



# Evaluation of the English-Speaking Proficiency Learning Domain of Students Engaged in Intensive Foreign Language Education

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Received: 5 December 2024 ▪ Revised: 27 April 2025 ▪ Accepted: 1 July 2025

## *Abstract*

This study aims to evaluate the speaking skills learning area in the 2019 English Language Curriculum in terms of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students receiving intensive foreign language education. A holistic single case design, one of the case study designs, was used in the study. The research group was formed by “convenience sampling” and “criterion sampling” methods from purposive sampling methods. The sample of the study consisted of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and English teachers of Imam Hatip middle schools providing intensive foreign language teaching affiliated to the General Directorate of Religious Education in Balikesir province. Within the scope of the study, 15 volunteer students and 10 volunteer teachers were interviewed. A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool. Descriptive analysis and content analysis methods were preferred to analyze the data obtained. The results show that students do not have enough time to speak English in the lessons, that they experience speaking anxiety, and that they are expected to make the lessons more fun and to switch to a practical and game-oriented teaching process. In addition, it was also observed that English lessons focus more on reading and writing skills than speaking skills in the four basic skills areas.

*Keywords:* English speaking anxiety, English speaking skills, English language teaching.

## 1. Introduction

In today’s world, globalization and rapidly changing socio-economic dynamics are increasing the need for individuals to effectively access information and play an active role in international relations. In this context, the ability to learn languages is a fundamental component of individuals’ capacity to communicate on an international level. Turkey recognizes foreign language learning as an important strategy to follow the dynamics of both domestic and foreign policies and to effectively participate on a global scale. This effort constitutes a step towards Turkey’s goal of becoming an influential player in both national and international arenas (Yörüger, 2023).

Throughout its history, particularly under the influence of various civilizations, Turkish society has been shaped by linguistic diversity. Therefore, foreign language education holds critical importance for Turkey to effectively represent itself on international platforms in cultural and economic contexts (Karagedik, 2013). From an academic perspective, foreign language education can be seen to enhance Turkey's competitiveness in areas such as international relations, cultural exchange, and economic integration.

A significant point of contention in foreign language instruction concerns the teaching of grammar. Particularly in recent years, criticism has been directed towards students' prolonged focus on memorizing grammatical structures and learning these topics through various formulas or symbols. In these critiques, grammar is deemed less important compared to students' communication skills, emphasizing the need for students to gain speaking practice. It is argued that excessive emphasis on grammar rules may detract from communication skills development, leading students to engage solely in rote memorization-based activities (Balm, 2020).

Despite its long history, English language teaching has struggled to establish a solid foundation due to various challenges encountered. This situation indicates that both students and teachers have not achieved the desired success in language learning. According to Hawkins (1987), students often attempt to better understand English by comparing it with their native language during the learning process. They aim to grasp the full meanings of learned words and establish connections between Turkish and English, given the distinct sentence structures and word inflections of these two languages. This circumstance may lead students to struggle with expressing themselves effectively and consequently avoid verbal communication within their communities due to fear of failure.

Bygate (2009) emphasizes in his study that over the past two decades, speaking skills have gained significant importance in the processes of education, learning, and assessment. Factors behind this shift include the prominence of traditional grammar-translation methods, technological advancements, and alternative teaching approaches. According to Bygate, excessive focus on the accuracy of structures during the teaching of speaking skills may hinder the fluent use of language; however, efforts towards fluent speech inevitably lead to making unavoidable errors (Nunan & Carter, 2001). Considering this situation, it is necessary to investigate the difficulties experienced in English speaking skills in schools implementing a predominantly English instruction program, along with the positive/negative impacts, deficiencies identified by teachers and students, and potential solutions to address these deficiencies. It becomes possible to obtain results regarding the effectiveness of the instructional program through program evaluation. Using the stages of scientific research process, the effectiveness, adequacy, or applicability of the instructional program can be assessed (Uşun, 2016). If there is any deficiency during the implementation process or as a result of it, these evaluations can help identify the points causing the problem and facilitate necessary corrections (Demirel, 2015; Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2015). Program evaluation can be designed and implemented based on the approach, fundamental principles, and the types of individuals it aims to cultivate in the evaluated program (Özdemir, 2009).

The aim of this study is to evaluate the Speaking Skills domain of the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade English-Weighted Instruction Program using the Responsive Evaluation Model, which is a participant-focused program evaluation model. This research endeavors to investigate the challenges encountered in the implementation of the English Teaching Program related to Speaking Skills among 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students, while also elucidating the deficiencies present in these practices. Consequently, the study aims to develop solutions to address the identified difficulties and deficiencies through participant feedback.

Assessing the English Teaching Program through a participant-focused evaluation approach has become crucial for serving teachers and students effectively, and for shaping the

program based on their preferences and suggestions. This research employs Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model, which recognizes that teachers and students from different schools may provide varied responses and insights regarding the program. It is anticipated that this model will elicit recommendations from participants' perspectives on the deficiencies and challenges in the Speaking Skills domain within the curriculum.

