



## PRIMARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CURRICULA OF GREECE AND TURKEY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Hilal Güneş<sup>a\*</sup>, Songül Taş<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

<sup>b</sup> Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Ankara, Turkey

Received: 08.09.2022

Revised version received: 21.12.2022

Accepted: 24.12.2022

### Abstract

The present study primarily aims at comparing the ELT curricula of Turkey and Greece concerning primary-level education. With this aim, a large number of articles, educational websites, theses, and dissertations, along with The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports and Ministry of National Education (MoNE) reports of Turkey and Greece were inspected. Data were analyzed qualitatively by using the document analysis technique. As a result of the analysis, some similarities and differences were detected in the design, development, and the implementation of two curricula. Starting the teaching of English at earlier grades, adopting student-centered and action-oriented teaching approach, promoting the development of listening and speaking abilities, targeting communicative, authentic, comfortable, and enjoyable learning environment, focusing on alternative and process-oriented assessment techniques, and aiming to develop intercultural communicative competence of the learners are among the similarities of two curricula. On the other hand, discrepancies were also revealed regarding the designing, developing, piloting, and implementation processes, testing of instructional activities and materials, training of the teachers, material infrastructure, class hours, and internal and external evaluation of the two curricula. By explaining the similarities and differences between ELT curricula of Turkey and Greece at the primary level, this study endeavors to provide information for English language teachers, researchers, curriculum developers, and policy-makers.

**Keywords:** Turkish ELT curriculum; Greek ELT curriculum; comparative education; primary level ELT curriculum; English for Young Learners (EYL)

© 2021 IJETS & the Authors. Published by *International Journal of Education Technology and Science (IJETS)*. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

---

\*Corresponding author Hilal Güneş ORCID ID.: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7952-2140>  
E-mail: [hilal.gunes@hacettepe.edu.tr](mailto:hilal.gunes@hacettepe.edu.tr)

## 1. Introduction

There are several factors affecting the need to learn a foreign language. One of these factors is globalization (Chang, 2006). With its global status, English language is regarded as a “lingua franca” and recognized in many countries as the native language, official language, or priority foreign language (Cook, 2011; Nunan, 2003). Hence, English has become a sine qua non for the development of countries, as the language of science, technology, economy, and business. This situation has resulted in teaching English as a primary foreign language in many countries. However, such an important issue is not given enough importance in Turkey. Most of the novelties in English language education are the result of short-term policies without any definite educational philosophy. With each government, the priorities of English language education change, thus the curriculum, coursebooks, and class hours change accordingly. Such an inconsistency creates teaching and learning problems, affecting teachers’ and learners’ success and motivation negatively.

To date, the benefits of early language learning have been emphasized by a considerable body of studies (Cameron, 2001; Donate et al., 2000; Larson-Hall, 2008; Nikolov & Curtain, 2000; Scheffler, 2013). In connection with this, the period beginning with basic education has been declared as a highly favorable period for acquiring language skills considering physiological, cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors (Driscoll et al., 2004; Hinkel, 2011; Sharpe & Driscoll, 2000). Thus, many countries, including Turkey and Greece, have started teaching English at earlier grades to improve English language proficiency (Brewster et al., 2004; Cameron, 2001; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Eurydice, 2012; Giannikas, 2011). On the other hand, it was also highlighted by many researchers that, starting language instruction at early age does not provide ultimate solution itself. Teaching staff, effective teaching curriculum, materials, methods, learning environment, time spent learning, and continuity in learning are important factors to be taken into consideration (Cameron, 2001; Copland, et al., 2014; DeKeyser, 2013; Driscoll et al., 2004; Edelenbos et al., 2006). Against this background, the effectiveness of English language education at the primary level bears great importance as it composes the basis of formal education. When students receive an effective English language education in their early years, their learning process is affected positively in the following periods. For this reason, the primary school level was chosen for comparison in this study.

Comparative education is a field that investigates the similarities and differences of education systems in different countries and cultures; and then offers constructive suggestions about the ways of educating people (Türkoğlu, 1985) or solving education problems (Cramer & Browne, 1965). Comparative education primarily aims to (1) provide valid information about education systems, their practices, and problems (2) develop assumptions and make comments concerning education, (3) contribute to the development of a country’s education system both theoretically and practically, (4) gain a perspective that will help the formation of education policies by examining the factors affecting education in various countries (Erdoğan, 2003). Comparative studies bear importance as they make people aware of different education

models and practices in different countries. By providing different experiences and approaches, they help policy-makers and administrators to make decisions related to education (King, 1979).

