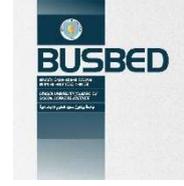


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A QUALITATIVE STUDY INTO TURKISH EFL TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE TASK EFFECTIVENESS IN A TERTIARY EDUCATION CONTEXT

Işıl Günseli Kaçar¹, Hüsnu Enginarlar²

ABSTRACT

Communicative tasks have been integrated into mainstream English language teaching (ELT) curricula and ELT textbooks not only at K-12 but also at the tertiary level on a global scale for over two decades. Despite the widespread implementation of the communicative tasks in different educational institutions with diverse learner profiles, the observation of classroom practices and anecdotal evidence from teachers and students denoted that there were varied perceptions concerning the effectiveness of communicative tasks between both parties, which indicates a need for the exploration of these perceptions. This qualitative study set out to investigate the perceptions of the EFL teachers and students at an English preparatory school of a large state university in Turkey regarding the effectiveness of communicative tasks in relation to the effectiveness of the communicative tasks. The data were collected through the open-ended items on the student questionnaire, the standardized open-ended teacher interviews and the teacher journals. Eight tasks with a relatively high communicative potential from the coursebook called *Language in use intermediate – classroom book* by Doff and Jones (1994) were used in the study. The data in the study were analyzed via inductive content analysis. The findings revealed that both the EFL teachers and students at the preparatory school of the university held favourable perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the communicative tasks. They also indicated a general alignment between both parties' perceptions of communicative tasks in the study. The study incorporates some implications for in-service teachers in the EFL contexts as well as some suggestions for further research.

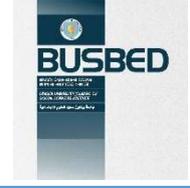
Keywords: Communicative tasks, Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions, Turkish EFL students' perceptions, Tertiary education context

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İNGİLİZCENİN YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRETİMİ ALANINDA YÜKSEKÖĞRETİM BAĞLAMINDA TÜRK ÖĞRETMENLERİN VE ÖĞRENCİLERİN İLETİŞİMSSEL GÖREVLERİN YARARLILIĞINA İLİŞKİN ALGILARI

Işıl Günseli Kaçar¹, Hüsnü Enginarlar²

ÖZ

İletişimsel görevler 20 yılı aşkın bir süredir dünya çapında ilk ve ortaöğretimin yanı sıra yükseköğretim alanındaki İngilizcenin öğretimi ile ilgili hazırlanan müfredatlara yaygın bir şekilde entegre edilmektedir. İletişimsel görevlerin farklı eğitim kurumlarında farklı öğrenci profilleri ile, yaygın bir şekilde uygulanmasına karşın, sınıf uygulamalarının gözlemlenmesi ve öğretmen ve öğrencilerin kişisel deneyimlerine dayalı kanıtlar iletişimsel görevlerin etkinliğine ilişkin her iki grup açısından farklı algıların olduğunu ortaya koymakta ve söz konusu algıların incelenmesi ihtiyacına işaret etmektedir. Bu nitel çalışmanın amacı Türkiye’de İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiği büyük bir devlet üniversitesinde İngilizce hazırlık okulunda çalışan öğretmen ve öğrencilerin iletişimsel görev algılarını incelemektir. Çalışmadaki veriler öğrenci anketindeki açık uçlu sorular, öğretmenlerle gerçekleştirilen standartlaştırılmış açık uçlu görüşmeler ve öğretmen günlükleri yoluyla toplanmıştır. Çalışmada Doff ve Jones (1994) tarafından yazılan *Language in use intermediate-classroom book* isimli ders kitabındaki göreceli olarak yüksek iletişimsel potansiyele sahip sekiz adet görev kullanılmıştır. Veriler içerik çözümlemesi yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular üniversitenin hazırlık okulundaki hem İngilizce öğretmenlerinin hem de öğrencilerin çalışmadaki iletişimsel görevlerin yararlılığı ile ilgili olumlu algılara sahip olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca bulgular her iki tarafın algılarının genel olarak benzer doğrultuda olduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışmada İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiği ortamlarda çalışan İngilizce öğretmenleri ve müfredat geliştiriciler için tavsiyelere ve yeni araştırma önerilerine de yer verilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İletişimsel görevler, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğreten öğretmen görüşleri, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenci görüşleri, Yükseköğretim bağlamı

Makale 1. yazarın doktora tezinden üretilmiştir. 2. Yazar 1. yazarın doktora tez danışmanıdır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely embraced by English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers/instructors as well as learners on a global scale at K-12 level and in higher education contexts. It has become an integral part of second/foreign language teaching programs in the 21st century. Defined as “a learner-centered and experience-based view of second [and foreign] language teaching”, CLT focuses on language learners and users (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p.69). It shifts our focus towards communicative functions and meaningful tasks, instead of language, striving to establish the relevance of tasks to a target learner group (Li, 1998). It also promotes learner engagement via the integration of authentic materials/tasks and collaborative work into ESL/EFL classes and the establishment of a classroom atmosphere with a low affective filter and a safe zone for learners’ self-expression (Li, 1998). CLT requires the teacher and the learner to assume new roles (Thompson, 1992). The former is considered to act as the “facilitator” and the “guide” on the side while the latter is regarded as an active agent in his/her own learning process (Karavas-Doukas, 1996, p.189). Not only the cognitive but also the affective involvement of learners in the learning process is prioritized (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Learner engagement in meaningful communication inside and outside the classroom in an authentic manner is essential in CLT (Thompson, 1992). In fact, in CLT, the learner input is regarded as imperative from the course design stage to the implementation (Thompson, 1992). In line with the shift in the learner roles, learners are expected to be actively involved in their own learning processes, using their linguistic and other resources, social skills and personal experiences. Nevertheless, not all learners possess the readiness level to take such an active role in the process, as Nunan (1989) pointed out:

... this (this role) can cause problems if you are teaching learners who have set ideas about language and learning, particularly if these differ greatly from your own (p. 86).

