5th Grade English Language Teaching Curricula in Turkey: Expectations vs. Realities

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the opinions of English teachers, advisors and a member of Curriculum Development Committee of Ministry of National Education about 5th grade English Language Curricula in Turkey. To this end, 100 English teachers were given Curriculum Opinion Scales. Fifteen English teachers, three advisors, and a member of Curriculum Development Committee were also interviewed through semi-structured interviews in order to add to the quantitative findings. The curricula were evaluated in terms of learning objectives and content, assessment and evaluation, coursebook as an instructional material, language skills, principle of appropriateness, and continuum of learning. Furthermore, participants shared their opinions on curriculum literacy, class hours, methodological perspectives, and examination system. The findings are discussed in comparison with the related literature.

Keywords: Curriculum evaluation, English language teaching, Turkey

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The role of English in economy and its importance to reach information are two of the crucial factors shaping the field of language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). English curriculum has been influenced by the changing perspectives on how to teach a foreign language over time, and for today, countries expect learners to use English for communication and focus on communicative principles which causes the need for interactive and learner-centered practice (Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Although the need for learning English has led the demand for effective language curricula, which can upskill individuals in a globalized world, teaching policies are criticized for not meeting this demand (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In order to educate students, a carefully planned curriculum development process is crucial as curriculum is not just "a school board-approved textbook series" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 209). Many scholars have defined the term 'curriculum' by pointing out different aspects. As stated by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), curriculum is "more than a list of topics and lists of key facts and skills (the 'inputs')" (p. 6). While Bobbitt (2004) focuses on experience, Richards and Rodgers (2014) approach the term as a design including teaching and learning situations. Focusing specifically on language teaching curriculum, Richards (1990) believes that the outcome of a second language education has a close relation to our perspective on language curriculum development process. Curriculum development process does not just involve definitions of its elements and in-class application. We need evaluation to see whether curriculum is really applicable in a classroom environment and it we can reach expectations and learning outcomes specified (Richards, 2001a). Additionally, focusing on the actions of the teachers and learners within the classroom settings, curriculum evaluation is crucial to see to what extent curriculum serves educational development (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Regardless of how it is defined, curriculum influences the teachers, students, and society (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Additionally, it is at the center of the education system as it forms a combination of theory, practice, and objective (Null, 2011). Although curriculum evaluation is not simply about the opinions of the stakeholders, their opinions and experiences have to be taken into consideration for an effective application because their perspectives and local contexts can create various interpretations and implementations of the curriculum.

ELT curriculum evaluation is not a new phenomenon for the field, the related literature provides studies conducted in various contexts from 1985 to present. For instance, in teaching English to young learners in Polish context, Stec (2011) claims that content of grammar, classroom management, insufficient time, learners' attention span, and background knowledge can be listed as some of the challenges for the teachers. Focusing on designing a curriculum guide for the Brazilian context, Gimenez and Tonelli (2013) believe that authorities should collaborate with the teachers during the curriculum development process. Moreover, in Chinese context, the study of Li (2010) investigated the implementation of English language policy and revealed that teachers were willing to share their experiences with the authorities and attend the process in order to design a curriculum which could meet the needs of the learners, however it was nearly impossible to reach the higher officials. Additionally, Salahuddin et al. (2013) evaluated the primary English curriculum in Bangladesh and pointed out lack of curriculum literacy, crowded classrooms, class hours, teaching materials, and in-service training as the factors affecting the application of the curriculum. Lastly, the study of Romero et al. (2014) evaluated ELT curricula in Mexico from the perspectives of various stakeholders and found out how uninformed the school management and teachers were about the curriculum.

Evaluation of ELT curriculum has been considerably studied in Turkish context, too. Regardless of the grade evaluated, the following points were often mentioned in ELT curriculum evaluation studies in Turkish context as the factors affecting the application of the curriculum: effect of examination system (Berkant et al., 2019; Dönmez, 2010; Karcı, 2012; Kaya, 2018), in-service training (Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Özüdoğru & Adıgüzel, 2015; Yedigöz-Kara, 2019; Zehir-Topkaya & Küçük, 2010), class hours (Cihan & Gürlen, 2013; Erdoğan, 2005; Karcı, 2012; Kaya, 2018; Zehir-Topkaya & Küçük, 2010), and teaching materials (Berkant et al., 2019; Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Erdoğan, 2005; Karcı, 2012; Zehir-Topkaya & Küçük, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Since the 2017-2018 academic year, there have been two English language curricula applied for 5th graders (young learners at the age of 10) in the Turkish education system. One of them was developed as a part of second-eighth grade English Language Curriculum (ELC). Adopting communicative principles, ELC aims for A1 proficiency level with 10 units, three weekly hours, and learning objectives specified for each language skill except writing (MNE, 2018a). After being piloted in selected schools, intensive English Language Curriculum for 5th graders (IntELC) was updated and the schools were allowed to have English courses up to 18 hours with the approval of school administration (MNE, 2018b). Just like ELC, IntELC also follows communicative principles and aims for beginning of B1 with 540 hours of classroom input, 36 units, and learning objectives specified for all language skills (MNE, 2018c).

