# TÜRK İLKÖĞRETİM OKULLARI İNGİLİZCE PROGRAMINDAKİ HEDEF VE YÖNTEMLERİN DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

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**Öz:** Bu makale Türk ilköğretim okulları İngilizce müfredatındaki hedef ve yöntemleri değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye'de uygulanmış çeşitli İngilizce müfredatları incelenmiş ve 2013 İngilizce müfredatında benimsenen hedefler ve yöntemler değerlendirilmiştir. Bu amaçla bir likert tipi anket hazırlanmış ve Türkiye İzmir ilindeki orta öğretim kademesinde (8. sınıf) 1130 öğrenciye uygulanmıştır. Bu çalışma 2013 İngilizce programının birçok ilkesinin öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenme tercihleriyle uyuşmazlık içinde olduğunu göstermektedir. Programın benimsediği yöntem ve öğrencilerin tercih ettikleri öğrenme tipi arasındaki en önemli çelişki programın açık dilbilgisi öğretimine, çeviri ve ezbere izin vermeyişi ile öğrencilerin bu tür etkinliklere katılma isteklerinin olmasıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İngilizce müfredatı, hedefler, İngilizce öğretimi, iletişimsel yaklaşım

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# EVALUATING GOALS AND METHODOLOGIES IN THE TURKISH PRIMARY SCHOOL ELT CURRICULUM

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**Abstract:**

This paper aims to evaluate the goals and methodologies in the Turkish primary school ELT curriculum. The various ELT curriculums implemented in Turkey have been examined and the goals and methodologies adopted in the 2013 ELT curriculum are evaluated. For this purpose, a likert type questionnaire was constructed and administered to 1130 students in the second cycle (grade 8.) of public primary schools in İzmir, Turkey. The study indicates that many of the principles of the 2013 ELT curriculum are in conflict with the students' preferences in learning English. The most significant conflict between the method of the curriculum and the students' preferred type of learning is the fact that while the curriculum does not allow for explicit grammar teaching, translation and memorization, the students would be like to be involved in such activities.

**Keywords:** ELT curriculum, goals, ELT methodology, communicative approach

## Introduction

Turkish ELT curriculum development has been deeply affected by the communicative approach. Thus the elements of native speakerism, the use of authentic materials, drama and role play activities along with task based activities, the need for developing communicative competence in students are often mentioned and adopted in Turkish ELT curriculum development. Syllabus design, on the other hand, is dominated by the use of functions, tasks and contexts of language use. With the rise of English as an international language pedagogy, the notion of native speaker model and the adoption of a single universal methodology for all contexts are severely challenged. Instead bilingualism, bilingual or multilingual competence as models and methodologies appropriate to local culture of learning are advocated (Acar, 2007, 2010; Alptekin, 2002;

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Cook, 1999; Nunn, 2005, 2007, 2011, McKay 2002). This paper questions the 2013 ELT curriculum of Turkey in the light of the data gathered by the students. As a result the paper is expected to shed light on the effectiveness of CLT oriented curriculum development.

### An overview of Turkish primary school ELT curriculums

1997 primary school and 1991 secondary school ELT curriculums in Turkey claim to have adopted a learner centered curriculum development. 1991 Turkish ELT curriculum explicitly states that "while this curriculum is developed, a learner centered approach is taken as a basis" (p.6). ELT Listening and speaking skills are emphasized over reading and writing. Course content is to be presented in a meaningful context and it is claimed that "the use of language is as important as the usage" (p.7), a claim commonly made in the communicative approach. Moreover in this curriculum model, the students' errors are tolerated as in the communicative approach. In large classes, group work activity is suggested. The students are expected to use English in daily communication. While the features of the communicative approach are adopted in these curriculums, surprisingly it is stated that an eclectic approach is adopted as methodology. 1991 Turkish ELT curriculum claims that " as to the method, basically an eclectic approach should be preferred" (p.7). The syllabus, on the other hand, is organized around grammar, function and vocabulary. The 1991 curriculum states that "in the 'curriculum content' section, different functions, notions (vocabulary) and structures at the level of secondary school (1., 2. and 3. grades) are itemized as a list" (in "report" section). Thus a mixed syllabus is adopted.

The 2006 Turkish primary school ELT curriculum also emphasizes the communicative aspect of English. Functions and notions are focused on. The use of mother tongue is avoided except in cases when the teacher faces a serious communication problem. Pair work and group work activities, simulation and dramatization, games, songs, puzzles are promoted and learner autonomy is encouraged. In this curriculum also it is claimed that learner centered and process oriented approaches to curriculum design is being adopted. The syllabus is built around "structures, functions, situations, topics, skills, tasks" (p.23) , which indicates that a mixed syllabus is being used.

