task, reminding them that they will get some benefits practicing some vocabulary and structures they have learnt in the groups in a secure way for some of them who feel shy to speak in front of the whole class. The third step is modeling the technique, which is the teacher examplifying what students are supposed to do in a given task. The fourth step is giving clear and detailed explanations. The instructions can include the restatement of the purpose of the activity, rules they are to follow, and a time frame. In the fifth step, students are divided into groups. However, according to Brown this process is not as easy as it seems and suggests considering individual variables such as proficiency level, background knowledge, age and gender, personal interests, personality and so on. The sixth step is checking for clarification as it is important to confirm if all students understand their tasks. The final, seventh step is to start the task with a sentence or a phrase they can understand to start. After the seven steps have been completed the teacher should go on monitoring what students are doing assuming his/her role of being a resource and facilitator. Finally, the groups report their findings to the other groups and the teacher, and there may be some discussions of the outcomes of the groups. During this whole class process, students get the chance to compare their work with the others'.

Some of the researchers found the strategy training of the students to better implement grouping techniques and the interaction in them. Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain and Steiner (1997) assume that there is a need for increasing students' modified interaction and social interaction strategies to improve the quality of interaction in EFL and ESL classes and conducted an experimental study. They found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the use of strategies. In parallel with this finding, students' communicative interaction in the groups has also improved. Snell (1999) also proposed an action research to improve the quality of interaction in the EFL classes. Students in an EFL class in Japan were trained to be more interactive in the classes as they are culturally silent and are not used to participating in the classes. The researcher observed that Japanese students enjoyed the interactive activities such as role plays in pairs. Students also instructed and reminded to be more interactive with the teacher. The researcher found it beneficial to lead them to become more interactive in an EFL class.

Learner's attitudes and perception of the interaction and interaction types in the

classroom are also very important (Brown, 2001; Kaya, 2007; Savignon &Wang, 2003). Students' perceptions may have an effect on the efficient implementation of interaction types in the EFL or ESL classes. Also students' previous experience of instruction effects their perceptions that is if they get used to teacher fronted whole class model they may find it difficult to adapt a learner centered group work activities. Investigating students' perceptions may enable instructors to have an idea about learners' positive and negative attitude towards interaction and they can plan their lessons considering their perceptions and see if they need training on interaction or not. For example, Chung and Huang (2009) found that although students appreciate pair or group activities creating dialogues and presenting conversations in small groups, they give more importance to grammar instruction. In their research, the interview data also revealed that it is because of their grammar based exams. Researchers conclude that although students' short term goal of passing entrance exam to enter a good university is fulfilled, their long term goal of communicative competence has not been much reflected in their curriculum. Savignon and Wang (2003) investigated Taiwanese students' perceptions and Rao (2002) the perceptions of Chinese students' perceptions and found positive results. In a more comprehensive research study, Kaya (2007) investigated both teachers' perceptions of communicative activities and students' perceptions at various proficiency levels. Interview and survey results indicated that both teachers and students perceived group work as more effective and enjoyable than whole class teaching. Second important finding of her research is that teachers find peer feedback and role plays more important than their students. Third, upper level students appreciate the interactive activities more than lower level students.

The interaction and interaction types and their application have attracted the attention of researchers. Through its ideal applications, researchers have found beneficial effects in most of the studies and positive perceptions towards interactive activities in EFL setting. However, if interaction and group work in the language classrooms haven't been applied well as it is in its theory, it may not give beneficial results and cause the dissatisfaction of all parties who are involved in formal or informal education settings. Therefore, the theoretical principles of interaction and group work, and its application process should be theoretically well understood. Teachers should train their students with action researches, giving positive feedback to their effective interactive behavior, and enhance their positive attitude towards interaction in the classes (Kaya, 2007). In addition, the internet has provided a new learning medium and interaction in online environment have also been considered very important by the second language acquisition researchers. The next part of this paper will dwell on the use of internet and its effects in language classes and perceptions about it.