As stated by Fullan (2007), "educational change depends on what teachers do and think-it is as simple and complex as that" (p. 129). However, authorities seem to share no or meager information with teachers in terms of curriculum changes. This lack of information causes disregard for local content realities, inconsistency between curriculum and elements such as

examinations or textbooks, and teachers do not know what they are expected to do (Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Curricular changes affect the stakeholders and it is important to see how well they adopt these changes because unadopted reforms can cause loss of resources (Bümen et al., 2014).

The present study is an attempt to evaluate ELT curricula for 5th graders from the perspectives of English teachers, advisors, and a member of Curriculum Development Committee in the country of Turkey. As they are responsible for in-class practice of the curriculum, the experiences and opinions of the teachers can provide feedback for the curriculum. However, evaluating the curricula only from the perspectives of the teachers can lead to misconceptions. Thus, getting the opinions of other parties involved can provide a better understanding of the curricula. To this end, the study searches for an answer to the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions of English teachers about IntELC and ELC?
2. What are the opinions of the advisors and the committee member about IntELC and ELC?

Significance of the Study

An overview of the related literature reveals three crucial points to be considered. First, although the number of the studies investigating ELT curricula from the perspectives of the stakeholders is quite a lot, the variety of the stakeholders seems to be neglected, especially in Turkish context. Compared to the number of the studies getting the opinions of English teachers or students, studies covering the opinions of other stakeholders such as parents, supervisors, officials, inspectors, and academicians are quite rare. Second, when we investigate the data collection tools used in ELT curriculum evaluation studies, we can state that Likert type scales are considerably preferred in the Turkish context (e.g. Erdoğan, 2005; Gürsoy & Eken, 2018;

Kambur, 2018; Yedigöz-Kara, 2019). Those studies using Likert type scales only reported small-scale pilot studies or taking the opinions of the experts for the development of the scales. Only a limited number of studies reported the results of exploratory factor analysis. Claiming that there is a misconception of scale development among researchers who often develop scales by basically getting some items together, DeVellis (2017) explains the risk of this misconception as "a researcher not only may fail to exploit theory in developing a scale but also may reach erroneous conclusions about a theory by misinterpreting what a scale measures" (p. 32). Although there are scales for the evaluation of ELT curriculum, there is still a need for valid and reliable scales, considering how those in the related literature are developed. Finally, both ELC and IntELC have been evaluated from the perspectives of teachers in many studies. However, the studies have mainly focused on ELC before its updated version in 2018. Thus, there is still a need for providing insightful information on the updated version of ELC. Although it is gaining popularity among ELT curriculum evaluation studies (e.g. Aksoy et al., 2018; Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Kambur, 2018), IntELC have been mostly evaluated from the perspectives of the teachers or students. More studies are necessary not only to compare the two curricula applied for 5th grade students but also to evaluate them from the perspectives of other stakeholders. The present study singles out by developing a valid and reliable curriculum evaluation scale as a data collection tool, focusing on the comparison of currently designed and updated curricula, and taking the opinions of not only teachers but also advisors and a committee member.

Methods

Research Design

Including both quantitative and qualitative approaches into the procedure, the study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed method research design to gain a general understanding

of the issue by collecting and analyzing the quantitative data first, and then, supporting it through qualitative data (Creswell, 2012).

Participants

The data were collected from two participant groups. As they are in charge of the practical aspect of the curriculum, the experiences and evaluations of the teachers can provide valuable feedback for its effectiveness. Thus, one of the participant groups included 100 English teachers, working with 5th graders; 56% of the teachers had teaching experience more than 10 years and 28% of them were following IntELC. Most of the participants had a BA degree and were supporting the application of IntELC.

In the Turkish context, the Curriculum Development Committee under MNE is responsible for curriculum design and this committee is formed with academicians from the related profession and teachers from the field. In order to have a better understanding about curriculum, their experiences during the process of development and perspectives can play a crucial role. Thus, within this study, three academicians as the advisors and an English teacher as the member of the Curriculum Development Committee of MNE formed the second participant group. Advisors took charge during the updating process of ELC and development of IntELC while committee members only took part in the development process of IntELC.

Data Collection Tools

Curriculum Opinion Scale for English Teachers (COSET)

The quantitative data for the study were collected through the Curriculum Opinion Scale for English Teachers (COSET), developed by the researchers. Adopting a five-point Likert type rating, COSET was formed with three parts: demographic features, 41 scale items, and an optional part for the participants to state their further opinions about the curricula. After creating

