



## In-service Teachers' Voices on the Quality of English Language Teaching in Turkey\*

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### Abstract

This study, part of a larger project conducted with in-service English teachers' in Turkey, reports teachers' views about the quality of English language teaching (ELT) in Turkey and major instructional problems they experience while teaching English. The study also revealed teachers' suggestions for coping with these problems. Data were collected through an online questionnaire that contained quantitative and qualitative items. 2,476 teachers working at primary, secondary, high schools in fifty cities across Turkey participated in the study. Basic descriptive statistics were performed on the quantitative data and qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. According to the participants, ELT in Turkey is not effective ( $N = 2,476$ ;  $M = 2.27$ ;  $SD = .91$ ). Students' negative affective states, large classes, poor textbooks, lack of materials, limited class hours, examination-driven teaching, and overloaded and structure-based curriculum were reported to be the main reasons for ineffective ELT. Participants agreed that shifting the focus of teaching to listening and speaking, improving textbooks, offering preparatory classes and increasing class hours, improving teacher development and recruitment, providing opportunities to go abroad, changing the focus of examinations, and changing the curriculum could help improve the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey.

**Keywords:** English language teaching in Turkey, teacher voice, factors influencing the effectiveness of English language teaching.

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# İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğretimi Üzerine Düşünceleri\*

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## Öz

Bu makale hizmet içi öğretmenlerin Türkiye’deki İngilizce öğretiminin kalitesi hakkındaki görüşlerini incelemek ve onların İngilizce öğretirken karşılaştıkları temel öğretim problemlerini anlamak amacıyla düzenlenmiş olan bir araştırmayı sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma ayrıca öğretmenlerin bu problemlerin üstesinden gelmek için önerilerini ortaya koymaya çalışmıştır. Katılımcılardan internet üzerinden uygulanan ve nitel ve nicel maddelerin bulunduğu bir sormaca yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Çalışmaya 50 farklı ilde ilkokul, ortaokul ve liselerde görev yapan 2476 öğretmen katılmıştır. Nicel veri, betimsel analiz yoluyla çözümlenirken nitel veriyi analiz etmek için içerik analizi uygulanmıştır. Katılımcılara göre Türkiye’de İngilizce öğretimi etkisizdir (N= 2,476; Ort = 2.27; SS = .91). Öğrencilerin olumsuz duyguları, kalabalık sınıflar, kitaplar, materyal eksikliği, kısıtlı ders saatleri, sınav odaklı öğretim ve müfredat İngilizce öğretiminin yeterince etkili olamamasına sebep olan temel faktörler olarak ortaya konmuştur. Katılımcılar, öğretim odağının konuşma ve dinleme olarak düzenlenmesinin, kitapların değiştirilmesinin, hazırlık sınıflarının konulmasının ve ders saatlerinin arttırılmasının, öğretmen seçiminin ve yeterliklerinin geliştirilmesinin, yurtdışına gitme olanaklarının arttırılmasının, sınavların ve müfredatın değiştirilmesinin Türkiye’de İngilizce öğretim kalitesini arttırmada faydalı olacağına dair fikir birliğinde olmuşlardır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Türkiye’de İngilizce öğretimi, öğretmen görüşleri, İngilizce öğretiminin etkililiğini belirleyen unsurlar.

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## **1. Introduction and background**

ELT is challenging in monolingual contexts. Kouraogo (1993) calls these contexts "input-poor environments" (p. 167) because they provide limited exposure to the target language, which makes it difficult for learners to improve their communicative abilities. Given that the main purpose of language learning is to improve learners' communicative competence (Littlewood, 1992; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), ELT in input-poor environments might fail to attain its major objective. There are many studies that have described this problem. In the Chinese context, for example, Pan and Block (2011) investigated teachers' and students' language beliefs and found that ELT is mainly grammar-based. In the Libyan context, Aloreibi and Carey (2016) underlined the disconnection between curriculum and practice as the reason why ELT is based on teaching grammar. This concern was also voiced by Alam (2017), who emphasised that communicative English teaching offered by policy makers is not implemented in classes in Bangladesh. Williams (2017) generalised this problem to the East Asian region, where ELT remained teacher-centred and textbook-focused. These studies provide empirical support for the assumption that despite curricular innovations that aimed to shift the focus of teaching English to developing students' communication skills, ELT fails to serve this purpose in some monolingual contexts.

