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Research

# A *Pracademic* attempt at course evaluation: tertiary level hybrid academic research class

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**Abstract**
Course evaluation is often overlooked in the curriculum design and development process. This research, viewed through a *pracademic* lens that combines practical and academic perspectives, analyzes the evaluations and suggestions of English-major students (n = 104) regarding an introductory academic research class within an English-medium hybrid teaching context. Using an online survey research model, the study gathered qualitative insights along with the predominance of quantitative data about various aspects of the course, the student roles, and the teacher over three academic years. The findings indicate that while the course was perceived as somewhat challenging, particularly for first-year students still acclimating to the principles of scientific knowledge, over half of the participants reported satisfaction with instruction quality. Key challenges were identified in understanding theoretical content, highlighting a need for increased practice and experiential learning opportunities. Recommendations include fostering student involvement in research communities and integrating applied research courses to enhance students' research skills and professional identities as future teachers. The study also highlights the importance of incorporating diverse instructional materials and the use of the students' mother tongue to improve comprehension. The results imply a necessity to align research training with students' future teaching roles to cultivate a positive attitude toward academic research as a vital component of their professional development.

**Keywords** Course evaluation · Academic research · Research skills · English as a medium of instruction

## 1 Introduction

University professors or instructors, as *pracademics*, assume several roles, from being teachers and practitioners to being academic researchers. Teachers also act as course designers since they need to develop new courses or revise existing ones [8]. Designing a course or revising an existing one requires them to be aware of the different aspects of the process. These aspects include, yet are not limited to, assessing needs, clarifying the course rationale and scope, organizing the input, materials, and opportunities as well as the instructional decisions made in the process. Assessment and evaluation are also an integral aspect of this process. This aspect is mostly attributed to the achievement of instructional goals and the measurement of student achievement. Along with this attribution, however, an ongoing evaluation of the course is one of the essentials to the design and development process of a course. Course evaluation is mostly an overlooked process that may help a course designer to revise an existing course, to foster quality, or design a new course. This point is similarly indicated by Nation and Macalister [19] who propose that it is necessary to review and reflect on the parts

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that are working well or not and to gauge the effectiveness of the course. In other words, "any thoughtful teacher [or a pracademic] will be curious about what is going on in the classroom" [1], p.37–38). With this in mind, in the current research, the *pracademic* acting as both a course designer and a teacher-researcher aims to present the results of an evaluation process of an academic research class run in hybrid mode in an English majoring program.

On the one hand, there has been an increasing interest in academic research classes since the involvement of students with diverse grade levels in research projects has been encouraged by nationwide educational research institutions and the Turkish government. Undergraduate research classes are available at several universities across the globe, and some major corporations and government agencies offer such programs as well [14]. There are several opportunities to involve undergraduate students in faculty-based, institution-based, and international projects. In particular, recent trends in education, such as student-centered learning and project-based learning in the course of pursuing an academic degree, require students to be competent in the field of academic research and to have inquiry skills. On the other hand, given the popularity of student exchange programs, students are expected to have theoretical and methodological research skills so that they can fulfill various course requirements of institutions in different countries. Specifically, regarding the course requirements of the ELL department in the current research, it is possible to state that having academic research skills is a *sine qua non* for bachelor students since they have academic research classes, seminars, and graduation theses along with assignments and term papers for almost all departmental courses. Furthermore, as potential job opportunities for English-majoring students are taken into account, most of graduates in the department prefer to be teachers or academicians in the related language teaching field, and the research class acts as a guide to develop their inquiry skills and inquiry-based professional development for their future practices. Considering the dynamic forces and expectations within the research context, the current research class stays at the heart of gaining academic success. Therefore, conducting teacher research for the evaluation of such an academic research class is believed to be significant as the current research topic has received scant attention in recent studies.