So far, most of the comparative education studies have been conducted with countries such as the USA, Germany, Britain, France, Italy, and Finland. However, making a comparison between countries that share common values, has an undeniable importance in terms of education. Therefore, Greece was chosen for comparison, as Greece and Turkey have common cultural, historical, and regional features. Also, in both countries, English is learned as a foreign language rather than as a second language. Despite the common backgrounds, there is a great difference in the English proficiency level of the two countries. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2021), which measures the English proficiency of countries in the world, Greece ranks 19th among 112 countries at the "*high proficiency level*", while Turkey ranks 70th among 112 countries at the "*low proficiency level*". What is more, although English proficiency level is very high in European countries, Turkey has "*the lowest proficiency in Europe*". These indicators show the seriousness of the English language education situation in Turkey. In this respect, it has been deemed essential to have a critical look at the issue to find out the reasons for such a big difference between these countries in terms of English language proficiency. Accordingly, this study aims to compare the English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula of Turkey and Greece at the primary level. The following research questions were sought throughout the study:

1. How is the ELT curriculum of Turkey at the primary level?
2. How is the ELT curriculum of Greece at the primary level?
3. What are the similarities and differences between primary-level ELT curricula of Turkey and Greece?

### *1.1. A brief history of foreign language teaching policies in Turkey*

Throughout history, social, geographical, economic, political, regional, historical, religious, and cultural factors have shaped the foreign language policies of the countries. In Turkey, foreign language education has been given importance since the Ottoman Empire. In those times, language policies and the languages to be taught were strongly influenced by the countries with which the Empire had relations (Küçükoğlu, 2013).

Before the Tanzimat Period, under the influence of Islamic religious education, Arabic and Persian languages were foregrounded as foreign languages (Demircan, 1988). During the Tanzimat Period, which initiated the westernization movements in the Turkish education system, French was foregrounded as a foreign language as the language of science, philosophy, and diplomacy. During the Meşrutiyet Period, German language was the main foreign language to be taught. Since the World War II, English has been the foregrounded foreign language in Turkey (Demircan, 1988; İnandı, 1997).

English as a foreign language (EFL) was introduced into the Turkish education system during the Tanzimat Period, dating back to the late 18th century (Kırkgöz, 2005). After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, there has been an increase in the connections between Europe and the USA. As a result, English has gained precedence over other foreign languages in Turkey. Today, English is the lingua franca of science, technology, business, and communication in the world. Therefore, to keep up with the latest developments in many areas and to communicate with other countries around the world, English is given a great importance in Turkey. At present, English is the only compulsory foreign language taught at all levels of education in Turkey (Kırkgöz, 2007).

The English language policy of Turkey has undergone tremendous alterations, depending on socioeconomic and political factors (Kırkgöz, 2007). The first major curriculum reform took place in 1997 which introduced the concept of a communicative approach in ELT and student-centered approach where students are more active learners than before. With this reform, English became a compulsory subject at all levels of education and started to be taught at earlier grades. In connection with this, *Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYLs)* course was introduced into the higher education curriculum of English language teacher education (Kırkgöz, 2009). However, 1997 education reform was not successful at all as it fell behind in meeting the expectations regarding communicative language teaching practices of teachers; coursebooks were not eligible enough for communicative teaching methodology, the content of the curriculum was too dense, teaching hours were not adequate, class size was too large, and resources were not sufficient enough to implement the syllabus effectively (Kırkgöz, 2006; Mirici, 2000).

Further innovations in the ELT policy of Turkey were made in 2005 to adapt the curriculum to European Union (EU) standards. This curriculum was much more comprehensive as it provided detailed information about curriculum design issues, the selection of suitable teaching materials for different grades, and the difference between language learning and acquisition. It also made distinction between how young learners (grades 4-5) and adolescents (grades 6-8) learn the language. It offered a variety of activities such as games, songs, plays, and drawing/coloring activities when learning English (Kırkgöz, 2007).

Until 2013, “8+4” educational model has been applied in Turkey. According to this model, English language has been taught from grade four onwards. The latest educational model, named “4+4+4”, was put into practice in the 2013- 2014 academic year, in order to comply with the international standards in education. This education model brought many innovations to the ELT curriculum and practices which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

## **2. Method**

In this study, one of the qualitative research types, the document analysis technique was employed. Document analysis is a systematic process of reviewing, interpreting and

evaluating printed/electronic documents (Bowen, 2009) to extract meaning, attain understanding, and establish empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For the analysis, a large number of articles, theses, dissertations, educational websites, along with The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports and Ministry of National Education (MoNE) reports of Turkey and Greece were examined.

### **3. Results**

This section begins with a synopsis of the Turkish and Greek education systems before addressing the primary level ELT curriculum of Turkey and Greece that anchor the study.