Teaching English is one of the perennial problems in the Turkish educational system as well. Although the educational system has undergone three significant changes in the last two decades, there is ample empirical evidence for the failure of innovations in terms of changing classroom practice. In 1997, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) increased the duration of compulsory education from five to eight years, and English classes were offered from the fourth year of primary school rather than from the sixth year of education. With regard to ELT, the communicative approach was adopted: the objective of ELT was to improve students' communicative abilities by means of learner-centred approaches (see Kırkgöz, 2007 for details). However, there are studies that concluded that classroom teaching was still structural. For example, Çelik (2000) investigated language learning needs of students at an ELT department at a university and found that students mostly needed to develop their speaking, listening, and pronunciation skills. According to Kırkgöz (2006; 2007), the problem was mainly because of poor textbooks, time constraints, large class size, and lack of qualified teachers.

In 2004, MONE restructured the educational system by adopting a constructivist learning approach to promote student active engagement in the learning process and changed the ELT programme accordingly (Topkaya & Küçük, 2010). Nevertheless, several studies found a gap between the curriculum and classroom practice and concluded that ELT remained structural and teacher-centred, with little emphasis on improving students' communication skills. For example, Uztosun (2011) conducted a qualitative study to investigate ELT classroom practices at high school level from teachers' and students' perspectives. Although teachers and students believed that developing communicative skills should be the major objective of learning English, they reported that they only focused on teaching grammar in English classes.

In 2012, MONE introduced the 4+4+4 educational system, which changed the structure of the educational system. The duration of compulsory education increased from eight to twelve years and students started learning English in the second year of primary education rather than in the fourth year. Constructivist approaches, communicative language teaching, learner-centeredness, and process-oriented assessment are highlighted in the curriculum. Despite these significant changes, studies carried out to investigate the implementation of the new system found that these innovations did not change classroom practice. For example, in a study conducted to investigate

the focus of ELT in primary schools, Gürsoy, Korkmaz and Damar (2013) concluded that most teachers did not teach speaking and listening skills. The problems of ELT in Turkey were detailed in the British Council and TEPAV's (2013) report which underlined that, despite taking more than 1,000 hours of English classroom instruction, the majority of students failed to improve their English competence: while 37% of general high school students believed that they were beginner learners of English, 6% of them considered themselves as advanced level learners. The report concluded that ELT in Turkey is based on passing a grammar-based test, and hence, fails to improve students' communicative competence.

The curricular changes and the findings of the studies summarised above show that educational reforms might not change classroom practice and this poses a critical problem in education. Therefore, conducting research studies to reveal whether the curriculum is implemented in classroom practice is important. Although there are several studies conducted in the Turkish context within this scope (e.g. Çelik, 2000; Gürsoy, Korkmaz, & Damar, 2013; Kırkgöz, 2006; Uztosun, Skinner, & Cadorath, 2017), studies that give a voice to a large group of in-service teachers across Turkey are scant. This study was designed to address this gap. It aims to understand in-service teachers' views about the quality of ELT in Turkey and to reveal instructional problems that hinder the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey. The study also attempts to identify in-service teachers' suggestions for dealing with these problems. The study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are in-service English teachers' views about the quality of English language teaching in Turkey?
2. What are in-service English teachers' views about the sources of major instructional problems experienced while teaching English?
3. What are in-service English teachers' suggestions for improving the quality of English language teaching in Turkey?

