



Strengths and Weaknesses of Primary School English Language Teaching Programs in Turkey: Issues Regarding Program Components

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Abstract

Today, the ability to communicate in English is a need brought about by the globalization process encompassing developments in many fields such as science and technology. To address this need, English language teaching programs in Turkey (henceforth ELTP) underwent substantial changes within the larger curriculum reform movements taking place in 1997, 2006 and 2013, the last of which is also called the 4+4+4 education system. In these ELTPs, major differences were based on primary school English language teaching and learning. However, there is a growing claim that these ELTPs did not achieve the intensions in equipping primary school students with the necessary communicative skills in English. Thus, this integrative literature review study aims to explore the results of the evaluation studies so as to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each ELTP regarding such program components as aims and outcomes, content, materials, and testing and assessment. In line with this, studies conducted to evaluate the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs were examined thoroughly, and their findings were identified for the analysis. The analysis of the studies showed that problems with the ELTPs under evaluation included not carefully written aims and outcomes failing to include all domains. It also reveals problems with the selection and design of the content and materials which failed to be adequate and effective. Lastly, reliance on paper-based assessment even failing to include productive skills is seen to be another problem. All these issues seem to be persistent over all the ELTPs, thus they call for careful consideration and action for the improvement of further program changes.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem statement

Education, regarded as the investment in people, is the primary force for the progress and development of societies as well as countries. One of the most significant aspects of education is that it enables learners to gain life skills and knowledge to survive in today's world which requires the ability to compete with the demands and complexities of the era we live in (Thijs & van den Akker, 2009). While doing so, modern education systems primarily make use of two instruments: curricula and teaching programs (Topkaya & Küçük, 2010). Curricula, as the reflection of a broader framework in terms of educational policies and goals to be achieved, are enacted through teaching programs (Brown, 1995; Lunenburg, 2011; Richards, 2013) which are, on the other hand, defined as a series of courses sharing a common goal (Lynch, 1996).

In terms of language education, in its narrowest sense, a teaching program is regarded as joined courses offered within a methodology to give language education and to meet the specified linguistic objectives (Lynch, 1996; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010, p. 53). In line with this, it is clear that a language teaching program lies at the core of language related educational activities. This also highlights the importance and the close relationship between a curriculum and a teaching program in that the core of a good curriculum is provided by a good teaching program (Mede & Akyel, 2014), which, otherwise, would provoke inconsistencies in meeting learners' language related needs, efficiency, and effectiveness of the teaching program to realize the learning outcomes.

Having a close and cyclical interaction with each other, curricula and teaching programs go through three basic stages known as planning based on the needs of the country and global world, implementation, and evaluation of the practices in action. Thus, what determines whether curricula or teaching programs give the desired results is their evaluation which paves the way to reconsider and if necessary, change their components.

Evaluation is always regarded as the core of any educational context since it helps make decisions about worth, improvement, and effectiveness of a program in addition to its impact and future (Douglass, 1998; Richards, 2013; Salihoglu, 2012). Therefore, evaluation of the curricula and teaching programs is of vital importance for various purposes primarily for making them flexible to adjust the needs of the evolving conditions of the global world. Besides, evaluation studies play a crucial role in designating the value, effectiveness, or impact of educational programs or in gaining information related to different components of programs for the purpose of deciding whether to continue, stop, or make partial changes in them (Özdemir, 2009; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010).

When the literature on program evaluation studies in Turkey is reviewed, it is seen that they gained momentum after the introduction of the 1997 curriculum reform. It is worth emphasizing that major changes in Turkey were conducted on primary school

curricula prelude to follow the stages of education. Hence, an integrative literature review study covering the findings of the previously conducted evaluation studies on primary school ELTPs may help researchers, academicians, program designers, and other stakeholders, such as teachers, gain insight into the features of these studies and their findings. Such an analytical integrative analysis can provide a number of advantages and is of great importance in terms of providing valuable information to scholarly reviewers, policy makers, program designers, material writers, teachers, and all other stakeholders. It also reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific evidence, identifying the gaps and the need for future research by connecting the related areas of studies giving additionally the opportunity to synthesize them and to guide the researchers with an overall picture in mind related to the given topic of research (Russell, 2005; Souza, Silva & Carvalho, 2010). Additionally, such studies are especially necessary considering the absence of them in the literature on English language teaching programs in Turkey.

Taking these ideas as departure points, this study primarily aims to analyze the structural features of studies, i.e. journal articles, master's and doctoral thesis, evaluating primary school ELTPs between 1997 and 2016, and secondarily aims to examine their findings to reach a deeper understanding regarding how each and every program change (from 1997 to 2013) dealt with the design of aims and outcomes, content, materials, and testing and assessment.

Thus, with this aim in mind, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the general features of the studies conducted to evaluate the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs in terms of the program components including their aims/outcomes, content, material and testing and assessment?

1.2. Background and context for the study: Primary school ELTPs in Turkey

In Turkey, foreign language teaching has gained an unprecedented significance especially in the last twenty years to provide learners with the quality language education in order to pursue international communication and to keep abreast of economical, global, and scientific developments (Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014; Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998; Kirkgoz, 2007). Hence, in order to carry out Turkey's far-reaching goals, the institutional body responsible for education- Ministry of National Education (MoNE) - has introduced three major curriculum changes altering the teaching of English in the last twenty years. The first of these curriculum changes took place in 1997 which was followed by the one introduced in 2006. And finally, a recent curriculum change has come about with a common name known as '4+4+4 education system', which was introduced in 2013.