It is also the case that although learners are expected to play an active role in the learning process, they are actively involved in classroom decision-making processes in varying degrees due to some teachers’ tendency to be the sole instructional authority figure in classroom settings. Learners and teachers tend to have their own perceptions and expectations regarding the learning process, which are also called hidden agendas (Nunan, 1989). Learners are inclined to evaluate the tasks from their own frames of reference and do not tend to modify these frames (Allwright, 1997; Pintrich et al., 1988; Schumann & Schumann, 1997; Schunk, 1992; Wittrock, 1986; Yorio, 1986). They form their own perceptions of the tasks they are engaged in. While they consider certain tasks important and relevant, they regard others as trivial and irrelevant. Learners contribute to the classroom events in different degrees and they are affected by them as well. In fact, both the specifications of the formal curriculum and learners’ attitudes and expectations from the learning process are likely to affect the effectiveness of any language program. A specific learning outcome occurs as an aftermath of an unprecedented interaction between the learner, the task and the task situation (Breen, 1987; Kumaravadivelu, 1991). In other words, learners’ perceptions of their potential task contributions, their perceptions of the task demands, and their own definitions of the task situation are likely to determine the learning outcome(s) to a great extent (Breen, 1987). Learners tend to have their own unique definitions of a learning task. In Breen’s (1987) terms, the task as workplan is likely to change in accordance with learners’ interpretations. As learners tend to accomplish different outcomes from a particular task, it is very likely that not all these outcomes will be aligned with the original workplan. In fact, learners might interpret teachers’ intentions and expectations differently when they are actively engaged in making sense out of social and cognitive dimensions of classroom events (Clark & Cresswell, 1979; Cooper & Good, 1982; Johnson, 1995). These aforementioned misinterpretations might even lead to interferences in the learning process (Anderson, 1981; Horwitz, 1988; Winnie & Marx, 1980). Previous studies demonstrated that student learning is promoted when there is a match between teachers’ and learners’ expectations and intentions (Weinstein, 1983). Learners’ perceptions of classroom events were indicated to affect the impact of teaching, learners’ self-perceptions and their role perceptions in classroom events, functioning as a filtering mechanism between the teaching process and the learner uptake (Wittrock, 1986). The secret ingredient to success in teaching lies in the degree of convergence between teachers’ intentions and learners’ interpretations (Johnson, 1995). In his seminal work in 1991, Kumaravadivelu also stated that when the gap between teacher intentions and learner interpretations gets narrower, the possibility of attaining learning outcomes increases. Hence, it is crucial to comprehend the factors leading to the lack of alignment between both parties’ perceptions of communicative tasks in ESL and EFL educational settings. Although this topic was explored in the ESL context to some extent in literature, it is relatively underexplored in the EFL context.

When it is taken into consideration that communicative tasks are regarded as an integral element of EFL coursebooks and classrooms worldwide in a wide range of educational institutions, including those in the EFL higher education contexts, there is a pressing need to investigate the teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of the effectiveness of communicative tasks in the tertiary EFL contexts and the factors underlying both parties’ perceptions at EFL preparatory school settings in the Turkish higher education contexts. Hence, the study set out to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in the textbook *Language in Use- Intermediate* by Doff and Jones (1994) at the preparatory school of a state university in Turkey?
2. What are the EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in the textbook *Language in Use- Intermediate* by Doff and Jones (1994) at the preparatory school of a state university in Turkey?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Studies regarding Teachers' and Learners' Views of Classroom Tasks

Numerous studies investigated the ESL students' perceptions of classroom teaching and learning activities in literature. The findings depicted certain variations in relation to activity/task preferences in accordance with student profiles and teaching contexts. To illustrate, the findings of a study by Alcorso and Kalantzis (1985) in the ESL context indicated that non-communicative tasks were favoured by students more than communicative ones in spite of a general tendency towards collaborative activities that promote a great deal of interaction among students. The results of a study by Conrad (1999) are consistent with those of Alcorso and Kalantzis (1985), demonstrating that college students' viewed non-communicative activities such as error correction and grammar instruction as useful for their learning processes while they also found communicative tasks conducive to their ESL development. Although Green's (1993) study in the tertiary ESL context revealed a relatively high level of task enjoyment regarding communicative tasks among university students, as compared to non-communicative ones, the findings varied in terms of students' task perceptions on the whole. In addition, in a survey study in the Chinese tertiary context on the investigation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative tasks, Rao (2002) showed that students had diverse preferences towards tasks. Despite some students' strong preference towards non-communicative tasks in English, the majority tended to have a preference towards a combination of communicative and non-communicative tasks. Similar to ESL students' perceptions of the classroom activities / tasks, students in the EFL context reported diverse preferences. Even though the studies in the EFL higher education contexts exploring students' perceptions of classroom activities/tasks are relatively scarce, a study carried out in the Turkish EFL higher education context by Topuz (1994), exploring the undergraduate and graduate students' perceptions of communicative classrooms, indicated a general preference towards communicative tasks for both groups despite certain differences regarding task choices.

Apart from studies addressing ESL/EFL students' preferences of classroom activities/tasks, the extant literature also contains comparative studies focusing on both students' and teachers' perceptions of classroom activities/tasks. For instance, Nunan (1986), in his investigation of the degree of correspondence between learners' and teachers' activity preferences, indicated a high degree of divergence between both parties' activity choices. The findings demonstrated that learners tended to have a preference towards pronunciation practice and error correction while teachers were inclined to have a liking for activities such as language games and collaborative activities. Another study by Block (1994), investigating teachers' and learners' perceptions of the task purpose, displayed that students adopted an achievement orientation towards the news viewing task and a survival orientation towards the job advertisement task: however, teachers adopted a survival orientation towards both tasks. The study revealed the importance of aligning the task orientation with the learner profile. In a similar vein, Barkhuizen's (1998) study on ESL students' and teachers' perceptions of language teaching and learning activities indicated that the former's perceptions did not match those of the latter. Findings revealed the students' resistance to communicative activities and their preference of traditional classroom work as opposed to the teachers' attempts to organize their classroom activities in a CLT-oriented manner. Teachers believed that communicative activities enable students to benefit from practice opportunities in ESL, enhance more active student involvement in language classes and elevate student enjoyment in class. Although they enjoyed the practice opportunities provided by communicative tasks, students tended to assign a low ranking to such activities as they did not encourage individual participation in them. Students also did not think highly of oral presentations or any oral tasks as some of them described these activities as "quite traumatic" (Barkhuizen, 1998, p. 100) since they found them anxiety-provoking due to being excessively accuracy-focused and the critical evaluation they were subjected to. They felt they were not provided with a safe zone for self-expression. They also added that the boys in class tended to dominate the activities. As they felt quite anxious while they were performing oral communicative activities, they expressed a lack of enjoyment. The findings revealed that teachers should be familiar with the learner profile that they address, provide scaffolding for learners and closely monitor their performance during the communicative activities. The instructors were also recommended to align their task choices and implementation with the characteristics of their learners. The findings of the study by Spratt (1999), exploring learners' task preferences and teachers' views of learners' task choices, reinforced those of Barkhuizen (1998). A high degree of mismatch (50%) was found between learners' task preferences and teachers' views of learners' task choices.

