



Available online at:  
[http://www. ulead.org.tr/journal](http://www.ulead.org.tr/journal)  
*International Association of Research  
in Foreign Language Education and Applied Linguistics*  
**ELT Research Journal**  
**2012, 1(4), 230-239**  
ISSN: 2146-9814

## **A case study in Istanbul: Exploring the deliberation in English as a foreign language teaching units at state schools**

**Dilara Demirbulak<sup>1</sup>**

Yeditepe University, Faculty of Education

### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to identify and understand the deliberation process carried out at school level. The assumption is that a sound deliberation for pre-exploration of the potential of the curriculum material in terms of not only the content that led to their development but also how and why the content was selected, arranged and transformed for educational purposes is essential in providing equal educational opportunity to citizens. The study was carried out at 27 state schools with 81 English language teachers. The results of the findings indicated that variation in deliberation is due to affective factors at schools.

**Keywords:** *deliberation, curriculum potential, teachers` approach to curriculum*

---

<sup>1</sup> Dilara Demirbulak, Yeditepe University, Faculty of Education

## Introduction

Education prior to proclamation of Turkish Republic can briefly be described firstly as having been provided by millet private rather than the state. Secondly, education was religion oriented so religious figures (ulama) were the teachers (Sönmez, 2013). Thirdly, the medium of instruction was Ottoman Turkish, Arabic and Persian (Saydam, 2007). Finally, the average person was only able to attend religion-oriented primary school (Sibyan Schools) where Holy book was the curriculum and the teaching material. Rote memorization was the teaching methodology employed and evaluation was based on correct reading of a sura, a prayer, or a rule by heart. The people who worked for the government and military were the graduates of Madrashes (higher education for the ones from higher socio-economic status) and Enderun School (for Christian youngsters) where along with religious education foreign language (Özkan, 2010; Fortna, 2002) and positive science education were also provided. The other subjects were mainly provided by the staff brought in from foreign countries and the curriculum and materials were developed by them (Akyüz, 2008; İhsanoğlu, 2004; Simon, 2003).

In order to overcome the inequalities in education, Law of the Unification of Education was passed upon proclamation of the Turkish Republic. In order for everyone to have the right to receive education, the first step was to attach all the educational institutions to the Ministry of National Education. Overall authority to determine the curriculum, the content of courses, the number of hours allocated for each course at schools per week, the years in which they should be delivered, etc., rests within the decision of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2011). A didactic and top-down approach to curriculum-making, which foregrounds the role of national centralized systems was adopted (Akyüz, 2008; Fer, 2003). The Arabic alphabet was replaced by the new Turkish alphabet for modern, practical, precise and less difficult reading and writing of the language as well as effective and efficient interaction among all citizens via the same language. Moreover, foreign language training which was limited to certain groups due to various reasons were now included in the curriculum of state schools and thus provided to all learners.

The curriculum could have provided equal opportunity over the years yet the quality and quantity of foreign language education has been one of the persistent and pressing problems. The coupling of Antel's statement in 1931 about not being able to provide effective and efficient foreign language courses at state schools with the results of the research carried out by European Union (EU) in 2011 is an example of the mentioned view. In the mentioned research it has been pointed out that more than 1/4 of Turkish companies were not able to export due to language barrier ([www.yonetisim.com](http://www.yonetisim.com)). This perceived weakness of education has drawn attention mostly to the highly centralized structured curriculum. It is believed that this type of practice of centralization where teachers are only point of interest in terms of faithful implementers has led to too frequent changes in the curriculum that have not led to development and advancement (Akyüz, 2007; Demirel, 2003; Varış, 1976).