The first systematic education reform covering all stages of education except higher education took place in 1997. With this reconstruction in the Turkish educational

system, compulsory primary education was extended to 8 years for all students. The 1997 education reform adopted behaviorist approach to education changing the teaching programs of nearly all courses offered in the national education including the English teaching programs. Thus, English language, which was offered to secondary school students prior to the 1997 reform, started to be taught to students in the 4th grade in primary schools. The primary reasons for this comprehensive initiative were, as stated by MoNE (1997), Turkey's need to keep up its relations with foreign countries using English, particularly with the countries of the European Union (EU), and increasing the quality of foreign language education within the EU standards. Lowering the starting age to learn English to primary education, MoNE aimed at teaching learners four skills for communicative purposes so that they can interact with people from other countries, which was regarded as the sign of global citizenship (İnceçay, 2012). Thus, based on the behaviorist theory of education, the 1997 ELTP adapted the methods of language teaching accordingly advocating the use of question-answer, memorization, role-play, drills, and repetition instructional techniques in addition to structural and vocabulary-based content (Dönmez, 2010; Örmeci, 2009). However, in spite of being one of the first comprehensive reforms in the Turkish educational system, it had some major weaknesses, as several studies and reports showed (see Büyükduman, 2005; Harman, 1999; Mersinligil, 2002; Zincir, 2006). Having been implemented only until 2006, it was then replaced with another major curriculum change.

Inefficiency of the 1997 education reform in fulfilling its aims led to a new comprehensive change in all primary school subjects as well as ELTP in 2006. The 2006 ELTP, unlike the 1997 one, which adopted the behaviorist theory, embraced the constructivist theory of learning having the features of student centered learning to foster student autonomy (Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yörü, 2012). The 2006 ELTP had the aim of equipping learners with necessary communication skills in English and since the theory of learning required students to construct knowledge by themselves, it made use of process-oriented syllabus including classroom activities, such as problem solving, pair and group work triggering students' cognitive, affective, and social development (Örmeci, 2009; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010). As a requirement of process-oriented syllabus, the 2006 ELTP also introduced performance-based, formative assessment based on portfolios and performance observations (Cihan & Gürten, 2009). However, similar to the previous curriculum movement, the 2006 reform had also some deficiencies, as several studies indicated (see Küçük, 2008; Örmeci, 2009; Şad, 2011; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010). Because of the problems encountered in its implementation, the use of materials and realizing the program aims, its implementation ended in 2012. Following this, a new system was put into practice in 2013 under the title of 4+4+4 education system.

The 2013 ELTP brought structural changes not only in the whole education system, breaking it into three parts as primary, secondary, and high school education in duration of 4 years each, but also in the teaching of English lowering the age for learning English to 7 years from 2nd grade for 2 hours a week (Ekuş & Babayiğit,

2014; MoNE, 2013). It was based on the principles and descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) and aimed at language proficiency and retention apart from fluency in communication. For this aim, in primary school level, the emphasis is on oral skills as listening and speaking while reading and writing skills are gradually covered in secondary school level. Thus, to promote language learning in the utmost level, the 2013 ELTP takes up an action-oriented approach to teaching suggesting teachers make use of an eclectic mix of classroom techniques from Total Physical Response (TPR) to drama, or game based activities (Yeni-Palabıyık & Daloğlu, 2016). In fact, because the preparation time for this change was quite short and caused debates before its legalization, the introduction of the system was heavily criticized and the reasons for the initiation of such a huge change in education were considered to be political rather than a real need (Gün & Atanur, 2014).

As this brief literature review shows, Turkey witnessed three major changes in its education system, and each of them brought about significant modifications and alterations not only in the structure but also in the implementation of the teaching programs. To be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of these teaching programs namely the 1997, 2006, and 2013 ELTPs, and to be informed about the gap between planned and experienced curriculum, these teaching programs have to be investigated under a holistic view; thus, this study makes use of the evaluation studies to gain a holistic insight into primary school ELTPs which underlie the stimulus for this study.

2. Method

Since the primary purpose of this study is to investigate and have a deeper understanding of the studies conducted to evaluate the primary school ELTPs in Turkey, it is designed as a descriptive study utilizing a qualitative approach based on integrative literature review. It makes use of document analysis to collect data which is frequently used in most program evaluation studies (Lynch, 1996). Document analysis is conducted for a variety of purposes, such as eliciting meaning, gaining understanding, and getting empirical knowledge by reviewing and analyzing necessary documents (Bowen, 2009). Besides, the integrative literature review aims to synthesize existing research knowledge, answer new questions, identify gaps in current research, and determine the need for future research (Russell, 2005).