In an attempt to identify the main sources of the mismatch between teachers' intentions and learners' interpretations of language-learning tasks, Kumaravedivelu (1991) investigated learners' and teachers' perceptions

of the characteristics, aims and demands of language learning tasks and listed the following ten sources: cognitive, communicative, linguistics, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, and attitudinal. Gaining familiarity with the potential sources of perceptual mismatches between teachers' and learners' interpretations is considered to help teachers foster the achievement of planned learning outcomes in the classroom. Kumaravadivelu (1991) underscored that teachers need to raise awareness towards learners' personal views and understanding of tasks to handle the potential mismatches between learners' interpretations and teachers' intentions. In this respect, it is crucial to gain insights into learners' personal perspectives regarding classroom tasks and events by exploring the potential motives behind the mismatches between teachers' intentions and learners' interpretations (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). It can be said that the learning process can be facilitated accordingly.

2.2. Learners' Interpretations of Tasks - Tasks as a Workplan and Task in Process

As Breen (1987) stated, the original task as a workplan is not necessarily aligned with the actual task in process. The latter refers to a process "where the learners perceive task content primarily through the present state of their current individual, ideational, sociocultural, linguistic-textual knowledge" (p. 29). Diverse learning outcomes might be expected in the task in process. There is supposed to be a direct link between the quality and efficacy of a particular task and its use in the teaching/learning process. The task designer needs to anticipate the motives and manners underlying learners' reinterpretations of a work plan during the task in process. To explore learner interpretations of the work plan, Breen (1987) suggests analyzing the task by responding to the following four questions:

1. *What is the task's explicit or implicit objective? Why is the task being undertaken?*

The task objective might vary from practising the use of a rule or finding the main ideas in a particular text to sharing information or solving a particular problem. Whether or not the task objective is explicitly stated, learners are likely to assign a particular task their own purposes. Learners' purposes can be considered on a continuum between the achievement or survival orientation. If learners attribute an achievement purpose to a particular task, the task may be regarded as compatible with learners' perceived learning needs. A task might be considered to promote an achievement orientation "to the extent that it is interpreted by learners as directly dealing with the present state in their knowledge and abilities in the language and the extent to which it offers real progress in clear relation to this knowledge and ability" (Breen, 1987, p.27).

When learners fail to relate the task objective to their learning needs, they are likely to attribute a survival purpose to the task (Breen, 1987). The survival purpose can be defined according to external criteria such as preparing for a test/exam, conforming to teacher priorities, passing a course, meeting others' expectations. When learners' own needs are not prioritized, they tend to get engaged in a particular task with a survival orientation. It is important to keep in mind that learners' task orientations are rarely static or fixed; in fact, they might have varying degrees of achievement and survival orientations for the same task (Breen, 1987). To illustrate, they may attribute a high level of achievement value and a low level of survival value to a particular task simultaneously.

One significant concern related to task design for learners is to explore the ways to enhance the possibility of learners' attribution of the achievement value and decrease their attribution of the survival value to a particular task, as pointed out by Breen (1987). Therefore, during the task design phase, the task as workplan should be designed in such a way that learning objectives are to be congruent with learners' perceived and stated learning needs. Task objectives should offer learners opportunities for progress in a field that they view as lacking in their cognitive repertoire. Hence, the implementation of a thorough need analysis prior to the task design is likely to be a plausible decision to investigate the purposes learners believe or task should serve.

2. *What particular subject matter is the task focusing on? What is the content of the task (linguistic rules, general knowledge, practical skills and abilities etc)?*

As Breen (1987) revealed, each kind of task content can be considered to be potential content for learning. Learners need to redefine the content explicitly depending on their background knowledge. They also need to explore and specify different aspects of the content familiar to them and subsequently discover the unfamiliar or problematic content as well as focusing on the problematic aspects by building connections with the familiar content.

3. *What procedure does the task require? How is the task to be done?- via recollecting and transferring the old (previously learned) information or skills; engaging in a problem-solving process, analyzing data or using particular skills, etc. It is important to note that the task as workplans should not restrict or prevent*

learners from working on the task the way they prefer (Breen, 1987). It can be suggested that “a task as workplan has to allow for alternative procedural routes through different problems discovered in the task content and as a means towards various achievement purposes” (p.34). Hence, tasks should provide learners an opportunity to evaluate how much progress they have achieved in relation to the parts they regard as challenging and to the goals they believe they have attained (Breen, 1987).

4. *In what situation and under what conditions is the task being undertaken? Where is the task being done?* – in pairs or groups in a classroom, in a class under the supervision of the teacher, individually, outside class, or as an assignment, etc. The explicit engagement of the learners in the decision-making process in the task as a workplan is recommended so that they can benefit from the social and material sources in the classroom that are at their disposal for achievement purposes (Breen, 1987).

In fact, the aforementioned four basic questions were taken as reference points in the design phase of the data collection instruments such as the student questionnaire and the standardized open-ended interviews with the the teachers.

