

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the English language education in public primary schools and to investigate the effects of reading based language instruction on the vocabulary knowledge and reading/writing skills of primary school students.

The participants were 5202 Grade 4-8 students and 101 teachers who were randomly selected from 52 public primary schools in different cities of Turkey. For the purposes of the study, the attitudes of the students towards learning English, and the attitudes of teachers towards English language teaching were investigated with attitude questionnaires. Moreover, to see the extent to which aims of English instruction as prescribed by the Ministry of Education are met, the reading/writing parts of the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests were used.

Finally, to see if any differences occurred between the students who continued with the regular English instruction prepared by the Ministry of Education and those who had reading-based instruction incorporated in the 4-hour-regular English classes for 8 weeks in terms of their vocabulary knowledge and reading/writing performances in English, students were given a vocabulary test and Cambridge Starters Test as pre- and post-tests.

Results of the study revealed that the majority of the students found learning English very beneficial. The students said that they mostly did grammar exercises in their English lessons, but actually wanted to carry out different types of activities such as singing and doing puzzles. The participating teachers stated that the aims prescribed by the Ministry of Education regarding English language education were not realistic. They believed that the present language teaching curriculum gave too much emphasis on linguistic aspects rather than communicative ones and thus, should be modified according to the needs and interests of the young learners.

The results of the English tests revealed that students have not achieved the prescribed aims such as understanding and using English words or applying grammar rules effectively and were particularly found unsuccessful in the tasks demanding production.

Finally, a significant difference was found between control and experimental groups in terms of their vocabulary knowledge and reading/writing skills.