Evaluating an English Language Writing Course through Logic Model: Links between Outcomes and Activities

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Abstract

A logic model can be used to present, understand, and evaluate the planned work and intended results of a program or a course. Using the logic model as a tool, this study explored the outcomes and activities of a writing course in English for General Purposes (EGP) context at the tertiary level in Turkey to clarify the links and potential gaps between course outcomes and activities. To this end, developing a study-specific logic model the study utilized a qualitative research design based on the data obtained through one-on-one and focus group interviews with the voluntary participation of ten students and two English language instructors. Based on the analysis of the interview data, two logic models were developed reporting a number of course outcomes and activities with regards to the English Writing course offered at the tertiary level. Of these, 6 outcomes using linking words appropriately; enriching vocabulary; planning an outline; organizing ideas; achieving unity and coherence; writing different types of paragraphs and 5 related activities writing model essays; analyzing sample texts; making presentations; having weekly assignments; writing a review of a book were found to be the same on both models. The differences detected in the logic models, on the other hand, indicate a need to develop a comprehensive course content, in which specific outcomes and their links to the activities are more clarified.

Keywords: Writing in English, program evaluation, logic model

İngilizce Yazma Dersini Mantık Modeli ile Değerlendirme: Çıktı ve Aktiviteler Arasındaki Bağlantılar

Özet

Bir programın veya dersin planlanan çalışmasını ve amaçlanan sonuçlarını göstermek, anlamak ve değerlendirmek için bir mantık modeli kullanılabilir. Mantık modelini bir araç olarak kullanan bu çalışma, Türkiye'de üniversite düzeyinde Genel Amaçlı İngilizce yazma dersinin çıktılarını ve ders etkinliklerini, ikisi arasındaki bağlantıları ve olası boşlukları açıklığa kavuşturmak amacıyla araştırmıştır. Bu amaçla çalışmaya özel bir mantık modeli geliştirilerek nitel bir araştırma deseninden yararlanılmış ve on öğrenci ile iki İngilizce öğretim elemanının gönüllü katılımıyla bire bir ve odak grup görüşmeleri gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşme verilerinin analizine dayalı olarak, İngilizce yazma ders çıktılarını ve aktivitelerini açıklayan iki mantık modeli çizilmiştir. Bu çıktı ve aktivitelerden, 6 ders çıktısının "uygun bağlaç kullanımı, kelime haznesini geliştirme, taslak planlama, fikirlerini organize edebilme, birlik ve tutarlılığı sağlama, farklı türde paragraflar yazma" ve 5 ders aktivitesinin "kompozisyon yazma, örnek metinleri analiz etme, sunum yapma, haftalık ödevler, kitap incelemesi yazma" her iki modelde de aynı olduğu görülmüştür. Mantık modellerinde tespit edilen farklılıklar ise, belirli sonuçların ve bunların aktivitelerle olan bağlantılarının daha netleştirildiği kapsamlı bir ders içeriği geliştirme ihtiyacına işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İngilizce yazma, program değerlendirme, mantık modeli

1. Introduction

Learning to write in a second or foreign language is a difficult process for it requires the manipulation of several micro and macro skills (Cumming, 2009). Micro-level skills include mastery of linguistic elements, text forms, attitudes, and thinking processes that help to produce acceptable written forms in line with the writing purposes while macro-ones are mostly related to the sociolinguistic, historical, and cultural factors which support the composing process in a unified and appropriate manner within written texts (Cumming, 2009; Nguyen, 2016). Without a doubt, using these skills purposefully in particularly L2 writing requires a lot of conscious effort and much practice.

Adopting an approach that mainly focuses on micro-level skills, teaching writing in English for general purposes (EGP) contexts usually includes introducing a "continuum of activities" ranging from mechanical aspects of writing such as mechanics, sentence structures to a more complex act of composing activities such as writing the main idea, supporting ideas or exemplification (Omaggio Hadley, 1993 cited in Myles, 2002). Within this framework, writing course contents also cover the teaching of a number of generic writing skills such as "note-taking, summarizing, narrating, and reporting for various real-life situations" (Yordanka, 2012, p.1).

For a writing course to reach its pedagogical outcomes, first and foremost, these complex, interwoven writing skills from micro ones to macro ones as well as appropriate teaching tasks need to be identified and sequenced in its content. This kind of inclusive content preparation is difficult in EGP contexts, where there is not usually a detailed and selective specification of goals since EGP is associated with education rather than vocational training and thus it is rather difficult for course designers and teachers to predict future English language needs of students (Far, 2008). Therefore, learners' needs are mostly taken for granted. Also, in EGP contexts course books selected for a particular course usually "predetermine the content, the sequencing of the content and the procedures for using the content" (Maley, 2011 cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). However, since teaching and learning English is context-specific, every course necessitates modifications and adaptations in terms of learning outcomes, instructional methods, and assessment techniques regardless of the content that a coursebook may provide. In this regard, understanding learners' needs becomes a fundamental starting point for teachers and course designers. Additionally, it is important to recognize that the intended goals and activities for a particular course may be perceived differently by teachers and learners, potentially leading to a failure to achieve the desired outcomes for both parties. Therefore, there seems to be a need for systematic inquiry to unveil the implicit, taken-for-granted aspects of English language course programs in EGP contexts, which can be effectively addressed by conducting program evaluations. Without a doubt, such evaluation studies not only shed light on program processes but also facilitate ongoing program development by indicating gaps that may exist in the design and implementation of programs.

Although there is sufficient literature on ELT program evaluation at primary and secondary school levels around the world and in Turkey as reported by Dündar and Merç (2017), there are relatively fewer studies on the evaluation of the programs of different ELT courses at the tertiary level (see for example Nam, 2005; Tekin, 2015; Tunç, 2010). Regarding the English language writing course design and evaluation within EGP contexts, there is a notable scarcity of studies, as evidenced by the limited research conducted (see for example Coşkun, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Moreover, the literature lacks insights on how to conduct a methodologically sound, instructor-led, and student-centered course evaluation as well as how to use the evaluation data to enhance course design and teaching approaches.