3. METHOD OF RESEARCH

3.1. Participants

The convenience sampling strategy was employed in the participant selection. There were two groups of participants in the study that was conducted at the preparatory school of a large state university in central Anatolia in Turkey. The first group was composed of 16 Turkish EFL teachers (6 teachers in the intermediate group and 10 in the elementary group). The teachers were female non-native speakers of English with teaching experience ranging from 2 to 15 years. Seven of them had a BA degree in English language teaching; three of them have a BA degree in English literature and two with a BA degree in linguistics, who had a diploma level teaching qualification such as COTE, DOTE, or DipELT. Six teachers had an MA degree in English Language Teaching. The second group was comprised of 491 students at the preparatory school of the university, 238 of whom were in the intermediate group (B1 level according to the Common European Framework- CEFR) and 253 of whom were in the elementary group (A2 level according to the CEFR). The students in the elementary and intermediate group were exposed to an intensive 20-hour instruction in English throughout the study. Both groups of students studied the same coursebook where the communicative tasks were chosen (*Language in Use-intermediate* by Doff and Jones, 1994). The intermediate group learners studied it in the fall semester and the elementary group students studied it in the spring semester. The data from the former were collected in the fall semester while the data from the latter were collected in the spring semester. All the students were Turkish non-native speakers of English with an age range between 17 and 19. They came from diverse English language learning backgrounds. All the participants were involved in the study on a voluntary basis.

3.2. Research Design

The qualitative research design was adopted in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research studies are based on naturalistic inquiry where the natural setting constitutes the direct source of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). They are concerned with the context and qualitative researchers investigate naturally occurring events and processes by going to a particular setting in focus. They “feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.5). Settings are reflections of individuals, groups, and societies in real life (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study is based on naturalistic inquiry as it investigates the general perceptions of EFL teachers and students at the preparatory school of a state university on the communicative tasks following their implementations in class without any manipulation or intervention on these perceptions. Qualitative research has a holistic perspective as researchers aim to have a thorough understanding of programs and situations as a whole. As Patton (1990) pointed out, “greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, complexities, idiosyncracies, and context” (p.51). The current study is holistic in nature as it explores EFL teachers' perceptions of communicative tasks implemented in class as part of the syllabus and learners' perspectives in this respect as a whole. Qualitative research is descriptive and researchers “try to analyze the data with all its richness as closely as possible to the form where they were recorded and transcribed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.5). The present study can be considered an in-depth inquiry into the participants' general perceptions of communicative tasks.

3.3. The Types of Communicative Tasks in the Study

In the current study, the term *task* is defined as “a piece of meaning-focused work which involves learners in comprehending, producing, and interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (Nunan, 1989, p.10). In relation to the communicative tasks in the study, four types of tasks were chosen in order to provide a representative sampling of the communicative tasks. In the selection of the

task types in the study, Long’s (1990) categorization was adopted: planned, unplanned, open, and closed. Planned tasks are those in which students allocate time to prepare for the task before their task engagement. However, in unplanned tasks, students are not allowed any preparation time to work on the task beforehand. Closed tasks are defined as those for which there is one predetermined answer or small set of answers. Open tasks, on the other hand, are those for which there is no correct answer. Two tasks were chosen for each category. The total number of tasks in the study was eight. Each task was observed four times- twice in elementary and twice in intermediate classes to collect data reliably. In other words, one task was observed in four different classes. It is beyond the scope of the current study to present the results by making specific reference to each task type. Hence, the findings were presented in relation to the students’ and teachers’ general perceptions of the communicative tasks in the study.

3.4. The Communicative Criteria

All the communicative tasks incorporated into the study were chosen in accordance with the communicative criteria developed by the researcher to decide on the communicative potential of the communicative tasks. At the design phase of the criteria to assess the communicative potential of the tasks, the framework utilized in a study by Jacobs and Ball (1996) was taken into consideration. The communicative criteria in the study are composed of two components suggested by Johnson et al. (1991) and utilized in a previous study by Jacobs and Ball (1996) examining the structure of group tasks in ELT: positive interdependence and individual accountability. A task was identified as having a high level of communicative potential if it encourages both positive interdependence and individual accountability (Jacobs & Ball, 1996). Positive interdependence exists “when students perceive that they are linked with their group mates so that they cannot succeed unless their groupmates do (and vice versa) and that they must coordinate their efforts with the efforts of their groupmates to complete a task” (Johnson, et al., 1991, pp. 4-5). On the other hand, individual accountability exists “when the performance of each individual is assessed; the results are given back to the individual and the group, and the student is held responsible by his or her group mates for contributing his or her fair share to the group’s success” (Johnson et al., 1991, p.8). There are three indicators of the two criteria each. These indicators are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Components of the Communicative Criteria and the Indicators of the Communicative Potential in a Communicative Task (adapted from Jacobs and Ball, 1996 and Johnson et al., 1995)

Positive Interdependence	Individual Accountability
1. Explicit instructions that ask group members interact with each other	1. Explicit instructions that encourage group members to ensure their individual contributions to task completion
2. Explicit instructions that ask group members to take action in response to one another	2. Explicit instruction that specify the nature of contributions expected from each group member
3. Explicit instructions that ask group members to do something as a result of interaction	3. Explicit instructions that ask each group member to individually share and explain their group’s answers to a member of another group

3.5. Data Collection

The data in the study were collected via the student questionnaire, the standardized open-ended interviews with the teachers and teacher journals. The student questionnaire was administered to the students face-to-face upon the completion of each of the communicative tasks in the study. The standardized open-ended interviews with the teachers were held face-to-face in the researcher’s office at the department within a week after the in-class implementation of each communicative task. The teachers wrote their entries in their journals after they implemented the tasks in class.

3.5.1. The Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was designed on the basis of the initial analysis of the teacher-related data from the pilot runs of standardized open-ended interviews and the teacher journals. The items were selected after an initial analysis of the points identified through the informal accounts of the teachers and the guidelines provided by Brophy and Alleman (1991) concerning the evaluation of effective classroom tasks. It aimed to explore the EFL student participants’ general perceptions of the communicative tasks and the factors affecting their perceptions of the effectiveness of them.