the item pool based on the review of the related literature and interviews with English teachers, a draft form was prepared and evaluated by the experts from the field of ELT, Program Development and Evaluation, and Assessment and Evaluation. A form with 67 items was prepared and piloted with 262 English teachers of 5th graders to conduct Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). A principal axis factor analysis was conducted on items with oblique rotation (promax). The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity were investigated to determine the suitability of the data set for EFA and sample size was verified for the analysis (KMO= .972, X2 = 16879.065, df= 1711, p<.01). By taking Kaiser Criterion and Cattell Scree Plot into account, COSET was decided to have a structure of six factors. Using 0.4 as a cutoff point, items, either having a cross loading difference below .1 or with factor loadings below 0.4, were eliminated. As a result of EFA, a structure with six factors, explaining 74.580% of variance, and 41 items was determined. Reliability of the scale was measured through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, Guttman's lambda, and McDonald's omega (α .985, λ-2 .985, ω .985). In order to validate the 6-factor structure of COSET, fit indices were investigated by conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with the data collected from 153 English teachers of 5th graders. X^2/df (1.91), CFI (.96), IFI (.96), and NNFI (.96) model indices had perfect fit while RMSEA (.077 / 90% Confidence Interval .071; .083), SRMR (.066), and NFI (.93) showed good fit, which verified the six factors structure of COSET. The factors were labeled as follows: learning outcomes and content, assessment and evaluation, coursebook as an instructional material, principle of appropriateness, language skills, and continuum of learning.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 English teachers, three advisors, and a member of Curriculum Development Committee of MNE. After

the analyses of the responses given to COSET, the questions of semi-structured interviews with teachers were prepared. The components of the curricula with high or low ratings were addressed through the interview questions. As the aim of interviews with advisors and committee member was to see their responses to the opinions of the teachers about the curricula, the set of questions was prepared after the analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the teachers. The interview sessions were conducted after the evaluations of the questions by the experts from the field.

Data Collection Procedure

Once COSET was developed, permissions from Ethics Committee and Directorate of National Education were taken and schools were selected through the stratified random sampling method. After the middle schools in a city center in Central Anatolia Region were enlisted and classified in line with geographical and socio-economic features, they were selected randomly from the list. The administrators of the selected schools were contacted and informed about the study. The data collection took place between 2019 Spring and 2020 Fall semesters within the school environment. After the analysis of the responses given to COSET, a set of questions was prepared for the semi-structured interviews. English teachers and interview sessions were conducted with voluntary teachers. After the analyses of the data collected from English teachers, semi-structured interviews with the advisors and committee member were conducted. They were reached through email and given detailed information about the aim of the study. While one of the advisors and committee member preferred to give their answers in a written form, two online interview sessions were conducted with two of the advisors in June 2020.

Data Analysis

In order to make an item-based evaluation of the responses, mean scores for each item were interpreted through the formula of "(highest point in the Likert scale – lowest point)/the number of the levels" suggested by Erkuş (2012). By adding .80 (5-1/5) the categories were defined as; 1 – 1.80 (very low), 1.81- 2.60 (low), 2.61- 3.40 (moderate), 3.41- 4.20 (high) and 4.21-5 (very high). In order to compare subtotals and total scores in line with the curriculum followed by the participants, first, the normality of the data was checked through Kolmogorov Smirnov test of normality. As the data set did not have a normal distribution ($p<.05$), Mann Whitney U test was used to make a comparison between the groups. Considering the difference between statistical significance and practical significance, effect size values were also calculated through the formula "$r = Z/\sqrt{N}$" and interpreted in line with the reference points: ±.1 small effect, ±.3 medium effect size, and ±.5 large effect size (Field, 2009). Qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews were used to support quantitative data through direct quotations.

Results

The opinions of the participants on ELC and IntELC are presented in the same order of the subscales in COSET and supported through responses shared during semi-structured interviews.

Learning Outcomes and Content

Fourteen items of the first subscale were mainly about the reachability of the outcomes and their suitability to the learners in aspects such as the daily life of the students, their needs and interests. Descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney U test results are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1

The Results Regarding Learning Outcomes and Content

Item	Curriculum	M	SD	*Mann Whitney U*			
				U	***z***	***p***	***r***
1	**IntELC**	3.85	.84	877	-1.127	.260	-0.11
	ELC	3.59	.92				
2	**IntELC**	3.64	.73	1005	-.027	.978	-0.002
	ELC	3.62	.84				
3	**IntELC**	3.89	.78	835.5	-1.515	.130	-0.15
	ELC	3.63	.79				
4	**IntELC**	3.57	.79	910	-.829	.407	-0.08
	ELC	3.43	.86				
5	**IntELC**	3.85	.93	990	-.151	.880	-0.01
	ELC	3.84	.91				
6	**IntELC**	3.60	.83	1002.5	-.045	.964	-0.004
	ELC	3.62	.89				
7	**IntELC**	3.50	.92	912.5	-.778	.437	-0.07
	ELC	3.29	1				
8	**IntELC**	3.60	.91	999.5	-.071	.943	-0.007
	ELC	3.59	.89				
9	**IntELC**	3.82	.77	842	-1.400	.162	-0.14
	ELC	3.54	.90				
10	**IntELC**	3.60	.83	792	-1.741	.082	-0.17
	ELC	3.16	1.1				
11	**IntELC**	3.85	.93	897	-.939	.348	-0.09
	ELC	3.68	.96				
12	**IntELC**	3.85	.80	939.5	-.605	.545	-0.06
	ELC	3.76	.83				
13	**IntELC**	3.71	.89	908	-.848	.396	-0.08
	ELC	3.58	.83				
14	**IntELC**	3.75	.88	805.5	-1.726	.084	-0.17
	ELC	3.45	.82				
Subtotal		52.14	8.8	832	-1.353	.176	-0.13
		49.8	9.2				

As presented in Table 1, except two items (7 and 10) for ELC, the teachers gave high ratings to the curricula. For IntELC the outstanding feature within the subscale was the consistency among the outcomes (Item 3, M= 3.89) while ELC got the highest ratings for reachability of the outcomes specified for vocabulary (Item 5, M= 3.84). Although IntELC got higher subtotal mean score, Mann Whitney U test results showed statistically non-significant difference ($p > .05$) with small effect size ($r < \pm.3$).

