



# An investigation of EFL teachers' viewpoints on the secondary school English language curriculum in Turkey

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## Abstract

The aim of the study is to determine the opinions of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers about the objective, content, teaching and learning process, and assessment and evaluation elements of the secondary school English language curriculum implemented in Turkey. The study adopted the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. The participants of the study consisted of 14 EFL teachers from seven different public schools in Turkey. The participants were selected using criterion sampling model. The data were gathered during the fall semester of 2020-2021 academic year via an open-ended question form developed by the researcher. Content analysis was used for analysis of the data gathered. The results showed that the opinions of the participants about the objective element of the secondary school English language curriculum were generally positive. On the other hand, it was concluded that the curriculum was not appropriate for students' needs, interests and readiness levels. In addition, insufficient time for activities, limited number of activities and insufficient course hours were noted as negative aspects by the participants.

**Keywords:** English language curriculum; curriculum elements; EFL teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the basic needs of a society is learning foreign languages. Hence, English has been accepted as a universal language. One of the primary reasons for this is that the current worldview necessitates the rise of a global language community (Castro & Villafuerte, 2019). Language learning and teaching has become increasingly significant as globalization has increased people's language learning needs (Ger & Bahar, 2018). According to Demirkan (2008), it is important for all to learn at least one foreign language in order to keep up with technologies, develop global interactions and relations, and promote international exchange. The 21st century, age of technology, makes English

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the most important communication language in terms of accessing information (Broughton et al., 2003).

In Turkey, English language is considered as an important value (Ocak & Karafil, 2021). It is generally agreed that practical teaching strategies that allow the effective use of language in everyday life should be included in learning environment (Suna & Dumuşçelebi, 2013). In this regard, foreign language teaching in Turkey has not progressed as planned because of some reasons such as the teaching materials employed (Arslan & Akbarov, 2010) and the use of traditional methods in foreign language teaching (Kabaharnup, 2010). It can be stated that traditional methods are ineffective to meet students' needs of learning language. This point should be taken into consideration in the process of curriculum development. In addition; the needs, readiness levels and interests of the learners should be considered, and the activities should be based on the level of the learners to develop an effective curriculum (Demirel, 2017).

Wiles (2005) defines curriculum as *"a goal or set of values that is activated through a development process and culminates in classroom experiences for students"*. Curriculum, as a main component of formal education, directs the teaching process (Güzel & Karadağ, 2013), and helps the educational activities achieve the objectives (Çıray, Küçükyılmaz & Güven, 2015). As Marsh (2009) points out, what is studied is learned. The process of designing curriculums, testing the designed curriculums, revising and correcting the dimensions of the curriculum in the light of the information obtained as a result of this trial can be defined as curriculum development (Erden, 1998).

Curriculums consist of a combination of objective, content, learning-teaching process and assessment and evaluation elements (Demirel & Kaya, 2012). In curriculum development process, these elements are considered, respectively. Objectives are the desired features that are decided to be acquired by individuals through planned and organized experiences. Content includes information to be provided and the way of regulating information. Teaching-learning process determines how the content will be taught. Lastly, assessment and evaluation refers to the process to determine whether the learner gains the desired behavior or not, and to collect, analyze and evaluate information about the effectiveness of elements (Demirel, 2017).

Teachers have key roles in curriculum implementation process (Rea-Dickens & Germaine, 1998). In this respect, it can be pointed out that teachers have great responsibilities in the implementation of the curriculum. When the literature is examined, it is seen that curriculum cannot be functional if teachers do not understand curriculum exactly or implement it effectively (Karacaoğlu & Acar, 2010); it is necessary for a teacher to adopt the curriculum and implement it in accordance with the specified objectives to increase the effectiveness of the curriculum (Ekiz, 2004; Gömleksiz, 2007); and teachers are expected to dedicate themselves to develop curriculum implementation process (McKernan, 2008).