### 1.1 Literature review

Considering general educational processes, the term "evaluation" is mostly used to refer to testing procedures. However, within the context of the current research, evaluation is associated with "all the practices and instruments involved in gathering and compiling the data necessary to make judgments about the value of a language course or program" [4], p.227). Evaluation may be run at the end of a term, a course or along with the program in use. Regardless of when they are specifically conducted, evaluations are regarded as significant since they are believed to play a crucial role in enhancing the course and thus increasing the quality of educational practices. In other words, course evaluations are used to advance the quality of lectures [9] and they can provide invaluable feedback for improvement. As similarly noted in the related literature, "Teachers may, for example, evaluate in order to improve the effectiveness of their 1. Course materials, 2. Classroom activities, 3. Teaching, 4. Students' learning processes, 5. Students' learning […]" [9]. As emphasized, almost every aspect of the educational process, from classroom materials to in-class performances of teachers and learners, is evaluated to better consider all these aspects. In this respect, Brown and Rodgers [4] remind that course evaluation also covers "the evaluations of the teacher's performance, classroom dynamics, students' performances, available sources" (p.250). Taking this reminder into consideration, the current research aimed to obtain English-majoring students' views on the different aspects of an academic research class, including the performance of teachers and teaching processes, English-majoring students' perceptions of their performance and learning, and overall comments and feelings about the class in general. In line with this goal, the current research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are the students content with the academic research class?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the academic research class?
3. What sides of the class need to be improved?

With the underlying framework of the study, which is based on a *pracademic* perspective, this research adopts an online survey model that focuses on the various aspects of the course, including student satisfaction, strengths and weaknesses, areas for improvement, teacher performance and student performance and overall class experiences from the students' perspective.

### 1.2 Key aspects of course evaluation

Course evaluation serves multiple crucial purposes. These purposes were elaborated by Graves [7] with a list. First, evaluating a course allows educators, including teachers and course designers, to assess its effectiveness and make necessary improvements to enhance the overall learning experience and outcomes for students. Second, by conducting evaluations, educators can identify specific areas within the course that may require improvement based on the needs, lacks, and feedback of the students. Third, involving students in the course evaluation process empowers them to take ownership of their learning journey, fostering a sense of responsibility and engagement in their educational experience. That is, taking their opinions regarding the course evaluation promotes their learner autonomy, too. Fourth, feedback obtained through course evaluations provides valuable insights that can be used to redesign and refine the course structure, content, and delivery methods for future terms. Fifth, course evaluations help academic institutions and educators make informed decisions about whether to continue offering a particular course based on its effectiveness and relevance. Sixth, through evaluation, educators can measure the overall achievement of the course in meeting its intended learning objectives and outcomes. Finally, insights gathered from course evaluations offer valuable guidance for potential redesign efforts, ensuring continuous improvement and relevance in course offerings. This is similar to what is discussed in the related literature, that is to say, gathering reflections on learning and teaching processes, having formative and collaborative dialogue between educators and students, and shared understanding, and students' active involvement in this evaluation process is deemed essential as it is posited to enhance learning experiences, contribute to sustainable improvements in course design and delivery, and facilitate professional teacher development [6, 20].

Recent advancements in hybrid contexts and course evaluation in tertiary-level education have transformed the dynamic educational landscape significantly [13, 16, 28]. Hybrid contexts are seen as advantageous as they combine the merits and alleviate negative impacts of synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, as well as face-to-face teaching [11, 22]). The incorporation of technology in evaluations, such as online platforms and data analytics, enables more effective trend analysis [29] while self-assessment encourages students to reflect on their learning and take responsibility for their progress. These advancements signify a transition towards more flexible and data-driven methods that enrich the overall educational experience in tertiary-level education.

Overall, by driving constant improvements in the design and delivery of courses and especially promoting students' engagement, course evaluation plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of educational processes. From the perspective of "classroom-centered research", as emphasized by Lynch [18], the present evaluation study may significantly contribute to the enhancement of the course in question. As Brown [3] highlights, an ongoing program evaluation is necessary, and evaluation is truly seen as "the heart of the systematic approach" to curriculum design, too. Furthermore, from a broader perspective, the findings may inform decision-making processes regarding language education programs and other inquiries within the field of applied linguistics.

### 1.3 Research setting

The current research was conducted in a 14-week compulsory academic research class worth 6 ECTS (European credit transfer system) in an English major program at an accredited Turkish public university. The participating students in this research had attended an English preparation program prior to their four-year English major program. These students were expected to enroll in an advanced research class in their third year of study and to present an academic graduation seminar, conduct applied research, and write a thesis to be eligible for graduation. They were also required to write term papers and conduct mini-research throughout their academic education. The research class under investigation aimed to provide the students with the basics of science, scientific research, theoretical, and methodological (know-how and know-what) research skills commonly used in the field of deductive research on language and English Language teaching studies. In brief, the current research class appeared to encompass their initial endeavors in their academic life.

