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The Antecedents Influencing the Implementation and Success of the Middle School English Language Curriculum**

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explore the antecedents influencing the implementation and the outcomes of the middle school English language curriculum. Case study was adopted to deeply explore a phenomenon, which can be the processes, events, persons, curricula, or things of interest to the researcher. The phenomenon, in this study, is the middle school English language curriculum. Four English teachers teaching different grade levels from a middle school located in Ankara were participants of the study. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview developed by the researchers. The interview schedule included 11 main questions and some probing questions to explore the antecedents that might have influence on the implementation of the curriculum. Data collected through interviews were analyzed with content analysis. Content analysis revealed four categories (themes) which were named as “teacher characteristics”, “student characteristics”, “school characteristics”, and “teachers’ views about the curriculum”. Findings indicated that rather than one factor, the combination of the four factors influence teacher and student behaviors which in turn influence the implementation process and the overall success of the curriculum.

Key words: Middle school English language curriculum, Antecedents, Case study, Teacher views

Introduction

Due to the fast changes and improvements taking place in science, technology and communication, “which have a global impact” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 142), every society is obliged to turn into a knowledge society through education (Yüksel & Sağlam, 2014), as education is one of the distinguishing factors for the prosperity of one country in the world (Erdem, 2009).

Education, the process of creating change in an individual’s behaviors (Yüksel & Sağlam, 2014), occupies the most important place to transform any society. In contrast to informal education which is “incidental [and which] everyone gets from living with others, as long as he lives” (Dewey, 2004, p. 7), formal education is provided at an institution called school and “in every school where teachers are instructing students, a curriculum exists” (Oliva, 1997, p. 3), in other words, “the institution of education is activated by a curriculum” (Oliva, 1997, p. 22). To this connection, “success in education is almost never the result of sheer luck. It is, instead, the outcome of careful planning” (Steller, 1983) and “the quality of education mostly relies on [how] the curricula [are] implemented” (Erdem, 2009, p. 529).

“The education system is a social institution which should be expected to change along with other institutions. It would be more surprising, not to say disturbing, if the education system were to stand still while all else changed” (Kelly, 2004, p. 1). As stated in TED report (2005), in many countries, program reforms are executed and paradigm changes are experienced once in ten years (as cited in Gelen & Beyazıt, 2007). To this connection “it is important to continuously reappraise and revise existing curricula” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p.150) as education “does not possess a reality apart from the time, place, and mores in which it exists” (Ornstein &

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Hunkins, 2004, p. 133). Especially, the dizzy improvements in science, technology, and communication channels necessitate continuous curricular developments (Demirel, 2012).

In addition to the other disciplines such as math, science and history, foreign language education has been gaining more and more importance and attention in Turkey due to the fast changes and improvements experienced all around the world. When the close history of English language teaching policies of Turkey is examined, it is recognized that foreign language curriculum has been exposed to 3 curriculum reforms since 1997. The first one came into being in 1997, the second one followed in 2005, and third one was developed in 2012.

To start with the first curriculum reform in 1997, “Turkish educational system underwent a number of fundamental changes with respect to the English teaching policy at all levels of education” (Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban, 2012, p.31). This reform increased the duration of compulsory primary uninterrupted education from 5 to 8 years (Akinoğlu, 2008; Akşit, 2007; Bulut, 2007; Eraslan, 2013; Gözütok, 2014; İnal, Akkaymak & Yıldırım, 2014; Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban, 2012), so it necessitated an eight-year unified curriculum (Gözütok, 2014). With this reform, English language teaching started to be offered from the 4th grade onward as a standard compulsory school subject (Kırkgöz, 2008). With this new curriculum, students started to learn a foreign language at younger ages. As stated by Kırkgöz (2005), this curriculum introduced the concept of communicative approach into English language teaching in Turkey for the first time (as cited in Kırkgöz, 2007a). However, research conducted on this curriculum revealed that the communicative language teaching did not seem to result in the expected influence on teachers’ classroom practices because classroom activities were largely based on traditional methods of teaching structure (Kırkgöz, 2007a). As a results, this curriculum couldn’t be a solution to failure in foreign language learning, especially speaking component, despite all arrangements and in-service training (Yaman, 2010).

Depending on the research studies and particularly the one conducted by the Department of Research and Development of Education (EARGED) (2006), the second curriculum was developed in 2005 (Soğuksu, 2013). Some international studies, such as Pisa (2003), Prills (2001), and Timms-R (1999) indicated that Turkey was one of the least successful countries in language teaching (Şahin, 2007), and the justification to prepare this curriculum was declared to be Turkey’s failure in the international examination results in TIMMS and PISA (Gözütok, 2014). In the 2004–2005 academic year, the second curriculum was piloted in nine cities and 120 schools; textbooks were prepared for the trial period, and the curriculum was started to be implemented in 2005 and 2006 education period (Gözütok, 2014). The changes introduced in this curriculum were part of a government policy in response to the efforts to join the EU through standardization of English language teaching (Kırkgöz, 2007a). However, this curriculum couldn’t be a solution to the problems related to foreign language education; either, and it was criticized by researchers a lot.

