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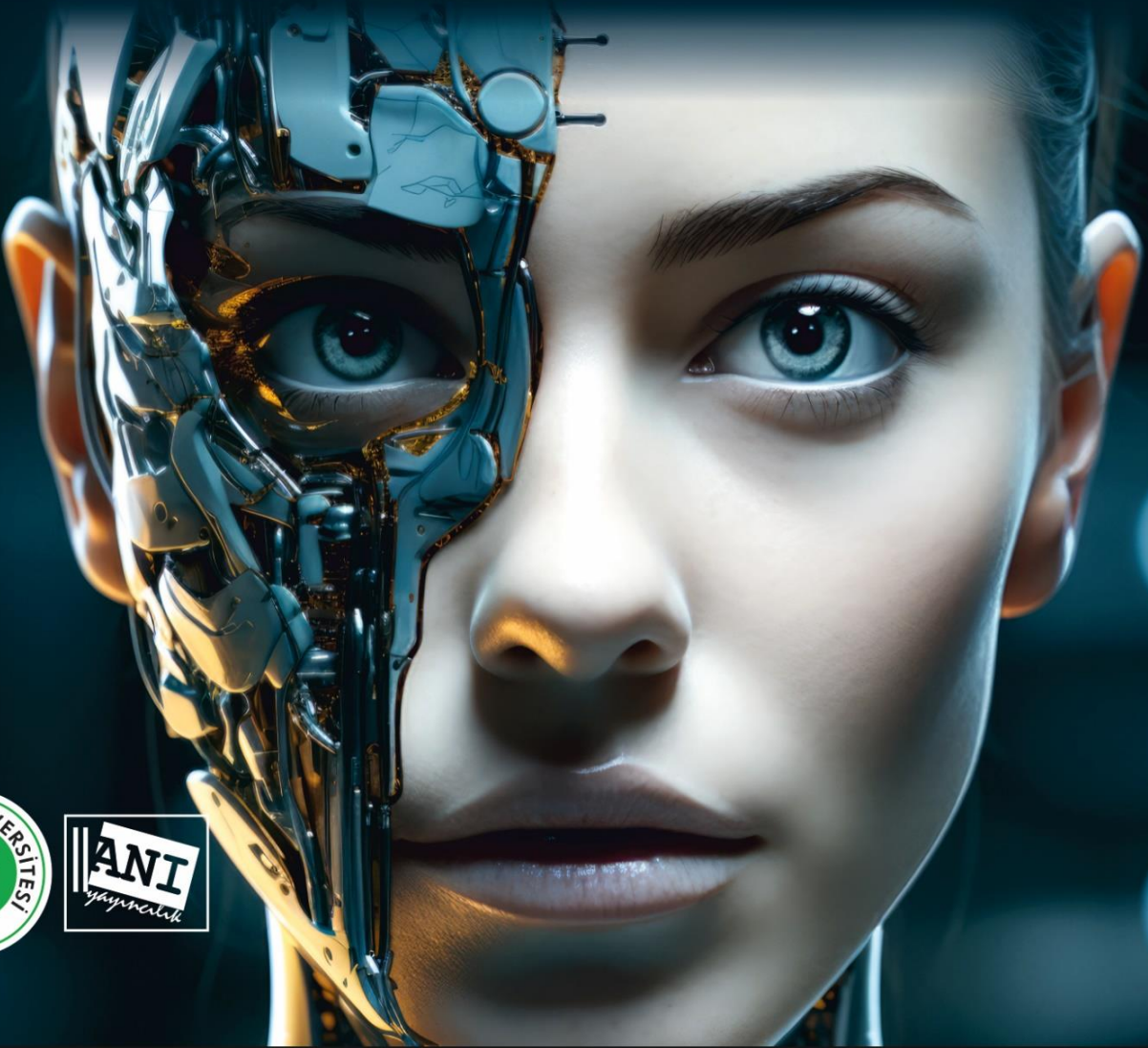
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# XI International Eurasian Educational Research Congress

# CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

KOCAELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ 1992

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XI INTERNATIONAL EURASIAN

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONGRESS

# EJERCONGRESS 2024
# CONFERENCE
# PROCEEDINGS

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# Main Theme

*"Designing the Future: Changing Paradigms and Transhumanism with Artificial Intelligence in Education"*