Regular evaluations are necessary for the effective implementation of the curriculum. At this point, in the current study, the opinions of EFL teachers, teaching at the secondary schools, on the current English language curriculum are taken to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. As Richards (2001) indicates that teachers can identify deficiencies and problems in the curriculum and give feedback directly to the curriculum from the learning environment. In other words, views of teachers related to the curriculum are important (Çepni & Akdeniz, 1996). This study tries to construct a holistic framework based on the current English language curriculum elements in five grade levels (4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th). In this context, the main aim of the current study is to determine the opinions of EFL teachers about the objective, content, teaching and learning process, and assessment and evaluation elements of the secondary school English language curriculum implemented in Turkey. To this end, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the opinions of EFL teachers about the objective element of the secondary school English language curriculum?
2. What are the opinions of EFL teachers about the content element of the secondary school English language curriculum?
3. What are the opinions of EFL teachers about the teaching and learning process element of the secondary school English language curriculum?
4. What are the opinions of EFL teachers about the assessment and evaluation element of the secondary school English language curriculum?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Study Design*

This study was designed as a case study, one of the qualitative research methods. Case studies examine a phenomenon/event within its up-to-date and real context, show their descriptions and explanations comprehensively, and attempt to make an in-depth examination of a system with boundaries specified (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). In the current study, the opinions of EFL teachers about the elements of the secondary school English language curriculum were tried to be investigated in depth.

### *2.2. Study Group*

The study group consists of 14 EFL teachers from seven different public schools in Turkey. 9 female and 5 male participants were included in the research process. 7 of the participants have 1-10 years of work experience, 4 of them have 11-20 years of work experience, 3 of them 21 years and more work experience. The study group was selected using criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods. The basic aim of this sampling method is that selected individuals meet a predetermined set of criteria

(Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, working in a secondary school as an EFL teacher was taken as a criterion for the selection of the participants. The names of the participants were not included because of the research ethics. Participating teachers were coded as T1, T2,...T14.

### *2.3. Data Collection Tool*

Open-ended question form was used to collect data to answer the research questions. The form includes four open-ended questions prepared by the researcher to reveal the opinions of the teachers regarding the English language curriculum within the research questions. A literature review was conducted regarding curriculum and its elements, and studies related to the subject were investigated to determine the questions to be asked to the participants. While forming the questions, opinions and suggestions were taken in terms of such criteria as content validity, clearness, understandability and number of questions from two professors who have been working in the field of Curriculum and Instruction. Based on feedback from these field experts, necessary changes were done to the questionnaire in terms of its shape and items. The number of questions has been reduced to four in accordance with the recommendations made. A great attention was paid to include questions which provide teachers to state their opinions in detail and reflect the purpose of the study in the best way. Suitability, clarity and comprehensibility of the questions were controlled.

### *2.4. Data Collection Process*

In the first step, each participant was informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary basis of participation. Also, it is explained that the data to be acquired from them would only be used for scientific purposes. The question form was sent to the teachers using “Google Form” and the teachers sent their answers via “Google Form”. However, 4 teachers did not answer the questions and 2 teachers answered partially to the questions. As a result, 14 EFL teachers who could be reached and answered all questions were included as the participants of the study. Data collection process was conducted in the fall semester of 2020-2021.

### *2.5. Data Analysis*

Content analysis was used for analysis of the data gathered. Content analysis aims to determine the concepts and themes that can explain the collected data, to collect similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to present them clearly for the readers (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In the current study, the data were presented with direct quotations without changing the participants’ opinions to ensure validity. In

this way, it was aimed to reflect the views of the individuals interviewed effectively. In order to determine the reliability of the research data, the researcher decided on whether the coding and the themes determined were arranged correctly. The obtained data were coded separately by the researcher and two field experts in educational sciences to calculate the consistency rates of the codes in the study by using the formula of Reliability = [Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100]. According to Miles and Huberman, (2015), the percentage of fit must be 70% or more. The agreement between the codes of the researcher and two field experts was found to be .95, which reveals that coding conducted within the frame of the research has a high reliability. After the proceedings were conducted to achieve validity and reliability, the findings were described and interpreted.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Findings related to the opinions of teachers on the objective element of the English language curriculum

Within the first sub problem of the study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers on the objective element of the secondary school English language curriculum. It was seen that teachers' opinions were grouped under two themes as "*positive sides*" and "*weak sides*." The obtained themes, codes and the frequencies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' opinions on the objectives of the curriculum

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Positive Sides	Understandable	9
	Consistent with the aims of the curriculum	9
	Achievable	8
	Appropriate for students' developmental characteristics	7
	Observable	6
	Practicable in daily life	4
	Based on student-centered approach	4
	Appropriate for students' cognitive development	3
	Providing value to students in present and future	1
Weak Sides	Including unclear statements	5
	Including abstract concepts	5
	Insufficient to develop learner autonomy	3

As seen at the Table 1, some opinions were grouped under the theme of “*positive sides*.” Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as; “*understandable*” (f=9); “*consistent with the aims of the curriculum*” (f=9); “*achievable*” (f=8); “*appropriate for students' developmental characteristics*” (f=7) and “*observable*” (f=6). On the other hand, the participants stated their negative opinions related to the objectives of the curriculum under the theme of “*weak sides*.” Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as; “*including unclear statements*” (f=5) and “*including abstract concepts*” (f=5).