In spite of “continuing efforts to improve the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in Turkey, a significant percentage of students left school without the skills to communicate successfully in an English-language medium” (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2013, p. ii), although the main purpose was to develop students’ communicative competence in those curricula. Therefore, the third curriculum was developed on March 30, 2012 (Gözütok, 2014), as the Turkish education/schooling system went through another transition from the 8+4 schooling model to the new 4+4+4 model. The first four, in this model, refers to elementary school period; the second four refers to middle school period and the third four refers to high school. With respect to the English language curriculum, it adopted communicative language approach and the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), and it was put into practice in 2013-2014 academic year. As a result of this curriculum reform, students began to be provided with foreign language education from the 2nd grade onward. However, “no matter how desirable language policies may be, unless they are backed by the will to implement them, they cannot be of any effect” (Bamgbose, 2003, p.428), because teachers’ resistance to change is one of the most important obstacles hindering a curriculum’s success (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017):

Often, teachers have not been able or willing to keep up with scholarly developments. They have not stayed abreast of the knowledge explosion, which would allow them to feel committed to curriculum change and the implementation of new programs. Teachers frequently view change as simply signaling more work—something else to add on to an already overloaded schedule for which little or no time is allotted (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017, p. 266).

In addition, “teachers’ understandings of the principles of an innovation and their background training play a significant role in the degree of implementation of a curriculum innovation” (Kırkgöz, 2008, p. 1860).

Therefore, teachers' perceptions of a new curriculum, their characteristics, their will to implement a new curriculum, and their proficiency and/or capacity to implement it should be investigated in detail. In addition to teachers, the influence of other variables including students, schools and education system are to be examined before any curricular change. Stake (1967) names these variables as "antecedents" which refer to the background conditions, Ornstein and Hunkins (2004) name them as entry behaviors, while they are also called inputs by some evaluators (Gredler, 1996). No matter how they are named, they refer to any conditions that exist prior to teaching and learning that may influence outcomes (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004; Gredler, 1996; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004; Stake, 1967) before the curriculum is run (Wood, 2001). They include characteristics of the students prior to their lessons (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004; Gredler, 1996; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004; Woods, 1988) such as student aptitudes, prior experiences (Stake, 1967), "previous achievement scores, psychological profile scores, grades, discipline, and attendance" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 307). They also include teacher characteristics such as years of experience, type of education, and teacher behavior ratings (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004) and characteristics of the schools.

To this connection, the purpose of the present study is to explore the factors available before the implementation of the middle school English language curriculum which influence the implementation and the outcomes of the curriculum. To this connection, the following research question was formulated:

1. What antecedents influence the implementation and outcomes of the middle school English language curriculum based on teachers' views?

Method

Research Design

This is a qualitative research aiming to find out "how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds" (Merriam, 2009, p. 24). As suggested by Merriam (2009), the primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings. Among the different types of qualitative research methodologies, case study was chosen as it can be conducted to "shed light on a phenomenon, which is the processes, events, persons, or things of interest to the researcher" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 436). Programs, curricula, roles and events can be listed as examples of a phenomenon (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). A case study generally specifies the unit or units of analysis to be studied (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Unit of analysis can be people, clients or students (Patton, 2002). To this connection, the phenomenon is the middle school English language curriculum, while the unit of analysis involves the teachers implementing the curriculum.

Participants

Four volunteering teachers from a public middle school located in Ankara participated as interviewees. Each of the four teachers was teaching in a different grade level. The teacher teaching the 5th graders (T5) was female, she graduated from the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) and had two years of experience in public schools. With four years of experience, the teacher teaching the 6th graders (T6) was male and he graduated from the Department of English Language and Literature (ELL). The teacher teaching the 7th graders (T7) was female and an ELT graduate with 11 years of experience. Lastly, with seven years of experience in public schools, the teacher teaching the 8th graders (T8) was female and a graduate of ELL.

Data Collection Instruments

An interview schedule, developed by the researchers, was the data collection instrument. It was used to explore the antecedents that could influence the implementation and the ultimate outcomes of the middle school English language curriculum.