2.2. Online Activities and Interaction

The rapid technological development of computers and the Internet have drawn the attention of English language instructors seeking ways to integrate technology into their curriculum of EFL classes. The World Wide Web has provided instructors with many pedagogic opportunities with its rich updated information and resource which provides authentic way of exposing to English. According to Kuo (2008), the provision of word processors, presentation software, multimedia, drill and practice programs and especially the Internet by the computers enables EFL learners to better engage in individualized instruction and an environment designed to meet their specific needs.

Students' and teachers' perception of the internet and computer use inside and outside the classroom are usually positive. Using the computers and the Internet in EFL/ESL classes have been widely researched and discussed in EFL/ESL literature (Berg 2003; Chatel 2002; Kuo 2008; Son 2008; Yang 2001; Kung and Chuo 2002). For example, in order to investigate how technology supports teaching and learning, Chatel (2002) conducted interviews and observations with eight classroom teachers and four ESL teachers and the qualitative data revealed if appropriate software and websites are selected, ESL students can learn and apply English efficiently. Some researchers benefit from its intrinsically motivational feature for language input and peer feedback via some

blogs, e-mail exchanges, etc. to make it a real life experience in EFL settings. Son (2008: 36-39) created some detailed and well planed web-based language learning activities for use in a teaching program. He made use of pre-created activities which are easily accessible online, task based activities using authentic web sources for problem solutions or information gathering tasks and Web activities prepared by teachers making modifications of some Web sources for their own students' needs and levels. After implementations of these activities, students were administered questionnaires to investigate their perceptions. The researcher obtained very positive reaction from the students about the overall activities. Son (2008: 41) suggested that in order to gain effective results from Web usage, teachers should become active and critical internet users and develop their own skills to benefit from Web materials. His study indicates that when carefully planned the Web provides many authentic opportunities enhancing the motivation of English learners. Similarly, Kung and Chuo designed an EFL curriculum with online activities. They were trained to use some websites in pairs on the computers at the learning centre. They were instructed to use some websites such as Dave's ESL Café, Randall's ESL Café which has sections with different levels and contents as well as one website created by one of the researchers. After the training sessions on these websites, they were given assignments to use these websites. Furthermore, students were asked to join a discussion forum in Dave's ESL Café and play some language games found at the different sites. Students were given questionnaires. Students had some explanations finding these websites effective tool for both as in class and out of class activity. They also report the teachers' guidance to use those websites proved beneficial. Some dissatisfactions can be cited as connection problems, comprehension problems due to their proficiency, students' having time constraints due to their usual assignment load.

Online peer chatting and feedback to writing process have been investigated and found that it improved negotiation of meaning and motivation of students (Liu and Sadler, 2003; DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Perez, 2003; Warschauer 1996) Researchers found that students discussed their writings or a topic exchanging ideas in online chatrooms and benefit from this negotiation and exchange of ideas. The feedback they give each other enabled them to improve their writings and enhanced their productive vocabulary usage. Warschauer (1996: 22) more specifically found that quieter students participated more than they used to emphasizing that it avoided domination of some students during group negotiations and enabled more equal participation. He identified some features of electronic discussion as involving longer turns and the more equal opportunity for all students to exchange ideas, allowing electronically-produced texts to be saved for review later, more formal and complex use of language. In addition, for oral discussions, he suggests that students could first generate many ideas and discuss or debate them orally. He concludes that face-to-face and electronic discussions could be combined in different ways to highlight the advantages of each.

The internet has provided networking among people from different countries. This feature of the internet has also been benefited by the researchers. Students were found to be more motivated to write in the target language for the audience of native speakers (Ware, 2003; Kern, 1996). Gelabert, Gisbert, Thurston and Topping (2008) launched a project for online communication environment between Spanish speaking learners of English language and English speaking learners of Spanish language. The researchers found that students could give feedback to each other's writing and benefited from it.

Online environment enable students to be exposed to authentic use of language and enable them to practice English outside the classroom. In addition, in recent years, online peer feedback has gained more attention and some empirical studies have been conducted to see its benefits, and some positive results have been obtained.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Setting and Participants:

This study was conducted in a state university in Turkey in order to investigate the students' perceptions towards interactive and technologically enhanced English listening and speaking classes. In that university, communicative approaches have been practiced and skill based curricula as one course "core English" with integrated skills approach, and four skills, listening and speaking as one course, writing and reading as separate courses have been provided in the preparatory class of School of Foreign Languages.