Although responses given to COSET could be interpreted as participants being content with the curricula, the interviewees draw a different picture about in-class practice. Except one of them, all the interviewees following IntELC stated that they could not reach the outcomes specified for language skills as grammar teaching took a great deal of their class hours. As well as criticizing the amount of new vocabulary and lack of learning outcomes specified for writing skills, the teachers following ELC believed that unbalanced distribution of the outcomes among the units and limited class hours created the difference between what was expected from the curriculum and in-class practice.

Responding to the criticisms of the teachers, the advisors and committee member insisted that neither of the curricula was grammar-based and not a single learning outcome was specified for grammar. They believed that the examination system forced teachers to focus on every single grammar structure. The point of how curriculum was presented in the coursebook was also highlighted, stating that they had to omit learning outcomes for writing skills in order to simplify ELC. Advisors also presented a theory-based rationale for the amount of new vocabulary in ELC. One of the advisors objected to the criticism in these words:

> We did that on purpose because without loading the words called as language shower or input, children can't have an output. It is stated in Krashen's Natural Approach or Communicative Approach, so the coursebook writer should get that input and form a context within the coursebook and prepare activities answering what we know when we know the vocabulary. The children need the language shower otherwise how they can hear those words. Studies show that at A1 level a child needs to know 300-400 words. (A3)

Assessment and Evaluation

Items of this subscale evaluated the curricula in terms of considering developmental features of the students, peer and self-evaluation, providing feedback for the efficacy of the curricula, and applicability of the suggested techniques. Mean scores of the responses and Mann Whitney U test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

The Results Regarding Assessment and Evaluation

Item	Curriculum	M	SD	*Mann Whitney U*			
				U	***z***	***p***	***r***
15	**IntELC**	3.03	1	1007.5	-.004	.997	-0.0004
	ELC	2.98	.97				
16	**IntELC**	3.17	.86	844	-1.317	.188	-0.13
	ELC	2.87	1				
17	**IntELC**	3.21	.78	996.5	-.093	.926	-0.09
	ELC	3.15	.97				
18	**IntELC**	3.60	.68	860	-1.275	.202	-0.12
	ELC	3.33	.85				
19	**IntELC**	3.39	.87	768.5	-1.944	.052	-0.19
	ELC	3	.90				
20	**IntELC**	3.32	.90	971	-.306	.760	-0.03
	ELC	3.25	.93				
21	**IntELC**	3.50	.79	987.5	-.174	.862	-0.017
	ELC	3.48	.76				
22	**IntELC**	3.10	1.1	801	-1.638	.101	-0.16
	ELC	2.62	1.1				
23	**IntELC**	3.42	.83	813.5	-1.583	.114	-0.15
	ELC	3.06	1				
24	**IntELC**	3.46	.88	964.5	-.366	.714	-0.03
	ELC	3.38	.79				
Subtotal		33.2	7	832	-1.353	.176	-0.13
		31.1	7				

As it can be understood from Table 2, teachers were content with the applicability of the suggested evaluation techniques. Consistency between the content and evaluation techniques, guiding teachers in terms of assessment and evaluation, and relevancy of the assessment and

evaluation to the developmental features of the students were found to be other outstanding features of IntELC while ELC got moderate ratings. However, Mann Whitney U test results showed statistically non-significant differences with small effect sizes ($p>.05$, $r< \pm.3$).

The leading topics discussed during the interviews with the teachers were applicability of the suggested evaluation techniques and evaluation of language skills. Although applicability of the suggested techniques got high ratings in COSET, the interviewees questioned the capability of those techniques in evaluating language skills. They also mentioned disregarding the level of the students, limited class hours, and the amount of the outcomes as problems.

When it comes to the evaluation of language skills, interviews revealed that schools had different procedures regardless of the curriculum they followed. While some of the teachers, following IntELC, were evaluating language skills during in-class activities, one of the schools was conducting skills-based exams. For the teachers following ELC, limited class hours and lack of technical equipment forced teachers to focus more on grammar and vocabulary rather than language skills and this resulted in students being inexperienced in skills-based activities. Sharing an information given during the district group teacher meeting, one of the teachers stated:

> It was mentioned during district group teachers meeting that if we decided as group for teachers to conduct listening exam for 5th graders, we could, but none of the teachers in our district was willing to take that risk because in order to test the listening skills of the students. First, I should really concentrate on those skills during the lessons. As I can't do that, there is no point in making a listening exam. (ELC, T2)

Responding to the opinions of the teachers, advisors highlighted the importance of evaluating language skills and they explained the issue through two main factors: lack of

knowledge on how to conduct skills-based exams and conformism. They stated that as well as being stated in Basic Law of Education, conducting skills-based exam was also crucial to reach the main objective of the curricula.

