

**An Analysis of ELT Teachers' Perceptions of Some Problems Concerning the  
Implementation of English Language Teaching Curricula in Elementary  
Schools**

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**Abstract**

It can be said that foreign language teaching/learning has been failure in Turkey for many years although nearly everyone believes that speaking at least one foreign language is essential today. Considering Turkey as a developing country in many aspects; such as industry, trade, technology, tourism, the importance of foreign language teaching will increase.

Children in elementary schools are open to ideas of global understanding. In other words elementary school education period can be said to be the right time to expand the students' intercultural views and enhancement of cognitive skills (Curtain, 1990). As it is mentioned above using a foreign language effectively has numerous benefits and it also helps a child to become a well-educated person while he/she is growing up. In order to make them successful, we should provide the children in our country with a well-organized language teaching. To do this, many researches should be done and many new ideas are required.

So, this study aims to investigate the problems faced by teachers and students, concerning the implementation of English Language curricula in terms of the components of curricula such as objectives, selection and organization of content, implementation of method and methodologies, the use of technology and evaluation.

The research sampling of the study consists of 261 teachers of English who are teaching 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students in elementary schools which were chosen randomly. The teachers of English were administered a questionnaire, data were analysed, the results were discussed, and in the light of findings recommendations were made to cause betterment in English language teaching in elementary schools.

**Key words:** ELT, elementary school level, foreign language, curriculum

## Özet

Günümüzde, neredeyse herkesin en az bir yabancı dil konuşmanın gerekli olduğuna inanmasına rağmen, Türkiye'deki yabancı dil eğitiminin sorunları bulunduğu söylenebilir. Türkiye'nin endüstri, ticaret, teknoloji ve turizm gibi birçok açıdan gelişen bir ülke olduğunu da düşünürsek, yabancı dil eğitiminin önemi daha fazla artacaktır.

İlkokul çağındaki çocuklar evrensel anlayış fikrine açıktırlar. Diğer bir deyişle, ilkokul eğitimi döneminin öğrencilerin kültürler arası anlayışını büyütme ve bilişsel gelişimini geliştirmesi için doğru bir zaman olduğu söylenebilir(Curtain, 1990). Yukarıda sözü edildiği gibi yabancı bir dilin etkin bir şekilde kullanılmasının birçok yararı vardır ve aynı zamanda bunun çocuğun büyürken iyi eğitilmiş biri olmasına yardımcı olacaktır. Öğrencileri başarılı kılmak için onlara iyi organize edilmiş bir dil eğitimi sağlanmalıdır. Bunu yapmak için de yeni fikirler gerekmektedir ve birçok çalışma yapılmalıdır.

Bu nedenle, bu çalışma öğretmen ve öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları amaçlar, dizin seçimi ve düzenlemesi, metot uygulamaları, teknoloji kullanımı ve değerlendirme gibi unsurları açısından İngilizce müfredat uygulamaları ile ilgili sorunları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Çalışmadaki araştırma örneklemini rastlantısal olarak seçilen ilköğretim okullarında söz konusu sınıf öğrencilerine İngilizce dersi veren 261 tane öğretmendir. Bu öğretmenlere 45 sorulu bir anket uygulanmıştır. Veriler analiz edilip sonuçlar tartışılarak bulgular ışığında ilkokullardaki İngilizce dili öğretiminin geliştirilmesine neden olacak önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İngilizce dil eğitimi, ilkokul düzeyi, yabancı dil, müfredat programı

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that English has already been an international language. Because the level of proficiency in foreign languages, particularly in English, is positively influential on political, social, technological, and intellectual benefits in the society, using a foreign language or languages effectively has become more essential (Curtain, 1990).