2.1. Procedure

At the time of the data collection phase of this study, the number of studies conducted to evaluate the primary school English curricula in Turkey was 63. The selection of the studies was completed in three different periods of time within 3 years beginning from 2013. The search for the studies was conducted online and a number of keyword combinations as “primary education + English + curriculum”, “primary education + English + language + teaching + program”, “primary education + English + program”, “primary education + English + curriculum + evaluation”, evaluation +

primary school + English" and "primary education + English + program/curricula/curriculum" were used to find the studies using Google, Google scholar, university library databases, Thesis Center of Turkish Higher Education Council (Yök Tez Merkezi), DergiPark, academia.edu, and Research Gate. The studies found were examined elaborately depending on whether they were within the scope of this study or not. Considering that a number of studies would also be published in Turkish, the same procedure was applied in the Turkish language. Those studies published in languages other than Turkish and English (if existed) were also left out of consideration within the scope of this study and those which were in higher education context or the ones belonging to primary education related to other subject areas were not taken into account. Besides, the studies which did not have any of the keywords i.e., evaluation, English, curricula, program, primary school, primary education, teachers' opinions, implementation in their titles or abstracts were not taken into consideration since it would not be possible to investigate all the studies one by one offered on the net. Similarly, the evaluation or review studies on primary school English language coursebooks were also excluded.

2.2. Studies used in the document analysis (Materials for the study)

As a result of the search for the studies to include in this study, a total of 63 studies were accessed. The distribution of these studies according to the three ELTP reforms is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Evaluation of studies based on three different ELTP reforms (N=63)

Primary School ELTPs	Evaluation Studies	Number of Studies
1997 ELTP	Arıbaş & Tok, 2004; Büge, 2005; Büyükduman, 2005; Er, 2006; Erdoğan, 2005; Harman, 1999; İğrek, 2001; Koydemir, 2001; Mersinligil, 2002; Mirici, 2000; Nasman, 2003; Orhan, 2001; Tok, 2002; Yanık, 2007; Yüksel, 2001; Zincir, 2006	17
2006 ELTP	Arı, 2014; Gökler, Aypay & Arı, 2012; Cihan & Gürlen, 2009; Çelen, 2011; Demirlier, 2010; Erkan, 2009; Erkan, 2015; Demirel, Gümüştekin & Yazgünoğlu, 2010; Güneş, 2007; Güneş, 2009; İnam (Çelik), 2009; Kalkan, 2010; Küçük, 2008; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakcı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özbay, 2009; Özel, 2011; Sak, 2008; Seçkin, 2010; Seçkin, 2011; Şad, 2011; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Üner, 2010; Yaman, 2010; Yörü, 2012	27
2013 ELTP	Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aslan, 2016; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Bozavlı, 2015; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014; Dinçer, 2016; Ekuş & Babayiğit, 2013; Erarslan, 2016; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Özudoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Tosuncuk, 2016; Yeni-Palabıyık & Daloğlu, 2016; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015	19

As Table 1 shows, the 1997 ELTP was evaluated by 17 and the 2006 ELTP was evaluated by 27 studies while the number of studies which evaluated the recent 2013 ELTP was 19.

In the analysis of these studies shown in Table 1, findings revealed in each study were initially grouped in connection with the research questions posed in this study. Employing content analysis, the grouped data were analyzed to figure out the

common themes and categories. Two other experts were asked to analyze the same data in samples and the themes and categories found by these experts were then combined and contrasted. Ultimately, the themes and categories used in this study were finalized.

3. Results

3.1. Findings related to general features of the primary school ELTP studies

The evaluation studies included in this study for the analysis were analyzed based on their surface structures including their publication type (journal or master's and doctorate thesis), methodology (quantitative, qualitative or quan+qual), participants (students, teachers, inspectors, and school administrators), and publication language (Turkish and English). The results based on the given criteria were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Surface structures of studies

Aspects ELTPs	1997 ELTP Number of studies	2006 ELTP Number of studies	2013 ELTP Number of studies
Publication Type			
<i>Master's Thesis</i>	9	17	3
<i>Doctoral Thesis</i>	4	2	1
<i>Article</i>	4	8	15
Methodology			
<i>Quantitative</i>	10	13	2
<i>Qualitative</i>	2	8	14
<i>Mixed</i>	5	6	3
Participants			
<i>Teachers</i>	5	16	17
<i>Students</i>	2	1	-
<i>Both</i>	5	5	-
<i>Administrator/Inspector</i>	5	-	2
Publication Language			
<i>Turkish</i>	13	19	13
<i>English</i>	4	8	6

As Table 2 presents, the studies which evaluated the 1997 and 2006 primary school ELTPs were mainly published either as Master's or doctoral theses while most of the studies evaluating the 2013 ELTP were articles (79%) in terms of publication type. As observed, a considerable change in the methodologies of the evaluation studies has also taken place over the years. The evaluation studies of the 1997 and 2006 ELTPs mainly adopted a quantitative approach (59% and 48% respectively); and this rate decreased over the years. On the other hand, the use of qualitative approach in research design increased and reached to 68% in studies of the 2013 ELTP. The case

of mixed methodologies is also worth noting here that the percentage of the studies making use of the mixed approach decreased gradually from 29% (the studies evaluating the 1997 ELTP) to 15% (the studies evaluating the 2013 curricula).