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# Sub-Themes

- Academic freedom, autonomy, and social responsibility in education
- Artificial intelligence and educational applications
- Augmented reality applications
- Barriers to learning
- Blended learning
- Computer-assisted measurement and evaluation
- Core skill sets for students and teachers
- Design of school buildings in the future
- Designing and delivering a digital strategy
- Digital competence
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- Distance Education
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- Post Earthquake Trauma Training
- Earthquake and Effective Psychosocial Intervention Methods
- Earthquake and Trauma
- The Impact of Earthquakes on School Staff
- Education and society
- Education for healthy living and healthy communities
- Education for a sustainable life
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- Educational leadership in the digital age
- Effects of regional differences on education
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Related to Marginalized Groups
- Emergency Management at Schools
- Evidence-Based School Counseling Services for Refugees and Marginalized Groups
- Globalisation and Education
- Higher education
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- The role of parents in education
- The skills we need to thrive in a post-COVID-19 world
- Vocational education
- Ways to overcome the digital divide

# XI INTERNATIONAL EURASIAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONGRESS

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*This book has been compiled with contributions from 61 authors representing 35 different universities in Turkiye, the United States, and Iran, as well as Turkiye's Ministry of National Education. Among the contributors, there are 51 authors from 31 universities 6 authors from education institutions in Turkey, 3 authors from 2 universities in the United States, and 1 author from a university in Iran.*

# CONTENTS

# Unveiling the Potential of Natural Approach in Language Teaching: Field Testing

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Turkish Ministry of National Education, Turkiye

## Abstract

In response to the problems experienced during the practice of the current ELT curriculum and the requirement for an authentic language learning environment, a unique English language teaching curriculum was designed for young learners in the present study. The curriculum was rooted in Krashen's Natural Approach and adopted an eclectic curriculum design model. This article aims to show the findings of the micro-level implementation (field testing) of the newly designed ELT curriculum. The implementation of the designed curriculum was carried out in a public elementary school in Ankara for three instructional hours. The purpose of the field testing was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, allowing for necessary adjustments and revisions before its broader implementation. Field testing showed that when students were exposed to substantial amounts of comprehensible input using engaging and relevant materials, without being pressured to immediately engage in production practice, they eagerly participated in the lesson. In addition, this study showed that successful implementation of an ELT curriculum necessitates thorough and diligent planning and preparation from teachers. Moreover, the study revealed that researchers possessing a solid understanding of the underlying principles of the curriculum and actively participating in the design process play a crucial role in the productive implementation of the program. This program should be implemented on a larger scale to have a more thorough understanding of the strong and weak aspects of the designed curriculum.

## Introduction

Extensive research and scholarly discussions have been dedicated to addressing the problems faced in the field of ELT in Turkey (Can & Can, 2014; Işık & Işık, 2017; Şahin, 2018). Consequently, the Turkish education system has been actively striving to enhance English language instruction through curriculum innovations, the adoption of diverse teaching methodologies, and significant investments in educational resources. However, despite extensive exposure to English language learning from primary to higher education levels, learners frequently fall short of achieving the desired language proficiency (Acar, 2021; Arslan & Akbaror, 2010; Işık, 2008; Şahin, 2018). Prior research identified various challenges impeding effective English language teaching including the issue of large class sizes, content overload, inadequate provision of materials and equipment, limited instructional hours, and insufficient guidance and support for teachers (Arslan, 2007; Arslan & Akbaror, 2010; Kırkgöz, 2008; Topkaya and Küçük, 2011; Şahin, 2018). Attitudes and perceptions of the teachers towards new teaching methods and curricula added to the methodological and motivational complexities.

Communicative language teaching has been the most widely preferred approach in the present ELT curricula of National Education. Research suggests that although having an eclectic approach, the current ELT curricula are mainly based on a Communicative language teaching approach (Acar 2018; Çelik & Gül Peker, 2018). Krashen's Natural Approach Theory introduces a different perspective to teaching language with a greater emphasis on comprehension rather than production

skills (Işık & Işık, 2017; Krashen & Terrel, 1983). Early years of the foreign language learning process are important as learners' attitudes and beliefs are shaped during this period and they are more sensitive towards language learning due to their developmental characteristics. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an appropriate authentic language environment appealing to the innate language learning capacity of young learners (Işık & Işık, 2017; Kozhevnikova, 2018). The aim of this paper then is to introduce a fresh English language curriculum that targets fourth-grade students utilizing the theoretical underpinnings of Krashen's Natural Approach Theory. This paper presents the findings derived from the field testing phase of our curriculum design project with a focus on its micro-level implementation.