During instrument development process, related literature was examined through document analysis. In order to find out whether the questions satisfy content validity, the first draft of the interview was sent to three experts, from different universities, working at the Curriculum and Instruction Division. Based on their opinions and suggestions, necessary changes were applied. To illustrate, the summative questions were turned into open-ended questions. Then, the interview was administered to two English teachers in order to check the clarity and understandability of the interview questions. As a result, some negligible changes were applied to the interviews. To illustrate, more probing questions were added so that the teachers could give more information.

Finally, they were pilot tested with two English teachers in an administrator's room in order to see whether it worked as planned and calculate how long it would last. The pilot administration for the interview lasted for an average of 40 minutes and a few more probing questions were added to the interview schedule to collect more in-depth information.

The final version of the semi-structured interview schedule, at the end of these processes, included 11 main questions and some probing questions to explore the antecedents that might influence the implementation and success of the curriculum.

Data analysis

For the analysis of the qualitative data, content analysis, a generic analysis of data (Creswell, 2007), was utilized to find out "core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453) in the data. Indeed, "all qualitative data analysis is content analysis in that it is the content of interviews, field notes, and documents that is analyzed" (Merriam, 2009, p. 205). "The process involves the simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content" (Merriam, 2009, p. 205).

In the present study, tips suggested by Creswell (2009) were followed. Data analysis started with transcription of the tape-recorded data. After reading the the raw data for a few times to "obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (Creswell, 2009, p. 185), coding process, which involves "taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term" (Creswell, 2009, p. 186) started. Lastly, the findings were reported after generating the themes/categories from the codes.

An inductive category development approach was followed as no preliminary codes were used. Coding was not done with one specific style. Words, phrases, and sentences were used as the representative unit of analysis depending on the data.

Intercoder reliability was used to measure the reliability of the data analysis. In this sense, a randomly selected interview was sent to two independent coders who have used content analysis in their works before. The intercoder reliability was calculated using the following formula (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64):

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$$

Using this formula, the agreement between coders of the interview was found to be 94% which satisfies the reliability.

Trustworthiness of the Study

There are many perspectives in literature with respect to the importance of validation in qualitative research, its definition, terms to describe it, procedures to satisfy it and these perspectives view qualitative validation in terms of quantitative equivalents using qualitative terms that are different from quantitative terms (Creswell, 2007). The validity and reliability issues as discussed in quantitative research corresponds to trustworthiness in qualitative research (Seale, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed different terms to satisfy trustworthiness. To illustrate, they use (1) confirmability which refers to objectivity in conventional terms (in quantitative research); (2) transferability instead of external validity in conventional terms; (3) dependability instead of reliability in conventional terms; and (4) credibility instead of internal validity in conventional terms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) have suggested similar terms that apply more to naturalistic axioms as those proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) such as internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity.

In the present study, some strategies were used to satisfy the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. Although, qualitative research "does not claim to be replicable" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 204) as "this assumption of an unchanging world is in direct contrast to the qualitative/interpretative assumption" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 203), attention was paid on reliability as well.

There are many strategies that can be used to satisfy the validity, which refers to "truth value" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278), "accuracy of findings (Creswell, 2007, p. 206), and the credibility and authenticity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the strategies like prolonged engagement,

triangulation, expert review, peer debriefing, and member checking to satisfy validity for qualitative data. The strategies applicable for the present study that were used to satisfy internal validity (credibility) and external validity (transferability) include member checking, prolonged engagement, and thick description.

Creswell (2007) suggest use of at least two strategies in any qualitative research. In the present study, more than two strategies were utilized. To illustrate, member checking, the process of going back to the participant to determine whether the participant agree with the researcher (Creswell, 2009), was used to determine the accuracy of the findings in order to satisfy interpretative validity and increase credibility of the findings. Further comments by the participants were used in the analysis if any. Second, the fact that researcher was also a teacher working in the school satisfied prolonged engagement strategy, which helped the researcher to build trust with participants and be aware of the culture (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Last but not least, thick description, was utilized for transferability that refers to the external validity and fittingness of the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Reliability, “the extent to which the research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220), questions “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220), and it refers to dependability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trial was utilized to satisfy dependability (Merriam, 2009). In the present study, the supervisor of the researcher was the auditor whom was informed about the study in detail. He was informed about “how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223).

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the antecedents that influence the implementation and the overall outcomes of the middle school English language curriculum. Interviews were conducted to find answers for this purpose and data were analyzed through content analysis. The results of content analysis yielded 4 themes (categories). The first theme was called as “teacher characteristics”, the second one was named as “student characteristics”, the third one was labelled as “school characteristics”, and the last one was called as “teachers’ views about the curriculum”. What is to add, these themes yielded some sub-themes. These themes and their sub-themes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Themes and Sub-themes Regarding Antecedents

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Teacher Characteristics	1.1. Attitude towards job 1.2. Awareness 1.3. Teacher preparation before teaching 1.4. Strategies, methods and techniques 1.5. Knowledge about the curriculum
2. School Characteristics	2.1. Class size 2.2. Materials
3. Student Characteristics	3.1. Positive characteristics 3.2. Negative characteristics
4. Teachers’ Views about the Curriculum	4.1. Positive views 4.2. Negative views

As seen in Table 1, the first sub-theme, teacher characteristics, yielded five sub-themes which were named as “attitude towards job, awareness, teacher preparation before teaching, strategies, methods and techniques, and knowledge about the curriculum, respectively.