The questionnaire was originally designed in English. The items in the questionnaire were then translated into Turkish so as to eliminate all sorts of potential misunderstandings due to the wording from the students' perspective. Before the Turkish version was implemented in the study, it was piloted on a group of preparatory school students and necessary modifications were performed in the items based on the feedback on the pilot run.

There were 17 items in the questionnaire, all of which were designed using the Likert scale format - a rating scale of five ranging from (5) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree. One category in the scale was the *undecided* category, which the students could circle if they felt unsure about an item in the questionnaire. The quantitative items on the questionnaire were designed to gather data on the following main themes: *the task effectiveness* (items 13,14,15), *the motivational task value* (item1), *group dynamics* (items 3, 5-12, 16), *the level of task challenge* (item 2), and *the level of task difficulty* (items 4, 17). Regarding the reliability of the questionnaire, the reliability coefficient was calculated as .85, which indicated that it was a relatively reliable one. Eight items in the questionnaire were open-ended. These items asked students to elaborate on their responses to the quantitative items related to the aforementioned main themes. In the current study, the students' responses to the items related to the main theme *the task effectiveness* were taken into consideration. The following are some sample items from the questionnaire:

Item 13. The task was useful for me.

- a) Strongly Agree b) Agree c) Undecided d) Disagree e) Strongly disagree

Open-ended item: In what way(s)?

Item 15. Doing the task was a good and efficient use of time.

- a) Strongly Agree b) Agree c) Undecided d) Disagree e) Strongly disagree

Open-ended item: In what way(s)?

3.5.1. The Standardized Open-ended Interviews with the Teachers

The second data collection instrument in the study is the standardized open-ended interviews. The interviews were designed to gain insights into teachers' general perceptions of task effectiveness as well as their perceptions of the tasks with respect to the motivational task value, group dynamics, the level of task challenge, and the level of task difficulty in the light of their own experiences of the tasks. The questions used in the interviews were designed in light of the aims discussed above and were formulated as open-ended questions. At the beginning of the study, the interviews were prepared in two versions: one to be held prior to the implementation and the other one to be held right after the implementation. However, since time constraints did not render it feasible to conduct standardized open-ended interviews twice, both versions were condensed into one.

3.5.2. The Teacher Journal

The third data collection instrument in the study is the teacher journal. In order to gain access to teachers' unrevealed feelings concerning the factors having an impact on the effectiveness of the tasks in the study, teacher participants in the study were asked to keep journals where they reflected on various aspects of each communicative task following the classroom implementation. The items in the journal required teachers to reflect on their general perceptions of the communicative task and the impact other factors made on their perceptions of task effectiveness. Teachers were guided with previously formulated questions to narrow down the scope of the investigation and to eliminate the possibility of gathering irrelevant data. To be more specific, in the journals, the teachers were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the task experience and various aspects of the communicative tasks such as the motivational task value (including the students' willingness to participate in the task), group dynamics, the teachers' perceptions of task effectiveness, level of task challenge and level of task difficulty. Great care was taken to ensure that the difference between themes was clear and that there were no overlaps between them.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data obtained from different data collection instruments was analyzed qualitatively, with the use of inductive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Inductive analysis a commonly utilised method for data analysis in qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It can be applied to open or half-structured data. It employs the abstraction strategy for the reduction and grouping of data to enable researchers to explore the research questions via concepts, categories or themes.

In the current study, the data from the teacher journals and the standardized teacher interviews were analyzed together while the student data from the open-ended questionnaire items were analyzed separately. In other words, the data analysis procedures were conducted twice- for the teacher and for the students. A departmental colleague

who had extensive experience in qualitative research was also involved in the data analysis as an interrater to ensure reliability. For the data analysis in the study (both for the teacher and student data), the following procedures were followed. Having chosen the students' and teachers' perceptions of communicative task effectiveness as the unit of analysis, the primary researcher examined the data for the identification of open codes. Later on, she combined these codes with other codes having similar content, formulating categories. Next, through an iterative approach to the data analysis, she refined the categories that emerged in the previous step to form the main and sub-themes in the study. The identified themes and sub-themes served as the basis for reporting the analysis results. In cases where the primary researcher and the interrater were unable to concur on a particular code, category or theme, they further negotiated on it until they reached a full agreement. The interrater reliability in the study was 95% for both the teacher and the student data. As a result of the data analysis process, five main themes and 11 sub-themes emerged based on the teacher data while six main themes and 14 sub-themes emerged based on the student data. The main and sub-themes pertinent to the teacher and student data are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 2.

Main and Sub-themes related to Communicative Task Effectiveness- Teacher Data

Main themes	Sub-themes
A. Practice Opportunities	a) Structural practice opportunities b) Lexical practice opportunities c) Speaking practice opportunities
B. Learning Opportunities	a) New structural points b) New lexical points
C. Tasks' Interaction-generating Potential	a) Existence of an information gap in the task b) Existence of a friendly and collaborative learning environment
D. Relevance of the task goal for the EFL students' immediate learning needs	a) Authentic task design b) Clear task goals for EFL students
E. Motivational task features	a) Active student involvement in the task b) Task-provided opportunities for the enhancement of creativity and critical thinking skills

As Table 2 displays, five main themes and 11 sub-themes emerged based on the teacher data. They focused on the cognitive and affective benefits of tasks for students as well as the task-related features. The themes and sub-themes related to the student data are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3.

Main and Sub-themes related to Open-ended Items on Communicative Task Effectiveness- Student Data

Main themes	Sub-themes
A. Practice opportunitites	a) Structural practice opportunities b) Lexical practice opportunities c) Speaking practice opportunities d) Enhancement of the EFL students' topic-related knowledge
B. Learning opportunities	a) New structural points b) New lexical points
C. Group-related features	a) Good cooperation among group members via peer learning/feedback b) Positive intermember relations in the group
D. Motivational features	a) EFL students' task enjoyment b) EFL students' active task involvement
E. Personal factors	a) Boost in self-confidence through successful task completion b) Positive impact on their self-perceptions as as EFL learners
F. Opportunities to foster critical thinking skills and creativity	a) EFL students' satisfaction with their development of critical thinking skills b) EFL students' satisfaction with their creative task engagement

As Table 3. indicates, the student data involved six main themes and 14 sub-themes. Although the themes are mainly congruent with those in the teacher data, a different theme emerged in the student data, personal factors. The students' emphasis on the positive impact of the tasks on their language learner identities seemed to be revealing, affecting their cognitive and affective task engagement favourably.