The participants showed a change considerably. In the studies evaluating each ELTP change, the researchers mainly collected data from teachers as the actual implementers of these programs. The percentage of the studies collecting data from teachers showed an uninterrupted increase from 29.4% to 89% between the 1997 to 2013 ELTPs. Additionally, administrators, inspectors, and students were also the participants of these studies; however, it is seen that in the recent ELTP change, the number of studies which collected data from administrators remained low.

Finally, since most of these evaluation studies addressed nation-wide stakeholders in Turkey, nearly three fourths of the studies were published in the Turkish language. Yet, an increase in the percentage of the studies published in the English language was seen as well. While the studies evaluating the 1997 ELTP published in English was only 24%, this rate increased to 32% the in the last ELTP change.

3.2. Findings related to the strengths and weaknesses of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

To start with, when the studies were analyzed, it was found that while some of them evaluated all the aspects of the related ELTPs, some focused on such aspects as aims and outcomes, content, material and classroom equipment, and testing and assessment (see Table 3).

Table 3. Program aspects evaluated by studies

Aspects of the teaching programs	Evaluation Studies
<i>Aims & Outcomes</i>	Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Arı, 2014; Arıbaş & Tok, 2004; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Büyükduman, 2005; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Er, 2006; Erarslan, 2016; Erdoğan, 2005; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; İnam, 2009; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçük, 2008; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe and Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özudođru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Seçkin, 2010; Tok&Kandemir, 2015; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010; Yanık, 2007; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015; Yörü, 2012; Yüksel, 2001; Zincir, 2006
<i>Content</i>	Arı, 2014; Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Arıbaş & Tok, 2004; Bayraktar, 2014; Büyükduman, 2005; Cihan& Gürten, 2009; Demirlier, 2010; Er, 2006; Erarslan, 2016; Erdoğan, 2005; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; Küçük, 2008; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2010; Topkaya& Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010; Yanık, 2007
<i>Material & Classroom Equipment</i>	Arı, 2014; Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Bozavlı, 2015; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Büyükduman, 2005; Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Çelik & Kasapođlu, 2014; Demirlier, 2010; Dinçer, 2016; Er, 2006; Erarslan, 2016; Erdoğan, 2005; Erkan, 2009; Erkan, 2015; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; İğrek, 2001; İnam, 2009; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçük, 2008; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Mirici, 2000; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özel, 2011; Özudođru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Seçkin, 2010; Seçkin, 2011; Tok, 2002; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Tosuncuk, 2016; Yaman, 2010; Yanık, 2007; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015; Yüksel, 2001

Testing & Assessment Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Arıbaşı & Tok, 2004; Bayraktar, 2014; Büyükduman, 2005; Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Er, 2006; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Mirici, 2000; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Tok, 2002; Yanık, 2007

Considering the ELTPs of 1997, 2006 and 2013, the studies in the form of master's and doctoral theses covered more of the program aspects than journal articles. Additionally, the studies shown in Table 3 also covered some other aspects such as implementation of the ELTPS which were not included in this study as it focused on program design issues.

Regarding the program aspects, each of them will be analyzed and their findings will be presented below based on each ELTP change.

3.2.1. Aims and outcomes aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Related to the aims and outcomes of the three ELTPs, the related studies were analyzed and themes were identified (see Table 4).

Table 4. Themes for the aims and outcomes of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Program aspects	Themes	Evaluation studies
<i>Aims and Outcomes</i>	<i>Clarity</i>	Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Arı, 2014; Arıbaşı & Tok, 2004; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Büyükduman, 2005; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Er, 2006; Erarslan, 2016;
	<i>Consistency</i>	Erdoğan, 2005; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; İnam, 2009;
	<i>Appropriateness</i>	İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçük, 2008;
	<i>Attainability of Aims/Outcomes</i>	Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe and Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002;
	<i>Integration of Language Skills</i>	Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Seçkin, 2010; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010; Yanık, 2007; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015; Yörü, 2012; Yüksel, 2001; Zincir, 2006

In terms of the aims and outcomes of the 1997 primary school ELTP, studies show that structural features such as design, clarity, and appropriateness are the strengths as they are clear and understandable (Büyükduman, 2005; Er, 2006) which contradicts to the findings of another study conducted by Zincir (2006). The analysis of the studies also showed that the aims of the 1997 ELTP were consistent with the outcomes and appropriate to students' affective, cognitive, and psychomotor levels (Büyükduman, 2005; Er, 2006; Harman, 1999). When the attainment of the aims and outcomes is considered, the findings of the studies demonstrate that one of the deficiencies of the 1997 ELTP was that aims of the curriculum, in general, were either moderately or never attained (Er, 2006; Erdoğan, 2005; Harman, 1999). However, regarding the attainability of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects, the affective aims of the 1997 ELTP were reported to have been achieved more than the cognitive ones (Arıbaşı & Tok, 2004; Büyükduman, 2005; Erdoğan, 2005; Mersinligil, 2002; Tok, 2002; Yanık, 2007; Yüksel, 2001). More precisely, the studies show that

language skills were not integrated equally into the program, and the aims related to listening and speaking were not attained (Büyükduman, 2005; Er, 2006; Erdoğan, 2005, Mersinligil, 2002), and listening was the least developed skill (Yanık, 2007). Thus, findings of the studies which evaluated the 1997 ELTP show that the aims did not help learners use the language in their daily life for communicative purposes and did not contribute to students' psychomotor, affective, and cognitive developments as specified (Er, 2006).