Table 2 summarizes the sub-themes and their corresponding codes with respect to teacher characteristics. The findings regarding teacher characteristics, as seen in the table, revealed that the teachers had positive attitudes towards their jobs (T5, T6, T7, T8), they valued their job (T5, T6, T7, T8), they loved their professions (T5, T6, T7, T8) and they were happy (T5, T7, T8) and were satisfied with their job (T5) despite some difficulties encountered. One of the teachers stated that

I love my job very much. The people close to me, like my father and my husband, think that this is the most appropriate job for me. My husband thinks that I can forget about any problems encountered in the classroom the moment I leave the classroom. I think that the job is suitable for me, so I am happy and I love my profession very much (T5).

Table 2. The Sub-themes and the Corresponding Codes for the Teacher Characteristics

Sub-Themes	Codes
1. Attitude Towards job	1.1. Love for English 1.2. Valuing the job 1.3. Difficulty of the job 1.4. Happiness with job 1.5. Satisfaction with the job 1.6. Love communication with students 1.7. Necessity of patience 1.8. Hate for paper work 1.9. Too much work load
2. Awareness	2.1. Failure to express themselves 2.2. Aware of their incompetence 2.3. Plan for professional development 2.4. Failure to apply some curriculum standards 2.5. The skill to be developed first 2.6. Realizing students' inability to learn 2.7. Failure to reach all students 2.8. Failure to reach her aims 2.9. Teaching English in a wrong way
3. Teacher preparation before teaching	3.1. Materials 3.2. Books 3.3. Worksheet 3.4. Reproduction of materials 3.5. No lesson plan 3.6. Reviewing the existing materials
4. Strategies, Methods and Techniques	4.1. Question-answer 4.2. Grammar translation method 4.3. Expository teaching 4.4. Giving examples
5. Knowledge about the curriculum	5.1. Insufficient or no knowledge about some tenets of curriculum 5.2. No knowledge about CEFR 5.3. No participation in in-service training 5.4. Internet sources 5.5. Colleague 5.6. Following no publication 5.7. No participation in seminars

Pointing to the difficulties encountered in the teaching process, another teacher stated that

I graduated from teacher's high school. I preferred this profession as I love English very much. Teaching profession is a holy job, and especially teaching English necessitates a great deal of devotion. It is something related to love. It is a must to love English and teaching profession. We have difficulties from time to time, this profession has many difficult parts. It necessitates a great deal of patience. Still, I am happy despite everything (T7).

The second sub-theme revolved around the teachers' awareness of themselves and the curriculum. The findings related to this sub-theme indicated that the teachers were aware of their incompetence (T5, T7, T8) such as failure to express themselves (T5, T7), failure to apply some standards of the curriculum (T5, T6, T7, T8), and they were able to recognize students' inability to learn or attain objectives (T5, T7). Being aware of their needs, they expected some opportunities to develop themselves as stated by one of the teachers:

I am aware of some of my incompetence, it may result from my inexperience, I do not know, but I want to improve myself. Unfortunately, I have a little daughter, so I do not have sufficient time. Still, I want to improve myself (T5).

With respect to her incompetence, this teacher continued saying that:

I wish I had my education in an English-medium university, because except for one teacher, all of our teachers were taught in Turkish. That is why, I cannot say that I have improved my English sufficiently. I cannot even say that I use English a lot. Everybody expects us to speak English, but we did not have such an education, there are some lacks somewhere. I wish to go abroad very much to get rid of this incompetence (T5).

When they were asked which skill should be developed first, one of the teachers replied that “Indeed, we need to put weight on speaking skills, but I focus on reading and writing skills” (T5). And she continued with an example from her experience:

I guess, it is time to focus on listening now. My daughter is three years old, for example, watched she “abcd” video with my students last week. She met English in this class for the first time. She memorized the song very quickly, and she can sing it now. I mean, the students should be exposed to listening first, then they can speak, after that they can develop their reading and writing skills (T5).