2013 Turkish primary school ELT curriculum clearly emphasizes the need for developing communicative competence by also citing Hymes (1972). It is also stated that the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages are closely followed in the curriculum and that the curriculum emphasizes language use in an authentic communicative environment. Authentic materials, drama and role play activites are suggested, which focuses the communicative aspect of language. Although the name of the communicative approach is clearly stated and its principles are closely followed in the curriculum, surprisingly eclectic approach is said to be adopted drawing also on an action oriented approach. 2013 ELT curriculum of Turkey, on the

other hand, takes basically the native sepakers as a point of reference. Any curriculum model adopting the notion of communicative competence (as developed by Hymes (1972) and Canale (1983)) and of authentic materials is somewhat native speaker oriented. With regard to authenticity, Harmer (1983), for example, argues that "authentic texts (either written or spoken) are those which are designed for native speakers: they are real texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language in question" (p. 146).

Canale (1983) in his criticism of knowledge oriented approaches to language teaching focuses on the importance of authenticity as he argues that

but such approaches do not seem to be sufficient for preparing learners to use the language well in authentic situations: they fail to provide learners with the opportunities and experience in handling authentic communicative situations in the second language, and thus fail to help learners to master the necessary skills in using the knowledge (p.15)

Kramsh and Sullivan (1996) state that

The once uncontroversial notion of 'authenticity' in language teaching (see, for example Widdowson 1979, Breen 1985a) has become problematic. Within a communicative pedagogy it seemed natural to use dialogues and texts that were 'authentic', i.e. spoken or written by native speakers for native speakers to communicate real-life messages for real-life purposes according to the socially sanctioned conventions of real-life language use. (p.199)

According to Canale (1983), the students must also meet the expectations of the native speakers in terms of actual communicative English use as he argues:

It is particularly important to base a communicative approach at least in part on the varieties that the learner is most likely to be in contact with in genuine communicative situations, and on the minumum levels of competence that various groups of native speakers (such as age groups, occupational groups) expect of the learner in such situations and that the majority of learners may be expected to attain. (p. 18).

Apltekin (2002) criticises such an orientation as put forward by Canale (1983) as follows:

This article questions the validity of the pedagogic model based on the native speaker-based notion of communicative competence. With its standardized native speaker norms, the model is found to be utopian, unrealistic, and constraining in relation to English as an International Language (EIL). It is utopian not only because native speakership is a linguistic myth, but also because it portrays a monolithic perception of the native speaker's language and culture, by referring chiefly to mainstream ways of thinking and behaving. (p 57)

Thus 2013 ELT curriculum's focus on "the need for developing communicative competence in English" (p. II) as well as its focus on the necessity of the use of authentic materials makes a constant reference to the adoption of the native speaker model in the curriculum. Alptekin (2002) goes on to argue that

The communicative approach considers target language-based learning as communicative competence to be essential in order for foreign language enculturation learners to participate fully in the target language culture. As such, the target language culture and its inhabitants, the native speakers, are elements crucial to the success of the teaching model. Learners are not only expected to acquire accurate forms of the target language, but also to learn how to use these forms in given social situations in the target language setting to convey appropriate, coherent, and strategically effective meanings for the native speaker. (p 58)

Indeed, as an aim adopted in the 2013 Turkish ELT curriculum, it is stated that "students listen and speak just as they would in a target language community / öğrenciler gerçek yaşamda o dili konuşan ülkelerdeki insanlar gibi dinleme ve konuşma eylemlerinde bulunurlar" (p. VII, VIII ).

The criticism of adopting such a native speaker oriented model of curriculum development will be examined in detail in the following section.

**Native English speaker or bilingual English speaker as a goal in curriculum development**

While the native speaker concept is widely used as a model against which the students' English proficiencies are measured, the concept itself is also widely discussed since it is difficult to define who is a native speaker as if also there is such a monolithic entity of a native speaker group who speak English in the same way.

According to Bloomfield (1933), 'the first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language' (p.43). Stern (1983) argues that native speakers have "a) a subconscious knowledge of rules, social settings, b) an intuitive grasp of meanings, c) the ability to communicate within social settings, d) a range of language skills, and e) creativity of language use" (in Cook, 1999, 186). While most of these characteristics are debatable, Cook (1999) argues that the indisputable element in the definition of native speaker is that a person is a native speaker of the language they learnt first. Someone who did not learn a language in childhood cannot be a native speaker of the language. Later learned languages can never be native languages, by definition (p. 187).