There seems to be two interrelated issues at this point. The first one is that curriculum is a text that is---as all texts are---interpreted based on the reader's beliefs, understanding, and experiences, and read in ways that differ from the intention of its authors (Deng 2009; Carson, 2009; Fullan 2008; Ben-Peretz, 1990). This is because while curriculum makers transform the scholarly material into curriculum materials at the first level teachers, transform the curriculum material into learning experiences in a classroom at the second level. The teacher involvement in the curriculum endeavor is for exploiting the various potential of the materials (Ben-Peretz, 1990). It is therefore important to identify how teachers approach the curriculum, especially in a centralized system and how they exploit it. Historically the primary task of a teacher is perceived as to follow an established curriculum and adapt to it in terms of students' needs or

their own teaching philosophy rather than to revise the curriculum or write it anew (Brown, 2001). This type of relationship between teachers and curriculum can be described as *curriculum fidelity*. The assumption here is that teachers, properly trained, can transmit curriculum in the manner of a 'high fidelity' audio system, and that this ultimately results in enhanced learning (Chval et al., 2006; Fullan, 2008; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Means, 2008; Snyder et al., 1992; Xu, 2009). The *adoption* approach, meanwhile, enables teachers to negotiate minor adjustments to the curriculum with the developers; dissociated experts still guide the process, though (Shawer, 2009). They are active so as to *tailor* the curriculum for their learners and act as mediator between the learner and the material based on what they think about their students, about what students bring to instruction, trajectories of their learning that content, their own understanding of the material, which shapes their interpretations of what the central ideas are (Ball & Cohen, 1996). Identifying how teachers approach and implement the curriculum is very important for providing equal opportunities to every citizen. That is, when the relationship between curriculum and instruction becomes *dualistic*, they become two different entities and thus what takes place in the classroom could limit the relationship to the master plan to be implemented in the classroom. The changes in either the curriculum or the instructional process would not have a significant chain effect on each other. This model is usually observed at centralized systems that operate in a highly structured top-down hierarchical fashion. This then results in curriculum being the superordinate and instruction the subordinate rather than complementing each other (Oliva, 1997). This then could lead to curriculum being reproduced more than being implemented as experienced in Turkey. Deliberation could furnish the teachers with the incentive to avoid dualistic experience by providing the floor for them to be heard loud and clear. As Stenhouse (1975) says, "changes not accompanied by incentives or even worse not changing old incentives that are counter-active to the new situation, will necessary produce psychological barriers which can raise serious problems". The absence of incentives is the cause for the teachers' rejection to take part.

The term "deliberate" is defined as "discussion and consideration by a group of persons of the reasons for and against a measure" ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)). It is used mostly in the field of law to describe the role and responsibilities of a jury to come to a decision upon careful consideration of evidence and hearing of both sides of the issue. It requires realization of the common good, shared concerns and the complexities of the given situation. It can only be achieved upon effective and efficient interaction among the members which means shifting perspectives upon hearing all parties views to better serve the community at large. However, it should be remembered that deliberation is not "debating" since the goal of debate is to win an argument and silence the other whereas the goal of deliberation is to find a creative solution to a practical problem. The deliberate curriculum making in education is therefore, is an ongoing activity that cannot be controlled by any group of people even if they are the experts of the topic and/or elected officials responsible of overseeing it (Null, 2011). Since educational problems cannot be solved via sole use of theoretical knowledge. The theory needs to be connected to practice and deliberation for making use of the strengths of the theory pertinent to the problem to be solved for successful translation to the classroom. This, in turn, requires the involvement of teachers in curriculum making. Since, they are the "gatekeepers" (Thornton, 2001) who know the realities of their classroom and the other teachers' attitudes as well as the fact that effectiveness and efficiency of curriculum depends on their support for a sound "mutually" agreed enacted curriculum.

The aim of this study is to identify and understand the deliberation process carried out at school level. The assumption is that a sound deliberation for pre-exploration of the potential of the curriculum material in terms of not only the content that led to their development but

also how and why the content was selected, arranged and transformed for educational purposes is essential in providing equal educational opportunity to citizens.