### 1.4 Research sample

The research sample purposefully consisted of first-year English major students who took an academic writing class in the winter semester and an academic research class in the following semester. The course was originally scheduled for face-to-face instruction, but it was moved to online platforms due to unexpected conditions (such as devastating earthquakes and the pandemic). Therefore, the research sample included students who took face-to-face and online classes, where the lecturer, content and coverage were all the same. The teacher already utilized Google Classroom

**Table 1** Features of the hybrid academic research class

| Title | Introduction to research techniques in language studies |
|---|---|
| Credits /ECTS | 4 Credits/7 ECTS Obligatory Course |
| Medium of instruction | English |
| Instructional blocks | Weekly units |
| Mode | Hybrid |
| Year / Semester | First year of the program / Spring semester |
| Duration of the course | 15 weeks- 2 sessions per week |
| Duration of the sessions | 75–90 min |

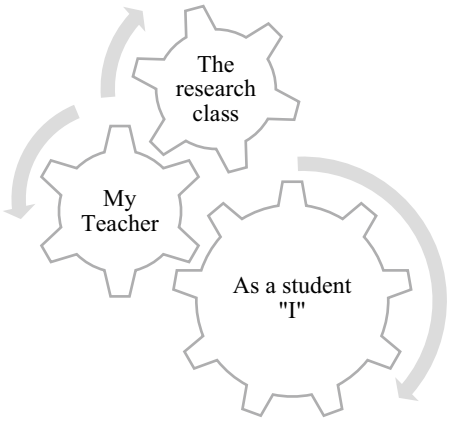



**Fig. 1** Three agents of the evaluation process

asynchronously for all types of assignments, tasks, document sharing, and notifications in both face-to-face mode and fully online live sessions. When the classes were conducted fully online, the teacher continued to use Google Classroom as well. This means that from the beginning to the end, the class was conducted in a hybrid mode (face-to-face lecture plus an asynchronous Google Classroom or fully online live class via Adobe Connect platform plus an asynchronous Google Classroom). Attendance in online live sessions was not obligatory according to institutional regulations; therefore, the recorded classroom videos were always available on the platform for the students to view or review later. The students received the same content and assessment procedures both online and face-to-face. At the end of the semesters, they were all invited to evaluate the class via a link to Google Forms.

Approximately 240 students enrolled in the classroom during these academic years, but 104 of them contributed to the current survey voluntarily. Table 1 summarizes the features of the hybrid academic research class under investigation. All in all, the research evidence was derived from the end-of-class evaluations obtained in the academic years of 2019, 2021, and 2023.

### 1.5 Research method

Course evaluation has historically depended on methodologies such as questionnaire surveys to gather feedback from students regarding their educational experiences [29]. Hence, the online questionnaire survey method was adopted in the current research. As noted previously, the evidence was gathered in the form of a time-series model with different groups of students attending research classes in the three academic years, respectively, 2019, 2021, and 2023. In this way, several students' evaluations regarding the same academic research class were obtained over time intervals.

### 1.6 Data collection tool

To ensure validity and reliability in data collection, the related literature was reviewed extensively, and expert opinions were obtained. The survey form was designed, and pilot testing was conducted with a smaller sample (N = 22). After revisions, it was finalized and administered online by the researcher. The survey probed the students' evaluations of their performance, their teacher, and their academic research class as illustrated in Fig. 1.

A total of four sections was covered in the survey form. The first section encouraged the participants to evaluate their own progress in the current research class (Cronbach's Alpha reliability score: 0.86), the second section asked them to evaluate their teacher (Cronbach's Alpha reliability score: 0.96), and the last section sought their overall feelings and opinions about the research class (Cronbach's Alpha reliability score: 0.83). The items in these four sections were presented on a 0–5 Likert scale ranging from "Completely Agree" to "Completely Disagree". Furthermore, an item with a nine-point scale was utilized to obtain an evaluation of the overall quality of the class. There were also two open-ended questions asking about the most negative and positive sides of the class. At the end of the form, the students' further comments and suggestions for future classes were gathered in an open-ended format.