Another important finding about teacher characteristics was the kind of preparation they did prior to teaching process. The findings revealed that they did not prepare lesson plans (T5, T6, T7, T8), however, they prepared their materials (T5, T7, T8), books (T5, T6, T7, T8), and worksheets (T5, T7). They also reproduced some materials (T5, T7) and checked the curriculum and the topic to see where they were (T5, T8). One of the teachers stated that

I check my archive related to the subject matter before entering the classroom. I prepare the materials that I will use, but I have not developed a system yet. After constructing an archive, I will enter my classrooms in a more planned way. I do not prepare lesson plans, because I follow teacher’s guide book (T5).

The other important topic regarding teacher characteristics revolved around the kind of strategies, methods and techniques they utilized during the teaching process. Findings indicated that they mostly used expository teaching (T5, T6, T7, T8), question-answer technique (T5, T6, T7, T8), grammar translation method (T5, T6, T7, T8), and drill (T7). Regarding teaching methods, a teacher reported that “I usually have to use expository teaching. If I prefer discovery learning, I cannot finish the topic” (T8) and she accused the students and the country as presented below:

As the students are used to expository teaching in the other lessons, they do not like communicative methods, so we cannot provide them with variety. Maybe, I should change myself, I don’t know. Language teaching is something prisoned to the classroom. As the students know this, they expect to sit and listen to the teacher’s lecture. They see English as a lesson to be learned such as mathematics and science, they don’t see it as a communication tool (T8).

The fifth sub-theme was about the teacher’s knowledge about the latest curriculum. The findings related to this sub-theme revealed that they haven’t participated in in-service training about the new curriculum (T5, T6, T7, T8), so they had insufficient or no knowledge about some tenets of curriculum (T5, T7, T8), and no knowledge about CEFR (T5, T6, T7, T8) as explained with the following utterances below:

First of all, I did not participate in any in-service training about the new curriculum. I know nothing about CEFR. We should have some information about the curriculum first. As far as I follow in the press, the curriculum has been designed to develop students’ listening and speaking skills, the books have been prepared in parallel to this aim, but I guess we are not ready for this as teachers. That is because, we had a traditional education (T5).

In addition, they stated that their knowledge about the curriculum was limited to internet sources (T6, T8), and their conversations with their colleagues (T6, T7) as explained by one of the teachers, “I haven’t heard about CEFR and I have not participated in in-service training. We, as teachers, always talk about the curriculum. There is a lot of information about it in internet sources” (T6).

The second theme, student characteristics, yielded two sub-themes and they were labelled as “positive characteristics” and “negative characteristics”. The sub-themes and their corresponding codes are presented in Table 3.

The positive characteristics of the students indicated that especially females had positive attitudes towards English (T5, T7), they had the capacity to learn anything (T5), and they wanted to learn English (T5, T7). Furthermore, these students were reported to make such efforts as asking questions continuously (T5, T7), studying willingly (T5) and buying supplementary books (T5). One of them stated that, “Generally, the students want to learn English. Except for a few students, all students buy the supplementary books that I advise. They ask me questions about some subjects although I do not assign any homework” (T5).

Table 3. The Sub-themes and the Corresponding Codes for the Student Characteristics

Sub-themes	Codes
1. Positive Characteristics	1.1. Positive attitudes towards English 1.2. Capacity to learn anything 1.3. Desire to learn English 1.4. Buying supplementary books 1.5. Asking questions frequently 1.6. Studying willingly
2. Negative Characteristics	2.1. Lack of competence in mother tongue 2.2. Lack of prerequisite knowledge 2.3. Difficulty in comprehending some grammatical subjects 2.4. Inability to understand what they listen 2.5. Lack of interest in a different culture 2.6. Irregular study 2.7. Dislike speaking activities 2.8. Used to expository teaching 2.9. Seeing English as a subject to learn 2.10. No interest in listening and speaking activities 2.11. Demotivation

In contrast to the positive characteristics, the findings with respect to the other sub-theme, negative characteristics, indicated that students had lack of competence in their mother tongue (T5, T6, T7, T8), they had lack of prerequisite knowledge (T5, T6, T7, T8), they had difficulty in comprehending some grammatical rules (T5), they were unable to understand what they listened (T5, T7). In addition, they had lack of interest in a different culture (T6, T8), they did not study regularly (T6, T7, T8), they disliked speaking activities (T6, T7, T8), they were used to expository teaching (T8), they regarded English as a subject to be learned (T8), they did not have any interest in listening and speaking activities (T8), and they had lack of motivation (T8).

A teacher reported his complaints about the students as shown in the following utterances:

The students are never aware of the importance of English. The biggest problem of the students is their mother tongue. Their mother tongue is very bad. Their failure in mother tongue influences the foreign language a lot. The children are very ignorant about culture. They are not open to another culture, so we cannot do anything (T6).

