EVALUATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CURRICULUM

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DOI: 10.14527/9786053188407.42
Introduction

Teaching of Turkish as a Foreign Language has gained much attention because of a couple of reasons. Various definition of the curriculum has been made so far in the literature. For example Ornstein and Hunkins (2004), defined the curriculum as in the followings:

- a plan including strategies for achieving desired goals,
- studying with experiences of the learner,
- a system consisting of people, the processes and procedures,
- a field of study,
- subject matter or content.

Evaluation has been defined by many researchers and experts as well (Worthern, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Middlewood & Burton, 2001). According to OECD Development Assistance Committee’s (1991) definition evaluation is a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results. Scriven (1991) defined evaluation process as identifying values and standards and applying it by using various techniques to reach a conclusion. Program evaluation has aimed to reach some objectives. Lynch (1996) stated objectives of the program evaluation are to provide necessary data about the current program and to offer accountability to stakeholders.

Developments in the program evaluation have greatly influenced the evaluation studies in the language education as well. According to Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005), these influences might be summarized as:

- Measurement of outcomes
- Focusing more on classroom process
- Evaluation as a professional area
- The development of teachers’ skills
- Formative evaluation

Studies in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) AND Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have broadly shaped evaluation studies in ELT. Logic behind these studies was to determine the effect of a certain treatments. Swain and Lapkin (2000) were the pioneers in this kind approach to language evaluations by studying Canadian bilingual education system. This approach was a way of seeking an alternative to combine the needs of learners with the appropriacy of the syllabus. This logic took language evaluation studies to the description of the curriculum with the help of data from questionnaires, interviews and systematic observation in classrooms. Purpose of the evaluation studies mostly have aimed to describe and explain instruction practices and efforts to implement a communicative syllabus.

English Language teaching has been one of the main concerns of the recent centuries. New methods and techniques have been arising with the new technologies and recent developments. Many institutions and schools are in the pursuit of best methodology, curriculum and teaching syllabus. There are various studies on the evaluation of the language program. Al-Darwish (2006), for example examined the effectiveness of teachers in teaching English. He found that the Kuwaiti English language teachers are the powerful supporters of communicative language teaching. Karataş and Fer (2009) also evaluated a language program that was administered in a prep-class at a university in Turkey and found that the curriculum war away from providing essential language skills for specific prospective future career. Akar (2009) studied the colleges of foreign language teacher training (FLTTC) and found that FLTTCs were effectively administered to acquire foreign language competencies in Poland. Kırkgöz, Çelik, and Arikan (2016) elaborated on the elementary level English curriculum in Turkey in terms of designer perspectives and stated that political, pedagogical and contextual factors affects the success and implementation of the curriculum and therefore, these need to be considered while designing the curriculum.
Tran (2016) studied the English curriculum design in two Vietnamese universities and concluded that English curriculum should be supported with more activities and training to develop communicative competencies of the learners in English. Guo and Xu (2016) examined the English curriculum in terms of its workload burdened on teachers in China and stated that teachers complain on the workload of the curriculum and they mostly recommend using computer and advanced technologies in teaching and implementing the curriculum.

Batdı (2017) evaluated English curriculum implemented in high schools of Turkey based on the views of the teachers and found that teachers hold more positive attitudes towards English curriculum in the first year of curriculum while they holds comparatively less positive attitudes towards the curriculum in the last years of high school education. Director and Sony (2017) examined the efficacy of English communication module provided by Pearson Training Curriculum at college level and concluded that communication workshops have helped learners in terms of their communication skills by developing critical thinking skills.

Tao (2017) investigated the oral English proficiency after the graduation of the universities and found that English proficiency levels of the learners especially in oral communication are increasing positively with the new collaborative and interactive teaching methods although it hasn’t reached the desired level. Although many studies has been done so far on how to teach foreign language best, not many studies focused on the evaluation of the ELT curriculum of the applied in a whole university to determine the efficiency in terms of its efficiency on academic success, teacher practice and content. This study evaluated the English Language Curriculum in use deeply by administering qualitative and quantitative methods as well. The results of the study would be a first and most important step toward efficiency of language education.

**Methodology**

Nature of the present study requires using qualitative and quantitative techniques together. Descriptive research design was used for quantitative part of the study. Four skills exam scores and test scores of standardized test with various forms were collected and evaluated. For the qualitative part of the study, content analysis was preferred for analyzing the setting and teaching practices. Semi-structured focused group interview were held to explore the situation and perceptions of the teachers and learners were evaluated. Phenomenological Research was thought to be appropriate for the study since focus of the research was to describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. In the qualitative part of the study, “ELT curriculum” was identified as a phenomenon. Data collection procedure was carried out with the help of participants of the research through semi-structure interview sessions and then researcher described the phenomena from the perspectives of participants. The description in this study focused mostly on what ELT Curriculum consisted (Moustakas, 1994). Textural and structural description of the ELT Curriculum was formed with the help of participants.