Consequently, this present study, undertaken in an EGP context focusing on an English Writing course at the tertiary level, attempts to uncover how implicit course outcomes are perceived by stakeholders and also seeks to identify the activities to explicate the potential links and gaps between these course elements by using logic modeling within a clarificative form of evaluation approach. Logic modeling is a structured and well-designed tool that effectively captures the explicit and implicit logic governing the operations of a course to generate the intended benefits and outcomes (Martin & Carey, 2014). Logic models serve as a valuable resource for both designing and evaluating programs, providing important insights into how inputs, actions, and outputs of a course contribute to attaining the desired results. While they are generally used in health-related, community, and social service program evaluations (Martin & Carey, 2014), logic models can also be applied in educational settings. Therefore, this study by focusing on logic modeling and providing documentation of the process involved in developing the model, which is rarely encountered in

language program evaluation studies, intends to contribute to the field. The insights gained from this research may be of value to teachers and researchers who would like to use logic modeling as a tool to better understand language programs and courses.

Against this backdrop, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the outcomes of the 'English Writing Skills' course as perceived by the students and instructors in a language department at a state university in Turkey?
2. How is the course designed to achieve the intended outcomes as perceived by the students and instructors in a language department at a state university in Turkey?

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Nature and Teaching of Writing in English

Writing is widely acknowledged as challenging by second and foreign language learners as it requires knowledge and skills which are intricately interwoven and interdependent. Salma (2015) emphasizes the importance of both linguistic competence and critical thinking skills to write effectively in L2. Similarly, Myles (2002) highlights the fundamental role of language proficiency and competence in L2 writing and stresses the need for "conscious effort and much practice" in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Expanding on the nature of writing skills, Hyland (2003) points out the multifaceted aspects involved in the writing process as follows:

> The process of writing is a rich collection of elements of which cognition is only one, and to understand it fully and to teach it effectively we need to include in this mix the writer's experiences together with a sense of self, of others, of situation, of purpose and— above all—of the linguistic resources to address these effectively in social action. (p.27)

In light of Hyland's (2003, p.27) multifaceted insights into the writing process, it becomes evident that the instructional approach adopted in writing courses cannot solely focus on teaching linguistic competence or cognitive skills in isolation but must also take into account the holistic nature of writing as a communicative and social act. Thus, course instructors need to equip learners with the necessary cognitive, linguistic, and social knowledge and skills. As an overall understanding of teaching writing, Hyland (2003a, p.27) comprehensively explains five types of necessary knowledge for an effective writing skill in English which should be incorporated into the teaching process. These include:

- *Content knowledge (the ideas and concepts in the topic area the text will address),*
- *System knowledge (the syntax, lexis, and appropriate formal conventions needed),*
- *Process knowledge (how to prepare and carry out a writing task),*
- *Genre knowledge (communicative purposes of the genre and its value in particular contexts)*
- *Context knowledge (readers' expectations, cultural preferences, and related texts*) (p.27).

In this regard, it becomes apparent that the outcomes and activities of a writing course become crucial in fulfilling this objective of equipping learners with the essential competencies outlined by Hyland. The writing course should serve as a platform that guides learners through each stage of the writing process, from the initial idea generation to the revision of drafts. By doing so, it should help learners become aware of their personal experiences and perspectives as writers and the social context in which writing takes place as well as develop their ability to adapt to situational demands, engage with diverse perspectives, and acquire critical thinking skills while at the same time utilizing linguistic resources for effective written communication. Therefore, the outcomes and activities of the writing course reflect the instructors' broad goal of providing learners with the essential competencies needed for producing purposeful, coherent, and well-organized written outputs. The development of writing skills from more global, macro ones such as considering the situational demands, communicative purposes to micro ones such as using appropriate lexis, formal written conventions requires the identification and sequencing of appropriate teaching activities in the process of writing course design. A well-structured progression addresses learners' needs, enhances their mastery of cognitive, social, and linguistic competencies as well as foster their engagement with the writing process (Hyland, 2003a).

In summary, writing instruction and course design requires careful consideration of various factors and elements to ensure its effectiveness as briefly summarized above. By carefully outlining the essential writing skills and competencies learners need to develop, integrating them into well-chosen and crafted tasks and activities, writing courses can empower learners to become skillful writers.

1.1.2. *Program Evaluation*

Broadly speaking, evaluation is the "systematic inquiry to gather information in order to make judgments or decisions" (Lynch, 1996, p. 2). It is an integral part of teaching and learning for it provides information about classroom practices, planning and management of learning tasks, teacher performance, and effectiveness of learning (Rea-Dickens & Germain, 1998). As stated by Owen (2006), clarificative form of evaluation is usually done when program planners have not worked a clear and comprehensive program plan. In such cases, programs are in operation but have vague goals that provide little guidance for those responsible for program delivery. Thus, having a strong formative purpose, clarificative evaluation leads to explicit program designs. In doing so, it helps stakeholders make connections between the interventions and intended outcomes by strengthening the coherence. In this regard, clarificative program evaluation made by the researchers of the current study may serve as a means to uncover the perceptions of teachers and learners about the intended program goals and activities and, thus, ensure a close fit between these stakeholders, classroom activities and tasks, and assessment methodologies.

On the international scale, there are several studies that researched the influence of academic writing courses on the improvement of EFL learners' writing performances mainly focusing on the evaluation of academic writing courses and discipline-specific writing courses or workshops at the tertiary level. For example, Salma (2015) in her study attempted to find the problems of writing skill and the practical needs of it in the Iranian EFL context through a quantitative research design. The findings revealed that 30 % of the participants find it difficult to start writing as they cannot organize their ideas. Moreover, Goddard's study (2003) revealed a significant level of improvement in students' writing skills concluding that the writing course could be considered beneficial for the learners. In an attempt to design a writing course syllabus, Alharbi (2019) carried out a study to reveal writing difficulties faced by learners in an EFL setting. Based on the findings, he reported that compared to the pre-tests, the learners' writing performance improved after taking the writing course. More specifically, the evaluative research by O'Connell (2022) attempted to use a Logic Model to evaluate a rater training procedure for EAP written assessment within a university department. The researcher drew a logic model outlining the department's guiding principles for rater training including problem, assumptions, inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. In another study, Stegemann and Jaciw (2018) used logic model framework in an attempt to identify the key assumptions and implementation problems of an inclusive education program in Canada.