Coursebook as an Instructional Material

The third subscale evaluates MNE-approved coursebooks. Descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney U test results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The Results Regarding Coursebook as an Instructional Material

Item	Curriculum	M	SD	Mann Whitney U			
				U	*z*	*p*	*r*
25	**IntELC**	3.03	1	910	-.786	.432	-0.07
	ELC	3.13	1				
26	**IntELC**	3.10	1	848.5	-1.274	.203	-0.12
	ELC	2.76	1				
27	**IntELC**	2.78	1	998	-.080	.936	-0.008
	ELC	2.73	.99				
28	**IntELC**	3.14	1	998.5	-.077	.939	-0.007
	ELC	3.11	1				
29	**IntELC**	3.28	1	1006.5	-.012	.990	-0.001
	ELC	3.26	.99				
Subtotal		15.3	4.4	995	-.100	.920	-0.01
		15	4.2				

Based on the mean scores presented in Table 3, we can state that participants were not content with MNE-approved coursebook regardless of their curriculum. The capability of the coursebook in terms of improving speaking skills got the lowest scores from the participants. Opinions shared during the interviews were consistent with the ratings. The teachers following ELC found the material consistent with the objectives of the curriculum, but they criticized it in terms of organization of the units, number of the activities, and improving language skills. As the teachers were unaware of the coursebook sets prepared specifically for IntELC, they were using

the coursebook designed for ELC as well as one published by international publishers. The main motive behind using two coursebooks was to prepare students for high-stakes exams by following an MNE-approved one and to use a supportive coursebook suitable to the content of IntELC. The problems with MNE-approved coursebook were functionality, unbalanced organization of the units, the number of the activities, and not appealing the interest of the students. Thus, they felt the need to follow an additional coursebook to support their students. One of the teachers expressed her opinions in these words:

> I don't think that the coursebook is efficient, it was partially prepared in line with the outcomes. In the first unit of MNE-approved coursebook there are too many grammar structures to cover, I dealt with the first unit for weeks, there were activities following one another and students got bored with so much grammar points. There is nothing fun, there are so many structures in the first unit, it gets simple with the second unit. In the extra coursebook we use there is a song at the end of each unit, the students are having fun but in MNE-approved coursebook there is no place to relax. (IntELC, T2)

Pointing out the importance of selecting the best option possible, advisors disagreed with the opinions of the teachers regarding MNE-approved coursebooks. One of the advisors stated that the source of the problem was not the coursebook but the methodological perspective of the teachers and believed that MNE should charge publishing houses for the design of the coursebooks instead of preparing them itself. It was also stated that there were indeed two online coursebook sets prepared for IntELC and they were labeled as supportive materials to eliminate the time consuming approval process of MNE. However, the teachers were unaware of them because of a miscommunication between the schools and MNE. Explaining the development process of the alternative coursebooks, committee member commented that teachers did not need

to follow the coursebook designed for a different curriculum because of the examination as students following IntELC efficiently could be successful at the high-stakes exams.

Principle of Appropriateness

Within this subscale, four items focus on the consistency of content and outcomes with the class hours and readiness level of the students. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The Results Regarding Principle of Appropriateness

Item	Curriculum	M	SD	*Mann Whitney U*			
				U	***z***	***p***	***r***
30	**IntELC**	3.07	1.1	905	-.823	.411	-0.08
	ELC	3.23	1				
31	**IntELC**	3.25	1	1006.5	-.012	.990	-0.001
	ELC	3.23	1.1				
32	**IntELC**	3.53	1.1	719	-2.308	.021	-0.23
	ELC	2.97	1				
33	**IntELC**	3.32	.98	883	-1.009	.313	-0.10
	ELC	3.08	1				
Subtotal		13.1	3.3	939.5	-.529	.597	-0.05
		12.5	3.3				

Based on the mean scores presented in Table 4, it can be stated that both of the curricula got moderate ratings, except item 32. Considering weekly hours for the specification of the content (item 32) was the only item with statistically significant mean difference ($p<.05$). However, the effect size for this item was found to be small ($r= -0.23$). Although responses given to COSET revealed that teachers following IntELC were content with the weekly class hours, except one of them, all of the interviewees believed that class hours were not enough to cover the whole content. Complaining about the limited weekly class hours and seeing them as the source of their struggles, interviewees following ELC shared that they were having some difficulties to

explain some of the structures to the students. They stated that no matter how many times they explained some structures, students did not understand. Suggesting covering one grammar structure throughout each grade, some of the teachers believed that students could not understand the structures when they had no knowledge about them in their native language.