### ELT Curriculum Innovation Movements

Turkey has been endeavoring to adapt to the global changes in the world by changing ELT programs and practices. The recent innovations in ELT curricula have been based on the Communicative Approach. The reform conducted in the primary school curriculum in 2006 was theoretically based on Constructivist Approach, Learner-centeredness, and Multiple Intelligences Theory (Erdoğan, 2007; Gömleksiz & Bulut, 2007; Tekışık, 2005). Being learner-centered, the current English curriculum involves a variety of activities based on different styles of learning, talents and speeds (Kavanoz, 2006). As for the methodological bases of the 2006 ELT curricula, it had an eclectic approach combining various approaches and/or methods such as communicative language teaching, brain-based learning, neuro-linguistic programming, and the theory of multiple intelligences.

The educational reform introduced teaching English language starting from the 2nd grade level in the 2013-2014 academic year. Based on Communicative Language Teaching and the CEFR, the 2013 ELT curricula of the primary school emphasized spoken language and developing oral-aural skills in particular (Kırkgöz, Çelik & Arıkan, 2016). Therefore, despite looking different, the two innovations are fundamentally based on similar theoretical approaches in terms of English language teaching.

The recent ELT curriculum change was conducted in 2018 for all grade levels together with the introduction of the 2023 education vision. Based on the same theoretical assumptions that were introduced in the 2013 ELT curriculum, the 2018 ELT curricula differ from the previous one only by introducing the "values education" and "key competencies" in the curriculum (Acar, 2018). It is argued that the 2018 ELT curriculum does not introduce a new methodology as it incorporates the same theoretical approaches as being dominated by the Communicative Approach (Acar, 2021). Therefore the recent innovations have not introduced radical changes in terms of ELT approaches and methodologies.

### Natural Approach

The theoretical bases of this new ELT curriculum are inspired by Natural Approach (NA). The basic theory underlying the natural approach is that learning a language occurs only when learners get comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrel, 1983). NA was first developed by Tracy Terrel (1977) and it has been influenced by the second language acquisition theory of Krashen (Krashen, 2009). Krashen thinks that the role of language is to communicate so NA mainly aims to develop communication skills of learners and the focus is on teaching communicative abilities; however, how they are developed is different from the other communicative methods (Ellidokuzoglu, 1997). Therefore, NA has a different approach to language teaching when compared to Communicate Approach.

The NA proposes that dealing with receptive skills (reading and listening) positively influences the productive ones (speaking, writing) as well. Therefore reading and listening activities are allocated more time than speaking and writing activities (Ellidokuzoglu, 1997). It is believed that students. It is believed that students develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening on condition that they are provided with a lot of comprehensible input (Ellidokuzoglu, 1997). The teacher's responsibility is to offer authentic materials and deliver comprehensible input, which supports students in internalizing the language (Matamoros-González, Rojas, Romero & Vera-Quiñonez, 2017). In this instructional approach teacher's role is to create an environment that facilitates students' exposure to the target language.

NA stands against translations and grammar explanations but it stands for exposing learners to the order of activities and teaching speaking before writing. At first, students are subjected to meaningful language, but they are not expected to speak if they are not ready and neither their errors are corrected nor they are taught grammar. The approach involves the teacher's talking, which is made understandable or meaningful with the help of visual aids and actions. It also

has common principles with Total Physical Response (TPR) such as highlighting meaningful language and positive feelings in the process of learning.

Although NA looks similar to task-based learning, it emphasizes comprehension rather than production. The natural Approach (NA) is theoretically based on five hypotheses about language acquisition: The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, The Input Hypothesis, The Affective Filter Hypothesis The Natural Order Hypothesis, The Monitor Hypothesis, (Krashen, 1985). Simply describe, these hypotheses respectively suggest that acquiring a language is different from learning a language in many aspects. The former is about using knowledge for real communication, and the latter is about knowing about the language or its rules; the learners can acquire a language through comprehensible input that is a little above their level and the learners' affective state may either hinder or enables this acquisition; the grammatical structures are learned in a predictable order and learning competence function as a monitor as it corrects the language mistakes occurred either before or after the language production (Krashen, 1985). As it is seen, NA is inspired by the combination of acquisitional hypotheses.

### Curriculum Design Model

This curriculum has a different instructional design model unlike the current one. The design of this curriculum is based on a combination of instructional design models developed by Dick et al. (2005), Morrison et al. (2011), Posner and Rudnitsky (2006), Reiser and Dick (1996), and Wulf and Schave (1984). Components of these models are used and, when necessary, they are modified to some extent in accordance with the needs of the existing context.