In the Turkish context, there are various studies conducted concluding that writing skill is not fully harnessed by Turkish English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because of various factors such as the extent and characteristics of writing instruction and experience in the native language and second language before entering university, inadequate knowledge of content, coherence and linguistic forms (Alagözlü, 2007; Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Kurt & Atay, 2007). As supported by Alagözlü (2007) foreign language learners find it very difficult to start a writing task, find the right words and develop ideas in a unified and organized way. She claimed that critical thinking skills and voice have something to do with learners' poor writing abilities in addition to their limited English language knowledge.

Also, there are studies exploring the writing performance in English and its relation to some variables such as virtual reality (Dolgunsöz et al., 2018), self- efficacy (Erkan & Saban, 2011), writing anxiety (Ekmekçi, 2018; Öztürk & Çeçen, 2007), challenges and main problems (Eryılmaz & Yeşilyurt, 2020) and feedback (Çelik, 2020; Kurt & Atay, 2007). As noted by Eryılmaz and Yeşilyurt, (2020), regarding evaluation studies on EFL writing, on the other hand, there is a dearth of research although evaluation studies on English language programs abound (see for example Coşkun, 2013; Tekin, 2015; Tunç, 2010). Those few studies conducted on the perceived effectiveness of writing courses are not evaluation, but part of needs analysis studies carried out particularly in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts (see for example Akcaoğlu, 2011; Akyel & Özek, 2010; Yağız, 2009). For example, with regard to writing difficulties and problems, the following studies emphasized different aspects. To start, Yağız's study (2009) revealed that lexical inadequacy was regarded as a problem indicating that an academic writing course should provide necessary and adequate information with regard to lexical knowledge to the learners. Similarly, Akcaoğlu

(2011) explored the academic writing needs of graduate students concluding that they needed a wide range of vocabulary to overcome the difficulties. Concerning the development of writing skills, Akdemir and Eyerci (2016) tried to explore the effectiveness of writing templates concluding that they might be useful tools for improving student writing performance.
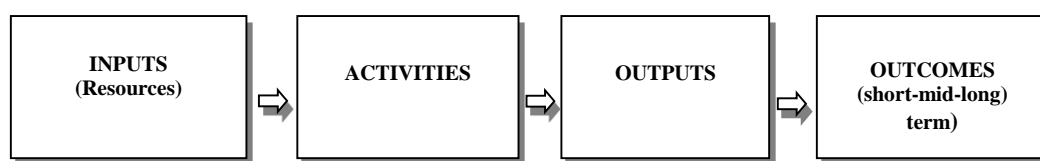
1.1.3.   Logic Modelling: Defining Qualities

As stated by Owen (2006), clarificative form of evaluation is usually conducted when program planners have not worked on a clear and comprehensive program plan. In such cases, programs are in operation but have vague goals that provide little guidance for those responsible for program delivery. Thus, having a strong formative purpose, clarificative evaluation leads to explicit program designs. In doing so, it helps stakeholders make connections between the interventions and intended outcomes by strengthening coherence.

As a clarificative evaluation model, logic model is a useful tool that "surfaces and summarizes the explicit and implicit logic of how a program operates to produce its desired benefits and results" (Martin & Carey, 2014, p. 456). In this systematic approach, the steps followed are designed to result in "graphic representations of a program showing the intended relationships between investments and results" (Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008, p. 4). In other words, it serves as a framework for presenting the logical linkages among the program elements which include inputs, activities, outputs, and short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
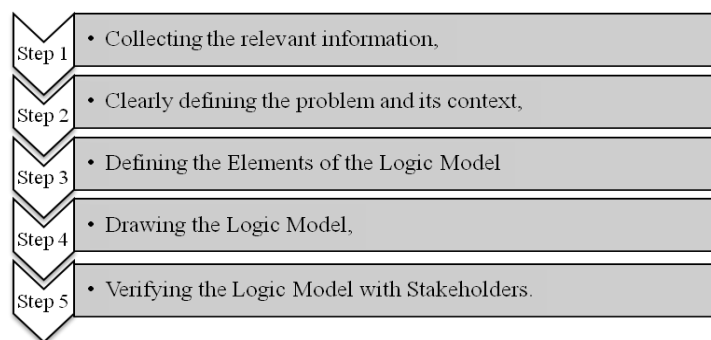
Main Elements of the Logic Model

In this model, inputs refer to "the human, financial, organizational, and community resources invested in a program so that it will be able to perform its planned activities" (Savaya & Waysman, 2005, p. 87). Teachers, course books, technical assistance are among the inputs of educational programs. Activities are all those components that are expected to create the intended outcomes. Homework assignments, presentations, and field trips are examples of activities. Outputs are characterized as the direct products and services provided such as the number of classes taught. Outcomes are the changes or benefits derived from activities. In education, changes in knowledge of the target population can be given as an example for outcomes (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999; Savaya & Waysman, 2005).

The construction of a logic model includes several steps as demonstrated in Figure 2 below. The first one involves collecting relevant information about the program through program documentation and interviews with stakeholders. In the second step, the problem and context are described in order to reach an understanding of the problems the target population of the program may face.

In the third step, the elements of the logic model are identified and catalogued in a table which enables the evaluator to check the accuracy of the information gathered with stakeholders with an aim to complete the missing information, if any. The fourth step involves the drawing of the logic model as a flow chart which displays the linkages and logical flow of the program by organizing the information regarding the program elements. In the last step, the logic model is shared with the participants to achieve a mutual understanding of each element.

Figure 2. *Steps for implementing the logic model*

Step 1 • Collecting the relevant information,
Step 2 • Clearly defining the problem and its context,
Step 3 • Defining the Elements of the Logic Model
Step 4 • Drawing the Logic Model,
Step 5 • Verifying the Logic Model with Stakeholders.

Note. From "Logic Models: A Tool for Telling Your Program's Performance Story" by J. A. McLaughlin and G. B. Jordan, 1999, *Evaluation and Program Planning, 22* (1), p. 4.

All in all, logic modelling can be used for the purposes of program planning, promoting evaluation of an existing program as well as generating a clear and shared understanding of how a program works (Martin & Carey, 2014; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). Facilitating communication and cooperation between stakeholders in addition to displaying logical linkages between the elements in a program; logic modeling plays a major role within this current study which particularly attempts to find out any causal connection between writing course activities and program outcomes, thus providing accountability for the program.