#### *3.1. The Turkish Education System*

In Turkey, education is highly centralized and under the supervision and inspection of the government. The basic principles of Turkish National Education involve generality and equality which means that educational institutions are open to all people, regardless of their race, sex, or religion, satisfying the needs of the individuals and society; orienting people towards programs or schools according to their interests, talents, and abilities, provision of basic education for all citizens with equal opportunities, democracy education and secularism. MoNE is responsible for reaching the goals set for Turkish National Education in the name of the government. The Ministry of National Education is organized into four parts, which are the Central Organization, the Provincial Organization, the Overseas Organization and affiliated Organizations. These organizations assume the responsibility of fundamental duties in the provision of educational services (OECD, 2005).

Duties of MoNE include planning, programming, implementing, monitoring, and controlling education and training services aimed at teachers and students in the educational institutions at all levels which are affiliated to the Ministry; opening pre-primary, primary, secondary schools and all kinds of formal and non-formal education institutions, and to grant authorization to educational institutions except for higher education institutions opened by other ministries, institutions, and organizations; organizing and implementing education and training services for Turkish citizens abroad; specifying the degree of equivalency of diplomas and certificates of formal and non-formal education institutions other than higher education institutions opened by other ministries, institutions and organizations. At the university level, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) is responsible for educational decisions and implementations. Education is officially funded, but schools can accept contributions from parents by means of their school-parent associations. The central and provincial governments are in charge of the personnel and financial management of the schools (OECD, 2013).

Since 2013, 8 years of primary education and 4 years of secondary education is compulsory. The language of education in Turkey is generally Turkish. Also, some schools at the higher education level offer education in English, German, and French. The Turkish Educational System consists of four levels as pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher education (EP-Nuffic, 2015a).

### *Pre-school Education*

In Turkey, children aged between 3 to 5 are accepted for pre-school education. Since the 2017- 2018 academic year, pre-school education has been compulsory for children who reached 54 months (MoNE, 2013).

### *Primary Education*

Primary education is compulsory and free for all citizens in Turkish state schools. Primary education institutions provide eight years of compulsory education consisting of primary and elementary education. Until 2013, the “8+4” education model was used, which covered 8 years of primary education followed by 4 years of secondary education. In this education model, pupils had primary education aged between 6 to 14. However, in 2012, the new educational model, “4+4+4”, was decided to be put into practice starting from the 2013-2014 academic year to keep up with the ‘international standards’ for education. The new model included 4 years of primary, 4 years of elementary, and 4 years of secondary education. In this model, pupils started primary education at around 5-5,5 years old. (MoNE, 2013). At the end of primary education, students receive a primary education diploma (OECD, 2005)

### *Secondary Education*

After students get a primary education diploma, they start compulsory secondary education which lasts 4 years. It covers general, vocational, and technical high schools (OECD, 2005).

### *Higher Education*

Higher education in Turkey is provided by universities. The CoHE (YÖK) has the responsibility of higher education institutions. To be admitted to a university, students need to have a secondary education diploma and take two central examinations named as the *Yükseköğretime Geçiş Sınavı* (Higher Education Examination, YGS) and the *Lisans Yerleştirme Sınavı* (Undergraduate Placement Examination, LYS) (EP-Nuffic, 2015a).

## *3.2. Primary Level ELT Curriculum of Turkey*

In Turkey, the regulations of the ELT program and curriculum are made according to the general principles of MONE. A periodic review of the courses is a necessity for a high-quality ELT education, and for maintaining an effective and up-to-date curriculum (MONE, 2018). Since 2013, the new education model, 4+4+4, has been implemented in Turkey. In this new model, English instruction starts to be given from the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade onward, rather than the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The transition from the former educational model to the new model has necessitated the revision of the ELT curriculum that accommodates 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades (MONE, 2018). Because the students started to learn English at younger ages (around 6-6.5 years old), the new curriculum was updated and re-designed considering the needs and characteristics of young learners (MONE, 2018).

While designing the new curriculum, the descriptors and principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)

were taken into account. As the CEFR emphasizes the necessity of students to be able to apply what they have learned in class into real life (CoE, 2001); the new model gives importance to the use of language in an authentic and communicative context (MONE, 2018). An action-oriented approach was adopted with the aim of allowing learners to use English for communication. Also, an eclectic method of teaching was preferred so as to address the needs of learners at different stages. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grades, mostly listening and speaking skills are emphasized; grammar, reading, and writing skills are very limited. In the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, reading and writing skills are introduced through short texts and controlled writing activities. Language functions and learning materials are selected according to the level of the students (MONE, 2018).