**Setting and Participants**

Target population of this study is university learners and their teachers at a school in Istanbul, Turkey. Four-year University level education on four major engineering departments, i.e. aerospace, electronics, industrial, and computer are provided. English has an utmost important for the learners, therefore, language courses are offered to classes of sophomore, junior, and senior unlike other universities that provide language courses just in first year of university education.

For the quantitative part of the study, almost 250 learners’ scores of the learners for each class were recorded and analyzed. 20 learners and 12 teachers out of 19 took part in the qualitative part of the study. All the participants of study were male. Purposive sampling method was chosen for the study since the chosen teachers were thought to be more appropriate for the purpose. Participants
were selected based on experiences with the curriculum and the ability to share that knowledge on curriculum. For ethical considerations, all the participants from the teachers and learners were informed about the purpose of the study. All the participants from learners were between 17 and 22 years old. Learners were from five different proficiency levels. The proficiency level of learners was determined by institutional exam called ALCPT. They are grouped as beginner, elementary, intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced depending on their score they get from ALCPT. Four learners from each proficiency level were chosen and semi-structured interviews were held with them.

The participant teachers hold this profession for at least two years to 15 years. They graduated from university in years starting from 2000 to 2011. Four of the teachers hold bachelor degree, four hold master degrees and four people are PhD graduate or PhD student.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study was obtained through four skills exam, institutional exam called ALCPT, content analysis form, teacher observation form, and semi-structured focused group interview. Four teachers out of 19 were observed during their course practices by two external evaluators individually. Then, their observations were compared and analyzed. The individual interviews consisted of open-ended and in-depth questions about their perceptions of the curriculum. An interview guide was prepared by the researcher and later revised by three experts on the field of English language teaching and curriculum design. The questions in the interview guide were used as a triggering purpose for further elaborating on teachers’ and learners’ perceptions during the interviews.

For the interview questions, three experts’ opinions were taken and revisions of the questions were done accordingly for the reliability and validity. Interview questions were applied to two teachers and three learners as a pilot study and questions were revised again to be clearer. Semi-structured focused group interviews were held in learners’ native language, which is Turkish, to have more valid results and not to cause misunderstanding. The interviews lasted approximately 25-30 minutes. Interviews took place in school cafe for the learners and in the office for the teacher for the convenience of participants. Learners and teachers answered questions about their perception of curriculum on a voluntary base. Audio record of the interview was obtained for data analysis procedure. Two researchers took notes at the time of the interview to compare it with audio record of the interview. The participants were given information about the research process and assured that the information they give would be kept confidential.

Data Analysis

After getting data from four skills exam scores and institutional exam called ALCPT, researchers analyzed the scores with the help of SPSS 20 and EXCEL. Content analysis form was examined and a report was formed. Teachers were observed whether they followed the lesson plan. For the semi structured focused–group interviews, researcher examined both findings of them and read the audio recordings and notes taken by researchers many times and focused on the important statements and comments of learners and teachers to identify the themes. Notes of the two researched at the time of the interviews were compared with each other notes and the audio recording. After interpreting the data, two other colleagues examined the interpretation and themes are revised again for the trustworthiness of the analysis. After exploring the general sense of data, processes of coding data and specifying the themes were applied (Creswell, 2013). Open coding is defined as categorizing major finding (Cresswell, 2009). Curriculum as a phenomenon was analyzed deeply within the light of these statements. Moustakas (1994) calls this step horizontalization. After the analysis procedure, results were shared with the participants to ensure that results were reflecting their intended purposes in the study to reach credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability of the data.
Results

Results of the study were explained and English language curriculum was evaluated on four dimensions as:

Curriculum on Tests Scores
Curriculum on Content Analysis
Curriculum on Teacher Practices
Curriculum on Semi-Structured Interview

Curriculum on Tests Scores

Overall entrance scores and overall graduation scores were given in Table 1. When overall entrance scores of last seven years were examined, learners varying in number joined the university and the average ALCPT score was found to be 46.60. When overall graduation scores of last seven years were examined, average score was found to be 72.50 and 55.50 percent increase in the scores of learners from entrance to graduation was observed.