There may be a great number of reasons for learning a foreign language. Harmer (1988) mentions about some of those tentative reasons as; a)being in the obligation of learning a foreign language because the learner is living in the target language community, b)needing it for specific purpose especially for occupational purpose, c)being compulsory because of school curriculum, purpose c)being attracted by the culture of target language, e)being in the hope of getting a better job

After many studies done on language learning, it is common knowledge that everyone has the ability to learn a language unless he has a mental anomaly. Children can learn their native language easily in the community they live in. However, at this point, we need to inquire what causes somebody to fail the task of learning a second language.

This study aims to uncover the problems concerning the implementation of curriculum in elementary schools, not in the other levels of ELT. Since starting ELT in the fourth year of elementary school is the starting point of foreign language learning in a student's educational life, it is important to cause students at this age feel themselves successful.

Before 1997, especially in state schools, there was no Foreign Language Teaching in primary schools in Turkey. It was a general agreement that, Foreign Language Teaching could not be achieved at the supposed level except in Anatolia High Schools. Even most of the students who graduate from Anatolia High Schools could not pass Exemption Tests they take when they start attending university. Today the situation is nearly the same. So it was essential to seek for an alternative way to solve this problem.

According to Ministry of Education, there are negative effects of a sudden entering into language teaching process in secondary schools. This is one of the reasons to start Foreign Language Teaching at an earlier age in primary schools. Besides, developing a new curriculum for primary school students also required a complete change in both secondary school curriculum and materials being used. The lack of articulation between the curricula in the primary schools and secondary schools can handicap language learning. There shouldn't be a great gap between these two school levels as well as between secondary school and high school.

Advances in technology have been reshaping old notions of educations. Improved devices such as modern audio-visual aids, highly developed televisions and teaching machines can be used in classrooms. However, to install these

technological devices the construction of school buildings must be very different from the traditional ones. Or they will probably need radical physical changes (Olivia, 1969).

Teachers are another important component in ELT. Met (1999: 173-175) states that second language teachers must be skilled in negotiating and monitoring student performance; they must be expert in instructional decision-making. They also must be a model for the use of second language and learning strategies. They need to design the environment to make the language learning easier.

As Finocchiaro (1964) indicates, the activities should not be challenging. Also very little new material should be introduced in one lesson which is combined with previously taught one.

While a child is acquiring the mother tongue, the motives are natural and compelling, because the language makes him a member of the community and helps him control his surroundings. However, the reasons for learning a foreign (second) language are not as urgent as for the first language. The objectives to learn a language are usually scholastic rather than social as in acquiring the first language, because learning a second language is not an end for the learner. If methods and teaching techniques include material suggesting motives and communicative situations in which the learner needs to use the language, the learning will probably be better (Mackey, 1967).

Johnson (Geneese, 1999: 199, 200) claims that one of the most important thing in second language learning can be a teacher guiding a small group of students, because each child can find opportunity to participate verbally in a skilful and sensitive teacher's class. The teacher can do a wide variety of activities in a small group.

It is possible to make some general statements about motivational factors for different ages and levels of learners of English as a foreign language. In a study, Michel (1967) claims that younger children are less analytical interferes acquisition. So it can be said that younger children are more receptive to drill. Another thing that can be said is that children are curious, and this in itself is motivating. At the same time it is probably true to say that their span of attention or concentration is considerably less than that of an adult. They need activities which are exciting and stimulate their curiosity: they need to be involved in something active. They do not like sitting and listening to their teacher for long periods. So they need constant

changes of activity. Teacher is a very important person for them. For this reason children will often wait for their teacher's approval, because this will make them extremely happy in the classroom situation.

Teaching English as a foreign language has always been a problem for all levels of education in Turkey varying from elementary to upper classes. What could be the reasons for the failure in ELT in elementary schools? Is the curriculum effective? To what extent have the goals been achieved? In this study, the problems faced in the implementation of English Language curricula in terms of the components of curricula such as the need for English teachers, formulation of objectives, selection and organization of the content, implementation of method and methodologies and evaluation are going to be investigated. To do this we must enquire the following research questions/(items).