The interactive activities such as role plays, group discussions, watching and commenting about the films, using internet sources for multiple aims such as listening practice with some websites, showing some pictures with the projector, and individual presentations using power points, mostly take place in listening and speaking courses. Therefore, listening and speaking course was seen as an appropriate course to investigate students' perceptions towards interaction and the use of technology in the classroom. In this course, an interactive book Northstar listening and speaking book was selected as the course book. The book itself provides listening practices with a CD, and activities such as role plays and discussions to encourage communication among the students.

As for the participants, 52 female and 91 male, totally 143 students who attended preparatory class in the 2008-2009 academic year completed the questionnaire to collect some data about their perceptions. The Questionnaires were distributed at the end of the term in preparatory classes. Some of those students started the preparatory class as true beginners or elementary, some others were higher levels but they needed further training of English to have upper intermediate and advanced proficiency level in view of the placement test they took. In the questionnaires, there were 66 students who began as elementary and completed the year at intermediate level, and 77 students who began as intermediate level and completed the year at upper intermediate level. As there were only 3 groups of upper intermediate level, they were all administered the questionnaires. As for the lower levels, they were selected randomly from the preparatory classes among students who volunteered to complete the questionnaires.

3.2. Instruments:

The data about students' perceptions were obtained with a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, there were four types of questions: questions for demographic information, mostly Likert-scale items for questioning the interaction and role plays, one multiple response question to choose which type of interaction type is the most efficient, and one open ended question to give students opportunity to add their further comments about the overall perceptions and suggestions about the listening & speaking syllabus. The first part of the questionnaire for the students included demographic questions about their gender, age, the high school they graduated from, and the level of class they currently are attending at PAU. The questions were about students' perceptions about group work, feedback, role plays, the use of the internet, and watching movies in the class. The questions about role plays and group work were adapted from Kaya (2007), and the others were created based on the researcher's own observations and experiences. The questionnaires were first created in English then translated into Turkish. They were piloted on 5 students from intermediate, 8 students from upper intermediate level students. After piloting some minor changes were made on the wordings of some questions. Then, they were translated into English.

4. DATA ANALYSIS:

The quantitative data were analyzed with statistical analysis using Standard Package of Social Sciences (SPSS, version 17). The mean values and T-test results were considered to see the difference between the perceptions of lower level students and higher level students, and the male and female students'.

The first issue investigated was students' perceptions towards role play activities. In terms of the role plays, the overall means seem to be low, however, being higher level and female students slightly higher than the lower level and male ones.

Table 1.Students' perceptions towards role plays.

	Means				SD			
Item	**G-1**	**G-2**	**Male**	**Femae**	**G-1**	**G-2**	**Male**	**Female**
1. I participate in role plays enthusiastically	2.38	2.84	2.62	2.65	1.27	1.10	1.20	1.22
2. Role plays arouse my creativity.	2.52	2.94	2.64	2.92	1.17	1.14	1.15	1.19
8. It has been useful to practice what I have learnt through role plays.	2.52	2.97	2.74	2.81	1.21	1.20	1.17	1.32
9. Creating our own situations in role plays is fun.	2.89	3.38	3.04	3.35	1.30	1.19	1.21	1.34
10. I prefer real life situations in role plays	3.05	3.30	3.19	3.17	1.30	0.95	1.11	1.15
12. Role play is an effective way of learning.	3.12	3.30	3.18	3.21	1.18	1.17	1.17	1.18

Note: G-1(Group 1):Students at beginner level into intermediate level G-2 (Group 2):Intermediate to upper intermediate SD: Standard Deviation