Direct quotations from the participants on these themes and codes are given below.

“*...In my opinion, determined objectives in the curriculum are understandable and clear. In other words, the statements are at a level that students can comprehend...*” (teacher 4)

“*It is possible to state that the objectives were prepared by taking developmental characteristics of students into consideration...*” (teacher 6)

“*...There are unclear parts in the objectives. In a way, it seems to me complicated and the statements were not prepared at a simple level*” (teacher 5)

“*I can say that the statements were not expressed concretely. I mean the curriculum includes abstract concepts mostly...*” (teacher 7)

### *3.2. Findings related to the opinions of teachers on the content element of the English language curriculum*

Within the second sub problem of the study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers on the content element of the secondary school English language curriculum. It was seen that teachers' opinions were grouped under two themes as “*appropriate for students*” and “*inappropriate for students*.” The obtained themes, codes and the frequencies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers' opinions on the content of the curriculum

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Appropriate for Students	Consistent with the objectives	7
	Attracting the attention of students	5
	Interesting	4
	Encouraging active participation of students	4
	Suitable for affective learning	3
	Building different perspectives	3
	Creating enjoyable learning environment	2
	Appropriate for different methods and techniques	2
Inappropriate for Students	Complicated	8
	Inappropriate for students' needs	7
	Inappropriate for readiness levels of students	7
	Inappropriate for developmental levels of students	7
	Unable to integrate the four language skills	6
	Including too many grammar rules	5
	Inadequate visual elements in course book	5
	Including similar topics	5
Unavailability of sufficient examples	3	

According to Table 2, it was seen that some opinions were grouped under the theme of “*appropriate for students*.” Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as; “*consistent with the objectives*” (f=7); “*attracting the attention of students*” (f=5); “*interesting*” (f=4) and “*encouraging active participation of students*” (f=4). On the other hand, the participants stated their negative opinions under the theme of “*inappropriate for students*” including the codes such as “*complicated*” (f=8); “*inappropriate for students' needs*” (f=7); “*inappropriate for readiness levels of students*” (f=7); “*inappropriate for developmental levels of students*” (f=7) and “*unable to integrate the four language skills*” (f=6).

The following excerpts are related to the themes and codes above.

*“It can be said that the content was consistent with the objectives. I mean the content was prepared in accordance with the objectives stated in the curriculum...”* (teacher 8)

*“...because of the fact that the content is interesting and uncomplicated, engagement levels of students increased substantially...”* (teacher 9)

*“...I found out that the content was not suitable for readiness level of students. While teaching, I had difficulties in explaining the subjects to children...”* (teacher 3)

*“To me, the most prominent negative aspect of the content is that it does not integrate the four language skills. Especially, activities based on listening and speaking skills are limited or not presented at a level that students can comprehend.”*(teacher 11)

### *3.3. Findings related to the opinions of teachers on the teaching and learning process element of the English language curriculum*

Within the third sub problem of the study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers on teaching and learning process element of the secondary school English language curriculum. It was seen that teachers' opinions were grouped under two themes as *“weaknesses of teaching and learning process”* and *“strengths of teaching and learning process.”* The obtained themes, codes and the frequencies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' opinions on the teaching and learning process of the curriculum

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Weaknesses of Teaching and Learning Process	Insufficient time for activities	11
	Limited number of activities	10
	Insufficient course hours	9
	Inappropriate for students' linguistic levels	7
	Unable to create communicative atmosphere	6
	Unable to meet students' interests	6
	Unable to improve speaking skills	3
	Unable to reveal individual differences	2
Strengths of Teaching and Learning Process	Increasing engagement levels of students	5
	Building positive attitudes towards the course	4
	Considering learners' skills partially	4
	Consistency of methods and techniques with the objectives and the content	3