4. RESULTS

The findings obtained from the inductive analysis of the standardized open-ended interviews with the EFL teachers, the teacher journals and the EFL student questionnaires are presented in two main sections in line with the research questions in the study. The first section is related to the perceptions of the teachers on the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in the study and the second is concerned with the students' perceptions in this respect. The findings related to the teacher data are presented together.

4.1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Communicative Tasks

With respect to the first research question in this study, the general perceptions of the EFL teachers at the preparatory school concerning the effectiveness of the communicative tasks, the findings revealed that the teachers held favourable views regarding the effectiveness of the communicative tasks. The main and sub-themes related to the teachers' perceptions are shown in Table 3. The first main theme, practice opportunities, was examined in terms of structural, lexical and speaking opportunities, the sub-themes. Regarding the structural and lexical practice opportunities, most teachers reported that the students' task engagement enabled them to revise the grammatical structures and internalize the new lexis that they learned. The following comments by Teacher (T12) and T3 in their journals are quite revealing in this respect:

"The task [Task 2] was helpful for students in terms of the tense practice. It was also effective as an exercise to introduce changes." (T12).

"This [Task 7] was actually like a lead-in to the whole unit so that they could start brainstorming about the media, the newspapers, and magazines and right after this I introduced new words and they made use of the words they already knew." (T3).

Apart from the structural and lexical practice opportunities, the teachers underlined in the open-ended interviews that the tasks also provided the students with opportunities to practise their speaking skills, which tended to be relatively neglected in the language classes at the preparatory school in the study. T4 emphasized this during the semi-structured interviews "In class we don't have so many opportunities to have them (the students) speak". The teachers pointed out that tasks were likely to generate an interaction-rich learning environment in class and task engagement would help students enhance their collaborative skills and communication, particularly, negotiation skills. The quote below by T5 summarizes the aforementioned views concisely:

"The aim of the task [Task 4] was to revise what they hopefully learned, made them use the language and the vocabulary they learned, but more than that because it's group work, there was a lot of student-student interaction and, you know, communication There was also fun. I wanted them to have fun."

Some teachers also pointed out in the open-ended interviews that while providing opportunities for speaking practice, the tasks also enabled students to integrate a variety of language skills, which is revealed by T4 regarding Task 1.

"I think they [the students] killed three birds with one stone. They listened, wrote and spoke, so they practised three skills in one task."

Apart from the aforementioned teacher comments on the effective task features, the teachers in the study underscored in their journals that the information gap feature of the communicative tasks served to facilitate interaction between students and activated their critical thinking skills as well. They pointed out that particularly in the decision-making tasks the students needed to evaluate different alternatives carefully and make a feasible choice. They also reported that assigning different roles to group members seemed to foster their task engagement, reinforcing their individual accountability and positive interdependence (Johnson et al., 1995). They remarked that when the students were given specific roles in the task completion, they appeared to be more willing to fulfil their responsibilities related to the task. They added that when students knew that they needed to perform their task-related responsibilities for successful task completion as a group, they felt more motivated for the task engagement. They mentioned that the existence of harmonious classroom dynamics through the establishment of a friendly and collaborative classroom atmosphere with a low affective filter seemed to be conducive to the students' learning process. They reported that the students appeared to be willing to exchange ideas and help one another while engaging in the task. They emphasized that the group members did not tend to dominate one another, which is frequently the case in the majority of the group tasks. The following quote by T2, in relation to Task 7, illustrates teachers' aforementioned ideas clearly:

“Especially the weak students felt more comfortable while doing the task. They got help from the better students in their group.”

The relevance of the task goal for the EFL students’ immediate needs was another main theme in the study regarding the teachers’ perceptions of effectiveness. Related to this theme, teachers pointed out the following sub-themes in their reflective journals: the authentic task design, the existence of clear task goals for students, and the interpretations of the task goal for students. Regarding the authentic task design, EFL teachers seemed to have divided opinions. Although the majority of the teachers held favourable perceptions in this regard, some teachers held negative perceptions in this respect. Those with favourable views indicated that the tasks are closely connected to the students’ immediate life concerns. These remarks are aligned with Breen (1987) emphasizing that the students’ task engagement is related to their view of the task’ relevance to students’ perceived and stated learning needs. The teachers pointed out that the students tend to make a great deal of effort when they consider the achievement of the task goal beneficial for their interlanguage development (Cole & Chan, 1994). They emphasized that students tended to find the tasks in the study relevant when they perceived that they gave them an opportunity to practice the language functions they needed to employ in daily life. When the students thought that the task provided them with an immediate opportunity for progress in a field that they felt lacking in their current cognitive repertoire, they tended to attribute an achievement value to it. T4 reflected on this sub-theme in the following way:

“The task was about buying and selling secondhand goods. Therefore, they [the students] needed to be familiar with some vocabulary related to household items and some language functions such as inquiring into prices, making, accepting or refusing the offers, which are often used in everyday life. The task was quite relevant to their immediate needs. As they are university students they are likely to be engaged in such activities.”

T9’s comment below regarding a decision-making task on choosing the best restaurant to go for a celebration also reinforced T4’s comment above:

“Students found the task [Task 6] effective in the sense that they were able to discuss something true to life. In real life they talk about which restaurant serves the best dinner, which place provides the best entertainment, etc.”

In addition to those teachers with favourable views on the task design, there were some who held unfavourable views. They remarked that some tasks do not resemble real life situations. They added that when students did not perceive the task as relevant to their lives or as instrumental for the achievement of their goals in life, they did not really engage in it thoroughly and approach it with a survival orientation (Breen, 1987). They commented that when students adopted a survival orientation towards a task, they tended to exclusively focus on task completion, which is illustrated in T10’s comment:

“For this task [Task 2], the students were asked to work in pairs and decide on the changes in a couple’s lives by looking at the two different pictures (before and after their marriage) using the present perfect tense. It might constitute a nice context for the structural practice but it lacked a lifelike feature- we normally don’t do something like this in real life.”