Especially for the first item about their enthusiasm to participate in role plays, lower level students report their negative feelings with a mean score of 2.38, while upper levels report their slightly more positive feelings toward it. Also both female and male participants have a negative feeling toward role plays with a mean score of 2.65 and 2.62. Next, for the second item, female and proficient students remain neutral to this question while male and lower level students report negative feelings about it (M=2.52, 2.64). This is also true for the 8th question, the mean scores for the lower proficient ones are lower than the female and more proficient ones. When it comes to creating about their own situations, they have more positive feelings about role plays, again upper level and female students having positive feelings (Item 10,M=3.38, 3.35 respectively), while lower level and male students still remain neutral about it (M= 2.89,3.04). Final question about its effectiveness, students slightly positively report their perceptions; the lower level and male students seem neutral while upper level and female students have positive feelings (Q 12, M=3.30, 3.21 respectively). As for the significant difference between the perceptions, there is no significant difference between genders (p>.05) for all the questions. However, for the first and second questions significant differences were found between the lower and higher level students. For the first question t=.021, p>.05, that is lower level students perceive role plays much more negatively than upper levels. For the second question, the t value, .031, which is p>.05, means lower level students find more negatively than upper levels. The overall findings seem to be contradicting to the belief that role plays are fun for students to learn English.

Table 2. Students' perceptions toward group work and feedback

	Means				SD			
Item	**G-1**	**G-2**	**Male**	**Femae**	**G-1**	**G-2**	**Male**	**Female**
12. My friends and I have learnt a lot of things from each other during the group work.	3.11	3.30	3.18	3.27	1.16	0.93	1.07	1.01
14. It is useful to work with higher proficiency peers in group work.	3.35	3.75	3.52	3.65	1.31	1.11	1.21	1.25
17. The feedback I received from my peers has enabled me to improve my English.	2.71	3.22	2.87	3.19	1.13	1.15	1.17	1.15
18. The feedback I received from my instructors has enabled me to improve my English.	2.83	3.81	3.04	3.90	1.26	0.88	1.15	1.01

Note: G-1(Group 1):Students at beginner level into intermediate level G-2(Group 2):Intermediate to upper intermediate SD: Standard Deviation

In Table 2, students seem to be neutral for the effectiveness of group work assuming that they haven't learnt a lot of things from each other during the group work. However, when asked a neutral question of a general perception as in the 14th question about the grouping with higher proficiency students. All students agree that it is useful to work with higher proficiency peers in group work, with higher means and without any statistically significant difference between the groups. As for the question 17, which is about the perceptions towards peer feedback, the mean scores indicate that all students are a bit unsure about the feedback they received from their peers. There is also a significant difference for the 17th questions between the proficiency group (.009, $p<.05$), while there is no significant difference between the gender group. Although both groups remain neutral to this question, higher proficiency ones seem to favor a little more than the lower level students. For the 18th question, high proficient and female students agree that teacher feedback has been beneficial for the students (M=3.81, 3.90) with quite low standard deviation (SD=0.88, 1.01). Students seem to value more teacher feedback than peer feedback, and the t-test results reveal some significant differences for the gender groups and proficiency groups. The t results for gender group difference and for proficiency group difference are both .000 which is $p<.05$, that is higher proficiency group and male groups perceive teacher feedback much more positively than lower and male groups.

Table 3. Students' perceptions toward the use of the internet and making presentations

	Means				SD			
Item	**G-1**	**G-2**	**Male**	**Female**	**G-1**	**G-2**	**Male**	**Female**
4. It is motivating that English language instructors use the internet as classroom material.	2.48	3.79	3.02	3.48	1.30	1.17	1.40	1.34
6. It is important to use the internet to make efficient presentations.	3.67	4.05	3.78	4.04	1.11	1.17	1.18	1.10
7. Preparing presentations is an enjoyable activity for me.	2.97	2.95	2.88	3.10	1.21	1.12	1.21	1.07
18. Using the internet to do my assignments has improved my English a lot	2.68	3.38	2.87	3.38	1.23	1.14	1.29	1.03
19. Our English Language Instructors at Foreign Languages Department use the internet in English language classes effectively.	2.89	3.74	3.13	3.73	1.27	0.98	1.27	0.97
15. I believe that watching movies in the class improved my English listening skills	3.17	4.08	3.44	4.04	1.27	1.10	1.33	1.04

Note: G-1 (Group 1):Students at beginner level into intermediate level G-2 (Group 2):Intermediate into upper intermediate SD: Standard Deviation