Table 1. Model English Language Curriculum (For 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Grades)

[CEFR] (Hours/Week)	Grades	Skill focus	Main activities/ Strategies
[A1] (2)	2	Listening and Speaking	TPR /Arts and crafts/Drama
	3	Listening and Speaking Very Limited Reading and Writing	
	4	Listening and Speaking Very Limited Reading and Writing	

Adapted from (MONE, 2018)

The new program aims to promote a motivating, enjoyable, and comfortable language learning environment for young learners to make them develop positive feelings towards learning English from the earliest years. It emphasizes the use of drama and role-play, hands-on activities, and authentic materials. To foster the communicative competence of the learners, learning tasks that develop learner autonomy and problem-solving skills were employed. For each level, units are structured around interrelated themes which are familiar to young students, such as friends, family, animals, and leisure activities. Teaching of the target culture, home culture, and other cultures is given importance to develop the intercultural competence of the students.

So as to be consistent with the teaching and learning methodology; testing, evaluation, and assessment procedures are based on the CEFR principles. Mostly, alternative and process-oriented testing procedures are emphasized. In addition, formal evaluation is carried out with the help of written and oral exams, quizzes, projects, and homework assignments. Self-assessment is also given importance to make students monitor their own learning. For this, students are expected to assess their learning through a self-assessment checklist including questions such as “how much did you think you learned?” and “what do you think you can do in real life, based on what you learned in class?” (MONE, 2018).

### 3.3. *The Greek Education System*

For the Greek state, education constitutes a basic mission and it aims to train Greeks from the intellectual, moral, physical, and professional aspects, and develop their both national and

religious awareness (World Data on Education, 2012). The Ministry of Education mainly aims a public, free, and quality of education for all levels. Accordingly, consolidation of remedial teaching and additional teaching along with special education and intercultural education are emphasized. Furthermore, reinforcement of foreign language teaching and using new technologies in education are also targeted (Education for All, 2015).

There is a highly centralized education system in Greece. Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Affairs are the responsible units for the educational decisions (ACEI Global, 2015). The Ministry of Education supervises some of the agencies such as “School Buildings Organization”, which is in charge of the design, development, and equipment of primary and secondary education; “School Textbook Publishing Organization”, which is primarily responsible for publishing and distributing course books and other educational supplies; “Organization for Vocational Education and Training” whose task is to organize and administer the vocational training institutes; “National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Organization for the Further Training of Teachers” whose duties include designing, developing, managing and implementing further education policies and programs. Apart from these agencies, there are consultative bodies to the Ministry of Education. One of them is “National Education Council” which gives recommendations to the government related to policy and planning issues on all levels. The other is the “Pedagogical Institute” which makes recommendations to the government on curriculum development and coursebook preparation matters (World Data on Education, 2012). There is a nationwide curriculum and all primary and secondary public schools, as well as private schools, follow this curriculum. The Ministry of Education decides who is suitable for teaching English in the state and private schools. Since 1976, compulsory education on for primary level lasts six years for pupils aged 6-12; and while for the lower secondary level, it lasts three years for pupils aged 12-15. Since 2007, pre-primary education has been compulsory for pupils who are five years old (World Data on Education, 2012).

The Greek Educational System is sub-divided into three levels: (1) primary education which is split into nursery schools and primary schools; (2) secondary education which is divided into lower secondary schools (*gymnasia*) and upper secondary schools (*lykeia*); (3) higher education is separated into universities (*AEIs*) and institutions of technological education (*TEIs*) (Anastasia, 2002).

#### *Primary Education*

Primary education in Greece is comprised of pre-school education and primary education. Pre-school education is given by kindergarten classes, and primary education is offered by primary schools (Sideris, 2016).



### *a. Pre-school education*

In Greece, pre-school education is compulsory for pupils who are five years old (World Data on Education, 2012). Children are accepted to pre-school when they are two-and-a-half years old (Just Landed, 2016).

### *b. Compulsory primary education*

After pre-school education, pupils continue to take compulsory primary education when they reach the age of six. Primary education has a six-year duration (grades 1-6). After they finish primary education, students are awarded the Apolytirio Dimotikou certificate (EP-Nuffic, 2015b) which makes them entitled to the lower secondary school (gymnasium).

### *Secondary Education*

Secondary education consists of two stages: (1) the compulsory lower-level secondary education which is offered in gymnasiums; and (2) the post-compulsory or upper-secondary education which is provided by the unified lyceums and technical vocational educational schools (Sideris, 2016).

#### *a. Compulsory lower-level secondary education*

It composes the last 3 years of compulsory education for pupils aged between 12 to 15. Upon completion, pupils are awarded the Apolytirio Gymnasiou certificate (EP-Nuffic, 2015b).

#### *b. Upper secondary education*

It is provided by two different types of school: (1) the general -*Geniko Lykeio*-(unitary *lykeio*) and the vocational -*Epaggelmatiko Lykeio*- (vocational *lykeio* – EPAL) as well as the *Epaggelmatiki Scholi* (vocational school - EPAS) (EP-Nuffic, 2015b).