Upon reviewing the literature, no study evaluating the speaking skills domain of middle school English teaching programs in Turkey using any assessment model has been found. Consequently, this study is expected to enhance the existing literature on this topic. Furthermore, by identifying potential challenges in the implementation of the English teaching program within the domain of Speaking Skills, this research aims to provide valuable insights for program developers. This research holds significance for the literature as it aims to uncover learners' and educators' insights and recommendations regarding the teaching program.

In accordance with the stated objectives and significance, the research process addressed the following problem:

“What are the participant perspectives and observational outcomes regarding the practices specific to the Speaking Skills domain of the 6th Grade English-Weighted Instruction Program?”

In this context, the subsequent sub-problems were investigated:

- (1) What are teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation process of the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive Foreign Language Curriculum in the Speaking Skills domain?
- (2) How do students perceive the implementation process of the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive Foreign Language Curriculum in the Speaking Skills domain?
- (3) What recommendations do participants provide regarding the challenges or deficiencies encountered during the implementation process of the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive Foreign Language Curriculum in the Speaking Skills domain?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research design

This research, aiming to evaluate the Speaking Skill Domain of the 6th Grade Intensive Foreign Language Teaching Program using Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model, is structured within the qualitative research design of Case Study. Case Study allows for a detailed investigation into how and why questions related to an event or phenomenon (Yin, 2009). In this study, the “Holistic Single Case Design,” one of the case study designs, was employed. In light of the preferred Responsive Evaluation Model, a single school was taken as the holistic case to examine the implementation process of the program, including the views of program participants, in-class activities, and relevant documents.

The Responsive Evaluation Model, developed by Robert Stake in 1973, is one of the participant-focused evaluation models. Valuing pluralism, this model emphasizes qualitative methods and provides a comprehensive evaluation reflecting the full complexity of the instructional program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). According to Aygören and Er (2018), the Responsive Evaluation Model is versatile and focuses on the whole, hence it can be considered constructivist. This approach aims to gather and evaluate various perspectives on the program (Stake, 2011).

Stake's responsive evaluation model consists of 12 steps outlined as follows: first, engaging in discussions with clients, program staff, and audiences; second, defining the framework of the program; third, providing an overview of program activities; fourth, identifying objectives and issues; fifth, conceptualizing issues and problems; sixth, determining data needs and concerns; seventh, selecting observers, criteria, and tools where applicable; eighth, monitoring specified preconditions, processes, and results; ninth, thematizing and preparing portrayals and case studies; tenth, validating, confirming, and attempting to disconfirm findings; eleventh, refining and formatting for audience use; and finally, twelfth, compiling formal reports if required (Stake, 2011).

## 2.2 Study group

The study participants consist of teachers and students involved in the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive English Teaching Program at a secondary school situated in the central area of Balıkesir Province, Turkey. The school and participants were chosen through a purposive sampling method, and details regarding the school and participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant information

| <i>Data Collection Instrument</i> | <i>Participants</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Sampling Method</i>                                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|--|
| Teacher Interview Form            | Teacher             | 10            | *Convenience Sampling Method<br>*Criterion Sampling Method |
| Student Interview Form            | Student             | 15            | *Convenience Sampling Method<br>*Criterion Sampling Method |

## 2.3 Data collection instruments

According to Stake (1995), one of the defining characteristics of the case study approach is the use of various data sources to provide rich examples of real-life situations. In line with the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher utilized the "Teacher Semi-Structured Interview Form" and "Student Semi-Structured Interview Form" developed for the study, along with observational forms, to examine program-related documents.

After drafting the interview forms, expert opinions were sought and necessary adjustments were made, such as extracting similar questions and modifying certain expressions. Subsequently, these revised forms were tested with three English teachers and four students from two different schools implementing the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive English Program. During the pilot implementation phase, modifications were made to some question stems to enhance clarity based on the characteristics of the data obtained by the researcher.

The data analysis process in the study was conducted in accordance with Stake's (1973) evaluation model, as outlined in the following 12 steps:

1. Talking with stakeholders: The researcher engaged in discussions with teachers and students involved in the Intensive English program at various schools. Information was exchanged regarding program content, students' attitudes towards the course, their concerns, and the challenges they encountered.
2. Determining the scope of the program: The researcher examined the learning outcomes of the units to be implemented during the process and held informal discussions with teachers to share their perspectives and gather feedback.