According to Table 3, it was seen that some opinions were grouped under the theme of *“weaknesses of teaching and learning process.”* These opinions reflected negative attitudes of participants towards teaching and learning process element. Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as; *“insufficient time for activities”* (f=11); *“limited number of activities”* (f=10); *“insufficient course hours”* (f=9) and *“inappropriate for students' linguistic levels”* (f=7). The participants expressed their positive opinions under the theme of *“strengths of teaching and learning process.”* Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as; *“increasing engagement levels*



*of students*” (f=5); *“building positive attitudes towards the course”* (f=4) and *“considering learners’ skills partially”* (f=4).

In this regard, the opinions of the participants are reflected by the following comments.

*“...I cannot adapt to the curriculum because there is limited time to conduct activities. This is an unmotivating issue...”* (teacher 7)

*“Frankly speaking, more course hours are needed to teach the content effectively. In this context, I cannot concentrate on practical activities in the learning process...”* (teacher 10)

*“Our class is very crowded and each of the students has different comprehension skills. The problem is that activities in learning and teaching process are not prepared by taking individual differences into account, which makes the process difficult, unfortunately.”* (teacher 13)

*“Some of the practical activities help students engage in the course more willingly and build positive attitudes towards learning English...”* (teacher 14)

#### *3.4. Findings related to the opinions of teachers on the assessment and evaluation element of the English language curriculum*

Within the fourth sub problem of the study, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers on the assessment and evaluation element of the secondary school English language curriculum. It was seen that teachers’ opinions were grouped under two themes as *“providing different assessment techniques”* and *“deficiencies in assessment and evaluation process.”* The obtained themes, codes and the frequencies are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' opinions on the assessment and evaluation element of the curriculum

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Providing Different Assessment Techniques	Paper and pencil tests	12
	Teacher assessment	11
	Portfolio assessment	9
	Peer review	6
	Writing assessment	5
	Project assessment	5
Deficiencies in Assessment and Evaluation Process	Limited time for individual evaluation	10
	Ineffective assessment and evaluation because of overcrowded classes	9
	Lack of leading knowledge in assessment and evaluation part	7
	Lack of sufficient resources about assessment and evaluation	7
	Unable to measure listening skills	6
	Unable to measure speaking skills	6
	Lack of peer review	4
Unapplicable methods and techniques	2	

According to Table 4, it was seen that the participants stated the assessment techniques they used. These were grouped under the theme of *“providing different assessment techniques.”* Under this theme, the most frequently expressed codes were as: *“paper and pencil tests”* (f=12); *“teacher assessment”* (f=11) and *“portfolio assessment”* (f=9). On the other hand, the participants stated their negative opinions related to assessment and evaluation element under the theme of *“deficiencies in assessment and evaluation process”* including the codes such as *“limited time for individual evaluation”* (f=10); *“ineffective assessment and evaluation because of overcrowded classes”* (f=9); *“lack of leading knowledge in assessment and evaluation part”* (f=7) and *“lack of sufficient resources about assessment and evaluation”* (f=7).

Direct quotations from the participants on these themes and codes are given below.

*“...Obviously, there is limited time to evaluate students individually. As a teacher, I consider this as an obstacle in terms of conducting an effective learning process...”* (teacher 1)

*“In my opinion, the curriculum seems insufficient to measure listening skills, which creates a serious deficiency related to learning/teaching a foreign language...”* (teacher 5)

*“...I have the opinion that if there is leading knowledge or evaluation examples in assessment and evaluation part in the course book, we can manage the process in accordance with these rules. These deficiencies should be fulfilled.”(teacher 13)*

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

In this section, each of the research questions addressed in this study were discussed. The purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of EFL teachers about the objective, content, teaching and learning process, and assessment and evaluation elements of the secondary school English language curriculum implemented in Turkey. Based on the results of this study, it is evident that the teachers who participated in the study have positive and negative perceptions related to the elements of the secondary school English language curriculum.