2. Method
2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured one-on-one and focus group interviews in addition to program document analysis was adopted for this study. Since the aim is to understand the outcomes and the activities of the course as identified by the stakeholders, a clarificative form of program evaluation was undertaken. As stated by Owen (2006), this form of evaluation is usually done when program planners have not worked on a clear and comprehensive program plan. In such cases, programs are in operation but have vague goals that provide little guidance for those responsible for program delivery. Thus, having a strong formative purpose, clarificative evaluation leads to explicit program designs.

2.2. Program Context and Course Description

This study took place in the French Language and Literature department of a Faculty of Science and Letters at a state university in Turkey. To gain admission to this department, students have to take a university entrance exam administered by the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM), which consists of two stages: the Higher Education Entrance Exam (YKS) and the Bachelor Placement Exam (YDT). The second stage exam, YDT, includes a foreign language test, and those who wish to study in French Language and Literature departments can take this exam in English, German or French. Since English is the most commonly taught language in Turkey, most students take the exam in English. The placement into the programs is made by ÖSYM based on the scores students obtain from this language exam and their grade point averages (GPA) in secondary education.

The specific program where the study was carried out accepts 41 students each year. There is a compulsory French language preparatory year in which learners are trained to have linguistic skills in line with the Common European Framework of Reference criteria and then a 4-year program is followed. The students are trained through a wide range of activities and teaching techniques including small discussion groups, role plays, problem-solving, and lecturing as they are expected to express themselves both in the spoken and written discourse which makes it necessary to provide them with writing skills. 'English Writing Skills'-course, the focus of the present study, was an elective course offered in the 3rd year of the program at the time of the data collection in 2016-2017 academic year. The course had been running for two terms, fall, and spring, for two hours a week since the 2012- 2013 academic year as part of a larger Elective Foreign Language course program. The teaching staff of the course is appointed each year for two terms from among the English language instructors working at the university. Perhaps due to this temporary appointment of the teaching staff, the 'English Writing Skills" course lacks a well-defined program content.

Each year instructors design their own separate syllabi, select materials, and choose classroom activities at the beginning of the term. At the time of the data collection, there were two course groups taught by two instructors following their own course programs. The course documents, i.e. the syllabi, prepared by the abovementioned instructors uncovered the following outcomes and related activities (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Writing Course Outcomes and Classroom Activities as Indicated in the Course Documents

Course outcomes	Classroom activities
▪ Developing as independent learners and thinkers ▪ Transferring the acquired knowledge and intellectual skills to further academic work ▪ Developing an understanding of the complex relationship between writers and literary texts and their social, cultural, and other contexts ▪ Writing a summary ▪ Identifying the components of a text ▪ Writing a short text	▪ Brain-storming ▪ Clustering ▪ Pre-writing activities ▪ Writing different types of paragraphs ▪ Organizing a paragraph / essay ▪ Free writing

The document analysis of the course syllabi revealed a total number of 6 outcomes and 6 classroom activities. Initially, the course documents were observed to lack well-defined outcomes that are linked to related activities. For example, it is not clear how the outcome referring to a higher-order skill, i.e. "*transferring the acquired knowledge and intellectual skills to further academic work*", can be achieved through the activities listed since such a skill development would definitely require a more genre-based academic writing teaching and learning. Similarly, the outcome "*developing an understanding of the complex relationship between writers and literary texts and their social, cultural and other contexts*" does not seem to be related to any classroom activities. There are also some identifiable problems with the classroom activities. Although *brainstorming* and *clustering* are pre-writing activities there is also a reference to *pre-writing activities* as a separate activity type.

2.3. Participants

Two course instructors and 10 3rd and 4th-year students participated in the study voluntarily. The participants were given codes (I1, I2, S1, S2, etc.) to ensure their anonymity. Some participant characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Characteristics of the Participants

Group	Participant codes	Gender	Experience	Academic degree
	I1	Female	7	Ph.D.(continuing)
Instructors	I2	Female	8	Ph.D.(completed)

Group	Participant codes	Gender	Year of study	Proficiency level
	S1	Female	3rd year	B1
	S2	Female	3rd year	B1
Students of	S3	Female	3rd year	B1
Instructor 1	S4	Female	3rd year	B1
	S5	Female	3rd year	B1
	S6	Female	3rd year	B1
	S7	Female	4th year	B2
Students of	S8	Female	4th year	B2
Instructor 2	S9	Female	4th year	B2
	S10	Male	4th year	B2

The English language instructors teaching the course were experienced teachers and at the time of data collection, they had been teaching the course for two years. The 3rd year students were all female and had just completed the course at the time of data collection. Their proficiency level was B1. Three female and

one male 4th year students who had taken the course the previous year also participated in the study. The reason for including them was to understand the similarities and differences between the perceptions of these two groups of students since each year different instructors were appointed to teach the course and were allowed to design it. As this study had a strong formative purpose, it was thought that an alignment could be made in future course design if there were any inconsistencies between the classroom activities and outcomes that each of these groups were exposed to in different academic years.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected towards the end of the fall term expecting that the students would have a clear understanding of the course goals and activities towards the end of the term. Initially, the written informed consent form was obtained from both groups of participants. Next, the logic modelling steps were followed. For the first two steps, the existing course syllabi designed by the two instructors were examined by the researchers in order to collect the relevant information and define the problem. In the 3rd and 4th steps, semi-structured interviews with the instructors and focus group interviews with the students were carried out so as to uncover the intended outcomes and classroom activities to draw the logic model. The students were informed about to what the outcomes and classroom activities might refer before they were asked the following interview questions: "What do you think of the outcomes of -English Writing Skills- course?" and "What activities are done to achieve these outcomes?" The interviews lasted approximately ten minutes. As for the last step, the graphic representations of the elements in the course were shared with the participants in order to reach a shared understanding between them and the researchers in order to overcome potential misunderstandings.