Regarding the aims and outcomes of the 2006 curriculum, the findings of the studies show a number of differences when compared to those found in the 1997 curriculum. The studies indicate that the poor clarity of the aims created problems for the teachers implementing the curriculum (Yaman, 2010) while this finding contradicted with the findings of other studies where the aims were reported to be clear, understandable, and appropriate to students' level (Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Güneş, 2009). However, most other studies found that the aims of the 2006 curriculum were not appropriate for students' developmental levels and needs (İnam, 2009; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Yaman, 2010) because the emphasis was mainly on lower-cognitive features (Gökler, Aypay & Arı, 2012).

Additionally, as part of the program design, evaluation studies found that the aims did not address the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of the students (Küçük, 2008). The aims related to reading and writing skills were found to be beyond students' levels (Cihan & Gürten, 2009); thus, the outcomes related to speaking and listening skills could not be achieved (Seçkin, 2010). In fact, most studies indicated that the reason why the outcomes for listening and speaking skills were not achieved in the required level as specified in the program is that the four skills were not integrated equally, and thus language skills development was not attained (İnam, 2009; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Örmeci, 2009; Seçkin, 2010; Yörü, 2012). As another finding of the studies related to integration of language skills, it is seen that rather than taking the communicative aspects of the language, in the 2006 curriculum grammar was heavily emphasized, and language skills were ignored on a large scale (Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Güneş, 2009; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Seçkin, 2010; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010; Yörü, 2012).

Findings related to the 2013 ELTP evaluation studies indicate that the aims and outcomes are clear and understandable; consistent and appropriate for students' level of learning and age characteristics (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Yıldran & Tanrıseven, 2015). Additionally, it is that affective aims are attained more (Erarslan, 2016; Kandemir, 2016; Yıldran & Tanrıseven, 2015).

Unlike the 1997 and 2006 ELTPs, the teachers as the participants of the studies reported that the emphasis on communicative skills was a strength of the 2013 ELTP (Erarslan, 2016; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Tok & Kandemir, 2015) and helped students in their daily lives (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aybek, 2015).

3.2.2. Content aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Related to the content aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs, the related studies were analyzed and themes were identified (see Table 5).

Table 5. Themes for the content aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Program aspects	Themes	Evaluation studies
Content	<i>Selection & ordering</i>	Arı, 2014; Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Arıbaş & Tok, 2004;
	<i>Sequencing & pacing</i>	Bayraktar, 2014; Büyükduman, 2005; Cihan & Gürlen, 2009;
	<i>Relevance & load</i>	Demirlier, 2010; Er, 2006; Erarslan, 2016; Erdoğan, 2005;
	<i>Language skills</i>	Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; Küçük, 2008; Küçüktepe,
	<i>Appropriateness</i>	Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2010; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010; Yanık, 2007

The studies focusing on the content of the 1997 ELTP highlighted that teachers did not find the content of the 1997 ELTP appropriate in terms of selection and ordering (Erdoğan, 2005; Yanık, 2007) since it included irrelevant and detailed information for the students (Büyükduman, 2005; Er, 2006; Mersinligil, 2002). As it was also expressed above regarding the aims and outcomes, the content was reported to have a major weakness due to such reasons as not integrating the basic language skills equally (Erdoğan, 2005) and not contributing to the attainment of four main skills (Mersinligil, 2002). Yet, as the studies report, a number of features were regarded as a strength of the 1997 ELTP in that content was found to be appropriate for students' level (see Arıbaş & Tok, 2004; Harman, 1999; Mersinligil, 2002; Tok, 2002), relevant to daily life, and encouraging students for the creative use of the language (Harman, 1999; Erdoğan, 2005); however, this finding was contradictory to another study stating the content did not encourage students to use the language in their daily lives (Er, 2006).

As for the 2006 ELTP, the content was found to be a weakness in that the sequence of the topics was not presented from easy to difficult (Küçük, 2008; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010) which caused a negative self-efficacy towards English on the part of the learners (Küçük, 2008). Similarly, it was reported that the content was not associated with daily lives of the students (Orakçı, 2012). One of the findings which most of the studies stressed was that the content was too loaded for the teachers to cover, and the main focus was on the reading passages as well as vocabulary (Arı, 2014; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Örmeci, 2010; Seçkin, 2010; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010). Similar to the 1997 ELTP, the 2006 ELTP was claimed to be communicative in nature in the program (MoNE, 2006); however, findings of the evaluation studies suggest that both 1997 and 2006 ELTPs were based on grammar in their content and language skills were not equally given place to provide students with better reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Orakçı, 2012).

In terms of the 2013 ELTP content, similar criticism against the 1997 and the 2006 ELTPs also arise as pointed out by a number of studies. It is reported that the sequence of the topics was not presented from simple to difficult (Alkan & Arslan, 2014) and not in harmony with each other (Bayraktar, 2014). On the other hand, most studies regarded the content of the 2013 curriculum as a strength since its design was based on teaching and learning principles, (Erarslan, 2016; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014) and students' level (Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014), thus attracting students' interest into learning (Alkan & Arslan, 2014).