## The Method

This study is a qualitative study with the aim of identifying and understanding the deliberation carried out at 27 state primary, secondary and high schools (9 primary schools, 9 secondary schools and 9 high schools) within the province of İstanbul in analyzing the EFL curriculum potential. Prior to the determination of schools, MoNE District Office was contacted so as to identify schools that are situated at "lower and/or middle" economic status areas. The reason for focusing on this feature is that as Fontana (1992) concludes, living conditions and economic problems act as a powerful handicap to the educational progress of learners and thus teachers' main role becomes fulfilling the unmet needs of students with such background.

### Participants

Eighty-one (81) EFL teachers participated in the study. Only 7 of these teachers were males. Of these eighty one teachers forty two of them could be described as "experienced teachers" since they had been teaching for more than ten years and the rest for less than ten years. Of the teachers with less than ten years of teaching experience, fourteen of them were MA and three of them were PhD students. Among the teachers who have been teaching for more than ten years, eleven of them had double majors. They had initially graduated from Business Management for example and then decided to become English teachers. Six of them held an MA degree but none of them with PhD degree though. Almost all of them had attended TEFL courses (table 1).

**Table 1**

### Participants

Years of Experience in Teaching	Gender		The number of teachers with or studying MA degree	The number of teachers with or studying PhD degree	The number of teachers attending TEFL trainings
	F	M			
More than 10 years	42	0	6	0	42
Less than 10 years	39	7	14	3	16

### Instruments

The three questions prompted at the semi-structured interview to the teachers were as follows:

1. *What type of work do you carry out at your English Teaching Unit (ETU)?*

2. *How would you describe your interaction with curriculum?*
3. *What are the factors that facilitate and or constrain the implementation of the national curriculum?*

### *Data Analysis*

The interview results were analyzed in an iterative manner. The data were first read and reviewed holistically and then studied in detail to come up with critical aspects or significant quotes each student teacher pointed out. They were then blended together to understand the similarities and differences in terms of the mentioned aspects (Gillham, 2000; Heaton, 2004). Finally, a set of categories that signified their conceptions was created.

During the analysis of the content, the data and the themes set were reviewed again with a colleague for cross-check purposes. The *content analysis of the generated codes had an intercoder reliability of .75 across all themes and consistency among the coders in how they segmented coded text.*

### **Results and Discussion**

As the data were analyzed, three broad categories that emerged were "*the factors that hinder and/or facilitate the deliberation processes at ELT units*", "*teachers` curriculum approach*", and "*curriculum and instruction relation*". These categories were used as headings to present the findings.

#### ***a. The Deliberation Process At the ELT Units of Schools***

All the schools that the participants of this study worked at had ELT units which consisted of at least three teachers. These unit meet at the beginning and at the end of each semester with the participation of one of the school administrators as mandated by MoNE legislation. The aim is to discuss the program to be (pre-semester) or had been (post-semester) implemented and make recommendations. The documents - minutes of the meeting, curriculum material, and the teachers` log (for the teachers to enter the units and/or activities covered at the end of each teaching hour) - are filed as mandated by MoNE.

Having described the "official process" the teachers stated that these meetings were mainly held for mere fulfillment of the requirements. Then they pointed out two daunting issues. The first one was that they downloaded the yearly plan and other required documents that they can find on the web that is ready to be used, made some changes such as names of the schools or dates and filed them. The next one was that the teachers` log was filled by the teachers at their convenience in accordance with the downloaded yearly plan rather than reporting what has actually been done at that specific lesson. In other words, all requirements were fulfilled on paper. They stated that teachers did not meet during the semester since that was not mandated by MoNE. However, even if they themselves wanted to do so it would not be possible since there were no room or space allocated to their unit. All the teachers were spending their non-teaching hours at the teachers` room which consisted of chairs and one or two dinner tables to be used as desks and meeting table. It would therefore be not feasible to carry out a meeting there. So, they "*run into*" rather than meet with the other members of their unit either at the teachers room or at the corridors. When this happens they would sometimes ask "what have you done so far" as expressed in their own words. They also pointed out that

since deliberation was only on paper they felt no sense of belonging or attachment to their teaching unit. One of the teachers said