The interviews with both groups were taped and then transcribed into word documents for coding. To analyze the data, inductive content analysis was used. Initially, the raw data were read to reach a general understanding. Later on, the data were coded which helped to identify the common themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this process, identifying and naming the themes were achieved by placing the similar and common words, concepts, and basic ideas into the same categories.

In order to achieve validity and reliability, some specific actions were taken. For content validity, two ELT academics were consulted on the interview questions before conducting the interviews. After receiving their feedback, some modifications were made to the questions. In terms of data analysis, an internal validation technique known as member checking was utilized and the transcribed interviews and the results were returned to the participants to check for accuracy (Lynch, 1996). The researchers also tried to minimize mono-operation and mono-method bias threats to external validity (Lynch, 1996) by triangulating the data sources (instructors, 3rd-year students, and 4th-year students) and data collection tools (semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and analysis of the existing course documents). With regards to reliability, the data gathered from the interviews with both groups were analyzed by one of the research authors and one external independent rater. The Cohen's kappa was run to determine inter-rater reliability and the consistency was found to be $\kappa = 0.88$ ($p < 0.001$) for the instructors' data set and $\kappa = 0.90$ ($p < 0.001$) for that of the students', which shows a considerably adequate agreement among the raters.

3. Findings

Research question 1: What are the intended outcomes of the writing course as perceived by the students and instructors?

The analysis of the focus group interviews conducted with the students revealed the following perceived outcomes for the writing course (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Writing Course Outcomes as Perceived by the Students

Outcomes of the course	Student codes
Using linking words appropriately	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10
Enriching vocabulary	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10
Planning an outline	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10

Organizing ideas	S1, S2, S3, S4, S7, S8, S10
Achieving unity and coherence	S1, S2, S8, S10
Writing compare and contrast paragraphs	S1, S2, S4, S5
Correcting grammatical mistakes	S3, S5, S7
Using fixed structures	S3, S9, S10
Using specific terms	S7, S9
Using punctuation correctly	S7, S8
Using adverbs	S4

As seen in Table 3, the students identified 11 outcomes for the course. Of these, only 3 outcomes, i.e. *using linking words appropriately*, *enriching vocabulary*, and *planning an outline,* were named by all of them. Thus, it can be stated that the course program heavily emphasized organization and unity of the writing texts as well as vocabulary building. The relatively high consensus achieved for the next two outcomes, *organizing ideas* and *achieving unity and coherence*, also indicates that achieving cohesion and coherence were the primary writing outcomes as perceived by the students.

As opposed to these similar perceptions, on the other hand, the analysis revealed that more than half of the outcomes were stated by less than half of the students, which shows a discrepancy in their perceptions regardless of their group as being the student of I1 or I2. When these results are analyzed closely, it can also be seen that those highly specific goals such as *using adverbs*, *using punctuation correctly*, and *using specific terms* were stated as the course outcomes, which might indicate individual writing skill development and/or problems these students experienced throughout the course. Similarly, the emergence of *correcting grammatical mistakes* as an outcome might also indicate an attempt to draw attention to grammatical accuracy. All in all, the differences in the perceptions regardless of the class levels show that the courses taught by different instructors did not refer to a common set of learning outcomes as the 3rd year students (taught by I1) and 4th year students (taught by I2) identified differing ideas. Similar to those of the students, a total of 11 outcomes were defined by the instructors (see Table 4). While 5 of them, *organizing ideas*, *planning an outline*, *achieving unity and coherence*, *writing different text types,* and *writing parts of an essay*, were indicated by both instructors, more than half of the outcomes were named by either of them.

Table 4.

Writing Course Outcomes as Perceived by the Language Instructors (N= 2)

Outcomes of the course	Instructor codes
Organizing ideas	I1, I2
Planning an outline	I1, I2
Achieving unity and coherence	I1, I2
Writing different text types (compare and contrast paragraphs, argumentative paragraphs, formal letters, review of a book/film)	I1, I2
Writing parts of an essay (introductions and conclusions)	I1, I2
Using linking words appropriately	I1
Using a wide range of vocabulary	I1
Supporting ideas	I1
Improving critical reading and thinking skills	I2
Distinguishing between fact and opinion, cause and effect, problem and solution, similarities and differences, general and specific ideas, and relevant and irrelevant information	I2
Improving research and presentation skills concerning their written works	I2

As the findings revealed, both instructors indicated the basic writing skills as the major learning outcomes of the course. Yet, when the perceptions of the instructors are viewed separately, it can be said that those stated by I1 refer to a set of more generic skills and basic writing outcomes which can be observed in the following statement:

I1: *I try to help my learners to organize their writing by planning an outline, write their texts using related vocabulary and linking words in order to achieve unity and coherence in their paragraphs.*

On the other hand, the outcomes stated by I2 in her own words suggest higher-order skills as follows:

I2: *My writing course mainly tries to provide my students an opportunity to improve their writing skills as well as their critical reading, critical thinking, research, and presentation skills.*

This finding indicates a notable discrepancy between the two instructors' perceptions regarding the intended goals of the course program which is quite similar among their students as well. For example, the students taught by I2 could not identify any higher-order writing skills as course outcomes, which shows their unawareness about the learning outcomes of the course. However, the students taught by I1 mostly identified similar outcomes to some extent such as *planning an outline, organizing ideas, achieving unity and coherence.* When the similarities and differences between the perceptions of the students and instructors about the intended outcomes of the writing course are analyzed together, it is seen that most of the generic and somewhat basic writing skills are stated as the course outcomes by all interviewees. Furthermore, a considerable overlap can be detected between the perceptions of the program students and I1 while I2 appeared to point out some long-term outcomes as echoed in the following excerpt:

I2: *The other purposes I want to achieve through my writing courses are developing student's creativity as well as critical thinking, using English composition skills at the university level and beyond.*

Lastly, when the findings from the course documents (see Table 2) and the instructors' perceptions regarding the course outcomes are compared, it is seen that fewer outcomes in number are stated in the documents. Since outcomes are the backbones of any course program and are linked to different programs components such as activities, materials, pedagogical approaches and assessment, it would not be wrong to say that the course documents in their current forms are not comprehensive enough to guide classroom teaching and learning.

Research question 2: How is the course designed to achieve the intended outcomes?

To understand whether the intended outcomes were linked to and supported by the classroom activities, both participant groups were asked to identify them. In Table 5 below, those activities as identified by the students are presented.