*The geniko lykeio*: It lasts three years for students aged 15 to 18 where students take general knowledge subjects. Upon completion, students are awarded the *Apolytirio Genikou Lykeiou* certificate. Students who want to continue on to higher education in Greece need to complete national examinations successfully. After that, they are awarded a higher education entrance certificate (EP-Nuffic, 2015b).

*Secondary vocational education*: Students with special technical interests generally enter a vocational upper secondary school (EPAL) or vocational education training school (EPAS). Admission to both EPAL and EPAS is granted on the basis of the *Apolytirio Gymnasiou* (lower secondary school leaving certificate). They offer a curriculum in which technical, vocational subjects, and workshop exercises are focused (Just Landed, 2016).

### *Tertiary education*

It is separated into university education which is given by universities and non-university education which is provided by Higher Technological Educational Institutes and Higher Education Institutes (Sideris, 2016).

### 3.4. Primary Level ELT Curriculum of Greece

In Greece, English has been the compulsory foreign language in primary education from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, in all state schools since 1991. Since 2003, English has started to be taught from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In 2010, a new project “*English for very Young Learners*” (PEAP) was put into practice which aimed to provide English language education in the first grade of primary education, in a selected number of schools. This project is a piloting stage of a new language plan that aims to teach English to very young learners (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2013).

#### *English for Very Young Learners” (PEAP) project*

The project titled “English for very young learners” (PEAP) is part of the action “*New foreign language education policies in schools: English for Young Learners*”. PEAP project is implemented by the Ministry of Education in Greece, funded both nationally and internationally. The project team consists of university members from departments of ELT and English literature, as well as experts in the field of teaching English to young learners (PEAP, 2014). This project aims to start teaching English as a compulsory subject from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, at the ages of 6-7, in 20 percent of the primary state schools in Greece. The project was expanded in 2011-2012, including 40 percent of the first and second-graders learning English at an early age. With this project, class hours were increased (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of hours learners are exposed weekly to English language instruction

School year	Age	Class hours in regular schools	Contact hours in PEAP school
1 <sup>st</sup> primary	6	-	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> primary	7	-	2
3 <sup>rd</sup> primary	8	3	4
4 <sup>th</sup> primary	9	3	4

The project involves three main steps: (1) designing and developing the curriculum, the syllabi, the learning materials, and e-learning portal, (2) training of the English teachers who will teach the first and second graders for the first time, (3) internal evaluation during the first two years of the project, and external evaluation during the third year of the project which involves evaluation of implementation and training processes (Karavas, 2012).

PEAP project aims at individual and social development of students by improving social and cooperative skills, gaining self-esteem, being respectful to people from different languages, cultures, preferences, or abilities, developing intercultural and interlingual ethical communication, enhancing analytical and synthetic cognitive skills, and developing learning strategies. It also aims to make students be able to familiarize with daily communicative practices in English, develop incentives to learn English and other foreign languages, develop speaking skills, and link spoken and written language through the gradual development of practices that focus more on recognition rather than on message comprehension. Considering

the profile of the elementary school pupil, the project adopts a "learning by doing approach" where language is treated as a social practice and learning is achieved through interactive learning. It also adopts a learner-centered approach (PEAP, 2014).

The themes and topics are selected according to young learners' interests, such as animals, toys, and family. Furthermore, the themes go parallel with other school subjects to promote an interdisciplinary approach. Enjoyable activities are used such as role-playing, handicraft, painting, and songs to develop young learners' communication skills. What is more, pictures, songs, dances, games, stories, and fairy tales are utilized to help young learners develop a positive attitude toward English. Activities are chosen to promote students' linguistic, cognitive, and social development (PEAP, 2014). The important fact is that the teaching materials and activities are not selected randomly but they were tested under real world classroom environments. Teachers used them in classroom, and gave feedback to the material developers. Moreover, extra materials were designed to cover extra time in the curriculum (PEAP, 2014).

For the assessment of student performance, the focus is on the process, rather than the product. Monitoring student performance is important with the help of scoring grid. Thanks to scoring grid, students are graded both collectively and individually for the skills they show with some help, alone, collaborating, and helping others. Homework is limited. Informal and alternative assessment methods are preferred like portfolios and projects (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2013). An online teacher training course titled "Teaching English to Early Language Learners (TELL)" was developed which covers 6 modules including guidelines and examples of good practice. The teachers who will take part in the project were trained through several online and face to face workshops and seminars. Moreover, the school advisers of English co-operated with the PEAP and had meetings with teachers (PEAP, 2014).