Perceptions towards the use of the internet were another point which was investigated in the questionnaire (Table 3). For the 4th question, which asks the general perceptions towards the usage of the internet as classroom material, while the intermediate students persist in reporting their negative feeling for this question (M=2.48), male students have a neutral position (M=3.02). As in the previous questions, only the female and higher level students have a positive attitude towards the use of the internet (M=3.48, M=3.79 respectively). While there is not a significant difference for this question between gender group, there is a significant difference between proficiency group 0.000, p<0.5. During the informal interviews before the preparations of the questionnaires, some of the students reported using the internet sources for their presentations and some other assignments. Moreover, for presentations, they, ideally, need to do research and provide some references using the internet sources. Therefore, the sixth question aim to investigate whether students find it important to use the internet for presentations, all the student groups responded to this item a lot more positively than the other questions. Also there was a significant difference between proficiency groups .000 p<0.5. This may indicate upper levels use internet while others may not rely on their proficiency to read from authentic sources. For the 7th question which investigates their subjective perception toward preparing presentations, they all seem to be unsure about it. For the 18th question asking again their personal experience with using the internet, students are all unsure about it, too. There is a significant difference both between gender (.015, p<.05) and proficiency groups (0.001, p<.05). Female and higher proficiency group seem to be more positive. In terms of their negative report, they do not seem to use the internet for their assignments, or even if they use, they do not think they have benefited from it. Overall, for these questions, their objective perceptions seem to be more positive than their personal experiences. As for the 19th question, while more proficient and female students seem to agree that English Languages Instructors at Foreign Languages Department use the internet in English language classes effectively (M=3.74, 3.73 respectively), male and less proficient students seem to be unsure about it (M=3.13, 2.89 respectively). The standard deviation for females and higher proficiency students seem to

be low (0.98, 0.97, respectively) which indicates the agreement for this question. For the final question, although the classes in that university are equipped with technological equipment, as in most of the questions lower level students maintain their positions being unsure about it (M=3.12). They have usually negative or unsure perceptions towards the questions about interactive activities and the use of internet or technological equipment. The most important reason for the internet is lack of internet in some low level classes. Informal interviews after the questionnaires analysis revealed that in some of the lower level classes, there is no internet access unlike the upper level classes, so this situation may have a negative effect on their perceptions towards the use of the internet in the classes. So, for these questions only upper level students' perceptions are applicable. They usually have positive attitude as probably they are exposed to the internet materials in their classes and make use of it outside of the classes for their assignments. As for the last question in this section with regards to the students' perceptions about watching movies, again the lower level students remain unsure about this question (M=3.17), while the other student groups are all have a positive perception about it especially the higher level and female ones with higher mean score of 4.08, 4.04. A significant difference was found between proficiency groups (.000, $p<0.5$). Also there was a significant difference for this questions between gender groups (.000, $p<.05$).

For the final question which was a multiple choice type question, they were supposed to choose (Q-20) in which type of the classroom study they find the most opportunity to speak English: teacher fronted, pair work or group work. For this question the mean score for intermediate level students is 1.66 and the upper intermediate is 1.89, and there is not a significant difference between them. In addition, for gender mean scores it is 1.90 for female participants and 1.72 for males with again no significant difference. This indicated that they favor pair work more than the other interaction types in their classes with a consensus on their preference of interaction types.

5. DISCUSSION

In this study considering the communicative and technology involved activities used in the context of the study, the objective and subjective attitudes of students towards them have been investigated via the questionnaire collected from 143 preparatory students at a state university in Turkey. As most common activities are oral presentations, role plays, group and pair activities, watching movies and serials, students' perceptions of them have been investigated via the questionnaire in the present study. When considered the overall responses, there is a clear statistical difference between the perceptions of male and female students and lower level and higher level students. In this study, gender difference in the students' perceptions confirms the previous assumption that female students usually participate more eagerly in the interactive activities and more motivated to learn English in general. This may be a culture specific point which needs more attention in some similar research in other contexts in Turkey.