**Figure 1**

*Curriculum Design Model*
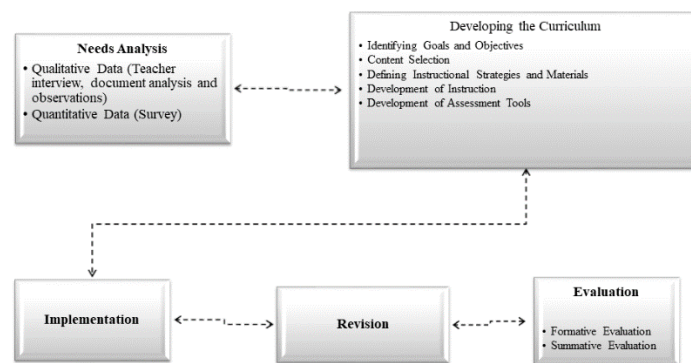


### Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the first stage of developing a curriculum design model. Witkin and Altschuld (1995) assert that needs assessment is a systematic process of making decisions about the program and setting priorities which are rooted in identified needs. In the first stage of the curriculum development process, a needs analysis study was carried out. In order to determine whether there is actually a need for a new curriculum and to identify the strong and weak sides of

the current curriculum (Smith & Ragan, 1999), the needs assessment study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were collected through interviews, written documents and classroom observations while quantitative data were collected through questionnaire form developed by the researchers. The results obtained from different data sources were synthesized and needs areas were identified. Table-1 Summarizes the phases of the Needs Analysis Study.

**Table-1**

*Summary of the Needs Analysis Study*

| Data collection method | Purpose | Data source |
|---|---|---|
| Document Analysis  Literature Review | To analyze the current condition of the curriculum and to identify the curricular problems as revealed by the related research studies | Related research studies, current curricula, textbooks etc. |
| Survey: Teacher Questionnaire | To identify the strong and weak sides of the current curriculum and to determine the parts of the current curriculum to be revised and modified. | English Teachers (N=53) |
| Semi-Structured Teacher Interviews | To identify the strong and weak sides of the current program and to determine the parts of the current curriculum to be revised and modified. | English Teachers (N=6) |
| Classroom Observations | To identify the strong and weak sides of the current program and to determine the parts of the current curriculum to be revised and modified. | English Teachers (N=2) and their students  Classes were observed for 7 hours in two weeks using observation forms. |

The results of the needs analysis study shed light on the curriculum development process by revealing the parts of the current program to be revised and modified. The authors reported the results of the needs analysis study in another paper.

## Method

### Observation of the Implementation (Field Testing)

This article aims to show the findings of the micro-level practice (field testing) of the newly designed ELT curriculum. This small-scale field testing was utilized to reveal the strong and weak sides of the newly designed curriculum which would provide feedback for the necessary adjustments or revisions before the actual implementation. To reach this aim, *participant observation* was used as a research method as the researcher had the role of the teacher in the class. The field-

testing took place in a public elementary school in Ankara which was selected purposively based on the criteria of ideal school for the implementation of the Natural Approach. The criteria for selecting the school were the school's having necessary technological equipment as well as the ideal class size together with students' having average socioeconomic status and academic achievement level. The classes were determined on consensus with the teachers. The participants were 30 (18 female and 12 male) 4th graders attending English language lessons in the selected state school. The observation lasted 6 lesson hours in two weeks.

Before the implementation, researchers conducted interviews with the school administrators and classroom teachers to inform them about the purpose of the implementation and ask for their consent. Then, the researchers gave the classroom teacher detailed information about the lesson and the characteristics of the students to make the necessary preparations accordingly. To enhance the reflective nature of the field testing phase, one researcher observed the practice of the designed curriculum while the other researcher implemented the lesson plans. Subsequently, the researchers reviewed the observation notes validated by member checking and engaged in discussions to evaluate the field testing process.

## Results

### Reflections on the Lesson Planning

While planning the lessons, the principles of NA and the results of the needs assessment study have been considered. One of the crucial roles of the teacher is to choose the most effective materials and employ enriched classroom activities that enable learners to engage in the language acquisition process in an anxiety-free environment (Kiymazarslan, 1995). Considering this, ample amounts of activities and materials that would be appealing to the learners were prepared. During this process, techniques such as TPR activities, activities in which mimics, body language and cases are benefitted to promote learners' questioning and answering, and group and pair work activities were utilized.