*"a novice teacher was appointed as the head of our teaching unit. She took the job seriously and tried to allocate responsibilities to use. That really got me upset so I gave her piece of my mind and that was it. She now knows what she is not supposed to do".*

In some schools then teachers believed in deliberation and got along well with each other in the unit yet their heavy teaching load prevented effective and efficient and frequent deliberation. Even with the limited deliberation they tried to share some of the supplementary materials to be used in classes.

So, the impetus for promoting the curriculum materials at the EFL teaching unit levels seem to be not a common practice. Therefore, the depth of discussions and whether or not group decisions are going to be taken depends on the personal relationship of the members of the unit. If they are good friends and believe in "team work" then it works. One of the common processes was that in all schools all the same exam was administered since one teacher prepared the exam based on the units/content identified in the yearly plan to be given in all the classes. So, this issue routed the interviews to teachers approaches to curriculum.

### ***b. Teachers` Curriculum Approach***

When the data were analyzed it was seen that teachers had adopted either curriculum transmitter or curriculum adapter approach. None of them had adopted the curriculum making-development approach since they are obliged to follow the yearly plans and the accompanying curriculum material provided by MoNE.

#### *Teacher as Curriculum Transmitter*

The teachers using the transmission strategies are adhering fully to the syllabus, textbook, activities and instructional strategies provided without making any changes or additions what so ever. They have stated that, for example, when for some reason or another they cannot play the listening tape then they just read the script. They do not skip any activity at the textbook and they even spend the exact time allocated for an activity at the plan. Textbooks serve as the main source for these teachers. Total of eleven teachers with more than ten years of experience and seven teachers with less than ten years of experience have adopted this approach. Of the three main reasons provided by the teachers the first one was students attitudes towards language training. Turkish education system is described as national standardized test oriented one and thus students motivation being dependent on whether the subject is included in it and if so its overall effect. English not being included at almost the most important exam, the University Entrance Exam, unless they are going to pursue a career related to language and National Achievement Test administered at the secondary school which included English being abolished coupling with "no failing" policy leads students not to pay the attention the course deserves. They practically believed that no matter what instructional strategy and material they use the students attitude would not change. Secondly, they have a belief that English as a subject matter is not on the primary course list of MoNE led to quality deterioration of the English program. Their belief has led to demotivation and lack of enthusiasm. The last reason is the "chill" from the anticipated consequences that could be faced with by political power in case not fully complying with their policies.

### *Teacher as Curriculum Adopter*

The teachers using the adopter approach supplemented the textbooks due to the numerous typos, complex and difficult to understand content and instructions of activities, irrelevant activities and/or lexicals within units, boring activities, insufficiency and/or lack of speaking-writing-listening skill and cultural informative messages, and too much reliance on memorization-oriented activities. They pointed out that anytime there is a forthy-authored textbook, supplementation need would be inevitable. One of the teachers said

"The textbook as it is would serve no means if not supplemented".

The extent of supplementation varied among teachers. Some of them said they believed in their guts while others carried out an on-going needs analysis via informal observations of students and made use of their past experiences to cherry-pick the activities, tasks at each unit and re-arranged the order of the activities. She said

"I am sure some of the lexical items in the textbook are not being used based on the feedback I got from the native speakers. However, I don't really want to skip those words since the authors of the book could also be the author of the national exams as well, you never know".