3. Reviewing program activities: The activities of Units 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the curriculum taught in the first semester were thoroughly examined along with their intended learning outcomes. The compatibility of targeted achievements with proposed activities was investigated.
4. Identifying objectives and key concerns: The information gathered from discussions with students and teachers regarding the instructional program was presented in the findings section.
5. Conceptualizing problems: To grasp the problems related to the instructional program, the data were analyzed using descriptive analysis and content analysis.
6. Identifying data needs, reviewing problems: The requirements of the instructional program, its strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations were detailed and presented.
7. Selecting observers, experts, resources/instruments: Within the research framework, a semi-structured interview form was developed as the data collection tool. The interview form was finalized after obtaining expert opinions.
8. Observing designated processes and outcomes: The findings from the research were analyzed alongside the results of prior studies in the domain of English-speaking skills to evaluate the outcomes.
9. Theming, preparing descriptions and case studies: Findings obtained from interviews with students and teachers were transformed into codes, categories, and themes, which were presented in the findings section.
10. Validating findings: To ensure data reliability, the coding of data was conducted by both the researcher and another curriculum specialist. Additionally, the data were detailed to facilitate their applicability in similar research settings.
11. Formatting the report for the audience: Findings and results from the research were shared with participants.
12. Compiling formal reports: The evaluation study was transformed into a report aligned with relevant literature, intended for dissemination to readers.

Moreover, in this study, a review of documents pertinent to the research objectives was conducted. The sources utilized in the document review were identified as the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive English Teaching Program, the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade English Textbook, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

#### *2.4 Data analysis*

In this study, the interviews conducted during the preparation and implementation process were transcribed in computer environment and then analyzed by descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis method is used in cases where themes have been previously identified (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In order to address each element of the English curriculum separately, descriptive analysis method was preferred and each element of the curriculum was identified as a theme. In the descriptive analysis method, the data collected were systematically described and the results were reached, and then the themes of “objectives”, “content”, “educational situations” and “evaluation” were formed. Content analysis was also used in data analysis. It was aimed to process the data other than the main themes in more depth and to reveal the sub-themes or codes that could not be noticed by descriptive analysis through content analysis. Thus, the data examined in the light of the main themes predetermined by the descriptive analysis method were subjected to content analysis and as a result, categories and codes were reached. The results obtained from the analysis are presented in the findings section.

### 3. Findings

To evaluate the speaking skills learning domain of the 2019 Intensified English Teaching Program, discussions were held with students and teachers. Student and teacher perspectives were examined within the frameworks of “objectives,” “content,” “teaching-learning process,” and “assessment”. The results derived from the research are detailed below.

#### 3.1 Teachers’ perceptions regarding the implementation process of the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive Foreign Language Curriculum in the speaking skills domain

##### 3.1.1 Objectives

In terms of teacher perspectives on the “objective” theme within the speaking skills learning domain of the Intensified English Teaching Program, two categories have been identified: “Cognitive Objectives” and “Affective Objectives.” Under the Cognitive Objectives category, codes include “Cognitive Skills,” “Vocabulary Knowledge,” and “Speaking Skills.” Within the Affective Objectives category, codes include “Positive Behavior,” “Negative Behavior,” and “Anxiety.” Codes and sub-codes related to these themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of objectives

| <i>Theme</i>         | <i>Category</i>      | <i>Code</i>                                     | <i>Sub-code</i>                     | <i>Frequency</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Objectives           | Cognitive Objectives | *Cognitive Skills                               | * Enhancing creativity              | 12               |
|                      |                      | *Vocabulary Knowledge                           | * Developing thinking skills        | 10               |
|                      |                      |   | * Increasing knowledge accumulation | 10               |
|                      | *Speaking Skills     | * Fluent speaking, sentence construction        | 8                                   |                  |
|                      |                      | * Enjoying speaking                             | 11                                  |                  |
|                      |                      | * Feeling happy while speaking                  | 10                                  |                  |
|                      |                      | * Getting excited                               | 7                                   |                  |
|                      |                      | * Being afraid/unwilling to speak               | 14                                  |                  |
|                      |                      | * Worrying about making mistakes while speaking | 13                                  |                  |
|                      |                      | * Fearing not being understood                  | 10                                  |                  |
|                      |                      | * Having difficulty expressing emotions         | 8                                   |                  |
| Affective Objectives | *Positive Behavior   |   |                                     |                  |
|                      | *Negative Behavior   |   |                                     |                  |
|                      | *Anxiety             |   |                                     |                  |

According to the analysis results, teachers have expressed that the objectives theoretically appear quite satisfactory. The goals expected to be achieved when a student reaches the specified level are seen as appropriate and realistic. However, it is perceived that these goals were established without considering the past and future, materials, classroom environment, or the emotional characteristics of the student. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that for intensified foreign language classes, goals need to be expanded and detailed. Respondents categorized cognitive goals under two headings: cognitive skills, vocabulary knowledge, and speaking skills. Consequently, they indicated that goals related to speaking skills should primarily focus on enhancing creativity, developing thinking skills, and increasing knowledge accumulation. Furthermore, fluent speaking and sentence construction were highlighted as primary goals. Affective goals were discussed in three categories: Positive Behavior, Negative Behavior, and Anxiety. Respondents expressed that students enjoy speaking, feel happy when speaking English, and get excited. Regarding negative behaviors, students were noted to fear speaking, feel reluctant to do so, worry about making mistakes when speaking English, fear not being understood, and struggle to express their emotions.