The third theme, school characteristics, yielded two sub-themes which were labelled as “class size” and “materials”. The sub-themes and their corresponding codes are presented in Table 4. The findings regarding class size indicated that due to the crowded classrooms, the teachers faced many difficulties. To illustrate, this issue caused inappropriate seating arrangement (T5, T6, T7, T8), too much noise (T5, T6, T7, T8), insufficient space for movement (T5, T7). In addition, it was found to be inappropriate for games (T5, T6, T7, T8), pair works (T5, T7) and group works (T5, T7, T8).

Furthermore, the large class size made it difficult to manage the classroom (T5, T6, T7, T8), which resulted in loss of control. It also led to inability to reach each and every individual student (T5, T7), it caused the teachers to skip listening and speaking activities (T5) and student-centered activities (T5, T7, T8). Touching upon the classroom characteristics, a teacher expressed the the following lacks, but accepted that the smart boards are enough to get rid of these lacks. She stated that

It is possible to say that the school has necessary opportunities, but there must be a language laboratory as well. Likewise, availability of headphones could help us do listening activities better, because

listening in a laboratory with headphones would be very different from listening from the smart board in the classroom. I wish we had such an environment, but the smart boards satisfy our need (T8).

Table 4. The Sub-themes and the Corresponding Codes for the School Characteristics

Sub-themes	Codes
1. Class size	1.1. Difficulty of classroom management 1.2. Failure to reach all students 1.3. Inappropriate seating arrangement 1.4. Difficulty in listening and speaking activities 1.5. Skipping listening and speaking activities 1.6. Unsuitable for games 1.7. Unsuitable for pair works 1.8. Unsuitable for group works 1.9. Too much noise 1.10. Cancelling student-centered activities 1.11. Insufficient space for movement
2. Materials	2.1. Smart board 2.2. Internet 2.3. Course book 2.4. Worksheets, tests 2.5. Technical problems 2.6. Lack of language laboratory 2.7. Lack of headphones

The other sub-theme was related to the materials available for teaching such as smart board (T5, T6, T7, T8), internet (T5, T6, T7, T8), course book (T5, T6, T7, T8), worksheets, tests (T5, T8) and these materials were found to be sufficient for teaching despite technical problems with the smart board (T5, T6), lack of language laboratory (T8), and lack of headphones (T8) as stated by one teacher: “We have no problem except for the crowded classrooms. We have smart boards, internet and our books” (T5).

The last theme, teachers’ views about the curriculum, yielded two sub-themes and they were labelled as “positive characteristics” and “negative characteristics”. The sub-themes and their corresponding codes are presented in Table 5.

The findings with respect to the teachers’ positive views about the curriculum indicated that the objectives were appropriate for students’ level (T5, T6, T7, T8), it had appropriate sequence of the skills (T5), it included appropriate speaking topics for students’ interests (T5, T6, T7), there was congruence between content and objectives (T6), it included appropriate texts for students’ level and interest (T7, T8), it included interesting themes (T7, T8), and it had easy topics (T7, T8). One of the teachers stated that

Frankly, the texts are appropriate for students’ level and they draw their attention. The topics like Arda Turan draw their attention more. Honestly, the topics are not boring, and they are appropriate for their level...Indeed, the objectives are appropriate for the level of the ones who have sufficient prerequisite knowledge, while they are more difficult for the ones who have lack of prerequisite knowledge and who do not study regularly (T7).

The findings regarding the other sub-theme, teachers’ negative views about the curriculum, indicated that the curriculum necessitated more time (T5, T8) as it was overloaded (T5, T6, T8), and it necessitated prerequisite knowledge for objectives (T5, T7, T8). One teacher reported that “I think that there must be less to learn now, the content must be given in more detail. Some subjects are difficult for the students to understand, so the students can be more successful if they learn them in the upcoming years” (T5).

In addition, some subjects were found to be above students’ level (T5), listening texts were reported to be above students’ level (T5, T6), likewise speaking activities were found to be above students’ level (T5, T6), writing activities were stated to be difficult (T8) as explained by a teacher: “Frankly, the listening activities are above the students’ level, they speak too fast, and also the sounds are not clear enough. Likewise, the students are not at the level of speaking although the speaking topics attract them” (T5).