## **2. Methodology**

This article reports partial findings of a larger research project. The project implemented a survey methodology to collect large-scale information from a wide population (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The appropriate data collection tool was a questionnaire, because it allowed for gathering large amount of information from a large group of participants (Dörnyei, 2002). The questionnaire contained quantitative and qualitative items which made it possible to reveal general tendencies and provide a rich description of the relevant concepts (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

The research project was carried out in October 2016 to collect data from in-service English teachers about their views on a variety of issues, namely self-perceived professional competence, in-service teacher education, research engagement, and ELT in Turkey. Due to limitation of space here, this article presents the findings of the items that addressed participants' perspectives on ELT in Turkey. There were one closed- and two open-ended items relevant to this topic. In the closed-ended item, participants were asked to respond to the question: 'Do you think that ELT in Turkey is effective?' by rating the item out of 5, in which 5 indicated 'very effective' and 1 indicated 'very ineffective'. In the open-ended items, participants were asked to comment on the problems they encountered while teaching English and offer suggestions to deal with these problems. The questionnaire was in Turkish. These items were included to collect data about in-service teachers' views about the effectiveness of in ELT in general, and yield an in-depth understanding of the factors that hinder the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey.

## 2.1. Participants

A volunteer sampling method was used to sample participants, in that the questionnaire was made available online and the link was e-mailed to all in-service teachers across Turkey. 2,476 in-service teachers participated in the study. 1,121 (45.3%) of them were male and 1,351 (54.6%) were female. They ranged in age from 23 to 63 years with a mean of 35.8, a median of 35, and a mode of 30. They were working at state schools in 50 cities located in all regions of Turkey. Participants' demographic information regarding the type of schools where they worked and years of teaching experience are displayed in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the participants

Type of schools	N	%	Years of teaching experience	N	%
Primary school	678	29	0-4	268	10
Secondary school	372	16	5-9	686	27
Anatolian High School	486	21	10-14	682	27
Vocational High School	314	14	15-19	574	23
Religious Vocational High School	180	8	20-24	142	6
Other	172	7	25+	125	5

## 2.2. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 to calculate central tendencies; namely, means, modes, and medians. Qualitative data were analysed through content analysis using MAXQDA version 12. The researcher first skimmed the data to identify recurring codes and then used MAXQDA to categorise these codes and calculate frequencies. For example, 'textbook' was one of the recurring codes and the responses which were related to 'textbook' were displayed by MAXQDA. This enabled the researcher to identify relevant comments and calculate their frequencies.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Research question 1: The quality of English language teaching in Turkey

The mean score of the item relevant to the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey was 2.27 (SD = .91) out of 5. The median was 2 and the mode was 3. While 161 (6.4%) participants reported that the quality of ELT in Turkey was effective or very effective, 1424 (47.5%) participants reported that it is ineffective or very ineffective. 891 (36%) participants found ELT in Turkey neither effective nor effective.

### 3.2. Research question 2: The sources of major instructional problems experienced while teaching English

To further understand participants' views about ELT in Turkey, they were asked to comment on the sources of major instructional problems they encounter while teaching English. 682 participants responded to this item. The quotes presented in this section were selected on the basis of their clarity and representative for the findings. In presenting these findings, participants

were coded as 'P' with a random number. The content analysis revealed seven recurring themes. The frequency of each theme is displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Frequencies of the themes regarding major instructional problems

Theme	Frequency
1. Negative affective states	117
2. Large classes	60
3. Poor textbooks	59
4. Lack of materials	40
5. Limited class hours	28
6. Examination-driven teaching	28
7. Curriculum	20

### **3.2.1. Negative affective states**

The most frequently recurring theme, mentioned by 117 participants, was negative affective states. The participants maintained that students' negative attitudes and prejudices towards learning English, lack of motivation, unwillingness, and indifference were the main sources of instructional problems. Some participants elaborated on the reasons for these negative affective states. According to P785, "students are prejudiced towards learning English because they find English difficult". P858 related these to students' previous experiences and commented that s/he "cannot present listening activities because of students' negative attitudes and unwillingness". In commenting on the reasons behind this problem P753 referred to the monolingual context of Turkey: "students are indifferent because they do not need English in their daily lives." Some participants related negative affective states with specific language skills. For example P93 commented that "students feel shy when they speak English" as they "feel anxious" (P193) and "are afraid of making mistakes when they speak English" (P90). Therefore, they "tend to remain reticent in speaking and listening activities" (P340).