3.1.2 Content

From the perspective of teacher opinions, the “content” theme of the 2019 Intensified English Teaching Program in the domain of speaking skills learning has been categorized into three main categories: “Themes/Units,” “Focus of Interest Themes/Units,” and “Negative/Challenging Themes/Units.” Under the Themes/Units category, codes include “Expansion,” “Diversification,” and “Deficiency.” Within the Focus of Interest Themes/Units category, codes comprise “Within the Program” and “Outside the Program.” The Negative/Challenging Themes/Units category includes codes such as “Relevance to Daily Life,” “Student Interest,” and “Deficiencies in the Program.” Codes and codes related to these themes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of content

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i> | <i>Code</i>                       | <i>Sub-code</i>                    | <i>Frequency</i>   |    |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|----|
| Content      | Themes/Units    | *Expansion                        | * Expanding units in a spiral      | 9  |    |
|              |                 | *Diversification                  | arrangement                        |  |    |
|              |                 | *Deficiency                       | * Diversifying topics and examples | 8  |    |
|              |                 |                                   |                                    | * Addressing deficiencies such as common exams and mismatches with units (vocabulary/topics, etc.) | 5  |
|              |                 |                                   |                                    | * Clarifying and increasing the allocated class hours specifically for Speaking Skills             | 4  |
|              |                 | Focus of Interest Themes/Units    | *Within the Program                | * "Delicious Breakfast" Unit   | 12 |
|              |                 |                                   | * "At the Fair" Unit               | 12   |    |
|              |                 | Negative/Challenging Themes/Units | *Outside the Program               | * "Weather and Emotions" Unit  | 8  |
|              |                 |                                   |                                    | * Spelling Bee (competition topic)   | 15 |
|              |                 |                                   |                                    | * Months and Seasons song  | 11 |
|              |                 |                                   |                                    | * Specific Day and Week activities   | 5  |
|              |                 |                                   | *Relevance to Daily Life           | * "Life" Unit requesting more information and engagement from students at the beginning            | 13 |
|              |                 |                                   | *Student Interest                  | * "City Center" Unit lacking student interest due to state buildings                               | 15 |
|              |                 |                                   | *Deficiencies in the Program       | * Simplified according to the Intensified Program  | 12 |

According to the analysis results, teachers have indicated the need for units to be expanded in a spiral manner and for topics and examples to be diversified. They have also noted discrepancies between common exams and some units, emphasizing the necessity to address these deficiencies. Teachers have suggested that clarifying and potentially increasing the allocated class hours specifically for speaking skills would benefit students. Regarding units where students struggle, teachers have mentioned that the “Life” unit, which is supposed to connect with daily life, demands excessive information and engagement from students at the beginning. Additionally, they have commented that the “City Center” unit, focusing on state buildings, lacks student interest. Moreover, it has been observed that units generally appear simplified according to the intensified program, potentially reducing student challenge, though this is viewed as a drawback.

3.1.3 Teaching-learning process

From the perspective of teacher opinions, the 2019 Intensified English Teaching Program in the domain of speaking skills learning has been categorized into a total of four main categories: “Instructional Process,” “Issues,” “Student Motivation,” and “Effective

Implementation Examples.” Under the “Issues” category, codes include “Student-related,” “Learning Environment-related,” “Material-related,” and “Instructor-related.” Within the “Student Motivation” category, three codes have been identified: “Before Class,” “During Class,” and “After Class.” The “Effective Implementation Examples” category includes sub-codes such as “Technological,” “Game-oriented,” and “Traditional.” Codes and sub-codes related to these themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of teaching-learning process

| <i>Theme</i>                      | <i>Category</i>                   | <i>Code</i>   | <i>Sub-code</i>  | <i>Frequency</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|------------------|
| Teaching Learning Process         | Teaching Process                  | *Teaching Options   | * Asking fact-based / opinion-based questions                            | 12               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Supporting idea generation processes                                   | 10               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Individual and group work  | 10               |
| Issues                            | Issues                            | *Student-related<br>*Learning Environment-Related<br>*Material-related<br>*Instructor-related | * Infrastructure deficiency / Lack of information                        | 15               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Lack of interest   | 13               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Inadequate foreign language education environment                      | 10               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Lack of library and laboratory facilities                              | 10               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Difficulty accessing technological materials                           | 8                |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Health issues  | 5                |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Resistance to departing from traditional methods                       | 3                |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Lack of engagement   | 2                |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Warm-up activities   | 12               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Activities made enjoyable with games                                   | 10               |
| Student Motivation                | Student Motivation                | *Before Class<br>*During Class<br>*After Class  | * Assessment through competitions  | 10               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Engaging the student actively / capturing their interest               | 13               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Building student confidence  | 11               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Contributing to the student's knowledge accumulation and reinforcement | 10               |
| Effective Implementation Examples | Effective Implementation Examples | *Technological<br>*Game-oriented<br>*Traditional  | * Engaging the student actively / capturing their interest               | 13               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Building student confidence  | 11               |
|                                   |                                   |   | * Contributing to the student's knowledge accumulation and reinforcement | 10               |

Based on the analysis results, teachers have generally indicated a preference for asking fact-based questions over other types of questions, particularly advocating for more use of opinion-based questions in the speaking skills process to support idea generation. They have mentioned conducting both individual and group work activities, noting variability in their implementation across different activities.