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

This study aimed to compare the ELT curricula of Turkey and Greece focusing on the primary level. With this aim, the document analysis technique was conducted after reviewing the literature, and data were analyzed qualitatively through the descriptive analysis method. Findings indicated some similarities and differences between primary-level ELT curricula of Turkey and Greece. One of the similarities is the year of compulsory English language education in the two countries. In Greece, English language is compulsory since 1991, starting from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. In Turkey, it was compulsory since 1997, starting from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade as well. In Greece, English instruction has been given starting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade since 2003, and since 2010, in 40 percent of the state schools, it starts from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. However, in Turkey, English instruction has been given starting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade since 2013. As starting to learn English earlier is better, 10 years might have made a difference between the English proficiency levels of the two countries.

Another similarity between the two countries are the recent projects in both countries which aim to start teaching English at earlier grades. In Turkey, it is with 4+4+4 education model, while in Greece, it is with PEAP project. The primary level of ELT curricula and practices of Turkey and Greece have some similarities. First of all, they aim to teach English to young learners in communicative, authentic, and enjoyable environment. Accordingly, an action-oriented teaching approach is adopted and English as a means of communication is promoted. In both curricula, developing listening and speaking skills were fostered in an interactive way. In this respect, daily communicative practices of English are given importance.

In both curricula, a learner-centered approach to ELT is encouraged. Interrelated themes and topics that are familiar to young learners were selected such as friends, family, animals, fruits, and classroom objects. The usage of enjoyable and hands-on activities which take the attention and interest of young learners were promoted such as arts and crafts, songs, drama, role-playing, games, and so on. In addition, authentic and interesting materials are encouraged to be used such as puppets, pictures, posters, stories, and maps. For the assessment of student performance, process-oriented, informal, and alternative assessment methods like portfolios and projects were encouraged in both curricula. They both aim to improve students' self-esteem as well as developing their social and cooperative skills. Self-awareness of home culture and appreciation of target culture and other cultures are given importance in both curricula.

Although the curricula of Greece and Turkey share some common features like having the same learning objectives, approaches, methods, materials, topics, themes, and assessment techniques, they have some differences as well. To start with, Greece placed emphasis on three main steps in the process of ELT curriculum development. The first phase was designing the curriculum, the syllabi, the learning materials, and the online learning platform. The second step was training the teachers who will teach English to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders for the first time. The last stage involved internal evaluation of the first two years of practice and external evaluation of the third year of practice related to implementation and training processes. When the curriculum development processes of Greece and Turkey were compared, it can be seen that two important steps are missing in Turkey. Only the first step, "designing/developing the curriculum, teaching aims, materials, and the online platform", was conducted in Turkey. In Greece, teachers were trained several times with online and face-to-face workshops and seminars before they teach. However, in Turkey, teachers did not have such a training. Also, internal and external evaluation processes of the new education model were not realized in Turkey.

Another important difference is related to teaching materials and activities. In Greece, the materials and activities were tested in real classrooms by teachers, and feedback was given to material developers. In addition, extra materials and activities have been developed for the possibility of extra time. However, in Turkey, the materials and activities were not tested by the teachers in real classrooms and extra materials or activities were not prepared. Last but not

the least, with the PEAP project in Greece, class hours were increased as the grade level increases (2 hours a week for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders; 4 hours a week for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders). Yet, in the 4+4+4 model in Turkey, class hours do not increase as grade level increases (2 hours a week for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> graders).

As can be seen, even if there are similarities between the two countries regarding the primary level of ELT curricula, there are also some differences related to the design, development, piloting, implementation, and evaluation processes of the two curricula. In Turkey, primary school ELT teachers' opinions regarding the new curriculum have been examined (Güneş & Karaazmak, 2017). According to the results, most of the teachers complained that they were not given any kind of in-service training related to the new program on how to teach very young learners, how to utilize activities, materials, and technology effectively, and how to use alternative assessment methods efficiently. Because of this reason, the teachers expressed that they have problems while teaching (Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Dinçer, 2016; Özüdoğru, 2016; Yıldiran & Tanrıseven, 2015).

The studies also revealed some challenges that primary school ELT teachers encountered during the implementation of the new curriculum. The teachers complained that the coursebooks are not effective enough as they have insufficient, boring, and same kind of activities (Aybek, 2015; Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Dinçer, 2016; Kandemir, 2016; Yıldiran & Tanrıseven, 2015). The teachers also mentioned the lack of physical and technological equipment in the classrooms, and the lack of teaching materials decrease the efficiency of the lessons. They pointed out that because of the overcrowded classrooms, utilizing the ELT methods, activities, and materials specified in the new curriculum is troublesome or impossible. It was also stated that two hours a week is not adequate for teaching the content specified in the curriculum (Aybek, 2015; Dinçer, 2016; Kandemir, 2016; Özüdoğru, 2016; Yıldiran & Tanrıseven, 2015).