Table 5.

Writing Course Classroom Activities as Identified by the Students

Classroom activities	Student codes
Doing weekly writing assignments	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10
Writing formal/informal texts	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6 , S7, S8, S10
Writing essays	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S10
Writing sample texts	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S10
Following course materials (such as reading instructor's notes, reading sample texts and doing exercises)	S1, S2, S3, S4, S7, S8
Analyzing sample texts for target structures	S1, S2, S3, S4, S7, S8
Making presentations based on their written works	S7, S8, S9, S10
Writing newspaper reports (Health, sport, magazine)	S7, S8, S9
Writing invitation letters	S1, S2, S4
Studying basic terms (Literature, health, football)	S7, S8, S9
Receiving teacher feedback	S3

The students identified 11 activities within the course. Of these, only *doing weekly writing assignments* was reported by all the students. In accordance with this finding, it can be noted that the instructors also placed the highest importance on the assignments in order to support the development of the related learning outcomes (see Table 6). Additionally, almost all students reported *writing formal/informal texts* and *writing essays* as other major activities of the course.

On the other hand, the findings revealed that almost half of the activities (5) were stated by less than half of the students, which indicates a divergence in their perceptions. The emergence of *teacher feedback* or *studying basic terms* as classroom activities might indicate individual learning experiences of the students rather than whole-class activities. In short, the differences in the perceptions of the course activities show that the courses taught by different instructors did not share a common set of learning activities. *Making presentations based on their written works, writing newspaper reports,* and *studying the basic terms (Literature, football, health)* are the main activities the students taught by I2 mentioned while the students taught by I1 reported *doing weekly writing assignments, writing formal/informal texts, writing essays and writing sample texts* as the main activities. Table 6 below is prepared to show the instructors' reports about the activities they used in order to achieve their goals in the writing course program.

Table 6.

Writing Course Classroom Activities as Identified by the Instructors

Classroom activities	Instructors
Weekly assignments	I1, I2
Collaborative activities (pair and group work)	I1, I2
Writing sample essays	I1, I2
Lecturing	I1, I2
Writing formal and informal texts	I1, I2
Writing four short essays	I1, I2
Writing compare/ contrast and argumentative paragraphs	I1
Writing a book review	I1
Making presentations	I2
Free writing	I2
Listening and video-watching activities	I2
Learning Strategy Instruction (such as planning, note-taking, gathering information, drafting, free-writing, revising, proofreading, and editing)	I2

The instructors identified 12 classroom activities for the course. While half of the activities, *weekly assignments, collaborative activities (pair and group work), writing four short essays, writing formal and informal texts, lecturing,* and *writing sample essays* were indicated by both instructors, the rest of them were named by either of them supporting the divergence of the students' perceptions regarding the in-class activities. Concerning the differences, both instructors can be said to have deployed those classroom activities that are in line with the course outcomes they stated in the interviews (see Table 4). As the interview data on the course outcomes earlier revealed, I1 was found to be more concerned with the development of generic writing skills. Thus, in terms of the classroom activities, she reported having used those activities that would be more functional to develop generic writing skills such as weekly assignments related to the development of micro-skills of organizing ideas, managing coherence, using punctuation, writing sample essays, etc. On the other hand, since I2 reported targeting at the development of *improving research and presentation skills of learners' written work* and *developing critical reading and thinking skills,* she reported to have used activities such as *presentations, listening and video watching activities, strategy instruction* in order to cater to the development of such skills as shown in the following comment:

> I2: *I try to make students engaged in listening and watching activities so that the classroom atmosphere becomes favorable, encouraging, tolerant, and joyful.*

As a final point, when the students' and instructors' perceptions of the activities of the course are compared, it can be stated that there is an overlap between the two parties to a large extent. For example, the students taught by I2 reported *presentations* as one of the main activities, similarly I2 attempted to improve learners' research and presentation skills through making presentations.

To conclude, while a total of 12 activities and 11 outcomes were identified based on the analysis of the data from the teachers, 11 activities and 11 outcomes were determined based on the analysis of the data from the students. A synthesis of all the findings gathered so far helped construct the following two logic models as presented in figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3.

Logic Model 1 Representing the Writing Skill Course Design Based on Instructors' Perceptions

Situation	Inputs		Activities	Outcomes
English Writing Skills course	• 2 hours a week • One term • 2 instructors • Selected course materials by the instructors	→	• **Weekly assignments *** • **Collaborative activities** • **Writing sample essays** • **Lecturing** • **Writing formal and informal texts** • **Writing four short essays** • Writing compare/ contrast and argumentative paragraphs • Writing a book review • Making presentations • Free writing • Listening and video-watching activities • Learning Strategy Instruction (such as planning, note-taking, gathering information, drafting, free-writing, revising, proofreading, and editing)	• **Organizing ideas *** • **Planning an outline** • **Achieving unity and coherence** • **Writing different text types (compare & contrast paragraphs, argumentative paragraphs, formal letters, review of a book/ film)** • **Writing parts of an essay (introductions and conclusions)** • Using linking words appropriately • Using a wide range of vocabulary • Supporting ideas • Improving critical reading and thinking skills • Distinguishing between fact and opinion, cause and effect, problem and solution, similarities and differences, general and specific ideas, and relevant and irrelevant information • Improving research and presentation skills for their written works

Note. Items in bold were stated by both instructors.

The Logic Model 1 (see Figure 3) essentially shows the contextual factors defined as inputs, the planned activities to help realize the outcomes and the intended course outcomes. The main philosophy behind the logic model can be summarized as follows: under certain circumstances (contextual factors, external factors, resources at present), if the program users employ the activities, then they will produce the expected-intended outcomes (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). Accordingly, the present Logic Model 1 reveals that although the activities reported by both instructors may be regarded as coherent in relation to the outcomes they support (written in bold), the allocated time for instruction appears to be a barrier for the successful implementation of them. Especially those intended to develop skills in producing written work in different text types or improve critical reading and thinking skills may not be possible to attain in a 2-hour 14–week course. Therefore, it can be stated that the consistency and the interrelations among the components of the logic model are questionable.