Some teachers such as T10 even pointed out their efforts to render the task in the textbook more authentic by modifying the task design. In their journals, they reported searching for ways to increase the degree of achievement value that the students attach to the communicative tasks in the textbook (Breen 1987). They emphasized that the task objectives should be aligned with the students’ perceived and stated learning needs (Breen, 1987). They added that some closed tasks in the textbook did not tend to appeal to students as they are exclusively focused on form as opposed to meaning, which resulted in a decrease in student motivation. The EFL teachers pointed out that as the students wished to develop their speaking skills, such tasks with an exclusive focus on form did not appeal to them. They indicated that although students were claimed to engage in a ‘free practice activity’ in the textbook they were not ‘free’ as they were constrained in terms of the type of questions they could ask. In fact, the teachers indicated that there appeared to be a pedagogical mismatch between the textbook author and the students (Kumaravadivelu, 1991).

With respect to the relevance of the task goal for EFL students, the majority of the teachers underscored the importance of clear goals as an essential feature of communicative tasks. During the interviews, they remarked that task goals should be explicitly stated for the learners, which is in line with Brophy and Alleman (1991). They added that clear task goals are necessary not only for task completion but also for students’ effective cognitive and affective task engagement (Cole & Chan, 1994). They commented that some task instructions in the coursebook were generally not clearly expressed or that the tasks lacked a clear purpose.

In relation to the relevance of the task goals for students, some teachers pointed out the mismatch between the students’ interpretations of the task goals and the task goals the coursebook authors specified for the tasks. To illustrate, T9 remarked during the interview that although Task 6 was introduced as one offering students structural

practice opportunities related to comparative and superlative forms of adjectives, the students saw it as a speaking practice opportunity. T9's comments echoed Kumaravadivelu's (1991) pedagogical mismatch, where there is a lack of alignment between the students' interpretations of the task goal and the expectations of the coursebook author concerning the task goal.

The final theme the teachers mentioned in relation to task effectiveness was the motivational features of the task. The students' active task engagement and the creativity-enhancing opportunities the task provided were the sub-themes in this regard. The majority of the teachers pointed out a relatively high level of student motivation for task engagement during the open-ended interviews. They reported that students seemed to be willing to engage in task completion. They attributed this willingness to the collaborative nature of the tasks that the majority of the students were content with, which is in accordance with the previous studies (e.g., Topuz, 1994). They added that the peer support, peer feedback and the opportunity for the negotiation of meaning were some of the factors contributing to the students' affective task engagement. The facilitative impact of the motivational task value on the students' perceptions of task effectiveness in the study is consistent with the previous studies (Brophy & Alleman, 1991; Cole & Chan, 1994). Despite the favorable views most teachers held concerning the motivational features of the task, a minority reported unfavourable views regarding the creativity-inducing aspect of the tasks due to the emphasis they placed on the structural practice at the expense of meaningful student-student interaction.

4.2. The EFL Students' Perceptions of the Communicative Task Effectiveness

The study revealed that similar to the teacher participants in the study, EFL students held favourable perceptions in general in terms of the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in the study. The teachers' and students' perceptions seemed to be aligned with one another. The students' perceptions of the communicative tasks in the study are presented in the five main themes: practice opportunities, learning opportunities, group-related features, motivational factors, personal factors and opportunities to foster critical thinking skills and creativity. Related to the task-provided practice opportunities, the students thought highly of the task-provided practice opportunities in general. These opportunities, in fact, appeared to be quite relevant to the students' immediate goal to improve their speaking skills (Brophy & Alleman, 1991). They remarked that when engaged in speaking practice, they also had an opportunity to revise structural and lexical points they learned previously. Some students viewed the opportunity to practise structural and lexical points not as highly as the speaking practice opportunities. In addition to the gains related to practice opportunities, a minority of the students also mentioned the extension of their topic-related background knowledge.

Regarding the task-provided learning opportunities, however, the EFL students' perspectives were aligned with those of the EFL teachers in the study. Although both parties agreed on the multiple practice opportunities the tasks provided, they concurred that the communicative tasks in the study rarely offered learning opportunities for students. In terms of the learning opportunities that the communicative tasks in the study provided for the students, only a minority of the students believed that the tasks presented an opportunity for them to learn new vocabulary and structural patterns.

With respect to the group-related features of the communicative tasks, the students in the study generally held favourable perceptions. They emphasized the importance of group cooperation and positive intermember relations in the group for effective communicative tasks. Some student participants pointed out that the existence of a strong bond between the group members working collaboratively towards the achievement of a common task goal contributed to their sense of task effectiveness. In other words, they remarked that positive interdependence and individual accountability were two important features of effective communicative tasks (Jacobs & Ball, 1996). Some described the tasks as effective that involved a vivid and dynamic exchange of ideas among group members and peer learning/ feedback opportunities. Some other students also mentioned that in effective communicative tasks, group members tended to handle intra-group conflicts in an agreeable manner.

Regarding the students' perceptions of the task-provided opportunities to enhance critical thinking skills and creativity, their perceptions varied. Some students thought the communicative tasks in the study enabled them to boost their creativity and enhanced their critical thinking skills unlike the traditional whole class tasks while others held unfavourable perceptions towards the tasks in the study. The students with unfavourable task perceptions emphasized that effective communicative tasks should be designed to enhance students' creativity and critical thinking skills. The findings suggest that the students tended to adopt a survival orientation towards the tasks where they did not have an opportunity to use their creativity or activate their critical thinking skills (Breen, 1987). They did not seem to be wholly engaged in such tasks; they tend to exclusively focus on the task completion instead.