In terms of the present context of the study, role plays are employed for the interaction in the classroom and use of language communicatively. The text book used also guide instructors to use role plays in related tasks for each theme based units. In the literature, role plays are regarded as useful tool for different communicative techniques and development of fluency, promotion of interaction in the classroom. Overall, it is regarded as a motivational activity in the EFL/ESL classrooms. For the role play questions, the analysis revealed that students did not find role plays funny enough, and reported that they did not participate in them enthusiastically. They have also negative feelings about its arousing their creativity. In order for the interaction to take place in the classroom and for students' to practice what they have learnt, role plays are regarded as useful tools. However, students do not feel positively for this question, either. They also don't find it an effective way of learning. Perhaps students find it useful and enjoyable as they practice it in the classroom but when asked about their perceptions they are negative and unsure. Around 9% of the students also stated in the open ended question section of the questionnaires that they have little experience with role plays. There is a need for classroom observation to gain a better insight into how instructors employ role plays, whether

they all participate and perform role plays to see its effectiveness well. Maybe, lower level students need more time and preparation for the role plays. When considered that even the higher level students do not respond to it positively, there is a clear need for classroom observations and then necessary action can be taken to change their attitudes and their more enthusiastic participation may be achieved. In this study, the teachers' perceptions haven't been investigated. They may not have put emphasis on role plays and may not be aware of its benefits themselves. Especially, students should be made aware that language forms can only take meaning in context which takes place in a cultural environment. Role plays teach students contextualized language, culture routines, which enable students to behave more naturally and be fluent even if they are not highly proficient students (Salies, 1995). This finding also reveals a conflicting result with the literature and survey studies conducted Rao and Kaya. In those studies students' attitudes were positive to role plays. In Kaya's study, teachers favored role plays more than students; however, overall student perceptions weren't so negative. These may be due to the type of students, teachers and the directors of the curriculum. Kaya conducted her study at Anadolu University which has a well established Foreign Languages Department.

In order to perform role plays and other communicative tasks in the classroom, group work which provides peer learning is encouraged. Students, in general, do not think that they benefit from the group work usage again having a negative and unsure attitude. Especially, lower level students do not value teacher feedback, may be indicating a deliberate dissatisfaction. They also do not value the peer feedback. Interaction theories indicate that negotiation and feedback enable students improve their English but students' attitudes again seem to be conflicting with the literature. In literature, the peer feedback in writing classes especially point out that students do not trust the feedback they receive from their peers and value teacher feedback more (Leki 1992; Zhang 1995). So this may be true for listening and speaking activities for these type and group of students in EFL context in Turkey. Teachers can apply different grouping techniques, grouping students choosing mixed ability students. Students reacted quite positively to the question about the effectiveness of working with higher proficiency students in a group. This attitude indicates a quite positive perspective of students understanding of group work. However, when they are asked if they have learnt from each other during a group work they do not respond so positively. Their subjective experiences may not be so positive, hence, there is a need to follow Brown's (2001:187) guidelines' for group work elaborated in the literature review, planning it more efficiently. Teachers as well as students can be trained for the smooth application of the group work in these classes.

As for the perceptions about the use of the internet in the classes or outside the class for students' assignments, lower level students persist in their indecisive attitude for these questions too. Students seem not to use the internet for their assignments but they seem to have more objective attitudes when asked if using the internet for preparing efficient presentations is important. They should be encouraged to use the internet sources while preparing their presentations. The internet provides updated and authentic source for them. In this way, they make extensive reading taking place outside the classroom being engaged in English. It helps them become more proficient users of language and use the language for authentic purposes can make them more motivated. Especially, the less proficient ones may be hesitant to use the internet sources considering that their proficiency level is not enough for it and feel anxiety doing research. However, they need to be encouraged into making use of authentic sources to improve their English, and some vocabulary strategies; guessing the meaning from context, skipping the unnecessary words, using dictionary for unknown core vocabulary can be practiced even at lower levels in English listening and speaking classes. There is a need to find and choose relevant subjects parallel to the topics in the text book from various websites or have class discussions leading them to search on the internet first. In addition, logistical problems may affect their reactions in the use of the internet by themselves. At the university, there may not be a convenient internet access, and