### **3.2.2. Large classes**

The second most frequent theme was large classes. This was addressed by 60 participants, who made similar comments to P100: "it is not possible to do a speaking activity in a class of 40 students." The participants underlined the importance of student engagement in classroom activities, in that "the effectiveness of English classes depends on the extent to which it provides students with the opportunity of practicing speaking, and writing skills" (P507).

### **3.2.3. Poor textbooks**

The quality of textbooks was the third recurring theme reported by 59 participants, who were dissatisfied with the textbooks provided by MONE. According to the participants, the main problem was that the textbooks "are for teaching grammar only" (P202), "do not emphasise the communicative aspects of English" (P157), and "do not include good speaking and writing activities" (P183). According to P406, "the CDs are not available and textbooks do not include videos and animations." Some participants mentioned that the textbooks are overloaded, in that "in the 8<sup>th</sup> year, for example, each unit has five outcomes and includes many new words" (P555).

This results in, according to the participant, “covering only grammar and vocabulary parts of the units in textbooks” and ignoring other parts, namely speaking, listening, and writing.

#### **3.2.4. Lack of materials and limited class hours**

The fourth recurring theme was the lack of supplementary materials available. 40 participants mentioned this issue and reported a need for “more instructional materials” (P88), especially for “visual and auditory” (P113) and “authentic” (P137) materials. The fifth most frequent theme was the limited class hours and this was mentioned by 28 participants, who agreed that they cannot teach English effectively because of “limited class hours” (P65) which makes it difficult to “teach four language skills” (P883), especially “speaking” (P343) and “listening and writing skills” (P689).

#### **3.2.5. Examination-driven educational system**

The sixth recurring theme, which was remarked by 28 participants, was the examination-driven educational system. P20 commented that “students are only concerned with exams”, and therefore, they “do not find English classes necessary” (P112), “do not perceive its importance” (P93), and “consider English classes as a waste of time” (P967) because “the university entrance examination does not include any English questions” (P77). “Students keep asking, now that English is important, why there are not any English questions in the university exam”, remarked P1093. This was mentioned by P188 as the main source of negative affective states, such as “students’ lack of motivation to learn English.” These comments suggest that students do not attach importance to learning English because it is not included in the general university entrance examination.

#### **3.2.6. Curriculum**

The last popular theme, mentioned by 20 participants, was related the curriculum. Some participants were dissatisfied with the curriculum because it is “overloaded” (P119) and “offers pencil and paper and multiple choice exams, and therefore, English classes are taught as if these were not language classes but classes of any other subjects” (P57). P234 was concerned with the top-down nature of curriculum design and asked: “is it not possible for teachers to design a curriculum according to their students?”

### **3.3. Research question 3: Suggestions for improving the quality of English language teaching in Turkey**

To understand participants’ standpoints regarding possible solutions to the problems summarised above, they were asked to make some suggestions on how to improve the quality of ELT in Turkey. 549 participants responded to this itme. The content analysis revealed seven recurring themes that are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Frequencies of the themes regarding suggestions for improving the quality of ELT

Theme	Frequency
1. Shifting the focus of teaching to listening and speaking	236
2. Changing textbooks	234
3. Offering preparatory classes and increasing class hours	176

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4. Improving teacher development and recruitment	126
5. Providing opportunities to go abroad	115
6. Changing the focus of examinations	97
7. Changing the curriculum	77

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### **3.3.1. Shifting the focus of teaching to listening and speaking**

The most frequent recurring theme concerns shifting the focus of ELT from grammar to listening and speaking skills. 236 participants made similar comments to P57, who stated that “teaching of English should not be based on written knowledge. Mostly listening and speaking activities should be carried out in classes and students should be provided with opportunities to use the language.” P75 and P101 suggested that “the number and the quality of listening and reading activities should be increased.” According to P126, “specific classes should be offered to teach a particular language skill, such as listening, speaking, and writing.”