3.2.3. Material Aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

With regard to the material aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs, the related studies were analyzed and themes were identified (see Table 6).

Table 6. Themes for the Material Aspect of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Program aspects	Themes	Evaluation studies
Material	<i>Provision & Delivery</i>	Arı, 2014; Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Bozavlı, 2015; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Büyükduman, 2005; Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014; Demirlier, 2010; Dinçer, 2016; Er, 2006; Erarslan, 2016; Erdoğan, 2005; Erkan, 2009; Erkan, 2015; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; İğrek, 2001; İnam, 2009; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçük, 2008; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe and Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Mirici, 2000; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özel, 2011; Özudođru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Seçkin, 2010; Seçkin, 2011; Tok, 2002; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Tosuncuk, 2016; Yaman, 2010; Yanık, 2007; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015; Yüksel, 2001
	<i>Lack of material & equipment</i>	
	<i>Coursebook</i>	

Of these studies in Table 6, no strength of the ELTPs so far has been reported. One of major deficiencies of the 1997 ELTP was reported to be the lack of proper design, provision, and delivery of necessary course materials and equipment for teaching the language. Regarding these, studies showed that teachers were not provided with adequate materials and equipment such as tapes, videos, computers made teaching inefficient (Büyükduman, 2005; Er, 2006; Erdoğan, 2005; Harman, 1999; İğrek, 2001; Mersinligil, 2002; Mirici, 2000; Yanık, 2007; Yüksel, 2001). Among the reported deficiencies of the 1997 ELTP, the coursebook provided was also regarded as one of the weaknesses in that activities and examples in the book were inadequate (Mersinligil, 2002). The book was also not designed based on the aims of the primary English curricula (Büyükduman, 2005). Additionally, the scarcity of supplementary materials and classroom equipment made the coursebook as the most frequently used course material in teaching the language (Mersinligil, 2002; Tok, 2002).

Studies reveal the same issues as the weaknesses of the 2006 ELTP since participants stated that the lack of materials was one of the major weaknesses of the program (İnam, 2009; Küçük, 2008; Örmeci, 2009; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010).

Additionally, it was reported that necessary equipment, such as computers, CD player, DVD player, and projector were not easily accessible, and authentic materials were not used in schools (Erkan, 2009; Erkan, 2015; İnam, 2009; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özel, 2011; Seçkin, 2011; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yaman, 2010). Provision and delivery of the materials hindered the effective implementation of the 2006 ELTP (Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Güneş, 2009; Seçkin, 2010); thus, teachers followed the coursebooks as the main source although they stated they were not designed carefully enough to meet the objectives as they were mostly grammar based (Ari, 2014; Demirlier, 2010; Erkan, 2009; Yaman, 2010).

As for the material aspect of the 2013 ELTP, the studies indicate that material design, provision, and delivery procedures following the 1997 and 2006 ELTPs did not change but ossified rather than showing improvement. Findings highlight that deficiencies in material and classroom equipment were among the major causes of failures in the attainment of the outcomes (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Aybek, 2015; Bayraktar, 2014; Bozavlı, 2015; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014; Dinçer, 2016; Erarslan, 2016; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Kandemir, 2016; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Tosuncuk, 2016). Likewise, findings of the studies show that the coursebook was heavily criticized for being inappropriate for an effective implementation (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Bozavlı, 2015; Dinçer, 2016; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Tosuncuk, 2016; Yıldırım & Tanrıseven, 2015), and findings of the studies also reveal that listening texts were too difficult for students to understand (Bozavlı, 2015; Erarslan, 2016; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Tok & Kandemir, 2015).

3.2.4. Testing and assessment aspects of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Related to the testing and assessment aspects of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs, the related studies were analyzed and themes were identified (see Table 7).

Table 7. Themes for the testing and assessment aspects of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 primary school ELTPs

Program aspects	Themes	Evaluation studies
Testing and Assessment	<i>Test Types</i>	Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Arıbaş & Tok, 2004; Bayraktar, 2014; Büyükduman, 2005; Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Er, 2006; Güneş, 2009; Harman, 1999; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Mersinligil, 2002; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014; Mirici, 2000; Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013; Orakçı, 2012; Örmeci, 2009; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Tok, 2002; Yanık, 2007
	<i>Integration of Language Skills</i>	
	<i>Alternative Assessment Types</i>	

Regarding testing and assessment as implemented by the teachers in the 1997 ELTP, a number of weaknesses were shown in the findings of the evaluation studies.

It was reported that most frequently used assessment types included tests and short-answer questions, or paper based grammar tests (Arıbaşı & Tok, 2004; Harman, 1999; Mersinligil, 2002; Tok, 2002;) in which practice tests covering writing, listening, and speaking skills were ignored substantially (Büyükduman, 2005; Mersinligil, 2002; Tok, 2002). Apart from these, other weaknesses related to testing and assessment were reported to be lack of end of unit progress tests in the coursebook (Mirici, 2000) and no use of alternative assessment types such as peer or self-assessment (Er, 2006).