Regarding issues encountered during the process, teachers have highlighted problems related to students, learning environment, materials, and instructors. They noted deficiencies in student infrastructure/knowledge, affecting their ability to build upon new learning in a spiral structure. Teachers mentioned student disengagement with units/topics where they struggle and cannot relate to previous learning. Concerning the learning environment, the inadequacy of the foreign language education environment, lack of library and laboratory facilities were identified as significant issues adversely impacting student learning. Additionally, difficulties in accessing technological materials were noted as hindering student engagement, utilization of technological advancements, and positive impacts on students' attitudes towards speaking English through

technology. Furthermore, problems related to instructors emerged from having multiple teachers impacting class continuity due to health issues, some teachers struggling to depart from traditional methods, thereby hindering adaptation to modern teaching approaches and resulting in lack of engagement in teaching speaking skills.

Teachers addressed student motivation through activities before, during, and after class. They highlighted that warm-up activities before class prepare students and increase their interest. They also mentioned using fun activities, particularly games during class to maintain high student motivation and encourage active participation. At the end of class, they found that continuing engagement through competitions and providing feedback effectively reinforces learning and positively impacts students.

Regarding effective implementation examples, teachers mentioned using technological activities to engage students actively and capture their interest, game-oriented activities to build student confidence, and traditional activities to contribute to knowledge accumulation and reinforcement. They provided specific examples and illustrations of these practices.

### 3.1.4 Assessment

The 2019 Intensive English Teaching Program has identified a total of two categories in terms of teacher perspectives on the learning area of speaking skills: “Assessment Method” and “Feedback Method.” Within the “Assessment Method” category, codes include “Speaking Exam,” “Drama,” and “In-Class Dialogues.” The “Feedback Method” category comprises three codes: “Scoring,” “Verbal Feedback,” and “Reward.” Codes and their respective sub-codes pertaining to these themes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of assessment

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i>   | <i>Code</i>                                | <i>Sub-code</i>   | <i>Frequency</i> |  |
|--------------|-------------------|--|---|------------------|--|
| Assessment   | Assessment Method | *Speaking Exam                             | *The area where students speak the longest and most consciously | 13               |  |
|              |                   | *Drama                                     |   | 10               |  |
|              |                   | *In-Class Dialogues                        | *Measuring students' speaking skills                            | 14               |  |
|              |                   |  | *In-class activity  | 11               |  |
|              |                   |  | *Prepared and public speaking skills                            | 14               |  |
|              |                   |  | *Engaging students actively                                     | 10               |  |
|              | Feedback Method   |  | *Improving spontaneous speaking skills                          |                  |  |
|              |                   | *Scoring                                   | *Measuring students' speaking skills                            | 13               |  |
|              |                   | *Verbal Feedback                           | *Student motivation   | 11               |  |
|              |                   | *Reward                                    | *Student motivation   | 10               |  |
|              |                   | *Error correction/pointing out correctness | 8   |                  |  |
|              |                   | *Student motivation                        |   |                  |  |

Based on the analysis results, teachers have indicated that speaking exams are the domain where students speak the longest and most consciously. They have stated that this enables them to accurately assess students' speaking skills compared to regular classrooms. Furthermore, teachers mentioned conducting activities such as drama examples and in-class dialogues to measure preparedness and public speaking skills in students. Additionally, they aim to engage students actively through in-class dialogues and improve spontaneous speaking skills. However,

the adequacy of these methods is subject to debate, especially considering the limited time available for skill development within the instructional hours. Regarding feedback methods, teachers reported providing feedback through scoring, verbal feedback, and rewards. Scoring is used to measure students' speaking skills after speaking exams, verbal feedback aims to maintain student motivation and correct errors, while rewards are used to sustain high levels of student motivation.