Table 1. Overall Entrance and Graduation Scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Learners</th>
<th>Av.scores</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>A. scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>77.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>71.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>41.00</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>68.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>73.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>69.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>52.60</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>72.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>75.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>46.60</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>72.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All scores of learners who joined the university in 2012 and graduated 2016 were collected from the beginning and until graduation and presented below.

Table 2. Terms and Scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012/2016</th>
<th>Admission</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
<th>Term 5</th>
<th>Term 6</th>
<th>Term 7</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores</td>
<td>42.50</td>
<td>53.20</td>
<td>56.50</td>
<td>56.60</td>
<td>58.20</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>66.40</td>
<td>75.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase(%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>13.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall increase</td>
<td></td>
<td>77.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the Table 2 was examined, learners improved their language proficiency through the terms. When terms were compared with the previous term, little improvement was observed between the terms. The highest mean increase was between the admission and the first term with 25.00 percent and 13.70 percent with the term seven and graduation. When the admission and the graduation were taken into account, there was a 77.60 mean increase. It could be deduced that curriculum was successful in terms of test scores. However, terms with little mean increase should be examined.
According to the final exam result based on four skills at the end of the first semester in 2016, average scores of 1020 learners were given below on four skills exam Table 3. These scores were shown to the school manager and teachers and these scores below were found to be satisfying.

**Table 3. Proficiency Levels.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Overall Test Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>94.00</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>93.00</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>86.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>94.00</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>90.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>98.00</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>99.00</td>
<td>90.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. Scores</td>
<td>87.30</td>
<td>89.30</td>
<td>90.60</td>
<td>89.00</td>
<td>89.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Curriculum on Content Analysis**

Learners can reach extensive materials covering four skills of English both in the library and on the internet server of the university. University has four self-access labs with computers and internet access. English has been given special attention because of the future career of the learners. Intensive English program has been applied for the first and second terms. Although lesson hours lessen in the following years and semester, it has never lost its value. Similar pattern of teaching has been maintained until the end of graduation. Course hours per week were given below.

**Table 4. Course Hours per Week.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>1. Year</th>
<th>2. Year</th>
<th>3. Year</th>
<th>4. Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The program constitutes of three phases: general English course books, authentic Content based instruction books and some faculty lessons instructed in English. During the first year of the curriculum, course book series called as Top Notch Fundamental and Top Notch 1 are studied. This course book series is for beginner classes. For the learners who have higher level proficiency than beginner, Northstar Book Series are offered. When the series were analyzed, it was deduced that thematic syllabus were preferred focusing on skill development of the learners for reading, writing, listening and speaking. On finishing commercial book series, content-based language instruction starts. The course book series studied in this phase were prepared after a long and tedious need analysis process considering the future career of the learners. In the final stage of the syllabus, all the students attending the first semester of the third year at the school will be instructed in English in at least any two engineering courses until the last semester of the school by their subject matter teachers.

The Language Teaching Program closely focuses on the main principles of content-based language teaching depending on language and content, learner needs and integration of four skills in accordance with the communicative method and active learning techniques. When the curriculum was examined deeply, curriculum was prepared after a long and tedious process starting with needs analyses conducted with senior-student, managers and teachers with the help of quantitative questionnaires, and qualitative semi-structured interview sessions.

Generally speaking, 60.00% of the mid-term score and the 40.00% of the in-term evaluation constitute the pre-final mark. Its 40% and the 60.00% of the final score yield the final grade. In the mid-terms, reading and writing skills are assessed equally. In the finals, there is an equally-leveled four-skill assessment. Half of the in-term evaluation is comprised of portfolio studies and quizzes.
Curriculum on Teacher Practices

During the courses, teachers followed the course plan prepared in advance. During the courses, teachers followed the course books which were chosen depending on the needs of school based on four skills practices. Listening and reading activities were held appropriately to the course plan. Speaking and writing activities were performed after forming necessary background to activate production. Grammar was taught mostly through pop-outs. Main focuses of the courses were to convey the message and content of the units. Communication between learners and teachers were endorsed.

Curriculum on Semi-Structured Interview

Objective

The objective of the curriculum is to provide opportunities for learners to reach at least B1 level according CEFR. The curriculum also aims to studying English while raising their content awareness in the subject matters that the learners are expected to be experts. When responses of learners and teachers were examined, both party believed learners reached at least B1 level. T1, for example, claimed “there is no one in my class having difficulty expressing himself in spite of starting in beginner level of English in admission.” T2 supported “we have four skills exam in the finals. Levels of the exams are above intermediate and B1 levels. We have almost no problem in the fourth class.”