### *C. Curriculum and Instruction Relation*

Participants of this study have indicated that they have not been -orally or written-informed about the underlying theories of the educational and/or instructional programs. They say they do not even know the aim of the English course. One of them said

*"I wonder if the officials know.. I believe the documents are just the reports of the literature reviewed and translated to Turkish".*

Teachers could be described as being "*skeptical*" about the curriculum materials provided by MoNE. Teachers point out to a paradox between their values and the policy makers enforcements. The textbooks are overloaded and the policy makers mandate full coverage of textbook which would mean to them "*just doing the activities superficially*". For them this would mean ignoring all the shortcomings of the textbooks and not doing any type of informal assessment such as asking comprehension questions. They believe the content of the activities are very superficial, not real-life related ones like charity work for homeless people or manners in formal settings. The students cannot use the language in these context to fulfill their communication needs in real settings. Surprisingly they have not been subject to any orientation as radical change was done in schooling and especially language training. They express their disappointment with the curriculum material by saying "*the language competency level of our graduates is hardly FCE level*".

During the interview it was necessary for the researcher to use educational program to refer to curriculum and instructional program for syllabi to avoid concept confusion. None of the teachers, first of all, participating in this study had seen the educational program. They mentioned about a "560 page manual" that they needed to comply with for their teaching practice. The specified instructional procedures in the manual could not be applied at state schools with the current infrastructure of schools and Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) was one of the examples given for this purpose. One of the experienced teachers said

"students studying at each grade of high school have to be grouped according to CEFR levels within themselves like A1, A2, or C2... This is impossible since there are no

teachers nor classrooms available to do it. The textbooks are not designed according to levels either. Let`s say classrooms, teachers, and textbooks are provided but there is still need for rules to enable students transition from one level to another. In other words, it`s against the law, so how can it be done".

This was a shared point of view just the examples provided in the curriculum by MoNE have been taken from a textbook published abroad. It was understood from their talks during the interviews that despite having differences in their approach to curriculum they shared a common view about the existing relationship between curriculum and instruction. They saw interaction between the two as "dualistic". As Oliva (1997) puts it "planners ignore practitioners and practitioners ignore planners". There are two groups taking programmatic and methodological decisions within the same system without interacting with each other at the desired level.

Another important remark made was that the students start at A1 CEFR level (beginner) in primary school. When they move to secondary school they start again at A1 CEFR level. When they graduate and go to high school they start again at A1 CEFR level. So, all those years are just repetition of one another that does not go beyond A1 and A2 level. When the reason for this was asked they all held the other schools not doing their job adequately and thus they had to start from the scratch. The claim of the teachers attending this study is MoNE being aware of this too yet not even the audits questioning it.

Although teaching is still in many cases a very private business, teachers do belong to a specific teach unit and work as a team. Just as each member of the team contributes to the team, the team can contribute to the members to share and make use of various intellectual knowledge for better support of learners and effective evaluation of the outcomes for an inclusive education.

## Conclusion

National curriculum approach in our country is for the ensurement of equal opportunity and equal rights for its pupil stemming from the gap between demand and supply in education. Teachers, as exercised in other countries, are expected to put the policy of the country into practice and are held accountable for the academic performance of the pupil. The findings of this study, which cannot be generalized due to the limitations in number and representations of the participants, suggest that there is a wide gap between not only the official curriculum and the classroom curriculum but also among the classroom curricula even within the same school. Resolutions need to be found to overcome this conflict and contestation for the best of interest of the pupil. It is therefore suggested that effective and efficient deliberation at school and/or district level could not only level off overload of work of teachers but also make use of all the hard-work wasted due to lack of systematization. The school principals need to be encouraged to ensure the deliberation via codifying the starting point for deliberation.

## References

- Akyüz, Y. (2007). *Türk eğitim tarihi*. Ankara:Pegem Akademi Yayınları.
- Ball, D. L. and D. K. Cohen (1996). "Reform by the book: What is — or might be — the role of curriculum materials in teacher learning and instructional reform?" *Educational Researcher* 25(9): 6-8, 14.