### **3.3.2. Changing textbooks**

234 participants remarked that changing textbooks could improve the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey. The main concern was about the top-down nature of textbook selection. The participants mentioned that “MONE should permit teachers to choose their textbooks” (P153) and “teachers should be allowed to use any supplementary books” (P89). With regard to the content of textbooks, some participants stated that “textbook activities should be practice-oriented” (P94). Some participants suggested that “international sources” (P119) and “books published by well-known international publishers” (P138) should be used as they publish books that “offer software support and include good visual and auditory materials” (P330). This could, as argued by P272, “solve several problems experienced in listening activities, including the problem of pronunciation.”

### **3.3.3. Offering preparatory classes and increasing class hours**

The third popular theme, which was mentioned by 176 participants, was to offer preparatory classes and increase the teaching hours of English classes. The participants suggested that “the students should have one-year preparatory classes where they take intensive English classes” (P860). P107 gave reasons for these suggestions as follows:

“the effectiveness of English learning depends on the extent to which it exposes students to the target language, and therefore, it is not wise to expect a student to develop reading, writing, listening, speaking skills in 3 or 4 hours of English classes a week.”

P327 stated that offering preparatory classes could make it possible to “overcome the problem of having limited time to improve students’ four language skills” and “provide students with many opportunities to practise English” (P536). Parallel to the need for preparatory classes, 166 participants specified that increasing class hours of English classes could be a solution. P201 suggested that “English classes should be at least 8 hours a week”. This could allow for “improving students’ four language skills through offering practice-oriented teaching” (P283).



### **3.3.4. Improving teacher development and recruitment**

126 participants considered a lack of in-service teacher education as a source of instructional problems. They called for the provision of teacher training programmes that “improve teachers’ competence” (P321) and “enable teachers to update themselves and increase their interests and motivation” (P1206). With regard to the focus of these programmes, some participants argued that these programmes should aim to “increase teachers’ English language competence” (P159), “especially English speaking competence because a teacher who cannot speak English cannot teach English” (P164). Some participants related lack of teacher competence to teacher recruitment policy in Turkey: “the graduates of different departments who can speak English should not be recruited as teachers of English” (P73). To address this, P137 suggested that “teachers’ competences should be evaluated”.

### **3.3.5. Providing opportunities to go abroad**

115 participants remarked that MONE should provide students and teachers with the opportunities to go abroad. This could “increase students’ exposure to English” (P574), and hence, “students could practise English in natural contexts” (P536). Some participants maintained that “teachers should go to foreign countries regularly throughout their career” (P1168) and “take in-service teacher training programmes and make observations” (P529). P617 suggested that these opportunities could be provided through “making more investments in establishing school-partnership projects.”

### **3.3.6. Changing the focus of examinations**

According to 97 participants, avoiding an examination-driven educational policy or changing the focus of examinations could be useful. In doing so, according to P706, students should be encouraged “not to study for the exams only” and “instead of examination-driven education, speaking-oriented ELT should be provided as this could promote students’ motivation to speak English” (P1262). With regard to the focus of English language examinations, participants agreed that English exams “should not be limited to testing grammar and vocabulary” (P1078), “should be skills-based” (P58) because only then do students “attach importance to developing these language skills” (P1078).

### **3.3.7. Changing the curriculum**

77 participants believed that changing the curriculum could lead to the improvement of ELT. They were concerned with the top-down nature of curriculum design and wanted to have a voice in designing classes: “teachers should be allowed to teach classes however they want” (P625) and “the curriculum should be flexible” (P596). P281 asserted that the “curriculum should be developed by organising nationwide workshops and giving a voice to students, parents, and teachers.” According to P938, the curriculum should be particular to the type of school because “the language needs of a student in a science high school are different than a student in a tourism high school.”