On the other hand, the advisors and committee member believed that teachers were teaching grammar in a wrong way. Furthermore, they stated that IntELC was prepared based on 20 class hours and what teachers should do was to redesign the content in line with their class hours, which could also be an opportunity for teacher autonomy. When it comes to the limited class hours of ELC, they agreed with the teachers and shared their struggle to explain the importance of more class hours to the authorities who took the class hours in the countries of Europe as a base. Comparing English exposure rate between European countries and Turkish context, they also admitted the difficulty of increasing class hours as it was directly related to the number of the teachers assigned.

Language Skills

The items of this subscale evaluate the importance given to language skills within the curricula. Mann Whitney U test results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

The Results Regarding Language Skills

Item	Curriculum	M	SD	Mann Whitney U			
				U	*z*	*p*	*r*
34	**IntELC**	3.35	1	907.5	-.810	.418	-0.08
	ELC	3.12	.97				
35	**IntELC**	3.64	.95	763	-2.010	.044	-0.20
	ELC	3.19	1				
36	**IntELC**	3.57	.95	958	-.419	.675	-0.04
	ELC	3.47	.99				
37	**IntELC**	3.28	1	708	-2.388	.017	-0.23
	ELC	2.72	1				
38	**IntELC**	3.78	.99	791	-1.877	.060	-0.18
	ELC	3.44	.91				
Subtotal		17.6	4.4	734.5	-2.115	.034	-0.21
		15.9	4				

Considering the mean scores, presented in Table 5, we can claim that according to teachers, both of the curricula gave less importance to speaking skills and pronunciation (Item 34 and 37). Although Mann Whitey U analysis showed statistically significant differences between the two curricula in terms of writing skills (item 35), pronunciation (item 37), and subtotals ($p<.05$), the effect sizes were found to be small ($r< \pm.3$). Making a general evaluation of the curricula in terms of language skills, interviewees following IntELC supported two different opinions. Two of the teachers found IntELC more efficient in terms of improving language skills, while three of them believed that overloaded grammar content constituted an impediment to focus on language skills. For the interviewees following ELC, the issue was not about focusing on language skills. There were some practical obstacles such as the number of the activities, overcrowded classes, and class hours for the teachers to reach those outcomes.

Insisting on remembering the fact that both ELC and IntELC were only focusing on language skills rather than grammar, the advisors and committee member stated that teachers

were dealing with grammar more than needed, and both of the curricula could be effective if applied correctly. Regarding the outcomes of language skills, one of the advisors responded:

> There is no separate outcome for pronunciation because we integrated the language elements, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation into speaking. Actually, we are emphasizing it in some of the speaking outcomes. We are not stating it explicitly as 'children know how to intone' but it is included in the skills. (A1)

Continuum of Learning

Three items of the continuum of learning subscale were about the consistency between activities and outcomes, student-centered activities, and preparing students for the next grades. Mean scores and Mann Whitney U results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

The Results Regarding Continuum of Learning

Item	Curriculum	M	SD	*Mann Whitney U*			
				U	***z***	***p***	***r***
39	**IntELC**	3.92	.76	768.5	-2.085	.037	-0.20
	ELC	3.51	.93				
40	**IntELC**	4.07	.76	663	-2.949	.003	-0.29
	ELC	3.47	.93				
41	**IntELC**	4	.66	749	-2.145	.032	-0.21
	ELC	3.52	.96				
Subtotal		12	1.8	692	-2.491	.013	-0.24
		10.5	2.4				

As it can be understood from Table 6, all item-based and subtotal mean score differences were found to be statistically significant ($p<.05$). However, all effect size values were small ($r< \pm.3$). Mean scores can be interpreted as teachers were content with their curricula in terms of continuum of learning, but interviewees shared quite different opinions. They blamed the education system for making students expect everything to be handed on a silver platter. IntELC

was believed to provide a solid base for the students, but information overload could cause problems. While some of the teachers praised ELC for being consistent with the following grades, some of them criticized it as it could not provide a solid base for the students.

Criticizing the perspectives of the teachers, committee member made the following comment:

> … when they see "talking about past time events", the teachers start to make students memorize the second form of the verbs. But the curriculum doesn't want this. Also the outcomes stated in the curriculum are all collected under four language skills. Students need to elicit grammar structures with language skills. This is stated at the introduction section of the curriculum. But as I said before, the reason behind this is the lack of curriculum literacy of the teachers. (CM)

Overall Evaluation

Lastly, total score mean values were compared. Based on the results, it can be stated that total score mean value of IntELC (M= 143.57) was higher than ELC (M= 135.02). However, the difference was non-significant and effect size was small (U= 830.5, z= -1.363, p>.05, r= -0.13). At the end of the interview sessions, teachers following IntELC mentioned that they had to find their own way of applying the curriculum and were not provided any guidance, which in a way caused different applications among schools. Supporting the application, teachers also highlighted the importance of providing a coherent coursebook with IntELC and improving physical conditions in order to get better results. As they wanted more class hours, interviewees following ELC were also supporting IntELC. Moreover, they felt the need of guidance, shared their expectations from the curriculum as a document, and as the appliers of the curriculum, they

wanted to have an active role in the process of curriculum development. They believed that teachers were left out of the process.