- Ben-Peretz, M. (1990) The concept of curriculum potential. *Curriculum Theory Network*, 5 (2), 151--159.
- Brown, H. D. (2001) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents).
- Carson, T. R. (2009) Internationalizing curriculum: Globalization and the worldliness of curriculum studies. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 39 (1), 145--158.
- Chval, K., Reys, R., Reys, B., Tarr, J., and Chavez, O. (2006) Pressures to improve student performance: A context that both urges and impedes school-based research. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 37 (3), 158--166.
- Demirel, Ö. (2008). *Yabancı dil öğretimi*. Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayıncılık.
- Deng, Z. (2009) *Revisiting the curriculum potential. Paper presented at the 1st International Conference on Practical: The Practical: An East--West Curriculum Dialog* (Capital Normal University, Beijing, China).
- Fer, S. (2005) 1923 yılından günümüze Cumhuriyet dönemi ilköğretim programları üzerine bir inceleme. *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Politikaları Sempozyumu*. İstanbul. Downloaded at 21.10. 2008 from [http://sevalfer.com/files/Bildiri\\_CumhuriyetDonemiProg.pdf](http://sevalfer.com/files/Bildiri_CumhuriyetDonemiProg.pdf)
- Fortna, B. J. (2002). *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fullan, M. (2008) Curriculum implementation and sustainability. In F. M. Connelly, M. F. He, and J. I. Phillion (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction: Managing Curriculum* (113--122). USA:Sage Publications.
- Fullan, M. and Pomfret, A. (1977) Research on curriculum and instruction implementation. *Review of Educational Research*, 47 (2), 335--397.
- Gillham, Bill (2000). *Case study research methods*. London: Continuum.
- Heaton, J. (2004) *Reworking Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.
- İhsanoğlu, E. (2004). *The Madrasas of the Otoman Empire*. UK: Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization.
- McDonough, J. & Shaw, C. (1998). *Materials and methods in ELT: a teacher's guide applied languagestudies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Means, B. (2008) Technology's role in curriculum and instruction. In F. M. Connelly, M. F. He, and J. I. Phillion (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction: Managing Curriculum*. (123--143) USA:Sage Publications.
- Null, W. (2011). *Curriculum: from theory to practice*. USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Oliva, P. F. (1997) *Developing the Curriculum*. USA: Longman.
- Özkan, S. H. (2010). Osmanlı Devletinde Yabancı Dil Eğitimi. *Turkish Studies International Periodical For the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 5(3)

- Saydam, Y. (2006). Language use in the Ottoman Empire and its problems (1299-1923). *Johannesburg, South Africa: University of Johannesburg, Unpublished Thesis.*
- Shawer, S. F. (2009). Classroom-level curriculum development: EFL teachers as curriculum-developers, curriculum-makers and curriculum-transmitters. *Teaching and Teacher Education.*
- Schwab, J. (1973) The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *The School Review*, 81 (4), 501--522.
- Snyder, J., Bolin, F., and Zumwalt, K. (1992) Curriculum implementation. In P. W. Jackson (ed), *Handbook of Research on Curriculum: A Project of the American Educational Research Association* (402--435) . New York: MacMillian.
- Sönmez, S. (2013). Primary education system in Ottoman Empire. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 3 No. 5;163*
- Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An Introduction of Curriculum Research and Development.* London: Heineman
- T.C.Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Eğitimi Araştırma ve Geliştirme Dairesi Başkanlığı. (2004). *İlköğretim öğrencilerinin başarılarının belirlenmesi. İngilizce bilgisayar okuryazarlığı raporu.* Ankara:MEB.
- Thornton, S. J. (2001). Educating the educators: Rethinking subject matter and methods. *Theory and Practice*, 40(1), 72-78.
- Varış, F. (1976). *Eğitimde program geliştirme: teoriler - teknikler.* Ankara: Alkım Kitapçılık Yayıncılık
- Xu, Y. (2009) School-based teacher development through a school-university collaborative Project: A case study of a recent initiative in China. *Curriculum Studies*, 41 (1), 49--66.