1. To what extent is the foreign language teaching successful in terms of achieving the objectives:
  - 1.1. Regarding the instructors' satisfaction with the job?
  - 1.2. When the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students are taken into consideration as language learners?
  - 1.3. Regarding the necessary time to plan and prepare for the next day's English courses?
  - 1.4. Regarding in-service training provided by the employer?
  - 1.5. Regarding the methods and techniques of ELT especially for children in the elementary schools?
  - 1.6. Concerning the order of the topics in the content of the course book?
  - 1.7. When the teaching is from the easier topics to harder ones?
  - 1.8. Concerning the syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education?
  - 1.9. Regarding the students' comprehension of the questions and their answers in the examinations?
  - 1.10. Regarding the students' ability of communication (asking and answering some questions with who, what, which etc.)?
  - 1.11. Regarding the students' level of English as the basis for better language learning in the secondary school?

- 1.12. Regarding the possession of the course books at the beginning of the term?
2. To what extent are the students aware of the objectives and informed about the aim of each lesson?
3. To what extent are the students provided with source books?
4. Are the course books are difficult?
5. To what extent are convenient techniques used:
  - 5.1. Regarding individual study during class?
  - 5.2.Regarding pair works or group works?
  - 5.3. Regarding audio-visual aids (slides, video players, televisions, computers, etc)?
  - 5.4. Regarding the emphasis on language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening)?
6. To what extent are the students suitably assigned?
7. To what extent is the syllabus improved by the help of the exam results?
  
8. To what extent are the methods of testing proper:
  - 8.1.In terms of testing through assignments?
  - 8.2. In terms of testing the students' achievement?
  - 8.3. In terms of testing the teacher's success?
  - 8.4. In terms of determining the students' passing grade?

### **Assumptions**

In this study, the teachers of English are assumed to be the true representatives of their branches in terms of being the most important factor on teaching process. In addition, the schools in which the study was carried out were assumed to represent the other elementary schools in Gaziantep in terms of reflecting the situations and/or problems that each item in the questionnaire concern with. As the questionnaire was piloted before, every item in the questionnaire is assumed to be valid and reliable. The subjects volunteered to participate in this study were assumed to answer the questions sincerely.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

In this descriptive study, the teachers of English in elementary schools are determined as the population. In other words, this group of teachers will be described systematically in terms of their perception of some problems concerning the implementation of ELT curricula. Isaac and Michael (Ekmekçi, 1991) define the descriptive method as describing the characteristics of a population or area of interest.

The purpose of this study is to get and analyse the opinions of the teachers who are employed by the Ministry of National Education to teach English to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students in elementary schools in Gaziantep. For this reason, to design a useful questionnaire, a number of teachers who teach English in elementary schools were consulted in order to identify the probable problems in the implementation of ELT curriculum. Some school administrators and some of those teachers were also interviewed, and in the light of the information obtained, a questionnaire consisting of 45 questions was prepared. The questionnaire was given to teachers of English only but not to administrators or students, because they were thought to be the most responsible ones to implement the curricula and the best observers of the learning/teaching process. Thus, it would be possible to get the most accurate information in the most direct way.

With the help of information gathered from interviews and the opinions written by a number of teachers before administering the questionnaire, it was understood that most of the teachers of English in elementary schools are regular classroom teachers. In other words there is a great shortage of English teachers appointed to elementary schools. In fact this situation was thought to be the fragment of the big problem. Moreover, it was almost impossible to collect enough data from only English teachers who work in elementary schools. Therefore the questionnaire was applied to teachers of English involving regular classroom teachers and the ones who graduated from English teacher training schools.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

In this section, the findings will be discussed to identify the problems about foreign language teaching in elementary schools. In the study, the instructors' teaching experiences are analysed.

The findings show that a small percentage (9.3 %) of the instructors who are teaching the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students have teaching experience less than one year. Other instructors have teaching experience at least one year.