### 1.7 Data analysis procedures

The quantitative data collected via Google Forms was converted into Excel format. All the data were transferred and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Specifically, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data. For the qualitative part, responses to open-ended items were analyzed manually through conventional content analysis, which refined the recurring themes reported by the participants. To ensure robust analysis, an initial coding framework was established, allowing codes to arise inductively from the data. To enhance credibility and mitigate the risks associated with the absence of multiple coders, the data were revisited several times. This iterative process included multiple rounds of coding. After gaining a comprehensive understanding of the data, the codes were finally organized into coherent themes. They were also quantified and tabulated to indicate the prevalence of patterns within the qualitative data. This integration of qualitative insights with quantitative measures provided an enriched understanding of the data overall. Through these rigorous data analysis procedures, the researcher aimed to ensure credible findings that truly reflect the perspectives of the participants.

### 1.8 Ethical considerations

The research, as well as the data gathering and analysis procedures, was conducted following the ethical principles of academic research. The survey form was designed after a comprehensive literature review, finalized with an expert opinion, and piloted with a similar sample. The participants were informed about the research and contributed to the study voluntarily, which explicates the varied number of participants each year and the limited number of responses given in the open-ended section. Ethical approval (No: E-82554930–050.01.04–365594) was obtained from the Council of Karadeniz Technical University.

### 1.9 Findings

As a hybrid tertiary-level research course, the class was delivered in diverse modes, including remote and traditional classes, across different academic years. The data presented in Table 2 indicates that face-to-face attendance dominates at 59.6%, followed by asynchronous attendance at 20.2% and a combination of synchronous and asynchronous attendance at 14.4%. Synchronous attendance is the least preferred mode, with a percentage of 5.8%.

Overall, more than half of the students attended the face-to-face classes, while nearly the other half attended in remote mode.

Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation scores regarding the students' self-evaluations of their roles and their perceptions regarding their progress in the academic research class.

**Table 2** Mode of attendance

| Modes | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Async | 21 | 20,2 | 20,2 | 20,2 |
| | Sync | 6 | 5,8 | 5,8 | 26,0 |
| | Both Sync and Async | 15 | 14,4 | 14,4 | 40,4 |
| | Face to face | 62 | 59,6 | 59,6 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 104 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

**Table 3** Self-evaluations of the students

| As a student in this class, I | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Motivated to learn the course subject | 104 | 3.63 | 1.01 |
| 2. Completed the tasks regularly | 104 | 3.71 | 1.24 |
| 3. Developed my critical thinking skills | 104 | 3.90 | 0.84 |
| 4. Developed my research skills | 103 | 4.08 | 0.83 |
| 5. Increased my knowledge of science and scientific research | 104 | 4.11 | 0.86 |
| 6. Developed an interest into scientific research | 104 | 3.37 | 1.16 |
| 7. Learnt how to formulate a good research question | 104 | 4.13 | 0.83 |
| 8. Learnt how to design a research | 103 | 4.08 | 0.84 |
| 9. Learnt the steps to conduct a scientific research | 104 | 4.05 | 0.85 |
| 10. Learnt some basic research-related terms like sample, experiment, hypothesis, correlation | 104 | 4.32 | 0.79 |

As inferred from the descriptive analysis in Table 3, the students generally showed a high level of development in research-related skills, such as formulating good research questions, designing research, and understanding the steps to conduct scientific research, as indicated by means ranging from 4.05 to 4.32. However, there was notable variation in their interest in scientific research (Item 6), with a mean of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 1.16, suggesting that some students may need additional engagement to foster a deeper interest in the subject. In other words, this variation may indicate that while some students may already have a strong interest in scientific research, others may require further support to cultivate a deeper interest in the subject. Overall, the students perceived positive progress in critical thinking skills and knowledge acquisition in science and research, highlighting areas of strength and potential areas for further support and encouragement.

Table 4 shows the descriptive analysis results of the students' perceptions regarding of their teacher, specifically the characteristics, roles, and teaching practices. The students' evaluations signify a generally positive perception of the teacher's performance across various aspects of the research class.