## **4. Discussion**

The present study showed that the majority of in-service English teachers believe that ELT in Turkey is not effective. This provides support for the assumption that ELT is one of the major issues in the Turkish educational system. This was voiced in the British Council and TEPAV’s (2013) report, in that despite devoting significant time to learn English, general high school

students considered themselves to be at beginner level in English. This might indicate that ELT in Turkey fails to improve students' perceptions of their English competence.

The participants provided information regarding the sources of problems experienced in teaching English and made some suggestions for dealing with these problems. The most frequent suggestion was to shifting the focus of teaching English from grammar to reading, listening, and speaking skills. They offered that particular attention should be given to teaching students how to use English communicatively. The participants' concerns about the overdependence on grammar with little emphasis on teaching communication skills are in line with several pervious studies. For example, in a study that investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of their language competence, Gürbüz (2006) revealed some parallel findings, in that speaking, pronunciation, and fluency were reported to be areas in which participants felt incompetent. Uztosun (2017) also found that pre-service teachers of English felt least competent in listening and speaking. Haznedar's (2012) study, which investigated in-service English teachers' perceptions of ELT at primary schools in a city, found that teachers do not focus on listening and speaking skills but rely on teaching grammar. These findings show that one of the main reasons for ineffective ELT in Turkey is the overdependence on grammar and placing more emphasis on developing students' communication skills might improve the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey.

According to the findings, students' negative affective states is the most frequent problem that in-service teachers encountered while teaching English. The participants reported that students are not motivated to learn English and feel anxious and shy especially in listening and speaking activities. Given that affective issues, such as motivation, anxiety, and willingness to communicate, are crucial for language learning and teaching (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998), the emphases participants placed on these issues seem to parallel the extant literature. Although the reasons for students' negative affective states are not investigated in the present study, it is possible to infer that the sources of problems revealed in this study (e.g. structure-based language teaching, large classes, poor textbooks, limited class hours) might result in negative states. However, it is worth emphasising that teachers are responsible for improving student motivation and they play significant role in developing students' affective states. As asserted by Dörnyei (2001), teaching style and activities impact on student motivation. Therefore, instead of depending solely on external factors, it is worth examining whether teachers can motivate their students by offering classes that are appropriate to their needs and expectations. This might call for a need for training teachers to deal with unmotivated students and/or to promote students' positive affective states.

Regarding problems encountered while teaching English, other frequent theme was large classes. The participants commented that they cannot teach listening and speaking because of having a large number of students in classes. The impact of class size on the effectiveness of English is acknowledged in the literature especially as a factor hindering the possibility of implementing communicative approaches (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011) and supported by the findings of previous studies (e.g. Kırkgöz, 2008; Uztosun, 2011). These findings show that class size is one of the factors that made it difficulty to teach English communicatively.

The subsequent themes were poor textbooks and lack of materials. Participants stated that textbooks cover grammar only and fail to present well-designed listening, speaking, and writing activities. They were also concerned with the overloaded content of textbooks and suggested using books published by international publishers and having a voice in textbook selection. As for lack of materials, the participants mentioned that they need more visual, auditory, and authentic

materials. It is a fact that textbooks and instructional materials play important roles in teaching English (Harwood, 2010) and some previous studies found these as the factors decreasing the effectiveness of ELT. For example, in a qualitative study that investigated instructional problems that in-service teachers of English experienced at primary schools in Turkey, Uztosun (2013) found that the poor quality of textbooks was one of the reasons why teachers cannot provide effective ELT. The British Council and TEPAV (2013) also reported that English classes are mostly designed to complete textbook exercises and textbooks fail to differentiate student needs. Previous studies also showed that teachers' dissatisfaction with the teaching resources decreases the effectiveness of teaching English in Turkey and other contexts (e.g. Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Kırkgöz, 2008). In addition to a need for better textbooks and instructional materials, these findings could indicate a lack of teacher competence. This is because depending heavily on ready-made materials might be problematic because teachers should be competent to adjust and adapt materials (Samuda, 2005, cited in Harwood, 2010) by preparing handouts, activity sheets, and worksheets to supplement textbook activities and designing and adapting a variety of audio-visual and authentic materials. From this perspective, these findings call for a need for training teachers on these competencies.