In the table showing the distribution of instructors' gender, it can be seen that most of the teachers of English are female. According to the results gathered from data analysis, only a small number of the English instructors (37 instructors out of 260) are English teachers who attend ELT departments of universities. Another fact about the instructors is that a great number of the teachers (217 out of 253) have more than 25 classes in a week. Most of the ELT classrooms are very crowded with more than 31 students. Oğuz (1999) states that it is not possible for students to sit in U-form, for this reason, it is difficult to apply many special language-teaching techniques.

According to the results gathered from the data analysis, a remarkable number of the instructors are not pleased with teaching English to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students in elementary school. This will probably affect the students' success in ELT.

It can be observed that a great percentage (23.1 %) of the instructors do not find themselves successful. When language teaching is thought as systematic, it can be accepted that this is a high rate of failure in education. Moreover, the problem may become bigger in the future in secondary school. The instructors do not find their students successful, either. Less than half of the instructors (34.2 %) think that their students are successful in language learning.

This is a very small percentage, so, to enable students to be more successful, the reasons for the failure must be analysed carefully. According the information that the researcher got from interviews with teachers and school administrators and as it can be seen in Table 4.6, the instructors are not given any chance to participate in in-service training. Seeing that there is a serious shortage of English teachers, classroom teachers can be provided with in-service training to make language-teaching better. As can be in the light of findings, most of the teachers think that they are not able to do an effective teaching because of their overloaded weekly timetable. The results, once more, prove that there is a shortage of instructors.

A great number of the teachers believe that the instructors who are teaching English to the students in elementary schools were not specially trained for the

purpose of teaching pupils at this age. However, Michel (1967) states that, special teachers who are qualified in the foreign language capable of teaching young children must be appointed to teach elementary schools, because the teacher must be an excellent model for the students to imitate. The teacher must motivate and stimulate the children constantly.

The findings show that most of the instructors follow the original content of the course book. The results show that, most of the instructors think that studying the units takes place from the easier to harder ones. The results also show that the order of teaching is parallel to the order in the official syllabus. Pakkan (1997) defines syllabus as the subject matter to be covered in the course, and mentions about three steps that the course designer has to take: 1) The teacher (course designer) has to choose the most proper type of syllabus for the particular group of learners and 2) s/he has to make the content specific and 3) s/he has to specify sequence and organization of the content. From these results, it can be inferred that there is not a conflict between the official syllabus and the content of the course book. As a result, the teaching of language takes place from easier one to harder.

The teachers of English in elementary schools feel themselves successful in the examinations they give the students. They do not think that their students are completely unsuccessful, either. Whereas, it should not be ignored that 63% of the teachers think that the children are rarely or sometimes successful. This means that there are problems on the way to achieve the objectives in elementary schools. As a result the teachers cannot mention a satisfactory knowledge of English, which is considered as a good basis before secondary school. This may cause some difficulties in language-teaching in the future.

According to 43.3 % of the teachers, their students know what they will have learnt by the end of the elementary school. In other words the teachers inform their students about the long-term objectives of ELT in elementary school. Only a small number of teachers never tell the long-term objectives to the students. On the other hand, much more teachers often explain the aim of each lesson to their students. Considering that pupils at the age of eleven or twelve are not interested in long-term objectives, but knowing the aim of the course at the beginning of it will motivate the students and this will cause them to get more ready to join the lesson, and benefit from the lesson more.

The results gathered from the data analysis show that resource books are not available for most of the students. Many students have to use only the course book which, in turn, hinders the students' success.

Teachers of English declare that they make their students study individually. The results analysed from the data do not give an exact decision about making the students study individually or in groups. It can be inferred that most of the teachers are not aware of the importance of pair/group work or dramatization.

It can be observed that, the instructors (29.3%) think that their students usually find the course book difficult. Only a small number of them believe that the course book is not difficult. There may be two reasons of this; either the course book is really difficult or there is a problem in teaching process. Because the teachers are not specially trained for language teaching in elementary schools, the problem is most probably about the teaching process. Then, the solution may be to employ more English teachers and/or provide classroom teachers with in-service training to improve themselves in terms of new teaching methods and techniques.