Besides, the outcomes identified by the students also support this finding in that they are more related to those basic, low-level generic writing skills such as using linking words, planning an outline, organizing ideas (see Table 3), which are relatively more concrete, visible, and assessable in the short-term. For this reason, it would be logical to categorize the outcomes as short, mid and long-term ones.

The program logic represented in the Logic Model 2 (see Figure 4) through the lens of the students shows a lack of consistency between the reported activities and the intended outcomes. Despite the fact that there is a wide range of activities requiring complex and more advanced writing skills such as writing essays, writing informal/formal/sample texts, writing newspaper reports; the majority of the outcomes are related to basic technical and formal aspects of writing skill development such as using linking words, fixed structures, and achieving grammatical accuracy.

Figure 4.

Logic Model 2 Representing the Writing Skill Course Design Based on Students' Perceptions

Situation	Inputs		Activities		Outcomes
English Writing Skills course	• 2 hours a week • One term • 2 instructors • Selected course materials by the instructors	⟹	• Doing weekly writing assignments • Writing formal / informal texts • Writing sample texts • Following course materials (instructor's notes, etc.) such as reading sample texts and doing exercises • Writing essays • Writing newspaper reports (Health, sport, magazine) • Studying basic terms (Literature, health, football) • Writing invitation letters • Analyzing sample texts for target structures • Making presentations of their written works • Receiving teacher feedback	⟹	• Using linking words appropriately • Enriching vocabulary • Organizing ideas • Planning an outline • Achieving unity and coherence • Writing compare and contrast paragraphs • Correcting grammatical mistakes • Using fixed structures • Using specific terms • Using punctuation correctly • Using adverbs

Consequently, the rather loose logical flow and linkages between the elements of both logic models and also the seemingly clear discrepancies between the perceptions of the instructors and students regarding the course activities and outcomes indicate that the program design is not complete. In other words, the models do not provide powerful evidence that the activities and outcomes are logically linked. Yet, it must be noted that further examination of the models is necessary to verify them. The level of detail as obtained from the findings does not allow to see the interrelations between all key elements accurately or the causal relationships that exist.

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

Utilizing clarificative program evaluation approach, this study was carried out to explore the outcomes and activities of a general English writing course at the tertiary level as planned and perceived by the course instructors and as perceived by the students who were enrolled in the course. Further, it was attempted to probe whether there is a logical connection between the activities and outcomes through logic modelling. To this aim, the relevant course documents were examined, and the perceptions of the course students and instructors were elicited.

The initial findings obtained from the course syllabi revealed that the course was geared towards higher-order writing skills to help students develop as independent learners and thinkers, transfer their knowledge and skills to further academic work as well as develop an appreciation of the complex relationship between writers, texts and the context in which they are situated. In parallel, the linguistic outcomes were observed to take second place. Given the fact that the program students were 3rd and 4th year B1 and B2 proficiency level English language learners, these goals can be regarded as appropriate to their age, English language and academic development. However, since the planned learning activities stated in the documents are not varied and mostly include pre-writing activities, it is not clearly identifiable how they will promote these higher-order objectives that require learning transfer.

When the course content is examined outlined in the program documents, the primary emphasis seems to be on the critical aspects of a wide range of literary works and the application of acquired knowledge and intellectual skills to further academic works. This focus is evident through the indicated learning outcomes

in the program documents, with the linguistic concerns taking a second place. However, as the instructors' interview data revealed, only I2 made references to improving students' critical reading and thinking skills as well as their research and presentation skills. In a similar vein, Alagözlü (2007) supported that poor writing abilities might be explained by the lack of critical thinking skills and limited English language knowledge. So, the discrepancy between the outcomes and the planned activities in the course syllabi, and the intended outcomes as stated by the instructors in the interviews reveals a lack of strategic instructional planning and implementation as well as communication between the course instructors. This implicates the importance of courses or modules about language program development as an essential part of EFL teachers' professional development both in pre-service education and in-service training. As it is stated by Hasman (1994, p.33), EFL teachers are frequently expected to plan courses and design course-specific programs [syllabi] "without any prior training or any guidelines on how to proceed". However, it is no doubt that designing an EFL course program is a quite challenging task which can be demanding during the planning process (Hasman, 1994; Kırkgöz, et al., 2016) as no single design (one-fits-all-approach) is suitable for varying contexts. Remarkably, as it is noted by Kırkgöz et al. (2016), it is frequently the teacher who guides and manages the process as they have first-hand knowledge about their students and their needs. Thereby, teachers as program designers and decision-makers need to follow the essential steps of program development including "clarifying the goals of the program, correlating these goals with the students' backgrounds and needs, offering content and skills materials in a variety of ways, and providing an outline for evaluating the program" (Hasman, 1994, p.33). All in all, these findings make it evident that language program design from planning to implementation and to evaluation should be an integral part of the professional make-up of English language teachers.

Aside from the important role of teachers and teacher knowledge and skills in program design, such an endeavor, without a doubt, requires cooperation among all stakeholders including students, teachers, school administrators, and so on. Yet, such cooperation necessitates and is maximized via institutionally structured, shared and supported processes as well as values and priorities (Bundy, Vogel, & Zachary, 2018). Therefore, the development of knowledge about and skills for course design needs to be also examined from an institutional perspective. The responsiveness and support of higher education (HE) institutions to such needs and efforts is questionable in the Turkish HE. Successful management of HE institutions, prioritizes individuals as "the most valuable asset in organization, and develops programs for constant learning on individual, organizational and global levels" which "means being aware of the significance of setting the mission, finding resources (people, money, knowledge) and finally meriting outcomes" (Marić, 2013, p. 223). Thus, organizational mechanisms to support the teaching staff in ways to promote their development and learning must be established as well. In this study context, this clearly refers to supporting language instructors in language program design and development since they teach EGP and EAP courses continuously trying to tailor them to the needs of different learner groups majoring in different disciplines.