Table 5. The Sub-themes and Their Corresponding Codes for the Teachers' Views About the Curriculum

Sub-themes	Codes
1. Teachers' Positive Views	1.1. Spiral curriculum
	1.2. Appropriate objectives for students' level
	1.3. Appropriate sequence of the skills
	1.4. Appropriate speaking topics for students' interests
	1.5. Congruence between content and objectives
	1.6. Appropriate texts for students' level and interest.
	1.7. Interesting themes
	1.8. Easy topics
2. Teachers' Negative Views	2.1. Necessitating more time
	2.2. Necessity of prerequisite knowledge for objectives
	2.3. Overloaded
	2.4. Some subjects above students' level
	2.5. Listening texts above students' level
	2.6. Speaking activities above students' level
	2.7. Inappropriateness of CLT for the country
	2.8. Difficulty of writing activities
	2.9. Uninteresting speaking activities
	2.10. Inappropriate books
	2.11. Too general objectives

Furthermore, communicative language teaching was found to be inappropriate for the country (T5, T6), the objectives were found to be too general (T8), speaking activities were found to be uninteresting, and the books were stated to be inappropriate (T8). In relation to communicative language teaching, a teacher stated that

It is impossible to implement communicative language teaching under these circumstances. The teachers' inefficacy influences this as well. The students are problematic; their mother tongue is problematic. The ones having problems in their mother tongue can never communicate in a foreign language (T6).

Discussion

The findings obtained through the content analysis revealed that there were four themes observed before the implementation of the curriculum. These variables were teacher characteristics, student characteristics, school characteristics, and curriculum characteristics.

The findings with respect to teacher characteristics indicated that they had many characteristics which were incongruent with curriculum standards. First of all, the findings with respect to the teacher characteristics revealed that the teachers who were interviewed did not participate in any in-service training about the new English language curriculum, so they had insufficient knowledge about the curriculum, and they had no knowledge about CEFR. This finding indicates that these teachers had to implement the curriculum without any change in their preferences of strategies, method, and techniques. As stated by Orntein and Hunkings (2017),

Teachers must become highly knowledgeable about the new curriculum content; they must perfect new instructional approaches; they must know how to manipulate the educational environment, taking into consideration the backgrounds and learning styles of their students. Such support often takes the form of in-service training or staff development. (260)

Actually, the curriculum does not provide any information about the necessary teacher qualifications, but as stated by Stake (1967), unavailable standards must be estimated. To this connection, the teacher to implement any curriculum has to know almost everything about this curriculum first, however these teachers had very limited knowledge about the curriculum they were to implement. As stated by Tekişik (2005), the success of a

curriculum depends on the training of the implementers of the curriculum (as cited in Tekin-Özel, 2011). Furthermore, it was found out that they made no preparation before entering the classroom except for following the teacher's guide book. As a result, they mainly preferred question-answer technique, and expository teaching while implementing the curriculum thus they ignored communicative language teaching. To this connection, they mostly preferred to focus on reading skills and grammar skipping listening, speaking and writing activities, although the teachers were recommended that "the focus of learning should be on communication, rather than on completing curricular items within a given period of time" (MoNE, 2013, p. vii). Indeed, they admitted that they even did not know how to apply communicative approach and they were not so good at these skills due to their insufficient pre-service/university education. Therefore, they had to find their own way mainly by taking their previous teachers in middle school or high school as models. In other words, they were used to teaching in the way they were taught years ago. As concluded in the study of Tekin-Özel (2011), the present study showed that the teachers have not left their old habits while implementing the curriculum.

Despite all these negative and incongruent characteristics, however, the teachers mainly had positive attitudes towards their job in that they loved English, valued their job, and they were happy and satisfied with their job despite the difficulties encountered throughout the process. In addition, it was found that the teachers were aware of some of their incompetence such as failure to express themselves, failure to apply some standards of the curriculum, and they were aware of the fact that they needed to develop themselves with the changing time. Therefore, they need to be provided with opportunities by the policy makers to cope with their incompetence, otherwise these problems found by the present study will never end.

The findings related to student characteristics yielded both positive characteristics congruent with the curriculum standards, and negative and incongruent ones. To start with the congruent and positive characteristics, they had positive attitudes towards English, they wanted to learn English. On the other hand, they were incompetent in their mother tongue, they had lack of prerequisite knowledge, and they were poor at listening, speaking and writing skills as put forward by their teachers. Considering the spiral nature of this curriculum which advocates that students frequently encounter content and activities that have previously been covered in order to reinforce what they already know (Oliva, 1997; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017; Tyler, 1949), lack of prerequisite knowledge may cause great problems that can be encountered during the implementation process of this curriculum. That is because, it may cause the teacher to spend more time on the subjects at which the students are poor.

The third variable taken as antecedent was the school characteristics. The findings with respect to this variable indicated that the materials available to use were smart boards, the internet, and the students' course books, which shows that the school did not provide the teachers with many materials suggested in the curriculum. In addition, the classrooms were found to be crowded which caused so much noise, failure to reach all students and inappropriate seating arrangement. As a result, it caused the teachers to skip listening and speaking skills, and it hindered student-centered activities such as games, pair works, and group works. In parallel to the study of İnceçay (2012), the present study indicated that the schools lacking necessary resources, materials and insufficient number of well-qualified teachers will make it difficult to put this curriculum into practice as intended.