Learners had the similar ideas about their levels. S1, for example, told “I don’t have any difficulty in following my English courses and in the courses in English. S2 added “I can easily read an article about my interests.” S3 asserted that he always entered foreign websites to search on the net without any problem.

Content

Content of the curriculum was seemed carefully chosen. Teachers expressed the reason why they chose the course book series they used. T1 mentioned “Four skills development was very difficult process so to meet this need we searched a lot and decided to use this series after consensus of the teachers in the department and school administration. T2 expressed that “content based series that they prepared meets students’ needs in their future tasks. S1 asserted “I feel myself more motivated in the courses because we talk about international affairs and current issues in Turkey.” S2 said” talking and reading about operational research application in the class which is directly related to my major makes me engaged.”

Implementation

ELT Curriculum in the school is quite comprehensive and detailed. This situation increases the loads of learners and teachers. ELT teachers should prepare rigorously before the lesson hours. Learners are quite busy with the engineering and ELT courses. Teachers have more than 18 hours of class per week on average. They think that this should be lessened. T4, for example, mentioned “having 20 hours per week makes me overtired and this also affects my performance in class”. T2 added “I sometimes have problems in organizing my days because of the heavy schedule. Learners have similar problems as well. L5, for example, said “I don’t have enough time to do my homework”. L6 mentioned that he lost his concentration during the courses.

Assessment

Assessment of the curriculum was based on communicative and content based instruction. There were basically three types of assessment in the school:
ALCPT (Administered in each semester for proficiency)

4 skills exams (For achievement)

Portfolio assessment (For achievement)

Teachers thought that assessment of the curriculum was well organized. They were aware of what they were doing in class. Their main focus was to develop language skills. T1, for example, said “we are teaching language skills so it is quite logical to assess learners on language skills. T2 added “we are both assessing proficiency and achievement. This is important for examining both overall language development and specific language development for the term.

Learners had similar beliefs towards assessment although some stated their discontent with extensive assessment procedure. L4, for example, stated “By examining my score in ALCPT, I adjust myself”. L5 expressed that “Four skill exams are hard to study but good to see language progress. L6, however, said “there are too many exams and I feel bored with the exams.”

Suggestions from teachers and learners

Both teachers and learners made some suggestions in the semi-structured interview. Teachers suggested that more colleagues should be hired to deal with heavy workload in working place. Material development team, assessment team and instructor team should be formed for more professional working environment. Monthly meeting should be held to discuss the curriculum and progress among teachers, learners and managers. Language classes should be separated from other classes and each teacher should have a separate class to design it according to needs of learners. To alleviate heavy working load of the teachers, course hours could be lessened. T2, for example, offered “we may not give English courses in the third class. T3 suggested “why don’t we make English classes selective in the second, third and fourth years.

Learners recommended that curriculum should be condensed. Rather than having mandatory English courses in each term, other engineering courses might be given in English or mandatory English courses might be selective. Learners also emphasized the importance of technology integration into the classroom and teaching environment. L3, for example, stated “technology may bring easiness into the class”. L4 also mentioned “integration of the technology may be one way of making teaching fun and entertaining.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

In this study, an extensive evaluation of ELT curriculum of a public university was held both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to quantitative results from four skills exams and a standardized proficiency exams called ALCPT, it was revealed that curriculum in use was found to be successful because average admission scores of the last seven years was 46.60 while average graduation scores of the last seven years was 72.50. When the scores of learners admitted in 2012 and graduated in 2016 were analyzed, 77.60 overall mean increase was found between admission and graduation. Four skills exam result was found to satisfying and sufficient by school managers and teachers.

According to content analysis as a qualitative part of the study, school was equipped with sufficient materials, facilities and implementations with a good curriculum design. Teacher observation analysis revealed teacher followed course outline and plan appropriately to curriculum design namely communicative approach and content-based instruction. Findings from semi-structured interview sections also revealed that objective of the courses were met while content and implementations and assessment were carefully designed. Teachers and learners, however, made
some suggestions for the betterment of the curriculum although they seemed fine with the curriculum.

For the betterment of the ELT curriculum, following were suggested:

Technology integration into the classroom and teaching implementations were strongly advised for the easiness and fun of the class members.

Revision of assessment system was needed to focus on more in teaching processes.

Teaming ELT teachers into material developers, assessors and instructors was suggested for workplace efficiency.

Redesign of the ELT class hours was advised not to overload teachers and learners.

Lessening pure English courses were advised for the easiness of the curriculum and increasing the number of courses given in English instead.

References