The results obtained about the use of audio- visual materials are really discouraging. The findings show that there is nearly no use of slide in teaching process. It can be understood that the teachers do not use any videos considering the insincere responds to the questionnaire item. The majority of the instructors admit that they do not use television in the classroom teaching in elementary schools. 84.6% of the instructors declare that they never use computers in the teaching process. Today, not only in language teaching but also in every aspect of education, the effective use of computer is inevitable. The results show that the teachers of English do not find the opportunity to use head projectors to teach English, since there are nearly no projectors in elementary schools according to the information got through interviews with teachers and school administrators. The situation is slightly different about the use of cassette players, because 11.2% of the instructors say that they rarely use cassette players. And also 15.9% of them claim that they sometimes use cassette players in language teaching. Although the use of pictures is relatively much more common than other audio- visual materials, it is not enough to get good results in ELT. The instructors think that instructors rarely use pictures in order to help students understand context or teach the meaning of a word. Furthermore, 24.3 % of the instructors do not use any pictures in elementary schools. As with the pictures, the use of wall- charts is not common enough to set an effective teaching.

The findings show that the instructors do not tend to use flannel charts and/or cards in ELT classes in elementary schools. As a result, the use of slides, over-head projectors and videos can be argued and said to be old-fashioned, but the instructors must use computers as a modern audio-visual material. Besides, they must also use tape-records, pictures and flannel-charts, because they are easily available and practical to use in language teaching process.

Another point that should be taken into consideration in ELT is about the four language skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking. The results show that 13.3 % of the instructors say that they never practise speaking in the class, and 18.8 % of them say that they rarely do speaking in ELT class. This means that one third of students try to learn a foreign language without speaking or doing a little speaking. However, speaking is one of the most important components of language teaching in every stage. In the light of the findings, it can be observed that the instructors try practise writing. Michel (1967) suggests that writing should be introduced in a limited way. Children should copy dialogues that they have already learned to read. They should also learn to write from dictation. The material should preferably contain the words learned previously. According to the results, teachers regard reading as important and try to practise it. There is no problem with this, because reading should be presented in elementary schools. It is important that the audio-lingual skills should not be neglected when the reading skills are introduced. The teachers think that the listening skill should also be taught and practiced, but as it is known, elementary schools are poorly equipped. In other words, most of the schools do not have any technical devices such as; televisions, projectors, slides, computers and tape /CD players. Most of the teachers claim that they try to practise four language skills equally. The quality of the teaching a language skill is more important than how equally it is being done compared to the other language skills.

The findings show that most of the instructors tend to give their students homework after every course. Easy tasks can be assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students in elementary schools.

As regards to obtaining the course books at the beginning of the educational year, the results show that the students still have trouble with possessing the course books immediately at the beginning of the year. Since the course books are the main material at school, all students, without exception, should obtain their course books in a reasonable time.

The results indicate that the purpose of examinations is to test the students' achievement rather than to test the teacher's success in teaching. Most of the teachers do not tend to test their students in order to determine the passing grade. The researcher agrees with the idea of testing achievement. Pakkan (1997:6) states in her study that 'the evaluation is a process judging the success and effectiveness in attaining the goals of a program and/or a basis for future language programs'. She adds that the evaluation is useful to see the points that should be modified and revised.

The instructors generally do not prefer to test their students by means of assignment. Considering the age of the pupils, testing by means of assignment can be taken into consideration, because assigning the student may remove the children's fear towards the foreign language and examination. From the findings, it can be seen that a few number of instructors use the students' examination results to improve the syllabus for the next term/year. The examination results may be very beneficial to develop a new, original syllabus and to make teaching/learning procedure better for next generations.