Finally, the students in the study reported that the positive impact their task engagement made on their personal beliefs about themselves as EFL learners. The students expressed their satisfaction with a sense of accomplishment and a boost of self-confidence upon their successful task completion. They reported that due to the mainstream exam-oriented system of education in the Turkish higher education context, they often tended to feel themselves

as unsuccessful in teacher-centered traditional learning environments and lose their motivation to persevere in their language learning endeavors.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings obtained from the study concerning the EFL teachers' general perceptions of the communicative tasks, in general, overlapped those of the EFL students. This finding contradicts those obtained from the previous studies conducted regarding the ESL/EFL learners' and teachers' views on the communicative tasks in the EFL higher education context (Barkhuizen, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Eltis & Low, 1988; Nunan, 1986). The indication of the correspondence between the teachers' intentions and the learners' interpretation in the study can be seen as a positive sign as Kumaravadivelu (1991, p.98) states that "... the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes". Bridging the gap between teachers' and learners' perceptions plays an important role in enabling students to authenticate and, thus, maximize their classroom experience (Breen, 1998; Van Lier, 1996; Weinstein, 1983). Both the EFL teachers and students in the study reported favourable views on the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in the study on the whole. However, each party expressed divided opinions on some particular task characteristics in their own cohort. To illustrate, EFL teachers' views regarding the authenticity of the communicative tasks varied. In a similar vein, the students pointed out mixed feelings about the tasks' potential to promote critical thinking skills and creativity.

The emphasis the students attached to the practice opportunities, particularly speaking practice opportunities, can be considered to be associated with the achievement value they attributed to the communicative tasks, which is not consistent with Barkhuizen (1998), indicating the students' preference towards traditional classroom work. The student participants in the study seemed to regard the tasks focusing on the improvement of speaking skills as congruent with their language learning needs (Breen, 1987). The findings also revealed that the students' inability to see the significance of a particular task objective to help their progress in their interlanguage development might result in their adoption of a survival orientation towards that task (Breen, 1987). The variation in terms of the students' attributions of a survival or achievement value to a particular task in the study might be due to their lack of fixed task orientations (Breen, 1987). Their task orientations appeared to be largely shaped by their learning needs. The study also confirmed the findings of the previous studies (Allwright, 1997; Pintrich et al., 1988; Schunk, 1992; Yorio, 1986) in that the students evaluated the communicative tasks based on their own frame of reference. The importance of authentic task design that was emphasized by the teachers in the study seemed to be closely connected to their perceptions of task relevance and task effectiveness (see Brophy & Alleman, 1991). In fact, the more authentic the students found a task, the more engaged they became in the task completion. In addition, the information gap feature and the opportunities for the negotiation of meaning embedded in the communicative tasks seemed conducive to the students' task engagement and, hence, to their language learning process. Task authenticity seemed to affect not only their cognitive engagement but also their affective engagement as well. They appeared to be more motivated when they perceived a particular task as authentic from their own perspectives. The student participants in the study also expressed their satisfaction with the anxiety-free and collaborative learning environment characterized by favourable classroom dynamics, peer support/feedback and a safe zone for self-expression, which is quite unlike the "quite traumatic" exam-oriented learning environment in Barkhuizen (1998, p.100). The peer feedback the students received during the task execution can be considered to promote their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1980). The positive interdependence and individual accountability features of the communicative tasks in the study also seemed to foster students' cognitive and affective engagement (see Jacobs & Ball, 1996). Finally, the EFL teachers' awareness of the pedagogical mismatches that arose during the task implementations and their strategies to handle them can be said to have enhanced the students' favourable task perceptions in the study (Kumaravadivelu, 1991).

VI. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the EFL students and teachers in the study held relatively similar perceptions related to the effectiveness of the communicative tasks in the study. In fact, the findings revealed that both parties held mainly favourable perceptions with some divided opinions on authentic task design and the task potential to develop critical thinking skills and creativity. Although the current study has certain constraints as to the duration and the number of participants, it is likely to provide valuable guidelines for the classroom teachers and curriculum developers in the tertiary EFL context. The findings suggested that the relevance of the tasks for students, authentic task design, the clarity of task goals, the provision of speaking practice opportunities in an interaction-rich collaborative learning environment should be taken into consideration in the communicative task selection for EFL students receiving intensive language instruction at preparatory schools in the higher education context. It is highly recommendable for in-service teachers and curriculum developers to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis to determine students' language learning needs before the academic year starts, which is likely to assist in the selection of effective communicative tasks to cater to the learning needs of the target learner profiles. In addition, the study highlighted the importance of task adaptation, modification, and evaluation skills for in-service teachers.

The findings underscored that in-service teachers need to be reflective practitioners who can act as effective facilitators of the learning process and establish a safe zone with a low affective filter for students' self-expression, promoting student interaction and collaboration. Teachers need to consider in advance whether their target student profile may approach the task with an achievement or a survival orientation and make the necessary arrangements to enhance the achievement value of the tasks from the student perspective. In addition, the study pointed out that to promote students' cognitive and affective task engagement, the teachers need to ensure student engagement in tasks that are relevant to their immediate learning needs with plenty of peer support. Regarding the suggestions for further research, it may prove fruitful to explore the possible changes in the perceptions of EFL students with different age and proficiency levels concerning communicative tasks through a longitudinal study. Another suggestion for further research is to explore the interaction patterns generated during the implementation of certain communicative and non-communicative tasks in face-to-face and online learning environments and to investigate whether and how the opportunities for negotiation of meaning affect the EFL students' perceptions of language learning tasks in these environments.

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ÇALIŞMANIN ETİK İZİNİ

Yapılan bu çalışmada “Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan “Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler” başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

Etik kurul izin bilgileri

Etik değerlendirmeyi yapan kurul adı: Çalışma birinci yazarın doktora tezine dayalı olup doktora tezi 2003 yılında tamamlandığı için etik kurul iznine gerek duyulmamaktadır.

ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KATKI ORANI

2. yazar birinci yazarın doktora tez danışmanıdır.

Yazar 1: Doktora öğrencisi

Yazar 2: Tez danışmanı

ÇATIŞMA BEYANI

Araştırmada herhangi bir kişi ya da kurum ile finansal ya da kişisel yönden bağlantı bulunmamaktadır. Araştırmada herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.