The participants agreed that one of the factors that influenced the effectiveness of ELT was limited class hours. They mentioned that they cannot teach other language skills, especially speaking, listening, and writing because of having limited class hours. This finding provides support for the argument that time constraints make it difficult to use different materials and present a variety of activities in classes (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011). This finding is in line with the findings of Uztosun's (2016) study in which limited class hours were found to be the major factor that obstructs effective ELT at primary schools in Turkey. In a study carried out to reveal the factors that influence the provision of communicative-oriented curriculum innovation at primary schools in Turkey, Kırkgöz (2008) found that limited instructional time was one of the obstacles. To overcome this problem, the participants suggested that preparatory classes should be offered to teach English intensively. These concerns were addressed by MoNE in 2017-2018 education year and fifth grade students take 15 hour-long classes per week in some pilot schools across Turkey. MoNE will decide whether to provide intensive English classes in all schools from 2018-2019 education year by taking into account the effectiveness of this piloting process.

Other recurring theme regarding the problems experienced while teaching English was examination-driven educational system. The participants commented that students do not value English as the university entrance examination does not include any English questions. They were also concerned with central examinations which include English questions as they only test learners' grammar knowledge. This problem was also addressed in the British Council and TEPAV's (2013) study which concluded that ELT in Turkey is based on passing a grammar-based test. Parallel to this, in a qualitative study that investigated teachers' beliefs about teaching English in a Turkish high school, Uztosun (2013) found that students were mainly concerned with developing grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, as these two areas were needed to become successful in the English language paper of the university entrance examination. These concerns could be addressed by changing the focus on central examinations to testing learners' communication abilities as this will improve learners' motivation to develop these skills.

Other recurring theme regarding the problems experienced while teaching English was curriculum. The participants found the curriculum ineffective because it is overloaded and offers multiple-choice exams. They wanted to have a voice in the design of curriculum. Kırkgöz (2009) also found overloaded curriculum as a source of problems in teaching English. This was revealed

in the British Council and TEPAV's (2013) report which suggests that the curriculum should be flexible and give teachers space to adapt it according to the needs of their students. Participants' expectations to have a voice in curriculum design is acknowledged in the literature, which highlights the fact that the curriculum development process should be transparent; teachers should have a voice in order to perceive the value of any changes and become knowledgeable about how to implement the innovations of the curriculum (Fullan, 1993). In essence, the curriculum is not structural and does not suggest grammar-based examination. Instead, in the curricula of English classes at primary and secondary levels, the main objective of teaching English was declared to be developing students' communicative competence by means of communication-based language teaching. Project and portfolio evaluations are offered as alternative testing tools. The participants' relevant comments regarding curriculum might indicate a misconception about the curriculum and this shows that they do not know the content of the curriculum, which might cause a disconnection between teaching practice and curriculum.

As for suggestions to improve the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey, the participants reported a need for in-service teacher education (INSET) as a means to enhance teacher development. Some participants commented that they should take teacher education in foreign countries to develop their speaking skills. There is ample evidence in the literature that INSET in Turkey is problematic (e.g. Atay 2008; Uysal, 2012). These programmes were reported to fail to provide continuous teacher development by means of offering subject-specific education effectively (Kırkgöz, 2008). As mentioned in several research studies, offering effective INSET to teachers of English might be a good way of overcoming many problems that teachers experience while teaching English.