they may not have a facility to search online. In this study, such logistical issues haven't been investigated, only their pure perceptions about usage of the internet have been interrogated. Another issue relevant to the internet is using it in the listening and speaking classes, although students were asked whether using the internet as classroom material is efficient they reacted negatively. They might have considered their own classes when responding to these questions. Furthermore, they may not figure out how to use it as they do not experience it in their classes. For the question directly asking about their opinion about the performance of teachers' using the internet in the classes, only female and more proficient students responded positively. The statistical findings also confirms the research question about the gender difference and indicates the difference in the student perceptions in terms of their proficiency levels. Teachers' perceptions toward Internet assisted language instruction and their performing the internet assisted application inside and outside the classes can provide a good role model behavior for the students. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions toward it affect the adoption of this teaching approach and their future behaviors in their teaching processes (Kuo, 2008). In addition, Crystal (1997 cited in Shin and Son:13) noted 85 % of the electronically stored information in the world is in English, so students for their occupational or academic purposes may have to use the internet web sites in English. Overall, students need to be prepared for the search on the internet usage in English preparatory classes for their future academic life.

The final commonly used listening activity was watching movies in the classroom. As movies provide authentic use of language, they are authentic way of improving their listening skills. For this question, both high intermediate level students and female students respond very positively. For this issue, again intermediate level students respond as being unsure, which indicates that although watching movies are fun for students, they are not sure whether it improved their listening skills. Students may not rely on their proficiency levels for this question. They may think they will understand every sentence word for word. Hence, they may not appreciate that watching movies has improved their listening skill. Selection of movies may make a change in their attitudes. Some movies without much slang usage and clear distinct voice can be selected. In some classes students watch "Lost" while in others they do not. In the serial "Lost", the characters are from different nations, which enables students to take the opportunity getting used to different accents. I personally feel that watching serials makes comprehension easier, as audience get used to characters' tone of voice, speech style, body language, mimicry and accents. Therefore, students can be encouraged to watch TV serials such as Lost either in the class time or outside the classes. It can lead to classroom discussions about the plots, characters and what will happen next. They need to be told that they do not necessarily have to understand everything. They need to watch it to gain a better insight into the culture of the language they learn, gain fluency, learn and practice daily expressions.

Suggestions for further studies

This study only aimed at investigating the students' perceptions about the overall materials in listening and speaking course in an EFL context. Teachers' or administrators' perceptions haven't been investigated in a formal way, and the researcher only drew on her own experiences and some further informal interviews with some students to interpret the findings. To gain better insight into the activities, classroom observations and teachers' perceptions should also be investigated.

The students' proficiency exam results could have been included as they might have given some insight why intermediate level students respond negatively to some questions. Furthermore, their perceptions may be negative but the proficiency exam results or their overall grades for this course may be higher, indicating that they have benefited from this listening and speaking course activities.

No formal transcribed interviews have been conducted. Some interviews took place informally that is without any tape recording but the researchers' taking notes of some opinions of the students to interpret the questionnaire data.

In this study the questionnaire data revealed some perceptional differences based on

students' gender and proficiency. In order to gain better insight into the students' perceptions, the interaction in the classroom should be video-taped. Some experimental studies can be conducted separating male students and female students or in a mixed class. Their participation into the interactions and use of strategies can be analyzed by considering the transcribed data. The same process can be conducted by comparing their proficiency levels and their perceptions. Further studies which follow such procedure on Turkish students can better reflect their perceptions and their performances. If necessary, training sessions for the efficient implementation of the interaction in the classroom should follow. In fact, currently the directors of the school of foreign languages provide training sessions on the speaking skills and strategies such as turn taking, repairing, feedback and so on. After the training sessions teachers' implementations of skills and strategies in the classroom can be observed and analyzed for effective interaction in the classroom and further conclusions and suggestions can be given.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, background information about interaction, methodology of the study, data analysis and discussions of the findings with pedagogical implications have been discussed. This study aimed at investigating Turkish EFL students' perceptions towards interactive curriculum enhanced by technology in a Turkish state university context. The participants were first year students who attended preparatory class to improve their English for their academic purposes. In the following years, they are supposed to take some major classes in English so they need to complete this preparatory class, at least, at intermediate level of English.