### *3.2 Students' perceptions regarding the implementation process of the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Intensive Foreign Language Curriculum in the speaking skills domain*

#### *3.2.1 Objective*

In terms of student perspectives within the Intensive English Teaching Program, regarding the learning domain of speaking skills, the theme of "objectives" encompasses two categories: "Four Core Skills" and "English Speaking Proficiency." Under the Four Core Skills category, sub-codes include "Speaking," "Listening," "Reading," and "Writing." Within the English-Speaking Proficiency category, sub-codes identified are "Current" and "Expected." Codes and sub-codes related to these themes are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of objective

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i>                | <i>Code</i> | <i>Sub-code</i>  | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------|--|------------------|
| Objective    | * Four Core Skills             | *Speaking   | *Fear of speaking  | 6                |
|              |                                | *Listening  | *Variations in speech in listening texts                       | 4                |
|              |                                | *Reading    | *Difficulty in comprehending what is read                      | 3                |
|              |                                | *Writing    | *Difficulty in writing newly learned words                     | 2                |
|              | * English Speaking Proficiency | *Current    | *Avoidance of speaking, fear of making mistakes, peer pressure | 12               |
|              |                                |             | *Ability to speak enough to convey information                 | 3                |
|              |                                | *Expected   | *Speaking comfortably without fear or hesitation               | 9                |
|              |                                |             | *Speaking more fluently and without pauses                     | 6                |

Based on the analysis findings, students have expressed various challenges and observations regarding their English-speaking skills within the Intensive English Teaching Program. They reported difficulties in understanding what they read until they learn new vocabulary, occasional struggles with English pronunciation in oral readings despite not facing issues in silent reading, and challenges in comprehending different accents encountered in listening texts or songs once accustomed to their English teacher's accent. Regarding writing, students indicated fewer difficulties compared to other skills, managing to write correctly during vocabulary learning exercises except for occasional spelling errors, yet sometimes facing challenges in text composition where they may think in Turkish. Confidence levels in English speaking varied among students, with some feeling confident when giving single-answer responses but lacking confidence in expressing themselves or engaging in dialogues. The initial confidence stemmed from the assurance of correctness in their responses, where they felt no hesitation from peers or teachers. However, in spontaneous situations such as engaging in dialogues or speaking in front of the class, students did not exhibit the same level of confidence, citing reasons such as fear of peer judgment, anxiety over making mistakes, preference for individual speaking tasks, and discomfort with public speaking. Despite undergoing approximately 10 hours of instructional time, students expressed a desire to achieve a level where

they can comfortably engage in extended dialogues and speak confidently. They acknowledged their different learning environment compared to regular classes and articulated higher expectations from themselves and their lessons. At times, they expressed a wish to overcome their fear of speaking, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about peers laughing at them, using phrases like “speaking like a foreigner” to describe their aspirations.

### 3.2.2 Content

In terms of student perspectives within the Intensive English Teaching Program regarding the learning domain of speaking skills, the theme of “content” comprises two categories: “English Needs” and “Focused Interest Topics.” Under the English Needs category, codes include “Present” and “Future.” Within the Focused Interest Topics category, codes identified are “Games,” “Shopping,” “Holidays,” “Daily Life,” and “Professional.” Codes and sub-codes related to these themes are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of content

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i>          | <i>Code</i>   | <i>Sub-code</i>     | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Content      | *English Needs           | *Present      | *Holidays, tourists | 14               |
|              |                          | *Future       | *School, projects   | 12               |
|              |                          |               | *Foreign trips      | 10               |
|              |                          |               | *University         | 3                |
|              |                          |               | *Professional life  | 3                |
|              | *Focused Interest Topics | *Games        |                     | 13               |
|              |                          | *Shopping     |                     | 10               |
|              |                          | *Holidays     |                     | 10               |
|              |                          | *Daily Life   |                     | 9                |
|              |                          | *Professional |                     | 2                |

Based on the analysis findings, students expressed their perspectives within the Intensive English Teaching Program regarding their English language needs in various contexts. Currently, they mentioned using English while conversing with tourists during holidays or for projects in school. They enthusiastically noted their excitement about participating in foreign language theater productions at school where they can use English. Looking towards the future, they acknowledged the necessity of English when traveling abroad and anticipated its importance in university studies and professional careers.

In terms of their interests, students indicated a strong preference for “games,” mentioning their enjoyment of foreign language games and the opportunity they provide to converse with people from different cultures. They emphasized the significance of using English for tasks such as shopping or navigating airports, recognizing it as essential for accomplishing specific objectives. They also noted that speaking English in areas expected by their parents during vacations would boost their confidence and satisfaction. Additionally, they expressed interest in using English in daily interactions, both in school and across various aspects of life. Notably, students showed curiosity about professional English terminology due to their exposure to such terms through their families’ occupations.

### 3.2.3 Teaching-learning process

In terms of teacher perspectives within the 2019 Intensive English Teaching Program regarding the learning domain of speaking skills, a single category under the theme of “Teaching-Learning Process” has been identified: “Learning Environment.” Codes derived from this category include “Classroom Environment,” “Lesson Materials,” and “Shortcomings.” Codes and sub-codes related to this theme are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Codes and sub-codes related to the theme of teaching and learning process

| <i>Theme</i>              | <i>Category</i>       | <i>Code</i>   | <i>Sub-code</i>   | <i>Frequency</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|---|------------------|
| Teaching-Learning Process | *Learning Environment | *Classroom    | *Classes where games are played, songs are sung, and everyone can speak | 15               |
|                           |                       | Environment   | *A colorful foreign language classroom with English writings            | 9                |
|                           |                       | *Lesson       | *Lessons where the smart board is used more frequently                  | 7                |
|                           |                       | Materials     | *A class where friends do not tease each other                          | 4                |
|                           |                       | *Shortcomings | *A teacher who is friendly and approachable                             | 2                |
|                           |                       |               |   |                  |