For the assessment, it was unveiled that the teachers mostly employ performance-based assessment techniques or classroom observations as they lack knowledge of alternative assessment techniques such as projects or portfolios. In addition, the teachers stated that evaluation forms, scales, or rubrics are not provided by MONE. Moreover, classroom observations have shown that some teachers focus mostly on grammar and writing, rather than listening and speaking activities, and mother tongue is used while teaching the target language (Bulut & Atabey, 2016; Dinçer, 2016; Özüdoğru, 2016).

In light of the discussions above, it can be implied that starting English language teaching at an earlier age in primary education and a well-designed curriculum does not guarantee success in learning the language. For more successful teaching of English, a well-organized teacher training needs to be provided to the teachers including the aspects of teaching English to very young learners, action-oriented approach, task-based learning, content-based learning, interactive learning, alternative assessment techniques, CEFR, and technology integration in ELT. Rather than a one-shot and presentation-based teacher training program; continuous,

interactive, and hands-on trainings with on-going support and counseling is of utmost importance. In addition, the ELT coursebooks, activities, and materials need to be reviewed and re-designed in line with the curriculum aims. Moreover, the physical, technical, and technological infrastructure of the classrooms and schools need to be improved. Lastly, class hours need to be increased and class size needs to be reduced.

To conclude, it may be drawn from this study that careful and meticulous planning is not enough for the successful implementation of the ELT curriculum. There are many internal and external factors affecting the success of the ELT education in Turkey such as piloting, implementation and evaluation processes of the curriculum, in-service teacher training, school administration, teachers, students, parents, technical and technological infrastructure, school/classroom facilities, teaching resources/materials, class size, teaching hours, and so on. It is clear that these factors have a significant impact on English language learning and English proficiency level in Turkey.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- ACEI Global (2015). Retrieved from <https://acei-global.blog/2015/07/24/15-facts-on-the-education-system-of-greece/>
- Alexiou, T., & Mattheoudakis, M. (2013). Introducing a foreign language at primary level: Benefits or lost opportunities? The case of Greece. *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning* 4(1), 99-119.
- Anastasia, A. (2002). *A Greek perspective of EFL (English as a Foreign Language)*. (Unpublished master's thesis). California State University, California.
- Bowen, G. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.
- Brewster, J., Ellis, G., & Girard, D. (2004). *The primary English teacher's guide* (New Edition). Pearson Education Limited.
- Bulut, İ., & Ataberk, E. (2016). An evaluation of the effectiveness of the primary school 2nd grade English language curriculum in practice. *İnönü University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, 17(3), 257-280.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chang, J. (2006). Globalization and English in Chinese Higher Education. *World Englishes*, 25(3/4), 513-525.
- Cook, V. (2011). Teaching English as a foreign language in Europe. In E. Hinkel (Ed.). *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 140-154). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Copland, F., Garton, S., & Burns, A. (2014). Challenges in teaching English to young learners: Global perspectives and local realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(4), 738-762.
- Council of Europe (CoE) (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Cramer, J.F., & Browne G.S. (1982). *Çağdaş Eğitim: Milli Eğitim Sistemleri Üzerinde Mukayeseli Bir İnceleme*. (Çev. F. Oğuzkan). İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi.
- DeKeyser, R. (2013). Age effects in second language learning: Stepping stones toward better understanding. *Language Learning*, 63(1), 52-67.
- Demircan, O. (1988). *Foreign language teaching in Turkey: Past to present*. Remzi Kitabevi.
- Diñçer, A. (2016). *Reflections of the second and third grade English language curricula in primary school*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Ankara University, Ankara.
- Donate, R., Tucker, G.R., Wudthayagorn, J., & Igarashi, K. (2000). Converging evidence: Attitudes, achievements, and instruction in the later years of FLES. *Foreign Language Annals*, 33: 377–393.
- Driscoll, P., Jones, J., & Macrory, G. (2004). The Provision of Foreign Language Learning for Pupils at Key Stage 2: Research Report, No. 572. DfES.
- Edelenbos, P., Johnstone, R., & Kubanek, A. (2006). *The Main Pedagogical Principles Underlying The Teaching of Young Learners*. European Commission, Final Report [EAC 89/04].
- Education For All (2015). Education for All 2015 National Review, Greece. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002299/229950E.pdf>
- English Proficiency Index (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.ef.com/~media/centralefcom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v7/ef-epi-2017-english.pdf>
- EP-Nuffic (2015a). The Turkish education system described and compared with the Dutch system. Retrieved from <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-turkey.pdf>