Analyzing the qualitative data statistically, it was found that from high intermediate to advanced level, female students have been found to be more positive and enthusiastic about interactive activities, the use of the Internet and presentations, and movies. So, when considered the research questions, it can be said that there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the different proficiency and gender groups. Higher intermediate students find them more important than the intermediate students. Intermediate level students usually remain neutral to most of the questions about interaction. Intermediate level students' uncertain attitudes may be caused by their lack of confidence in using the language proficiently enough, or they simply don't value these activities. This finding is in line with Kaya's finding about the perceptions in different proficiency groups. As she also suggested in her study, there is a need for the improvement of the lower level proficiency groups' attitudes. When considered the gender difference, the findings confirmed the previous assumption that female students are usually more motivated and participative in the interaction in the classroom unlike the male students. In Turkish culture, there may be a fallacy that females are much better at language and social skills while males are more qualified in scientific subjects. Furthermore, female students are usually guided to be teachers of English language or other subjects while males are more led to engineering and scientific subjects for the college education. This might be one of the reasons of why female students respond more positively than male students. There is a need for more detailed research in terms of the gender differences and perceptions in Turkey to gain a better insight into it.

Students can be guided chat online with other students in other countries. As the research into online studies indicates, students benefit from networking with increased motivation and enthusiasm. Students have a better chance of practicing their English in an authentic way. As Sullivan (1993: 34) suggested "Call provides a forum for social interaction, collaboration, negotiation of meaning and dissension." Interaction can take place synchronous (users online chatting at the same time) or asynchronous (delayed form of communication such as e-mail exchange) forms (Warschauer & Healey, 1998: 63). A project can be launched between Turkish universities and other universities for online communication and feedback process.

The administration provides some in-service training as workshops from time to time. There is a need for more systematic training for competency in the use of internet-based materials and their integration into the existing curricular. In the following years, both the

students and instructors can be better trained for the more effective application of interaction in the classroom, use and provision of the technological materials and the Internet inside and outside the classes, and activities with movies. In this way, more positive opinions can be achieved. As Yang (2001:175) indicates the relationship between web usage and the ZPD, teachers can provide learners relevant and useful sites which are written for developing ESL student, which can provide assistance in their ZPD's. The internet should be benefited by the teacher which will constitute a good role modeling behavior for the students. Students can more actively use the internet benefitting from the English websites to do their assignments or studying English. Multimedia usage and the internet and collaborative tasks in language learning is the authentic way of language learning enabling them to become more sophisticated in both using computers and gaining experience with group approaches to projects (Warchauer & Healey: 61). In addition, the perceptions regarding the films have been quite positive among all the groups of participants. In terms of the local context, the current administrators of school of Foreign language give importance to involve instructors in developing materials and create awareness in the importance of watching movies and to use them as an authentic material in the classroom. Currently, the material developers at the institution have created some tasks and activities to carry out before, during and post-watching. They should be piloted to see their contribution to the interaction in the classroom and be revised afterwards for more effective exploitation of them. In this way, motivational aspects of films can be better reflected into an interactive curriculum. The materials can be better controlled for more efficient practice in the classroom. As Kaya (2007) suggests the tasks should be designed in such a way that they would interact with each other or among groups as specified as interaction types in the literature. The tasks can encourage role plays of the scenes they have watched or they can have own role plays creating their own dialogues.

Furthermore teachers should be made more aware of the interaction patterns and teachers' control of them. As the studies conducted by Soler (2002), David (2007) and Johnson (1995) indicate teacher-student and student-student interaction have proved to be very efficient and students can acquire interaction strategies while they are actively involved in classroom interaction. In general the research reported in the literature has provided effective strategies which teachers can benefit for efficient interaction in various contexts. In addition, according to Kaya (2007:98), training can be beneficial to increase the awareness of both students and instructors. She suggested that this training can involve role play assignments, working in groups collaboratively, using the target language and planning the group work effectively. Therefore, in the context of the study, the interactions need to be more emphasized with the effective implementation of interaction types and patterns with training.

This study revealed some preliminary findings of the perceptions of Turkish students based on their proficiency and gender. There is a need for more comprehensive research including the perceptions of all parties in a curriculum. In addition, a needs analysis of the EFL students, instructors and program directors should be conducted. In this way, some dissatisfaction can be better removed and their wants and desires can be more effectively fulfilled in the current context of the study. Some similar surveys in the future should be administered to see if there is a perceptional change in the present context of the study after training sessions.

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