As it was the end of the semester and the students were familiar with English to a certain degree, it was assumed that they were at the second stage of language acquisition. In this stage students feel ready to produce speech, learners can answer yes-no, either- or and wh-questions that need one word as an answer. Students are not expected to use a word actively upon hearing it many times (Kiymazarslan, 1995). Therefore, in some activities, students were expected to produce one-word utterances or phrases and they were required to write single words. Moreover, as the lessons were planned for the young learners, games, songs and craft activities were utilized so as to make the learning process more enjoyable and interesting. As revealed by the needs assessment study, teachers suggested the use of learner-centered methods such as drama, learning by doing, the use of body language, and the use of enriched teaching materials which lead to students' active participation. In a parallel way, teachers argued that lack of motivation was one of the

important factors leading to students' failure to learn a language. As a result, by using a variety of appealing activities, the researchers aimed to make the learning activities more meaningful for the learners and increase their motivation.

Needs assessment study indicated that the reading texts offered in the course book were not found authentic and lack of authenticity was considered another of the reasons for students' failure. NA emphasized the use of authentic materials that are generally used in real life rather than unnatural ones that are specially created for teaching a language (Hoge & Dodds, 2005). Teachers need to create a language-rich environment by providing authentic materials and comprehensible input to support students' language acquisition (Matamoros-González et al., 2017). Additionally, when selecting materials such as songs, stories, and poems for the lessons, the i+1 principle was taken into account. This principle required incorporating language slightly more advanced than the students' current language proficiency level (Hoge & Dodds, 2005). The researchers, thus, carefully selected authentic texts that were appropriately adapted to match the students' proficiency level.

*Reflections on the Implementation*

Field testing was an important stage of the curriculum design process as it gave insights regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the ELT curriculum and enabled to improve of the necessary parts. The main limitation of the implementation was that three lessons were presented in one day which might be tiring for the students. Besides, as the teacher was an outsider rather than their everyday teacher, it might have created stress for the students and their affective filter might have increased. Moreover, the piloted unit was planned for the last week of the first semester and it was assumed that students had learned the prerequisite skills beforehand. In the same way, it was supposed that students were used to teachers' speaking English during the lesson. However, it was observed that the students were not accustomed to teachers giving instructions and feedback in English. These might be considered other limitations of this field testing. Nevertheless, these shortcomings can be overcome by training the students from the beginning of the semester as planned in the program and the piloted lessons can be implemented more effectively.

Except for the aforementioned shortcomings, the lessons went as planned and it was observed that predetermined objectives were achieved. To assess the attainment of the objectives, the learners' participation in the activities and their performances was considered. It was observed that most of the students performed what was expected from them in each activity with 90% accuracy. There were two slow learners who had difficulty in attaining the objectives. When the underlying reasons for the failure of these learners were questioned, it was found that these students were below the average of the class.

One of the aims of the researchers was to provide students with a lot of meaningful language in a stress-free environment and to endorse positive attitudes toward language learning. To achieve this aim, the physical environment of the class and

the activities utilized and teachers' attitudes during the implementation stand to be crucial. Considering the physical environment, there were 20 students in the class which was an ideal class size for teaching English. Moreover, the class involved enriched physical equipment such as a computer, overhead projector, and loudspeakers needed for the implementation of the activities. Besides, the researchers tried to create a stress-free and positive atmosphere in the class by making use of enjoyable songs, stories, videos, colorful pictures, and flashcards which were both authentic and appealing to the learners.

The language used in the reading and listening materials was little above the proficiency level of the learners as they were chosen by considering i+1 principle. However, it was seen that students were able to comprehend them by using contextual clues. In a parallel way, the researchers simplified their language to ensure that students comprehend the input provided by them as much as possible. In addition to this, the planned activities were carried out with a high level of student participation. While the students asked questions or responded to the teacher in their native language, the teacher spoke English all the time to give rich input during the lessons (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, students felt themselves emotionally and effectively ready for the lesson.

During the implementation, it was observed that the activities attracted students' attention and interest. Being the main source of the input, the researchers presented the topic mostly in a direct way through simplified explanations and descriptions related to the topic. However, despite the teachers' active role, students were also active during the lessons as they were most of the time engaged in hands-on activities such as making a storybook, cutting, pasting, coloring, and matching the pictures. Furthermore, they were highly engaged in reading and listening in English through a variety of tasks. It was observed that games, videos, songs, and pair work activities increased the students' motivation as they had a concrete purpose to achieve during these activities.