As indicated in Table 4, the teacher received high ratings for encouraging discussion and participation (mean: 4.25) and demonstrating sensitivity to students' needs (mean: 4.16). The students also appreciated the clarity in presenting

**Table 4** Students' evaluations of their teacher

| My teacher | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Encouraged me to attend the class regularly | 102 | 4.06 | 0.92 |
| 2. Encouraged discussion and participation | 102 | 4.25 | 0.94 |
| 3. Gave answers to my questions | 103 | 4.39 | 0.74 |
| 4. Demonstrated sensitivity to my needs as a student | 100 | 4.16 | 0.88 |
| 5. Presented the course content clearly | 98 | 4.26 | 0.91 |
| 6. Organized the course very well | 102 | 4.09 | 0.95 |
| 7. Presented the course material in an informative way | 100 | 4.10 | 1.0 |
| 8. Stated learning goals of this class very clearly | 103 | 4.22 | 0.86 |
| 9. Was effective as a class leader | 101 | 4.17 | 0.90 |
| 10. Asked our views in making decisions about the class | 103 | 4.05 | 1.03 |
| 11. Respected the students' ideas | 100 | 4.40 | 0.86 |
| 12. Was concerned about students' learning and progress | 102 | 4.35 | 0.82 |
| 13. Was supportive and helpful in class | 102 | 4.41 | 0.72 |
| 14. Was available and helpful outside the class | 100 | 4.01 | 0.98 |
| 15. Gave us feedback and helped us to improve | 101 | 4.25 | 0.88 |
| 16. Gave us chance to speak in the class | 103 | 4.57 | 0.65 |
| 17. Was patient | 99 | 4.53 | 0.77 |
| 18. Was organized | 103 | 4.49 | 0.77 |
| 19. Effective as a lecturer | 101 | 4.28 | 0.90 |
| 20. The same teacher should conduct this class next year | 100 | 3.97 | 1.11 |

course content (mean: 4.26) and the informative delivery of course material (mean: 4.10). Additionally, the teacher was highly regarded for respecting students' ideas (mean: 4.40) and being supportive and helpful in class (mean: 4.41). However, there were areas for potential improvement, such as students desiring more clarity in decision-making processes (mean: 4.05) and a slightly lower preference for the same teacher conducting the class next year (mean: 3.97). While there were areas identified for potential improvement, such as seeking more student input in decision-making processes and a slightly lower preference for the same teacher in the following year, the general sentiment reflected a positive learning environment fostered by the teacher. Overall, it was perceived that the teacher exhibited strong teaching qualities, fostering a positive and supportive learning environment.

Table 5 summarizes the students' evaluations of their academic research class. The evaluation of the research class provides a varied perspective on different aspects of the course.

As shown in Table 5, while the students found the course topic to be somewhat interesting, with a mean rating of 3.40, they perceived it as challenging, as indicated by a mean of 3.71. The requirement of substantial work in the course received a mean value of 3.85, suggesting a demanding academic environment. On a positive note, the students highly appreciated the consistency between exam content and classroom learning, reflected in a high mean rating of 4.32. Assignments were perceived as beneficial for improving research skills, with a mean of 3.99. Furthermore, the majority of the students acknowledged covering the topics introduced at the beginning of the term, indicating effective course planning and delivery, with a mean value of 4.28. Overall, while there were mixed feelings about the level of challenge and workload, the students expressed satisfaction with the learning process and assessment procedures, with mean ratings of 3.99 and 3.95, respectively.

The current research predominantly relied on quantitative data as the primary source of evidence, while qualitative data served a supplementary role in identifying areas for improvement. A section for open-ended questions was included at the end of the survey to further explore students' reports on various aspects of the course, particularly those not addressed in the closed-ended questions. The recurring themes in the volunteer students' opinions are presented in Table 6 as follows:

Given the lower rate of qualitative responses, the findings in Table 6 indicate diverse opinions about both the strengths and weaknesses of the course. It is also important to note that ten students noted no weaknesses, while three students reported that there were no positive aspects, and an additional three students expressed uncertainty about the strengths. In addition to these reports, the strengths identified by the students outnumbered the weaknesses, as reflected in the frequency of the codes listed under the themes in Table 6. It seems that the course appealed the students mostly owing to engaging activities, thorough and organized course content, and qualifications of the teacher as summarized in a report by one of the students: *"The teacher is patient and truly wants us to understand the topic, does not want students to learn something for exam. I actually do not like the class too much but the teacher made me love it"*. On the other hand, the course was perceived as uninteresting, challenging and theoretically detailed, as seen in some representative excerpts such as *"The content could be more entertaining to the students to avoid boringness"* and *"It is boring and uninteresting. It does not have any relation with English at all"* and *"I had difficulty understanding the subjects at first because they were very abstract, but toward the end of the period, a whole was formed in my mind and I started to understand"*. The educational setting emerged as one of the identified weak sides, with face-to-face class students expressing concerns about the physical environment such as *"classrooms without good airflows"*. Additionally, those participating in the remote mode voiced dissatisfaction with the inherent challenges of online education. This was manifested by the self-reports as follows "[the weakest side of the class] *is being a part of the online education*", *"unstable connection"* and *"Because the course is online, I cannot understand the purpose and content of the course"*, on the other hand, the following reports represent the positive