Based on the analysis results, students predominantly expressed a preference for a classroom environment where games are played as their first and foremost choice. They indicated that a learning environment where songs are sung and everyone has opportunities to speak English would be more effective for them. Furthermore, they mentioned that a classroom adorned with colorful displays and English writings on the walls would further motivate them. Regarding lesson materials, they highlighted that classes utilizing smart boards and technology extensively would facilitate better learning outcomes and sustain their interest. Concerning peer interactions, they sought an environment free from peer pressure where friends refrain from making critical comments, emphasizing the importance of both individual and group achievements. Additionally, from a teacher perspective, students emphasized the value of a friendly and approachable teacher who does not react harshly to mistakes, engages with them warmly, and fosters a love for learning while encouraging diligence in their studies.

### 3.2.4 Assessment

According to the teacher perspectives within the 2019 Intensive English Teaching Program regarding the learning domain of speaking skills, a single category under the theme of “assessment” has been identified: “Speaking Exams.” Codes derived from this category include “Intimidating,” “Encouraging,” “Challenging,” and “Engaging.” Codes related to this theme are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Codes related to the theme of assessment

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i> | <i>Code</i>   | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Assessment   | *Speaking Exams | *Intimidating | 12               |
|              |                 | *Encouraging  | 4                |
|              |                 | *Challenging  | 4                |
|              |                 | *Engaging     | 3                |

Based on the analysis findings, students expressed familiarity with speaking exams over the past two years, noting that initially, these exams were new and intimidating to them. They mentioned feeling tense when attempting to speak one-on-one with the teacher in an empty classroom. However, they also added that speaking in front of a group was less intimidating than expected. Moreover, they highlighted that until the previous year, they did not have a strong incentive to practice speaking, and these exams served as a compelling reason to engage in speaking activities. Finally, they indicated a preference for environments where they could speak more frequently and at greater length compared to a classroom setting.

3.3 Sixth Grade English-Intensive Education Program: Participants' recommendations regarding challenges or deficiencies encountered in the application process for speaking skills development

The 2019 Intensive English Teaching Program yielded four codes from the perspectives of teachers regarding the learning domain of speaking skills: "Objectives," "Activities," "Materials," and "Skills." The thematic codes are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Codes Related to the Theme of Teacher Recommendations

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i> | <i>Code</i>   | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--------------|-----------------|---|------------------|
| Assessment   | *Objectives     | *Expansion of objectives                                | 10               |
|              | *Activities     | *Adaptation of in-class activities to student interests | 8                |
|              | *Materials      | *Provision of materials and resources for teachers      | 3                |
|              | *Skills         | *Clear delineation of the four basic skills in lessons  | 2                |

Based on the analysis results, teachers have proposed recommendations such as broadening the objectives, adapting in-class activities to student interests, providing more materials and resources for teachers, clearly delineating the skills in lessons, and clarifying the number of class hours.

"In the intensive English teaching program, based on student perspectives on the theme of 'recommendations' in the area of speaking skills learning, two codes were identified: 'Change' and 'Continuity.' The thematic codes are presented in Table 11."

Table 11. Codes related to the theme of student recommendations

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Category</i> | <i>Code</i>                                | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--------------|-----------------|--|------------------|
| Assessment   | *Change         | *Speaking class hours should be increased. | 11               |
|              |                 | *Teachers should only speak English.       | 8                |
|              |                 | *Speaking hours should be more fun.        | 8                |
|              |                 | *There should be overseas trips.           | 1                |
|              | *Continuity     | *Continuity of speaking classes            | 7                |
|              |                 | *Continuity of smart board usage           | 5                |

Based on the analysis results, students have provided recommendations related to the "Change" code, such as increasing the number of speaking class hours, making classes more fun, incorporating games and songs, having teachers speak only in English, and ensuring that speaking sessions are more enjoyable. They also suggested domestic or international trips. Regarding the "Continuity" code, students recommended that speaking classes should continue, and there should be a continued increase in the use of smart boards and technology.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The research first established the current situation based on the obtained data. Subsequently, prioritization of the problem's root causes was facilitated according to their significance. Following this, based on the information gathered regarding the source of the problem, conclusions and recommendations for resolving the issue were shaped according to the perspectives of both students and teachers.