If one of the essential characteristics of English as an international language is that English is denationalized (McKay, 2002) and since English in today's world is largely used among bilingual speakers, the students don't need to achieve native speaker proficiency. Cook (1999) argues that "because L2 users differ from monoligual native spe-

akers in their knowledge of their L2s and L1s and in some their cognitive processes, they should be considered as speakers in their own right, not as approximations to monolingual native speakers" (p.185). Thus as an alternative to native speaker models which have been used as models of correctness for the students in the classroom, many models of bilingual or multilingual competence have been proposed (Acar, 2007, 2010; Alptekin, 2002; Nunn, 2005, 2007, 2011). Such bilingual or multilingual models of competence take as their point of departure the idea that comparing a bilingual English speaker (usually referred to as a non native speaker of English) with a native speaker would not in itself be a fair comparison since the former learns English in the expanding circle mostly in adulthood and with a limited language exposure but the latter learns English in early childhood with a massive amount of input. Thus comparing a bilingual English speaker with a native speaker would be like comparing a bird with a cat, a quite irrelevant and unfair equation. Cook (1999) also suggests that "L2 users should be viewed as multicompetent language users rather than as deficient native speakers…"(p. 185).

**CLT or EIL as appropriate methodology in Asian Contexts**

The communicative approach adopts Hymes' theory of communicative competence as a goal in English, a term later refined by Canale (1983). Contrary to grammar oriented approaches like the audio-lingual method, it focuses on the rules of use (the appropriate use of language in appropriate situations) rather than the rules of usage (the rules of grammar). The students' ability to use English appropriately for the native speakers is the primary target of the communicative approach. Thus native speakers are the ideal models for the students (Alptekin 2002; McKay 2002; Nunn 2005).

Richards and Rodgers (2001) list the characteristics of the communicative approach as follows:

1.Language is a system for the expression of meaning.

2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.

3.The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

4.The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.  (P. 161)

 "Western notion of the 'teacher-as-facilitator' as being an ideal teacher/student relationship" (Ellis, 1996, p. 216), "English-only approach to presentation and practice that is such a prominent feature of the British EFL tradition" (Swan, 1985b, p. 85), learners as active participants in language learning thus a learner centered methodology as the ideal way of learning for the students, the use of authentic materials (Kramsh

and Sullivan, 1996), native speakers as the ideal models for the students (Alptekin 2002, Nunn, 2005, 2007, 2011, McKay 2002), native speaker culture as the only culture to be taught are among features which make the communicative approach a western methodogy.

McKay (2002), however, criticises the validity of the assumptions of CLT and puts forward a set of assumptions characterized as English as an international language pedagogy. According to this new approach, a theory of EIL teaching must recognize the different uses of English in multilingual societies. Many bilingual users of English do not need to acquire native like competence and EIL should be taught in a way that respects the local culture of learning.

McKay (2002) further argues that

The prevalent assumption that CLT is the best method for the teaching of EIL has several negative effects. It often requires students to become involved in language activities that challenge their notion of appropriate language behaviour in a classroom. Its emphasis on an English-only approach can undermine the productive use of the mother tongue in the learning of English, which is particularly problematic in an era in which English is being learned primarily in bilingual classrooms…Clearly in the teaching of EIL, local educators should have control over how English is taught, implemeting a methodology that is appropriate to the local context rather than looking to Inner Circle countries for models (p.118, 119).

In this respect English as an international language pedagogy allows for variation in the use of English by bilingual English speakers, adopts bilingual or multilingual models of competence (Acar, 2007, 2010; Alptekin, 2002; Nunn, 2005, 2007, 2011), as a goal and advocates a methodology that respects the students' local culture of learning.

**Research Methods**

To determine whether the curriculum goals and methodologies meet the expectations of the students regarding their language learning purpose, the activities they would like to carry out, the use of the mother tounge, the treatment of errors etc., a likert type questionnaire which consists of a five point scale (strongly disagree, disagree, partly agree, agree, strongly agree) was prepared and administered to 1130 students in the second cycle (grade 8) of public secondary schools in İzmir, Turkey. Eighteen different primary schools and 1130 eight grade students from these schools were chosen randomly from six different districts in İzmir. These are Karşıyaka, Karabağlar, Konak, Gaziemir, Bornova and Buca. The questionnaire had been piloted by 180 students before being applied to 1130 students. The reliability factor was found to be 0.737 as a result of carrying out reliability analysis. The original questionnaire was prepared in English but it was translated into Turkish for the students to understand the items well. The statistical analyses were carried out using the SPSS 16 software program.