**Table 5** Students' evaluations of the class

| The research class | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The course topic was interesting | 103 | 3.40 | 1.14 |
| 2. The course topic was challenging | 103 | 3.71 | 1.04 |
| 3. The course requires a lot of work | 103 | 3.85 | 1.02 |
| 4. The exam content was consistent with what we learnt in the class | 103 | 4.32 | 0.81 |
| 5. Assignments helped me to improve my research skills | 103 | 3.99 | 0.99 |
| 6. We have learnt the topics that our teacher said in the beginning of the term | 102 | 4.28 | 0.83 |
| 7. I am happy with the learning process | 103 | 3.99 | 1.0 |
| 8. I am happy with the assessment and evaluation processes | 102 | 3.95 | 0.94 |

**Table 6** Qualitative data: Strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions

| Strong sides | Weak sides | Suggestions |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1: Reinforcing learning through active engagement (N = 13) | Theme 1: Problematic sides of educational setting (N = 10) | Theme 1: Educational process (N = 12) |
| • lots of practice, repetition and review (N = 3) | • Online education (N = 7) | • More fun (N = 3) |
| • tasks and assignments given (N = 7) | • Limited class-time | • More videos (N = 3) |
| • encouraging students to participate (N = 3) | • small size class & airflow (N = 2) | • More practice (N = 2) |
| Theme 2: Qualifications of teacher (N = 13) | Theme 2: Challenging sides of the course content (N = 11) | • More L1 use |
| • teacher knowledge & skills (N = 5) | • Not interesting & boring content (N = 5) | • More readings about the previous research studies |
| • teacher's patience (N = 2) | • Repetitive topics | • More feedback to homework |
| • motivating students (N = 2) | • time-consuming tasks and assignments | • No homework |
| • Teacher's style (N = 2) | • Focus on theoretical knowledge (N = 2) | Theme 2: Materials (N = 4) |
| • Teacher's communication with students (N = 2) | • Challenging research terms and concepts (N = 2) | • Slide sharing (N = 2) |
| Theme 3: Provision of a through course content (N = 16) | Theme 3: Delivery of the content (N = 7) | • A hardcopy textbook |
| • Clarity in content and materials (N = 4) | • Waste of printed article papers | • Less detailed presentations |
| • Comprehensive coverage (N = 3) | • Not riveting delivery | Theme 3: Educational setting (N = 1) |
| • Enhanced research skills (N = 2) | • Not shared slide contents as pdfs (N = 2) | • Lecture hall |
| • Enlightening course content (N = 2) | • Inadequate videos | |
| • Developmental Learning process (N = 3) | • Repetition and review | |
| • Good organization | • Detailed explanations | |
| • Content easy to understand | • No weak side (N = 10) | |
| • None (N = 3) | | |
| • Not sure (N = 3) | | |

trend "*Being educated on the internet due to the pandemic was ineffective in terms of communication, but we were like in the classroom because our teacher was in constant communication with us"* and *"I think as online class, it was perfect to learn in this way, reading and learning a lot about the research process. However, if it were face to face class, I think I would have done my best to put into practice what I have learnt throughout every single class. It would be easy to meet lecturer and ask questions, discussing topics* etc. *Research is not easy. It requires a lot of practice and hard work".* The qualitative data here as a whole imply aspects to be improved within the course delivery.