According to the advisors and committee members, teachers had active roles in the development process as they were part of the committee as a member and MNE also got feedback from other teachers from the field. Responding to the criticism of the teachers about the curriculum document, they stated that within centralized education system, it was not possible to prepare a detailed curriculum and it should not provide solutions to the in-class problems because it was impossible to foresee every possible problem. Misconception of the coursebook as the curriculum was also pointed out. Reminding the relation between the curriculum and the coursebook, one of the advisors made the following comment:

> It is really important how the curriculum is reflected in the material. At this point what stands out is what material designers understand from the curriculum and how they reflect it. Proficiency of those people should be questioned. (A2)

Criticizing the perspective of curriculum as thinking about what to include in a unit of coursebook, one of the advisors suggested designing the whole education system in line with the curriculum and providing local constant in-service training in order to improve the application of the curricula. He also highlighted the importance of making skills-based exams by associating the current examination system with conducting a swimming exam through pen and paper.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the present study showed that teachers had some difficulties in reaching the learning outcomes for different reasons. Teachers following IntELC showed the overloaded grammar content and intensity of the learning outcomes as the reasons behind their struggle, which was also mentioned in the studies evaluating IntELC (Berkant et al., 2019; Dilekli, 2018;

Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Yedigöz-Kara, 2019). Being the source of many troubles in practice, limited class hours were the factors hindering teachers to reach the outcomes in ELC, which was consistent with the study of Cihan and Gürlen (2013). Regardless of their curriculum, teachers were focusing on grammar more than needed. Not only did the advisors and committee member persistently pointed that two curricula did not focus on grammar but also it was clearly stated in the documents of the curricula that they were based on communicative perspectives. As explained in IntELC:

> Parallel to the English Language Teaching Program (for the 2nd – 8th grades) published by Board of Education in 2017, the present program for the lower secondary education (5^{th}, 6^{th}, 7^{th} and 8^{th}) is based on communicative principles to English language teaching. It organizes the curricular objectives with regard to language skills and functions (uses), not in terms of any dichotomy or classification on grammatical forms (usages). Thus, the present program is based on a series of thematic and communicative syllabi, success of which is inevitably dependent upon the analogous approach in teachers' instructional choices, in measurement repertoire and in learners' practice (MNE, 2018c, pp. 3-4).

There can be two explanations for the mismatch between what IntELC and ELC intended to do and the in-class practice of the teachers. The first possible reason stated was curriculum literacy. According to Sural and Dedebali (2018), curriculum literacy has a crucial role in reaching the expected learning outcomes. It is deemed to be important for saving teachers from the captivity of the coursebook and preserving teacher autonomy (Ben-Peretz, 1990). In the Turkish context, teachers saw the coursebook as the curriculum and did not follow the updates in the curriculum (TED, 2009). Moreover, Saral (2019) found out that English teachers at the state schools in Turkey had a moderate level of curriculum literacy. Teachers need curriculum literacy

to decode the official document and understand the objectives and philosophy behind to reflect the curriculum into practice (Kahramanoğlu, 2019). Although 71% of the teachers in the present study claimed reading the updated curriculum document, their responses might indicate contrary.

The effect of examination system can be another explanation. Students are expected to have detailed knowledge on grammar and vocabulary instead of language skills to be able to pass high-stakes exams. Exam-related concerns of the teachers were consistent with the findings of the studies evaluating IntELC from teachers' perspectives (Berkant et al., 2019; Yedigöz-Kara, 2019). Studies from various contexts have also indicated the effect of the national assessment system on the application of the curriculum (e.g. Al-Darwish, 2006; Alwan, 2006; Glasgow, 2014; Li, 2010; Nothaisong, 2015; Tsai, 2007; Wu, 2013). Additionally, teachers following ELC mentioned their struggles between the theory and practice and the burdensome examination system. High-stakes exams changed the role of tests within the teaching process and this created high expectations for school-based stakeholders (Cheng & Curtis, 2008). This situation is called as 'washback effect', a term which connotes uncalled influence on learning-teaching situations (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Within Turkish education system, learners from all levels have to deal with high-stakes exams for better education (Özmen, 2012). For instance, at the end of middle school, students take the secondary education placement exam and in the English section they are responsible for grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills, which is quite contrary to the objectives of the curriculum (Kılıçkaya, 2016). The mismatch between the national examination system and curriculum is deemed to cause the following: teaching to test, wasting sources, disregarding the objectives of the curricula, and increase of inequality of opportunity in education (Wedell, 2014). Not including other language skills except reading can cause disregarding those skills during the in-class practice. Additionally, teachers' concern for the

secondary education placement examination can be quite early considering the grade. Besides, shaping the lessons as instructed in the curricula can help students to be successful at English sections of any exams as claimed by the committee member.