**Data Analysis and Results**

**Students' aim in learning English**

The first item of the questionnaire examined the students' aim in learning English.

**Table 1** Students' aim in learning English

| Items | strongly disagree % | disagree % | partly agree % | agree % | strongly agree % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I learn English to find a good job in the future. | 5,2 | 3,7 | 24,5 | 28,6 | 38,0 |
| I learn English because it is a compulsory school subject. | 27,1 | 28,8 | 18,3 | 14,2 | 11,6 |
| I want to learn English because it will help me use the internet (searching information in English, writing emails in English etc. ). | 9,5 | 12,0 | 29,9 | 25,1 | 23,5 |
| I want to learn English for daily communication. | 6,5 | 11,5 | 21,3 | 27,3 | 33,4 |
| I learn English because of family pressure. | 69,0 | 19,5 | 4,7 | 2,8 | 4,0 |
| I want to learn English because Turkey will join the EU. | 26,5 | 25,7 | 22,7 | 15,0 | 10,3 |

As seen from Table 1, the students' most popular reason for learning English is to find a good job in the future. Their second most popular reason is learning English for daily communication and their third reason is learning English so that it will help them use the internet. Since the goal of the students is to find a good job by taking the advantage of knowing English, it is important to note here that in Turkey finding a job mostly requires passing of a state governed exam called YDS, which is based on reading and grammar rather than listening, speaking and writing. According to this result, it can be said that in their future careers, the students will taje YDS as long as

they learn English to find a good job in Turkey.  The 2013 ELT curriculum in Turkey, however, specifies speaking and listening as the primary skills; reading and writing as secondary skills as can be seen from CEFR chart (p V). It is also stated in the curriculum that the main goal of the 2013 ELT curriculum is to develop Hymes' model of communicative competence in order for the students to use English appropriately in appropriate situations in daily life, though English has no place in the everyday communication of the Turkish people. The students' desire to learn English for daily communication, on the other hand, may indicate that they think knowing English means speaking it for daily communication.

The 2013 ELT curriculum of Turkey is based on the principles of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the official language curriculum of the EU "to maintain international standards for learning" (p. II) and for the students to "communicate effectively on an international level" (p. II). While the curriculum developers in Turkey have a motivation to adopt EU language standards for the students to be able to communicate with EU citizens in international context, table 1 indicates that most of the students disagree with the item "I want to learn English because Turkey will join the EU."

**The students' beliefs about the methodological issues**

Table 3 shows that the students prefer to be involved in activities (practice) and that they also need instruction (presenting language). It may indicate that the students would like both teacher instruction, that is, presentation of language items on the board, as well as language practice activities.

**Table 3** Student centered or teacher centered class

|   | Items | strongly disagree | disagree | partly agree | agree | strongly agree |
|---|-------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| 3 | I would like my teacher to spare a lot of class time for activities. | 6,6 | 11,9 | 30,4 | 26,1 | 24,9 |
| 4 | I would like my teacher to spare a lot of class time for instruction. | 9,5 | 16,3 | 34,2 | 23,5 | 16,5 |

As to which type of activities the students would prefer, Table 4 shows that most of the students would like pair work and group work activities as well as grammar based activities. Most of the students, however, would not like to be involved in individual activities in the classroom.

**Table 4** Students' preference for different types of activities

|   | Item | strongly disagree | disagree | partly agree | agree | strongly agree |
|---|------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| 5 | I like to do the activities by myself, not in pairs or groups. | 25,8 | 29,5 | 21,9 | 10,9 | 11,9 |
| 6 | I like to be involved in pair work and group work activities. | 7,0 | 6,6 | 17,0 | 30,7 | 38,7 |
| 7 | I like to be involved in grammar based activities. | 5,8 | 5,2 | 24,2 | 32,1 | 32,7 |

The students' preference for teaching grammar is also an important issue. The 2013 Turkish ELT curriculum does not give any place to grammar items in the syllabus. Rather it claims that "the communicative approach entails use of the target language not only as an object of study, but as a means of interacting with others; the focus is not necessarily on grammatical structures and linguistic functions, but on authentic use of the language in an interactive context in order to generate real meaning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2006)" (2013 ELT curriculum, p. III).