The first research question explored the opinions of EFL teachers about the objective element of the secondary school English language curriculum. Based on the findings, it was seen that most of the teachers emphasized the positive sides of the objectives suggested in the curriculum. One of the findings was that the objectives were consistent with the aims of the curriculum. Similar finding was found in the studies conducted by Güneş (2009) and Kaya and Ok (2020). In the current study, it was found out that the objectives were appropriate for students' developmental levels. This finding conflicts with the findings of the studies conducted by Örmeci (2009) and Yaman (2010) which concluded that the objectives were above students' developmental levels. In addition, based on the current study's findings, some striking issues emerging were that the teachers thought that the objectives were based on student-centered approach and appropriate for students' cognitive development. In this respect, it can be stated that the curriculum includes learner-centered principles. On the other hand, teachers' negative opinions related to the objectives were investigated. The findings indicated that the objectives included unclear statements and abstract concepts. In this regard, it can be said that the participants are of the opinion that statements need to be more clear and to include concrete concepts. Also, the participants thought that the objectives were insufficient to develop learner autonomy. This finding is supported by the studies conducted by Örmeci (2009) and Tekin-Özel (2011) which concluded that the curriculum did not develop learner autonomy.

The second research question addressed in this study examined the opinions of EFL teachers about the content element of the secondary school English language curriculum. The analysis of the opinions of some teachers resulted into the finding that the content was appropriate for students. One of the notable findings of the current study was that the content was consistent with the objectives. However, unlike the current study, in the study conducted by Büyükduman (2005), it was concluded that the content was not consistent with the objectives. Another notable findings were that the content can attract

the attention of students and encourage active participation of students. These findings suggest that the content supports students in learning a foreign language. On the other hand, the participants stated negative opinions related to the content of the curriculum. Results showed that most of the participants thought that the content was complicated and inappropriate for students' needs. However, Güneş (2009) reported that the content suggested in the curriculum was appropriate for the needs of students. In addition, the findings revealed that students' developmental and readiness levels were not taken into consideration. Based on the data obtained, it is possible to note that the secondary school English language curriculum was prepared above student's age and linguistic levels. In other words, it can be said that the curriculum seems insufficient to meet the needs of students at different linguistic levels. In this context, it is evident that the content has some weaknesses. In addition, some teachers thought that the content focused on grammar rules intensely, which was also regarded as a negative aspect by the participants.

Within the framework of the third research question, it was aimed to determine the opinions of EFL teachers about the teaching and learning process element of the secondary school English language curriculum. Based on the obtained findings, it is important to note that the participants emphasized mostly negative aspects of this element of the curriculum. The teachers regarded insufficient time for activities, limited number of activities and insufficient course hours as main problems of learning and teaching process element. The participants thought that the teaching and learning process element was not appropriate for students' linguistic levels. Apart from that, it was concluded that the curriculum was insufficient to improve speaking skills. At this point, Od (2013) emphasized the importance of speaking skills in learning English. In this context, it can be said that the activities in the process were beyond students' learning levels. On the other hand, the participants indicated strengths of the teaching and learning process element. One of the notable findings was that the teachers thought that students' levels of engagement to the course increased. This finding is congruent with the study of Güneş (2009). In addition, consistent with the study of Kaya and Ok (2020), the present study showed that the activities can help students build positive attitudes towards the course.

In the last sub problem of the study, it was tried to examine the opinions of EFL teachers about the assessment and evaluation element of the secondary school English language curriculum. In addition, the participants stated the assessment techniques they used. Two notable findings of the current study were that the teachers thought that limited time for individual evaluation, and ineffective assessment and evaluation because of overcrowded classes were main problems of this element. Also, it was found out that suggested assessment methods and techniques in the curriculum were not able to measure students' listening and speaking skills. The results of the study overlap with the results of the study carried out by Kaya and Ok (2020). Accordingly, it can be said that

the teachers cannot assess and evaluate the performance of the students by taking four language skills into account due to some reasons such as limited time and class size.

Consequently, the current research addressed to make contribution to the existing literature by exploring the opinions of EFL teachers on the elements of the secondary school English language curriculum. The study has strengthened the idea that opinions of teachers who have key roles in curriculum implementation process are so important to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum. In light of the findings, it can be argued that the curriculum has some weaknesses and needs to be revised. In this respect, more research is required to investigate the reasons behind the problems stated in this study. This study tries to offer valuable insight into the curriculum by examining it in detail in terms of its elements.

The study was applied in limited sample. Accordingly, further research should be conducted using different universes and samples to increase the generalizability of the results obtained in this study and to compare the findings.

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