One of the points about which advisors and teachers shared different opinions was the amount of new vocabulary in ELC. Although it was not an issue considering the responses given to COSET, the interviewees criticized ELC harshly because of the amount of new vocabulary. On the other hand, advisors explained their intention through the term 'language shower' and pointed out the importance of how vocabulary was taught. Wilkins (as cited in Thornbury, 2002, p. 13) claims that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". As well as its role in language learning, vocabulary is also necessary to learn and use grammar (Cameron, 2001). The studies in the related literature have mentioned 2000 words as a threshold (Schmitt, 2000; Thornbury, 2002). Moreover, explaining the learner's vocabulary size, Nation (2013) notes that "the larger the vocabulary size, the greater the quantity of language that needs to be processed in order to meet the words to be learned again" (p.108). According to Thornbury (2002), what learners need is to be exposed to the words as much as possible as well as repeated memory retrieval. Instead of the amount of the vocabulary, the attention should be paid on how to teach learners new vocabulary in a meaningful context and how effective the coursebooks are in this regard.

Another important point was the teachers' obligation or preference to conduct pen and paper exams mainly because of their prejudgment about their students' level and technical obstacles. The advisors listed conformity, class hours, and teachers' lack of knowledge of how to conduct skills-based exams as the reasons. Conformity can be defined as adopting the behavior performed by the majority of group members (van Leeuwen & Haun, 2014). Discussing the

impact of conformity on teacher autonomy, Saldana (2013) points out that prospective teachers have the tendency to choose the preferred method within the system. Moreover, excluding language skills from high-stakes exams can mislead the learners about the importance of these skills (Yaman, 2018). As explained by McEwen (1995), "what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught" (p. 42). The way English is evaluated in high-stakes tests should be changed. However, it is not easy. Wedell (2014) believes that exam results are important to all stakeholders for different reasons, and if the national assessment became consistent with the communicative principles, most of the students could not pass those exams as they were not getting the necessary support. Therefore, it is easier to pretend that the curriculum is taught and assessed as it is intended.

Regardless of their curriculum, the teachers criticized MNE-approved coursebooks from different aspects. Coursebook as an instructional material is a crucial element for most of the language classes, even sometimes the only source of input and practice (Richards, 2001b). According to McGrath (2013), these materials are called coursebook because they are "the foundation for a course" (p. 5). However, the result of heavy reliance on the coursebooks can be their control on the instruction (Kitao & Kitao, 1997). Although none of these materials can be a perfect fit for the language classes, an efficient coursebook can reflect the curriculum by providing a variety of context and activities that teachers cannot design on their own (Richards, 2001b). One of the reasons behind the reliance on coursebooks was the examination system. Teachers felt the obligation to cover the materials in detail in order to make their students get higher scores from high-stakes exams. Many teachers work under the pressure of the theory encouraging them to adjust the curriculum into their practices and the demand of school-based stakeholders to cover the coursebook in line with the assessment system (Wedell, 2014).

Limited class hours were one of the long-lasting problems. The insufficient class hours have also been documented by the studies evaluating the 5th grade English curriculum (Cihan & Gürlen, 2013; Işık, 2019). Moreover, it has been cited as one of the factors affecting the application of the curriculum in other contexts (e.g. Al-Darwish, 2006; Altaieb, 2013; Sun, 2007; Tsai, 2007). Class hours seem to be one of the points on which teachers and advisors agreed. While teachers were sharing the difficulties they had because of limited class hours, the advisors shared their struggle to explain the importance of having more class hours to the authorities. Considering the opportunity of experiencing real use of language in a European context, the situation is quite different for the learners in a Turkish context. As stated by Lightbown and Spada (2013), learners in a classroom are more likely to be exposed to the new language and discourse types less. Considering the points discussed so far, the core problem seems to be the inconsistency between what is expected and what is practiced in local contexts. Pointing out the discrepancy between macro-level objectives and micro-level in practice, Kırkgöz (2009) suggests that Turkey needs to realize the discrepancy between macro-level objectives and micro-level in-practice and needs to have a coherent language policy for ELT to become more effective.

Curriculum development is a dynamic process and improving the factors hindering the effective application of the curriculum is also an important part of this process. The success of a curriculum is related to sharing a common perspective and the strong interaction among MNE, coursebook writers, school management, and teachers. Based on the findings, some implications and suggestions can be provided. The need for in-service training has been indicated by various studies not only in the Turkish context (e.g. Çankaya, 2015; Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Dönmez, 2010; İnam, 2009; Örmeci, 2009; Yedigöz-Kara, 2019; Zehir-Topkaya & Küçük, 2010) but also

in other contexts (e.g. Almalki, 2014; Altaieb, 2013; Burgos, 2012; Harris, 2010; Hillberry, 2008; Nothaisong, 2015; Powell, 2008; Tsai, 2007). Thus, providing in-service training about the content, methodological perspective, and outcomes of the curricula in order to overcome the problem of curriculum literacy among the teachers can be effective for the application of the curricula. There should also be a consistency between the evaluation system adopted in high-stakes exams and the curricula. As claimed by McGrath (2013), "syllabus development, textbook production and examinations need to be a part of an integrated operation. It helps if they are housed in the same building, but regular coordination meetings should be a sine qua non" (p. 193). Lastly, as being one of the main problems, class hours should be increased mainly because few hours limit the language exposure rate, which may result in not reaching the expected outcomes (Moon, 2005) and affecting the way teachers design their in-class practices.

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