Table 7 shows that the students mostly prefer their teachers to explain the grammatical rules on the board, that is, they prefer a deductive way of teaching grammar. The principle of not focusing on teaching grammar adopted in the 2013 ELT curriculum and the students' preference of learning grammar explicitly are in conflict with each other.

**Table 7** The students' view on deductive grammar teaching

|   | Item | strongly disagree | disagree | partly agree | agree | strongly agree |
|---|------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| 11 | I like my teacher to explain gram matical rules on the board. | 3,9 | 2,1 | 9,4 | 27,3 | 57,3 |

It is also interesting to show that Turkish learners of English prefer learning English by translation and learning English words by memorization as Table 9 indicates. Such a preference by the students is also in conflict with the principles of the 2013 ELT curriculum, where there is no place for translation and memorization. Although the use of the students' mother tongue is allowed for giving complex instructions or explaining difficult concepts, the use of translation and memorization is never mentioned. Moreover the curriculum argues that it draws "on an action-oriented approach in order to allow learners to experience English as a means of communication, rather than focusing on the language as a topic of study" ( 2013 ELT curriculum, p. 2).

**Table 9** The students' attitudes towards learning English through translation and memorization

|  | Item | strongly disagree | disagree | partly agree | agree | strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | I like to learn English by translation (by translating English words and sentences into Turkish). | 5,0 | 4,8 | 15,3 | 27,6 | 47,3 |
| 14 | I like to learn new words by memorization. | 5,8 | 6,5 | 20,7 | 28,0 | 38,8 |

As to the use of the mother tongue in the class, the students prefer the teacher to explain the language points in Turkish and they are against the use of only English by the teacher. While the 2013 ELT curriculum states that "communication is carried out in English as much as possible" (p. VII) it also gives place to the use of the mother tongue by stating that "L1 usage is not prohibited or discouraged, but it should be employed only as necessary (i.e., for giving complex instructions or explaining difficult concepts"(p. VII). The point, however, is that while the 2013 ELT curriculum allows for the use of the mother tongue only when necessary, the students want the teacher to explain the language points in Turkish all the time.

**Table 5** The students' attitudes towards the use of the mother tongue in class

|   | Item | strongly disagree | disagree | partly agree | agree | strongly agree |
|---|------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| 8 | I like my teacher to explain the language points in Turkish. | 6,4 | 4,0 | 17,5 | 24,3 | 47,8 |
| 9 | I like my teacher to speak only English in class. | 32,8 | 25,7 | 24,7 | 6,9 | 9,9 |

Another conflict between the preference of the students and the ELT curriculum of Turkey is in the treatment of the students' errors by the teacher. Table 8 indicates that the students like their teacher to correct their mistakes immediately while the curriculum states "do not correct students' errors on the spot. Note down the language issues that cause confusion, and then practice them as much as possible." (p. IX).

**Table 8** The students' attitudes towards the teacher's treatment of student errors

|   | Item | strongly disagree | disagree | partly agree | agree | strongly agree |
|---|------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| 12 | I like my teacher to correct my mistake immediately when I make a mistake. | 4,3 | 4,2 | 13,5 | 29,0 | 49,0 |

**Conclusion**

This study indicates that 2013 Turkish ELT curriculum is not developed by taking the ideas of the students and thus many of the principles of the 2013 ELT curriculum are in confict with the students' preferences in learning English. It also shows that the principles of CLT adopted in the curriculum are also in conflict with the students' preferences. EIL with its assumption that the best method is the one which respects the students' culture of learning English (McKay 2002) seems to be more appropriate since it gives voice to the students in curriculum development. In Turkey the students want to learn English mainly to find a good job in the future. The 2013 ELT curriculum based on the aim and principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Lan-

guages, on the other hand, aims to enable the students to use English appropriately in appropriate situations in their daily lives though English is rarely used in the daily lives of the people. From the data it is also seen that Turkish learners of English do not learn English because Turkey will join the EU in the future. The most significant conflict between the method of the curriculum and the students' preferred type of learning lies in the focus on grammar, translation and memorization. The 2013 curriculum with its communicative orientation states that

The communicative approach entails use of the target language not only as an object of study, but as a means of interacting with others; the focus is not necessarily on grammatical structures and linguistic functions, but on authentic use of the language in an interactive context in order to generate real meaning (2013 ELT curriculum, p.III).

The students, on the other hand, display an interest in the explicit learning of grammar, the use of translation and memorization.

Since the 2013 ELT curricula in Turkey are prepared without taking the views of the students into account, it is not surprising to see such conflicts. Future curriculum development processes should identify learners' beliefs and thus mismatches should be dealt with.

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