In the open-ended part of the questionnaire, 75 teachers have written their further opinions. Some of these teachers, who wanted to add a specific problem or emphasize a difficulty, which is previously asked about in the questionnaire, writes about level of topics and language used in the course books. A great number of them think that the teachers should be provided with in-service training in case the regular classroom teachers are obliged to teach English to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students. The most significant finding reached in this part is that 34 teachers out of 75 teachers, who write their further opinions in this part, insist on the idea that the teachers who graduated from ELT departments of the universities must be employed in the elementary schools.

To sum up, there should be a lot of reforms in every stage of ELT in elementary schools. The purpose of this study is to reveal the problems by analyzing the data gathered from the teachers, and to come to solutions that make the foreign language teaching better.

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS**

In the light of the findings in this study, the following recommendations could be helpful to make English language teaching more effective.

To start with, there is a real shortage of teachers of English who are graduates of ELT departments of the universities. Instead regular classroom teachers or other teachers who are from different branches are trying fulfil the job of teaching English to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students in the elementary schools. Olivia (1969) States that, unless a competent teacher is available, foreign language teaching cannot be effective. Then, the Ministry of National Education should employ more teachers of English to teach English in the elementary schools.

Another serious problem about the implementation of ELT curriculum in elementary schools is crowded classrooms. First of all, monitoring the students and correcting the students' errors instantly will be very hard in crowded classes. The number of the students in language classes should be lessened in order to make monitoring easy for the purpose of an effective language teaching.

Teachers of English need time to get prepared for the next day's classes in terms of various activities and teaching materials such as pictures, drawings, cards etc. Thus, teachers of English who have an over-loaded timetable may not perform well in class. So the teachers should be assigned a reasonable number of classes a week, which makes them feel relaxed.

Teachers who are not voluntary should not be assigned to teach English in elementary schools. If the sole aim is to substitute a lesson without taking the outcomes into consideration, an effective learning will never occur. If the classroom teachers are obliged to teach English lessons, they should participate in in-service training that promotes effective teaching methods and techniques.

The teachers should be flexible about following the syllabus or studying the units in the course book according to their students' capacity. They should choose and/or prepare more suitable materials in order to replace some parts of a unit when necessary. In defining the purpose of course materials, Hutchinson (1987:107,108) identifies some principles. According to him, good materials, firstly, do not teach but they stimulate the learner. To do this, therefore, they contain interesting texts, enjoyable activities and opportunities for learners to use their potential knowledge and skills. Secondly, good materials help the teacher and the learner to organize the teaching/learning process providing various activities to maximise the chances of learning. Hutchinson indicates the third principle as 'materials embody a view of the nature of language and learning. That is, they should match the instructor's opinions and feelings about the learning process. For instance, if the instructor thinks that

frequent reinforcement helps learning, items to be learnt should be practised several times. Good materials should also introduce teachers to new techniques. Finally, good materials contain models of correct and appropriate language use.

Testing should be parallel to the task done in the class. In other words questions should be contextualized and must be meaningful.

Because of their age, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students' attention span to the course is not long. So, the teachers should prefer short activities that do not take much time and make the student bored easily. The teacher should prefer doing group- work.

The schools should be provided with audio- visual materials such as tape/CD players, projectors, video players, and televisions. Moreover, computers with appropriate teaching programmes should be available in elementary schools, because the use of these materials makes the pupils alert and encourage them to participate in the activities. The teachers should choose the most appropriate methods while they are teaching the children in the elementary schools. They should prefer pair works and group works. These types of activities give the students opportunity to practise the topic by experiencing the context. Demirel (2005:51) states that from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the approach that accepts the learner as the centre of the learning/teaching process has come out. He thinks that the course books, especially for the students in upper classes, are topic-centred. However, according to curriculum designers, learning process should be learner-centred, because learning cannot be separated from the learners living due to his/her needs or interests.

The students should obtain their course books immediately at the beginning of the educational year, as the course books are the most important teaching materials for the students. They may feel themselves discouraged and demotivated without their course books.

The teachers of English in the elementary schools should improve the next year's syllabus by the help of the findings they get after they examine and analyse the examination results, because the examination results reveal the handicaps in the teaching process or show the interests of the students.

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