The suggestions reported by the students still highlight a desire for a more supportive, interactive, and entertaining learning experience, as presented in Table 6. The key themes are related mostly to the educational process, setting, and materials. More use of videos, more focus on related research studies, more feedback on assignments, sharing course slides with students, less detailed presentations, use of hardcopy textbooks, and even no homework are among the suggestions listed by the students. As the medium of instruction is English and the content seems to be challenging for students to internalize, the students also expect to have their first language in use as stated one of the students: "*In my opinion, the lesson should not have been taught entirely in English. Since the listening skill level of each student was not the same, Turkish summary could be made*". On the other hand, several students appreciated the only English medium as follows: "*I think the constant use of English in this class was significantly good for us. It helped us learn new words that are related to our field and see how the Academic English was used by an expert in this field*".

As emphasized previously, the current research methodologically prioritizes the quantitative data; therefore, Table 7 reiterates the overall quality of the class as perceived by the students.

As evident from Table 7, the students' ratings mostly appear on the positive side with percentages of 48, 1 and 17,3. A total of 7 students out of 103 reported low quality. In brief, the overall results highlighted the relatively high level of quality, as reported by the students.

## 2 Discussion and conclusion

The current research was conducted with tertiary-level English majoring students attending an English-medium hybrid class with a focus on academic research. Using a survey research model, evidence was gathered over three successive academic years regarding their evaluations of the academic research class. This data was collected via a structured survey form by the teacher-researcher at the end of each term.

### 2.1 To what extent are the students content with the academic research class?

The findings of this research indicate that the research class was found a bit challenging, as it was conducted at the first year of their program, where the learners were still novice and at their premature stages in terms of internalizing the features of scientific knowledge and understanding the role and rationale of using academic research in their field. Despite being informed that they needed to acquire knowledge of scientific research and its principles to succeed academically in their field, the students faced difficulties. Nevertheless, the research findings can provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of the course content, materials, and instructional methods used in the class for the students' present and future academic pursuits. Accordingly, necessary changes can be implemented to improve prospective teaching practices.

**Table 7** Perceived level of the quality of class

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | Cumulative percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | 1 | 2 | 1,9 | 1,9 | 1,9 |
| | 2 | 5 | 4,8 | 4,9 | 6,8 |
| | 3 | 28 | 26,9 | 27,2 | 34,0 |
| | 4 | 50 | 48,1 | 48,5 | 82,5 |
| | 5 | 18 | 17,3 | 17,5 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 103 | 99,0 | 100,0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | 1,0 | | |
| Total | | 104 | 100,0 | | |

### 2.2 What are the strengths and weaknesses of the academic research class?

The findings overall indicated that a significant portion of the students were content with the quality of the class. However, the main difficulty centered on the course content. Despite its challenging aspects, including the workload and heavy content, the research class showed alignment with the objectives set by the teacher, and several students were pleased with the learning, assignment, assessment, and evaluation processes. It was also found that a considerable number of the students had difficulty understanding the theoretical aspects and reported a need for more practice. It might be advantageous for students to have opportunities to apply their knowledge. To this end, students may be invited to participate in research communities at universities or other institutions that fund research. Elective courses with a focus on applied research studies could be added to the undergraduate curriculum. Conducting small-scale studies is also expected by Turkish students, as noted in a similar evaluation study by Yakut [30]. As highlighted in related research [10, 17],), undergraduate research experiences may provide students with enhanced technical skills, a deeper comprehension of the scientific process, and a more robust sense of identity as a scientist.

As commonly reported by Turkish students in the study conducted by Uztosun and Erten [27], the students in this study mostly believed that research was not related to their field of study or future plans. Most of the students in the current research are, in fact, prospective English teachers. Therefore, as some students may not see the relevance of research to their future professions, it may be beneficial to highlight the role of English teachers acting as teacher-researchers in their context to gauge and enhance the effectiveness of their teaching practices. Research as a course in teacher education is considered necessary to address negative attitudes towards research and facilitate the integration of research concepts with their professional practice [5]. It is essential to raise awareness among students about professional development practices and introduce related research types such as action research, teacher research, or reflective teaching. Researchers, educators, and teachers may also assist their students, as prospective colleagues, in viewing academic research as a continuous endeavor for their professional development. In this way, by encouraging students' inclusion in research communities [26], their awareness and engagement in academic research can be enhanced.