Findings related to the testing and assessment practices based upon the 2006 ELTP show that traditional tests, such as multiple choice, fill in the blanks and matching questions were the major practices implemented by teachers (Ocak, Kızılkaya & Boyraz, 2013), and alternative assessment tools, such as performance tasks, projects and portfolios were regarded ineffective in attracting students' interest into language learning; thus decreasing student performance (Orakçı, 2012; Yaman, 2010). Although alternative assessment types were hardly ever implemented, teachers mostly used self-assessment and peer assessment among other alternative assessment types (Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Güneş, 2009). As studies also show, teachers were reported to have been given little or no information about testing and assessment types in the 2006 curriculum (Cihan & Gürten, 2009; Güneş, 2009; Örmeci, 2009). It is also seen that the testing and assessment types did not cover language skills, thus language skills could not be assessed thoroughly (Yaman, 2010).

As for the 2013 ELTP, the program suggests teachers to assess students' performances in the classroom through alternative assessment types rather than testing them (MoNE, 2013), and this is reported to be a strength of the 2013 ELTP considering teachers' views (Bayraktar, 2014; İyitoğlu & Alcı, 2015; Küçüktepe, Küçüktepe & Baykın, 2014; Merter, Şekerci & Bozkurt, 2014). However, it was reported that suggested assessment types did not assess student outcomes and found to be inapplicable (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015). As in previous curricula, teachers acknowledged that they were not informed enough about assessment types (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015).

4. Discussion and conclusions

Since the major purpose of this study was to find out how effective the ELTPs in Turkey in terms of such program design issues as aims, outcomes, materials and testing and assessment, this integrative review study has yielded several conclusions based on the analysis of the evaluation studies regarding the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs.

The introduction of the first extensive restructuring movement, the 1997 ELTP, was a milestone not only for the Turkish education system, but also for the evaluation studies to gain momentum. Regarding the conclusions related to the surface structures of the evaluation studies, it is clear that following the launch of the 1997 ELTP, the evaluation studies were low in number; however, a steady increase was observed after the introduction of the 2006 ELTP which maximized with the launch of

the 2013 ELTP. However, the last three years between 2014-2016 witnessed a remarkable increase in terms of the number of the evaluation studies related to primary school ELTPs. Thus, when the features of the studies conducted on the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs are considered overall, it is quite possible to claim that the importance attached to program evaluation studies carried out to evaluate the primary school ELTPs increased with the introduction of each curriculum change. One reason for this may be related to the awareness into the significance of the evaluation studies conducted in Turkey as also stated by Yapıcıoğlu, Kara, and Sever (2016). Especially, the reason why evaluation studies increased after the launch of the last curriculum change may also be related to the “academic incentive system” introduced in 2014 (<http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/11/20141114-1.htm>) with the aim of increasing the quality of scientific research, participation to academic conferences, and job satisfaction of the academicians at universities. In fact, as Alparslan (2014) found in his study, one of the antecedents of job satisfaction for academicians is the academic incentive; thus, this incentive system may have urged academicians and researchers to study educational programs and curricula more.

Regarding the publication types of the evaluation studies, it can be concluded that evaluation studies were initiated as master's and doctoral theses in the first two ELTP changes of 1997 and 2006 indicating the importance of the universities in the initiation of evaluation studies in Turkey. On the other hand, articles as the publication type gained a considerable popularity among studies that evaluated the 2013 ELTP known as 4+4+4 education system. It is worth noting here that the percentage of publication types in the form of master's and doctoral theses decreased dramatically in the studies evaluating the recent 2013 ELTP while articles gained popularity (79%). This indicates that evaluation studies have been a part of educational studies not only for student researchers but also for academicians and researchers.

The next conclusion regarding the methodology employed in the studies evaluating the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs is that a tendency from adapting quantitative to qualitative approach gained popularity. When research methodology of these studies is considered within the twenty years of period (1997-2017), it is seen that quantitative methodology was quite popular among studies conducted after the 1997 and 2006 ELTPs; yet, qualitative studies have increased over time especially after the 2013 curriculum. As Yıldırım (2010) states, in recent years there has been a tendency to conduct more qualitative studies in Turkey compared to the past although widespread preference is quantitative approach (Örücü & Şimşek, 2011), which has also been supported by the findings of this study. This tendency to make use of more qualitative approach to evaluate education programs may stem from the fact that quantitative approach to program evaluation sometimes fail to address some aspects of the programs; that is, numbers may not be enough to highlight the whole picture. Thus, the researchers tend to use more qualitative methods to cover the aspects of the education programs in depth and in a more comprehensive way (Yüksel, 2010).

In terms of the language of the publications, it is concluded that the studies were published overwhelmingly in Turkish. Since the evaluation of education programs aims to inform various stakeholders related to the worth of a program and helps them in their planning, decision making and gaining insight into the process of education (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004), these studies addressed the Turkish education system and were published in Turkish naturally.

Regarding the participants, teachers were the major participants of the evaluation studies of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs. As Yeni-Palabıyık and Daloğlu (2016, p. 46) state, "most of the research on English language curriculum in Turkey has focused on the perceptions and views of the teachers" since they lie at the heart of teaching programs (Topkaya & Küçük, 2010). In fact, collecting data regarding the ELTPs mainly from one source, the teachers, can also be seen as a weakness since they provide only a limited range. However, it is a known fact that students, teachers, managers, and families are equal stakeholders in educational contexts (Janmaat, McCowan, & Rao, 2016). Stakeholders other than teachers in the evaluation studies of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs were not included as necessary.