As for the instructional techniques, the researchers employed Total Physical Response, loud reading, and narrow reading including contextualized vocabulary and language structures which were slightly above their language proficiency level. In this way, the researchers aimed to develop receptive skills of learners (listening and reading) by providing comprehensible input through topic-based tasks as suggested by Natural Approach. All the activities were designed in a thematic fashion which gave students an opportunity to read and listen about the same topic numerous times.

**Discussion**

There is considerable research and discussion on how to teach English since students always have difficulty learning a foreign language in Turkey. Research showed that the physical conditions of the schools, attitudes and behaviors of the teachers, and the approaches employed while teaching English are some of the prominent factors hindering the language acquisition of learners (Arslan & Akbaror, 2010; Topkaya and Küçük, 2011). Besides, lack of motivation and

interest in learners towards foreign language learning is another hindering factor of successful ELT implementations in the Turkish education context. Early years of the foreign language learning process stand to be important as learners' attitudes and beliefs are shaped during this period (Kozhevnikova, 2018, Işık & Işık, 2017). Consequently, it becomes imperative for specialists and professionals in the field to utilize authentic and effective approaches to teaching English to young learners.

Learners' having high motivation is also among the determinant factors in language acquisition. Previous scholarly investigations have indicated that Turkish language learners exhibit limited motivation and encounter frustration when attempting to speak English (Arslan & Akbaror, 2010; Şahin, 2018). It is our contention that an excessive emphasis on production-oriented language practice, such as dialogues and role plays, before students feel sufficiently prepared, can further lower their motivation levels. Primarily, this leads to a challenging classroom environment and heightens learners' affective filter, impeding their language acquisition process and fostering negative attitudes towards English learning (Krashen, 1985). Consequently, learners may face numerous obstacles in developing spoken English proficiency, even if they make significant progress in other language skills. In the present study, we sought to implement an alternative curriculum approach to examine its feasibility within the Turkish educational context and assess its impact on enhancing learners' motivation.

Based on the field testing, it was observed that when students were exposed to substantial amounts of comprehensible input using engaging and relevant materials, without being pressured to immediately engage in production practice, they eagerly participated in the lesson. Results of the field testing verified the arguments of the previous scholars which indicated that exposing learners to rich receptive experiences, such as extensive reading and listening activities in the target language, yields more favorable outcomes in terms of enhancing language proficiency.

## Conclusion

Designing an English language curriculum necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both curriculum development and ELT. In the case of this curriculum, its design was shaped based on the principles and philosophy of the Natural Approach (NA), requiring extensive research and analysis of the existing educational context. Pertinent literature on ELT and the Natural Approach provided valuable insights for this endeavor. Additionally, the researchers drew upon their prior experiences in teaching English to young learners and sought input from colleagues and experts in the field of ELT. Expert opinions and suggestions greatly contributed to the quality of the project. Regarding the curriculum design itself, the researchers critically examined previously studied designs to assess their suitability for the new curriculum. Mırıcı (2006) highlighted the challenges of teacher resistance and lack of knowledge about new curriculum features as significant obstacles to successful implementation. In this regard, the present study showed

that as researchers possessed a solid understanding of the theoretical bases of the curriculum and actively participated in the design process, the implementation became more feasible and effective.

During the preparation phase for the field testing, the researchers encountered challenges in organizing the activities and selecting appropriate materials for the lessons. The materials had to align with the principles of the NA and be authentic and tailored to the language proficiency level of students(Krashen, 1985). Additionally, the activities needed to be enjoyable and conducive to the language acquisition process (Kozhevnikova, 2018; Işık & Işık, 2017). Balancing these requirements and effectively selecting or developing materials and planning activities proved to be a demanding task. The present study showed that successful implementation of an ELT curriculum necessitates thorough planning and preparation, requiring diligence and hard work from teachers.

## Recommendations

This curriculum development study holds significance as it adopts a unique and less commonly used approach. Being one of the pioneering studies in the field of ELT, the curriculum needs to be evaluated and modified, along with a comprehensive implementation of the entire curriculum to assess its effectiveness. The designed English curriculum, based on the principles of the NA, presents an important endeavor in introducing fresh perspectives to the field. Rather than solely relying on the widely accepted communicative approach, this curriculum considers the implications of different approaches, taking into account diverse learner needs and educational contexts. Researchers can draw upon various methods and approaches to cater to the specific characteristics and requirements of the learner group and educational settings. By implementing it on a larger scale, a more thorough understanding can be gained regarding the strong and weak sides of the new curriculum.

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