- EP- Nuffic (2015b). The Greek education system described and compared with the Dutch system. Retrieved from <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-greece.pdf>
- Erdoğan, İ. (2003). Karşılaştırmalı eğitim: Türk eğitim bilimleri çalışmaları içinde önemsenmesi gereken bir alan. *Türk Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 1(3), Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/tebd/issue/26131/275239>
- Eurydice. (2012). *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe*. Brussels, Belgium: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5775673/EC-XA-12-001-EN.PDF/917d3746-886e-456a-8b01-1971013d1cef>
- Giannikas, C.N. (2011). L1 in English language learning: A research study in a Greek regional context. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 21(3), 319-339.
- Graddol, D. (2010). *English Next in India*. British Council.
- Güneş, H., & Karaazmak, F. (2017). Issues related to English language teaching at primary schools and suggested solutions. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 10(54), 731-737.
- Hinkel, E. (Ed.). (2011). *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- İnandı, B. (1997). Yabancı Dil Öğretiminin Sorun-çözüm Bağlamında Değerlendirilmesi Üzerine. Retrieved from [http://yadem.comu.edu.tr/1stELTKonf/TR\\_Ibrahim\\_Ilkhan\\_Sorun\\_Cozum.html](http://yadem.comu.edu.tr/1stELTKonf/TR_Ibrahim_Ilkhan_Sorun_Cozum.html).
- Just Landed (2016). Public education in Greece: Curriculum, hours and evaluation system. Retrieved from <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Greece/Greece-Guide/Education/Public-education-in-Greece>
- Kandemir, A. (2016). *An evaluation of 2nd grade English curriculum within a participant oriented program evaluation approach*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Pamukkale University, Denizli.
- Karavas, E. (2012). *Introducing English in the first grades of primary school: The teachers' response and their emerging training needs*. Poliglotti4.eu Expert Seminar. Retrieved from <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap/events/peap-symmetexei>
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2005). *English Language Teaching in Turkey: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Teaching English to the World: History, Curriculum, and Practice*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2006). Teaching EFL at the primary level in Turkey. In M. McCloskey, M. Dolitsky, & J. Orr (Eds.), *Teaching English as a foreign language in primary school* (pp. 85-99). TESOL.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2007). English language teaching in Turkey: Policy changes and their implementations. *RELC Journal*, 38(2), 216-228.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2008). Curriculum innovation in Turkish primary education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(4), 309-322.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2009). Globalization and English language policy in Turkey, *Educational Policy*, 23(5), 663-684.
- King, E. J. (1979). *Other schools and ours: Comparative studies for today*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Küçüköglü, B. (2013). The History of Foreign Language Policies in Turkey. *Procedia Social Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1090-1094.
- Larson-Hall, J. (2008). Weighing the benefits of studying a foreign language at a younger starting age in a minimal input situation. *Second Language Research*, 24(1), 35-63.



- Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2018). Teaching Programme for English Lessons at Primary Schools. Retrieved from <http://mufredat.meb.gov.tr/Dosyalar/201812411191321-İNGİLİZCE%20ÖĞRETİM%20PROGRAMI%20Klasörü.pdf>
- Mirici, İ. H. (2000). A research on foreign language (English) curriculum of primary school 4th & 5th graders in our country. *Gazi Üniversitesi Dergisi*, 20(1), 107-118.
- Nikolov, M., & Curtain, H. (2000). An early start: Young learners and modern languages in Europe and beyond. Council of Europe: European Centre for Modern Languages.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region. *TESOL Quarterly* 37 (4), 589-597.
- OECD (2005) Basic Education in Turkey Background Report. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/39642601.pdf>
- OECD (2013). Education Policy Outlook: Turkey. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/edu/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20TURKEY\\_EN.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/EDUCATION%20POLICY%20OUTLOOK%20TURKEY_EN.pdf)
- Özudođru, F. (2016). *Evaluation of primary school 2nd grade English language teaching curriculum through illuminative evaluation model in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). Anadolu University, Eskişehir.
- PEAP (2014). English Education Program in Primary Child Age. Retrieved from <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap/>
- Scheffler, P. (2013). Introducing very young children to English as a foreign language. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 25(1). (1-22).
- Sharpe K. & Driscoll, P. (2000). At what age should foreign language learning begin? In Kit Field (Ed.). *Issues in modern foreign languages teaching*, (pp. 72-86). Routledge.
- Sideris, A. (2016). The Greek Educational System. Retrieved from <https://www.munplanet.com/articles/munplanet-insider/the-greek-educational-system>
- Türkođlu, A. (1985). *Fransa, İsveç ve Romanya eğitim sistemleri*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Basımevi.
- World Data on Education (2012). Retrieved from [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Greece.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Greece.pdf)
- Yıldiran, Ç., & Tanrıseven, İ. (2015). Teachers' opinions on the English curriculum of the 2nd grade primary education, *International Journal of Language Academy*, 3(1), 210-223.

---

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).