### 2.3 What sides of the class need to be improved?

Several areas for improvement have been identified. Considering the features of good teaching, which include consistent, relevant and efficient instruction, as affirmed by Pennington and Brown [23], the current academic research class was found to be consistent since the course coverage and progression were consistent over time,relevant, as it delivered what it claimed; and efficient, as resources including time and energy were not wasted. Nevertheless, in addition to the use of various sources, research books, and presentation slides provided to the students, the qualitative findings of the study implied that possessing a single physical textbook could be advantageous for some students. Moreover, the lack of a textbook was noted as a challenging aspect of the research course designed by Khoukhi [14]. Having a hardcopy textbook might be particularly beneficial for students who prefer tangible resources. It may improve concentration and retention as certain learners find it easier to study from printed materials than from digital formats. In addition to the use of hardcopy textbooks, the students also expressed a desire to use of their mother tongue more frequently than relying solely on English medium instruction. This finding aligns with a previous study [2] conducted with Turkish tertiary-level students who struggled to follow lectures and understand the material despite the teachers' observed efforts to lower the speech rate and frequently repeat content in an English medium instruction context. The use of first language should be encouraged for more inclusive education, engagement, and better understanding. Beyond theoretical content, it is essential to incorporate more practical applications that allow students to apply their knowledge as this can help reinforce learning and build their confidence. Hands-on projects or group works may enhance student engagement and motivation, and promote deeper learning in academic research. As suggested by Khoukhi [14], conducting research classes over two successive semesters may assist students in integrating theoretical and methodological skills with the implementation of various projects over an extended period. To enhance learning by practice, promote active learning and autonomous learning in this research process, it may help to integrate student-generated audio-visual digital resources [12, 21] in hybrid educational contexts.

### 2.4 Suggestions for further research

Despite the promising results regarding the course evaluation, some questions remain. The current study, with a mixed-method design, covered various perspectives on the evaluations of a research class delivered in different modes. Further

research with a focus on the delivery of content can scrutinize the perspectives of the students attending in different modes independently. This suggested that research may shed more light on realities if the mode of delivery, traditional, hybrid or solely online, affects their evaluations and perceived overall quality. With respect to the medium of instruction, longitudinal studies could offer more comprehensive understanding of how the academic engagement, motivation, and performance of students develop over time as the medium of instruction switches from English to the students' first language. Additional qualitative insights into their future teacher preferences are also necessary to understand the variation in responses given to the item, choosing the same instructor for subsequent years, despite the constructive feedback given about the teacher qualities and teaching practices. As a *pracademic* attempt, this experience of conducting a teacher-research evaluation of an academic research class enabled the researcher to assess the current circumstances. Through this teacher research, the researcher was able to gather the students' self-reports on strengths, suggestions, and weaknesses, allowing for necessary adjustments to the class. However, to gain a broader understanding of reality from different perspectives, it is essential to conduct ethnographic studies, including more observational data and field notes. As emphasized by Kiely (2001, p.259), it is necessary for effective teaching and teacher development to have "multifaceted perspectives on what happens during and as a result of evaluation". Systematic follow-up studies with the purpose of post-program assessment, as recommended by Tsou and Chen [25], may help reveal the impact of gained skills and competence in the future fields of students attending academic research classes and provide valuable reflections on the courses held.

### 2.5 Limitations

It is significant to acknowledge the limitations of the current research. First, the research faced the risk of the non-response error, a common problem in end-of-course evaluations as cited by Steyn, Davies & Sambo [24]. The research was limited by the varying number of voluntary students surveyed and, thus, unequal distribution of the gathered data. This limitation was intended to be mitigated by the combination of quantitative and qualitative data obtained over three academic years. Second, the research was constrained by the absence of multiple coders in the analysis of the qualitative data, which was of secondary importance in terms of priority in the present mixed-method research. To address this shortcoming, an iterative coding process was conducted in which the researcher coded and revisited the data multiple times before associating it with the themes. Finally, the current research was conducted through the lenses of an insider, which may result in bias in evaluations of the students and the research results. It would be advisable to examine and compare the results of a further study conducted from an outsider perspective to mitigate bias and experimenter expectancies [18] and gain deeper insights into the implementation of the course, particularly by identifying weaknesses and areas for improvement.

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**Data availability** Data is provided within the manuscript and is stored in SPSS for further requests.

## Declarations

**Ethics approval and consent to participate** The study was approved by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Karadeniz Technical University. Informed consents were obtained from all participants prior to their participation. The research was conducted in agreement with the guidelines governing research involving human participants, as outlined by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Karadeniz Technical University (Document No: E-82554930–050.01.04–365594).

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