Extended Summary

Involving Learners as Active Participants in Designing a Course
Syllabus: A Sample Research

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Introduction

Needs analysis has been one of the important areas in language teaching, especially with the emergence of various learner needs. It provides true and concrete portrait of the teaching environment, relating learning as closely as possible to teaching. Besides learner’s needs, teacher as a practitioner, being the center of the classroom, is the one who observes the learners, plans extra activities related to the syllabus objectives and adapts the materials in accordance with the learners’ needs and expectations. Learners are mostly disregarded and their role in designing any instructional element is ignored. Therefore, the reasons why teachers, curriculum developments and the other related groups of people need determining the learners’ needs should be defined clearly.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the fifth grade secondary school students’ needs for an elective English course in Turkey. These learners (N=179) were selected, because beginning from the semester 2012-2013, some fifth grade learners began to take elective English course in the secondary schools. For this reason, this raised a change in the fifth grade elective course syllabus to form the content of a new type of the course. This study was carried out to fill the mentioned confusing gap and vagueness for the teachers and students and to present the views and expectations of the participants. The aim was to find responses to the following research questions: (1) What are the needs of fifth grade students for an elective course? (2) What type of content should be designed in this elective course?
Method

A needs analysis survey form developed by the researchers was used to conduct this study. It consisted of 9 questions and was designed according to the requirements of the students’ needs, interests and pedagogical aspects by examining the course books in detail.

Findings and Conclusion

In accordance with the survey results, a new syllabus needs to be developed or the existing one needs to be redesigned. In response to the research questions it can be concluded that fifth grade students in elective English course would like to learn English through visual aids, role playing, working in collaboration, and using L1 in classroom when necessary. Furthermore, the participants expressed that they liked reading activities, but listening based activities should also be integrated into course syllabus, and they want to be encouraged to speak in class by teacher. Put another way, higher means of the items ‘travel’, ‘cartoon characters’ and ‘role playing’ indicates that course books should have a slightly different content and learning and teaching methods from the students’ current course books, that is, contents, grammaticality and methods should support the supplies of the elective course as a secondary source. Considering the fact that this is a pilot study, the number of students and schools can be increased to make a clearer picture of the real needs of fifth grade learners. In brief, more research is needed to determine the type of syllabus of the elective English course depending on the students’ interests that can be obtained from the needs analyses. Then, the course would be more challenging, supportive, interesting and motivating for the students at secondary schools.