### **5. Limitations of the study and future research**

The study has several limitations. Firstly, the data were collected through a questionnaire and were not triangulated by using different data collection tools, and therefore, the study might provide a narrow perspective on ELT in Turkey. Secondly, despite the large sample size, participants were not sampled through a random sampling but a volunteer sampling method, which makes it difficult to generalise the findings to the population. Thirdly, the number of relevant questionnaire items were limited, and therefore, the findings failed to provide both quantitative and qualitative aspects of in-service teachers' perspectives on particular issues. Finally, since the qualitative data were analysed through a software programme, it was difficult to calculate inter-rater reliability. To overcome these limitations and provide a broader perspective on ELT in Turkey, further studies are needed to provide empirical evidence on the quality of ELT and generate implications to improve the effectiveness of ELT, by using longer questionnaires and different data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and diaries.

### **6. Conclusions and implications**

The present research had three objectives: a) to reveal in-service teachers' viewpoints regarding the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey, b) to identify the main instructional problems that hinder the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey, and c) to offer suggestions to overcome these problems from teachers' perspectives. Considering the findings regarding the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey, teachers believed that ELT in Turkey was not effective. Students' negative affective states were reported to be the major problem that teachers encountered. They reported that they cannot teach English effectively because students are not motivated to learn English, and hence, do not want to participate in classes. These concerns make it essential to design English classes that could foster student motivation to learn English and develop their awareness of the importance of

communication in English (British Council and TEPAV, 2013). This might also call for a need for educating teachers on how to motivate students and how to deal with unmotivated students. To ensure this, as suggested by the participants, a more flexible curriculum could be offered to allow for adaptation of the content according to the students.

The participants suggested that the focus of teaching English should be shifted from grammar to listening and speaking and they commented that English should not be taught by depending on written knowledge but the main objective should be on developing learners' listening and speaking skills. According to the participants, the current system makes it difficult for students to perceive the value of learning English, especially because English is not included in the general university entrance examination, and they reported that students do not place importance on improving communication skills because of the grammar-based examinations. To avoid this, English should be included in the general university entrance examination and, as concluded by the British Council and TEPAV (2013), the focus of English examinations should be shifted from grammar- to communication-based. This could improve students' perceptions of the value of developing communication skills in English.

The second major problem was large classes. The participants agreed that they cannot involve students in the learning process and improve their different language skills. As concluded by Kırkgöz (2008), this issue should be addressed by policy makers and initiatives should be implemented to organize smaller classes. In addition to this problem, participants considered poor textbooks as one of the major reasons for ineffective ELT. They maintained that textbooks are overloaded, are not communicative, and do not provide good audio-visual materials. These problems could be taken into account by policy-makers, authors, and material designers. Moreover, participants reported a need for audio-visual and authentic materials as they were not satisfied with the supplementary materials provided. However, considering that teachers should be able to adapt or develop materials appropriate to their needs (Samuda, 2005, cited in Harwood, 2010), this expectation could indicate a lack of teacher competence in designing materials. To avoid this, it might be useful to provide in-service teacher education on how to overcome this problem.

Limited class hours were also mentioned as a factor hindering the effectiveness of ELT in Turkey and seen as an obstacle to improving students' speaking and listening skills. To overcome this problem, participants suggested that preparatory classes should be offered, in which students can take one year of intensive English language education. According to the respondents, this could solve problems experienced because of having a limited number of hours for English classes. Additionally, participants agreed that the curriculum is overloaded and places too much emphasis on grammar rather than communication. They were also concerned with the top-down nature of the curriculum and wanted to have a voice in curriculum design. Considering these issues, it might be useful to follow a bottom-up approach by giving a voice to teachers in the curriculum design process. Participants underlined the need for effective in-service teacher education for improving teaching competence and fostering English language competence, especially in speaking. They also addressed teacher recruitment and underlined the significance of recruiting well-qualified teachers and evaluating in-service teachers' competence regularly and systematically. They also suggested that increasing opportunities for teachers and students to go abroad could be a solution to limited exposure to English.

This study showed that conducting studies to understand teacher voices yields insights into instructional problems encountered while teaching English, which in turn can allow the

generation of practical proposals to improve ELT. Therefore, it is important to provide further empirical evidence on these issues and all the findings should be taken into account by policy-makers.

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