#### *4.1 Identification and prioritization of the problem's root causes*

1. Students' lack of foundational knowledge from previous years affects their ability to grasp new learning and undermines the construction of a solid knowledge base.
2. Resistance to departing from traditional methods and the absence of engaging lessons diminish students' interest and participation.
3. Students' reluctance to speak in front of peers and fear of ridicule contribute to a lack of self-confidence.
4. Concerns about making mistakes, difficulty in expressing emotions, and fear of speaking English lead to hesitancy and reluctance.
5. Fear of teachers and anxiety over grades exacerbate concerns, further reducing students' motivation to engage in spoken English.
6. Students' uncertainty about when and how to apply learned information, words, or sentence patterns in real-life contexts diminishes their interest in language learning classes.
7. Absence of a foreign language classroom or laboratory limits hands-on learning and practical application opportunities.
8. Discrepancies between theoretical knowledge and its application in practical settings or long gaps between learning sessions contribute to knowledge retention issues.
9. Difficulty accessing technological resources may perpetuate reliance on traditional teaching methods and decrease student engagement in the subject.
10. Insufficient resources aligned with the Intensive English Teaching Program lead to students progressing with basic-level materials and exacerbate resource deficiencies.
11. Inconsistencies between unit content and questions in standardized exams by the Ministry of Education trigger students' lack of confidence.
12. Various units containing irrelevant or advanced information deter students from maintaining a connection with the subject matter.
13. Anxiety and fear of making mistakes during speaking exams contribute to stress and apprehension among students.

#### *4.2 Recommendations*

Based on the findings of the study, the sources of anxiety and reluctance in English Speaking Skills classes for 6th grade students in Intensive Foreign Language programs were categorized into educational and non-educational factors. Regarding educational factors:

1. Students' foundational gaps from previous years impact their ability to learn new material and hinder the construction of a solid framework. Therefore, after evaluating the speaking skills instruction, level groups should be formed, and activities should be planned to bridge the gaps between groups, emphasizing both individual and group-based teaching.
2. Inability to depart from traditional methods and lack of fun in lessons diminish student interest and engagement. To enhance student participation and activity, activities that make lessons enjoyable should be pre-planned. Games, songs, videos, and encouraging speaking competitions should be incorporated into the curriculum to foster student engagement.

3. Students' fear of speaking in front of peers and apprehension of ridicule lead to a lack of self-confidence. Collaborative communication between guidance services and interdisciplinary seminars with classroom teachers should be initiated to address peer bullying and personal freedoms. Additionally, teachers should exhibit behaviors that discourage peer comments and adjust grading accordingly.
4. Fear of making mistakes, difficulty expressing emotions, and anxiety about speaking English lead to reluctance. Backup activities should be planned where students can correct their mistakes confidently. Teachers should organize individual and group activities that boost students' confidence and allow them to learn from their errors within a constructivist framework alongside traditional methods.
5. Fear of teachers and anxiety about grades increase apprehension and decrease enthusiasm for speaking English. Teachers should move away from traditional methods and use affirming behaviors that support internal achievement. English teachers should participate in seminars/training sessions organized by the guidance service to address these issues.
6. Students' lack of interest in applying learned vocabulary or sentence patterns to daily life results from not knowing where and when to use them. Therefore, drama activities should be created where students can use learned word groups or sentence patterns. In addition to these activities, field trips should be planned when circumstances permit.
7. The lack of a foreign language classroom or laboratory reduces opportunities for experiential learning and application. Therefore, classrooms with foreign language classes should be decorated with projects, bulletin boards should be organized, and classrooms should be adapted to suit foreign language instruction.
8. The sporadic presence of theoretical knowledge in practical applications leads to forgetting learned information. Therefore, discussions with school administration should be conducted to stabilize foreign language classes for speaking lessons and to prepare for each skill lesson in advance by addressing topics related to application before implementation.
9. Difficulty accessing technological materials can lead to continued use of traditional methods in class, which can also reduce student interest in the class. Contact should be made with the school's computer teacher to prepare smart board applications, technological innovations, and to ensure that the installed applications work properly in classrooms without any problems.
10. The lack of resources at the appropriate level for the Intensive English Teaching Program results in students progressing with a simple book and a lack of resources. Therefore, in addition to the National Education Book, an additional source should be preferred. Materials should be prepared for students by planning the contents of the English book prepared for Foreign Language classes on the National Education's own site
11. Questions or topics that do not match the units in the common exams organized by the Ministry of National Education trigger students' lack of self-confidence. The English book prepared for Foreign Language classes, English books of the National Education Publications, and English books of Special Publications should be reviewed by English teachers and the subject list should be determined at the beginning of the year. In this way, attention can be paid to eliminating deficiencies in exams.
12. Various units that are not related to the students' interests and contain information above their level alienate students from the class. Themes and units decided by English teachers' discussions should be diversified, differentiated, and made to suit students' interests. Different activities can be helpful for this.

Fear felt during speaking exams and anxiety about making mistakes cause anxiety for students. Students should be informed about the importance of speaking exams. Videos and stories about the importance of English in our lives and our future should be shared before this. The importance of speaking should then be reinforced. Classroom activities should be organized to familiarize students with speaking exams as a normal speaking environment, rather than an exam situation, with the constructive approach and constructive understanding of the teacher.

#### Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The authors declare no competing interests.

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