To sum up, this study concludes that the evaluation studies conducted on primary school ELTPs in Turkey varied greatly and increased in number enriching the literature especially after the 1997 ELTP and reached its climax with the last curriculum change indicating a deeper appreciation of the importance attached to program evaluation in the development and implementation of the teaching programs. As the legal institution responsible from curriculum design and implementation, MoNE may, in fact, run a country-wide project to evaluate the teaching programs of the most subjects including English, which seems missing when these evaluation studies are taken into consideration because almost all the studies were carried out by individual researchers.

The findings of the second research question show that curriculum design based on education program components, in general, has failures in implementing the English courses in the desired level; thus, causing problems in teaching English. Regarding this, the findings of the studies show that the aims of each of the ELTPs were verbalized clearly and were appropriate for students' level. Additionally, they were also reported to be consistent with each other; however, in the studies, no or little attainment of the outcomes was reported because of unequal integration of language skills and intensive emphasis on grammar. Thus, in the design of the ELTPs for the future, inclusion of stronger and effectively applicable aims and outcomes needs to be provided. As Harman (1999) argues, verbalization, clarity and consistency of aims, though quite significant, are not solely enough for an effective and efficient teaching. However, as the findings show, the communicative nature of the 2013 curriculum is perceived as a strength indicating a trend moving from grammar-based traditional teaching to communicative language teaching. As Saricoban (2012) stresses, Turkish education system is now trying to meet the communicative requirements of the evolving world; thus, making initiatives through education reforms. Hence,

communicative aspect of the language is heavily emphasized in the last education system, indicating a significant difference compared to the previous two ELTPs.

The contents of both 1997 and 2006 ELTPs were regarded as negative for an effective implementation of English in the classroom since sequencing and pacing did not appeal to the teachers in addition to including irrelevant and detailed information in coursebooks without associating it with students' daily life. The findings of the studies indicated that focusing mainly on grammar and emphasizing mainly reading and vocabulary hindered the attainment of four skills. Additionally, the findings also show that contents of the 1997 and 2006 ELTPs were intense for the teachers to cover in the given course hour. However, it is clear that most studies found the content of the 2013 ELTP as a strength as it did not face the criticism raised for the previous programs. As Richards (2013) states, a careful design of the content is one of the most basic elements for the enhancement of aims and attainment of outcomes. Thus, it can be claimed that the content of the new education reform may be an indicator of the possible success of 2013 ELTP in terms of primary school English lessons which call for future evaluation studies regarding the impact of the primary school 2013 ELTP.

Although there seems to be some minor amendments in the design of the ELTPs over time, one of the major problems that appears to be repeated continuously based on curriculum design is the material aspect, which is the most criticized issue for all ELTP changes. In almost all evaluation studies, it was maintained that teachers were not provided with enough number of course and supplementary materials, and the course book which is reported to be the main source followed by the teachers was regarded as ineffective in delivering the content. Thus, it is true that design, provision, and delivery of the appropriate and varied course materials as well as equipment is quite critical for the aims of the ELTPs to be met. Yet, MoNE seems to have major failures in designing and provision of course materials which might be the result of top-down curriculum design policies of Turkey.

Finally, the findings related to testing and assessment component of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs indicate that although the first two ELTP changes of 1997 and 2006 were claimed to be communicative, classroom practices were traditional-grammar based both in implementation and testing procedures. Language skills were not assessed and alternative assessment types were hardly ever implemented. In terms of the 2013 ELTP, a positive change towards testing and assessment procedures was observed, and teachers as the participants of the evaluation studies reported that alternative assessment was a strength although they claimed to be not informed about testing and assessment aspect of the new ELTP. It is suggested, as a result of these findings, that in prospective ELTP designs, the strengths of the former ELTPs may be used as the base and building upon the stronger aspects of them, new ELTPs may increase the quality of English language teaching and learning processes by also eliminating the reported deficiencies.

Overall, it is possible to conclude that the first two ELTP changes were regarded as a failure in terms of language teaching in primary schools in that the 2006 ELTP

seems to have repeated similar insufficiencies in the program design although it was claimed to have been launched as a solution to the deficiencies of the 1997 ELTP. The recent ELTP change seems to have created a number of innovations in its approach to language; however, some components are still defective in terms of program design. The reasons for these deficiencies may stem from the top-down program design policies of the MoNE. Additionally, it seems clear that although several evaluation studies were conducted evaluating the education programs in Turkey, their findings were not taken into consideration by MoNE as required (Yapıcıoğlu, Kara & Sever, 2016). Additionally, teachers as the real implementers of the education programs were not taken into consideration while designing the curricula and were not informed about the ELTPs well enough. When all these factors come together, each ELTP change taking place of the previous ones shares similar deficiencies yielding similar results. Thus, to be able to eliminate the weaknesses and add on the strong aspects of the program components, it calls for close communication and cooperation between all stakeholders, including the teachers, to make informed decisions and take informed actions which will ultimately have the potential to prevent likely failures of the future program changes.

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