The overlap between two instructors' opinions about the outcomes related to the organization of writing texts such as "*To be able to organize ideas, plan an outline, achieve unity and coherence*" supports the idea that the EFL learners mostly have problems with the unity and coherence in their writing tasks as in line with Salma's study (2015) who highlighted that EFL learners find it difficult to start writing as they cannot organize their ideas. This also corroborates with Myles' sayings "conscious effort and much practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas" are necessary benchmark for academic writing (2001). Moreover, with regard to the outcomes of the course as stated by the instructors in this study, similar findings can be observed in Yağız's study (2009) as both studies emphasized providing lexical knowledge and enriching vocabulary for improving writing skill of learners. Considering teaching activities, as stated by Coşkun (2011) in his study, it might be necessary to shift the emphasis from discourse-level writing to more free-writing exercises through more student-centered activities which also supports the findings of this study as the activities in both logic models include free writing and collaborative activities, as well. Additionally, the activities in the logic models of the current study including drafting, outlining, making presentations, and analysis of sample texts were also suggested by the instructors in Coşkun's study (2011).

The findings regarding students' perceptions of the course outcomes showed that they viewed the development of some generic writing skills such as planning an outline, organizing ideas, achieving unity and coherence as the major learning goals of the course. Moreover, the technical aspects such as punctuation and using adverbs, correct grammar, linking words, specific terms, and fixed structures were considered as the course learning outcomes by student participants. Given the fact that the instructors did not identify the

development of these technical skills except *using linking words appropriately* as the outcomes of the course, it becomes obvious that the students could not develop a clear understanding about the underlying goals of the course. Despite the fact that the students in this study context were identified as B1, B2 level English language learners according to their English language test scores they obtained at the university entrance exam, they may have had a much lower level of writing skills. Therefore, this finding also indicates the necessity of conducting a needs assessment as the first step in course design (Nation & Macalister, 2010), which not only enables instructors to determine their course objectives and identify their learners' skills and characteristics but also enables program students to become aware of their own needs. Such an awareness and insight may minimize the perception gaps between instructors and students regarding different aspects of the course including the underlying learning objectives.

Lastly, despite the fact that the level of detail as obtained from the findings does not allow to make bold claims about the program logic as perceived by the instructors and students, the logic models drawn tentatively suggest that the logical flow among the elements of the program such as the activities and outcomes, are not in a close causal relationship. Therefore, it can be understood that the program is inadequately defined and there is lack of communication and agreement between the program participants which was observed in the differences between 4th and 3rd year students' opinions. This result, firstly, emphasizes the urgency of explicit goal identification for a comprehensive course content development in which the sequence of activities and their links to specific outcomes are clarified. As Hasman (1994) indicates, course objectives are precursors to other course design steps. Secondly, once set, course learning outcomes need to be communicated to the students as explicitly as possible because the related literature shows that knowledge about learning outcomes guide the students, help them stay focused, organize their learning, and help them understand the importance of materials in courses (Simon & Taylor, 2009). Thirdly, as Yıldırım and Zehir Topkaya (2020, p.9) also note, "constructing a collaborative community of teaching practice" is needed to overcome communication problems and administration's leadership is required "to create foundations for the development of a sense of membership in the community of practice". For course design, revisions, and improvements, organizing regular meetings prior to the commencement of the academic year can help achieve a unified course syllabus.

5. Suggestion and Implications

The findings of the study highlight several significant issues which deserve further exploration and discussion. This study was designed in alignment with the principles of clarificative evaluation since the program of the 'English Writing Skills' course under investigation was a relatively established one and had been running for almost a decade at the time of data collection. Language program coordinators, language instructors, and other stakeholders working in similar contexts can benefit from this program evaluation approach as this study can be regarded as a systematic attempt to employ it to find answers to the research questions it pursued.

As this study also showed, in general sense most programs might be considered as not explicit (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). In an age of accountability and quality assurance in education, systematic development of programs as well as measuring their performances and impact have become established strategies. On this point, the logic modelling can be effectively used to describe and assess both language programs to improve the quality of language education. This study showcased how this approach could be used on course-level language programs to capture the program structure. On this account, future research on language course design may include explorations to reveal the links and causal relationship among the elements of the program structure explaining *how* teachers build a whole network of learning outcomes, resources, activities, assessment procedures, and etc. that fully accounts for the program logic. One-on-one interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of course materials are just some approaches that this process may include.

Without a doubt, in order to operationalize language program evaluations regardless of the approach utilized, the findings of this study strongly emphasized that needs assessment should be undertaken to clearly identify learners' needs. Since needs are context-specific, socially constructed, and evolve in time, it is recommended that on-going needs analysis be incorporated into the institutional organizational system of any language program and language instructors be empowered to carry out their needs analyses, analyze and interpret the findings, and transfer the results to successfully develop and improve their courses. Professional development programs can be offered to develop instructors' research skills encouraging them

to do research in order to improve the quality of their programs, their teaching, and learning. This study also strongly emphasizes the need to cultivate a professional culture of communication and collaboration. It is recommended that instructors working in the same program contexts, teaching the same or similar courses be brought together for course design, revision purposes which must be organized by the administrative staff. In this study, the instructors' observed lack of common understanding about the learning outcomes and activities might have also arisen from the fact that they were appointed to the department to teach the course for a year, which is a common practice used to organize and manage EGP courses offered in different departments in Turkish HE. Such an approach may cause a negative impact on instructors' sense of course ownership, which may result in reluctance in investing time, effort, and energy in course design. Therefore, heads of the departments as well as the administrators of the School of Foreign Languages should encourage specialization in teaching EGP courses as well as EAP and ESP courses and instructors should be appointed to faculties and departments accordingly.

Last but not least, it needs to be acknowledged that there are some limitations to the conclusions drawn from the findings of this study. A limited number of students voluntarily participated in the study and therefore the sample cannot be considered as representing the population in the course context, thus the findings and conclusions cannot be generalized to the whole population. Besides, the logic models drawn can be much more complex than the one presented. As the qualitative data was obtained through interviews only in this study, observations, reflective journals, diaries, field notes, etc. would yield more valid and fruitful data. Thus, lack of such data collection tools would cause another limitation to the current study, which the future inquiry could focus on.

6. Endnote

The shorter version of this article was orally presented at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, VII. Uluslararası Eğitimde Araştırmalar Kongresi – ICRE 2017; Çanakkale, (April 27-29, 2017).

Note on Ethical Issues

The author confirms that the study does not need ethics committee approval since the data was collected before 2020 (Date of Confirmation: 07/06/2023).

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