The last variable influencing the implementation of the curriculum was found to be the curriculum characteristics. The findings regarding curriculum characteristics revealed that the curriculum had appropriate texts for students' level and interest, interesting themes, easy topics, attainable objectives, and objectives that are applicable in students' real life. On the other hand, the findings also revealed that the writing, and speaking activities were difficult to conduct, and the curriculum was overloaded.

Conclusion

To wrap up, the present study showed how the combination of above mentioned factors influenced teacher behaviors and student behaviors which in turn influenced the implementation process and the success of the curriculum. To put it more concretely, when the findings of the present study are examined, it is seen that some variables come together and influence each other a great deal. In other words, one factor on its own did not lead to a specific classroom practice and thus an outcome. To illustrate, such teacher-related factors as teachers' lack of knowledge about the curriculum and CEFR, their incompetence in the target language caused the teachers to spend most of the time on grammar and reading skills ignoring listening, speaking, and writing skills. They preferred to teach English in this way because they learnt English similarly while they were students, which shows that their university education or the new curriculum has caused no change in the way they teach. These factors, in turn, led the teachers to use lecture, dictation and expository teaching most of the time with the help

of the board, and the students' books as the only materials. In addition to teacher-related factors, insufficient time to cover the overloaded curriculum, students' lack of prerequisite knowledge, low self-confidence, large class size, and lack of materials were found to cause the teachers to use teacher-centered instruction. They also hindered student-centered, listening, speaking, and writing activities. As a result of these classroom practices, only students' reading skills were measured through written exams, while their competence in listening, speaking, and writing skills were never assessed.

Consistent with the study conducted by Ersen-Yanik (2007), the present study showed that the main problems encountered in the implementation process resulted from lack of materials and resources, the course-book, the learners, the classroom environment and the curriculum, and these problems influenced the classroom practices, the assessment procedures, and the attainment of goals. As concluded by Kırkgöz (2007b) in her study, the present study revealed that communicative language teaching proposed by MoNE "did not seem to have made a real and expected impact on teachers' beliefs or on classroom practices, because it was not used, and that a gap between the objectives proposed by the curriculum and the actual classroom instructional practices of teachers existed" (p. 184). This finding was also consistent with the study conducted by Liao (2004) who claimed that as teachers are used to traditional teaching methods and due to structural tests and crowded classrooms, communicative language teaching is inhibited in Asian countries and China. As stated by Kırkgöz (2007b), "teachers' methods of English language teaching have been inspired largely by traditional language learning theories that consider linguistic knowledge as something to be internalized rather than meaning to be socially constructed through communicative activities such as games, songs and dialogues" (p. 184).

As stated by Shapiro (1985), depending on the results of an evaluation study, a policymaker would either have to develop a new program to attain the given goals or modify the goals in terms of feasible outcomes for a given conceptual program model; program failure, in contrast, does not imply the need to modify program conceptualization or goals; rather, the problem is one of implementation. When all these findings are taken together, it is possible to put forward the idea that the observed antecedents were not congruent with the curriculum standards. Therefore, it is possible to say that it is the antecedents leading to failure rather than the curriculum. In other words, there is no "theory failure" but a "program failure", as there is lack of congruence between the planned curriculum and the implemented one (Suchman, 1976 as cited in Collis & Moonen, 1988; Shapiro, 1985).

Recommendations

The following suggestions can be stated based on all these findings:

1. It is necessary for the policy makers to take actions to provide the intended antecedents before any curricular change.
2. As stated by Gözütok, Akgün and Karacaoğlu (2005), a curriculum needs to be developed in the light of curriculum development principles suitable for the realities of a country, characteristics of the people, and the society; a curriculum with even these characteristics have no chance of bringing about better results than the older curriculum considering incompetent teachers, crowded classrooms, and bad physical conditions (cited in Tekin-Özel, 2011). The implementation of this curriculum without paying attention to these prerequisites and/or antecedents seems to be the main reason behind the failure of this curriculum. To this connection, the policy makers are recommended to make a decision about whether to develop a curriculum which is applicable by the available teachers and conditions or an ideal curriculum which is difficult to implement as planned due to the reasons aforementioned.
3. Further research can include observations schedules, achievement tests, and the views of students, administrators and parents.

Limitations of the Study

The findings may not be generalized to Turkey as it is limited to one city, Ankara; however, it is expected to give insights about the foreign language education in the country at the middle school level. The conclusions arrived at with this study is limited to teachers' views, so further research can include the views of the students, the parents and administrators to compare the results. Likewise, observations schedules can be conducted to see how the curriculum is being implemented. Last of all, students' proficiency level can be measured to see whether the suggested objectives have been attained by the students.

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