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## LECTURERS' VIEWS OF CURRICULUM CHANGE AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING DEPARTMENTS IN TURKEY

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to understand lecturers' views about the effectiveness of curriculum change procedures taking place in 2006 at the English language teacher education departments of Turkish universities. The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data through an open-ended questionnaire completed by 27 lecturers working at fifteen different universities and semi-structured interviews with five of the participants. The results indicated that lecturers did not have voice during the change process and were not well informed about the changes. The change process was reported to disregard some important steps of curriculum development such as needs analysis, teacher training, and evaluation. With regard to course-specific changes, the 2006 curriculum was reported to be effective in involving practical courses. Combining separate literature courses, adding a vocabulary course, and extending class hours of some courses were found to be effective changes. Conversely, removing skill-based courses, decreasing class hours of the research skills course, combining advanced reading and writing courses, and removing school experience course were reported as negative aspects of the 2006 curriculum change. Considering these findings, a number of suggestions are made to achieve effective curriculum change at English Language Teaching Departments.

**Keywords:** Pre-service teacher education, curriculum, English teaching, Turkey

**Özet:** Bu çalışma, 2006 yılı İngilizce Öğretmenliği müfredatının oluşturulmasında takip edilen müfredat değişikliği süreçlerinin etkililiği hakkında öğretim elemanlarının görüşlerini anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Araştırmada on beş farklı üniversitede görev yapmakta olan 27 öğretim elemanından açık uçlu bir sormaca yoluyla nitel ve nicel veri toplanmış ve katılımcıların beşiyle görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, 2006 müfredat değişikliği sürecinde öğretim elemanlarının söz sahibi olmadıklarını ve değişiklikler hakkında iyi bilgilendirilmediklerini göstermiştir. Müfredat değişim sürecinin, müfredat geliştirmenin önemli aşamaları olan ihtiyaç analizi, öğretmen eğitimi ve değerlendirme gibi adımları takip etmediği belirtilmiştir. Yapılan ders değişiklikleri ile ilgili olarak, 2006 programının uygulama derslerine ağırlık vermesi konusunda etkili olduğu bildirilmiştir. Farklı edebiyat derslerinin birleştirilmesi, kelime dersi eklenmesi ve bazı derslerin ders saatlerinin artırılması etkili değişiklikler olarak gösterilmiştir. Buna karşılık, beceri odaklı derslerin çıkarılması, araştırma becerileri dersinin saatinin düşürülmesi, ileri okuma ve yazma derslerinin birleştirilmesi ve okul deneyimi dersinin çıkarılması 2006 müfredatının olumsuz özellikleri olarak tespit edilmiştir. Bu bulgular ışığında, İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümlerinde müfredat değişiklik sürecinin etkili bir şekilde gerçekleştirilmesi adına bir takım tavsiyelerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Hizmet öncesi öğretmen yetiştirme, müfredat, İngilizce öğretimi, Türkiye

### 1. Introduction

There were two major curricular changes in the Turkish teacher education system in 1998 and 2006. These changes were mainly initiated by the educational changes in the structures of state schools because the main role of teacher education departments in Turkey is to educate prospective teachers according to the structures of state schools that are administered by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). In 2012, MoNE implemented significant educational changes and designed 4+4+4 educational system in which the duration of compulsory education was expanded from eight to twelve years. Unlike the old system in which students began learning English as a foreign language (EFL) when they were ten years old, in the new

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system English language education is offered at the second year of primary school when students are eight years old. Considering these significant changes, it is possible that the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), the authority for curricular changes at teacher education departments at Turkish Universities, will implement changes in English language teaching (ELT) departments.

Conducting empirical studies focused on curriculum change by giving voice to different stakeholders has important implications for curriculum designers. Nevertheless, in the Turkish context, only a scant body of research has investigated the effectiveness of curriculum change in ELT departments. The present study is designed to address this gap and provides suggestions that could be taken into account while designing future curricular change procedures. To this end, this study aims to understand practitioners' perspectives on the process of curriculum change and profile their views about the effectiveness of the curriculum in use.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What are lecturers' views about the process of curriculum change made in 2006 at a number of English Language Teaching Departments in Turkish universities?
- (2) What are lecturers' views about the strong and weak aspects of the curriculum in use?
- (3) What are lecturers' suggestions for improving the effectiveness of future curricular innovations?

## **2. Curricular change procedures followed in designing 2006 ELT department curriculum**

The changes brought on by the 2006 curriculum were proclaimed to be bottom-up in nature, enabling the participation of a wide variety of universities. The main goal of this curriculum was declared to be "educating intellectual, competent problem-solving teachers who teach students how to learn rather than technician teachers who only perform in a particular way" (Kavak, Aydın, & Akbaba Altun, 2007, p. 65). The changes were made following a three-step process: (i) selecting a study group of 25 people, (ii) preparing a draft programme in the workshop carried out in seven days with representatives of MoNE and sending the draft programme to universities, and (iii) finalising the programme after receiving feedback from numerous universities (YÖK, 2006). This is the description of the change process from CoHE's perspective. However, it is also worth addressing the practitioners' views about the change procedure, in that teachers are responsible for implementing the changes (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

This study focuses on the changes made in the curriculum of English Language Teaching (ELT) Departments. The graduates of these departments qualify as teachers of English after four years of university education. The ELT curriculum includes courses covering three domains: field knowledge, professional knowledge, and general culture. Among those, field knowledge courses receive more weight as they focus on developing students' English language skills (e.g. Advanced Reading and Writing, Oral Communication) and ability to teach English as a foreign language (e.g. Teaching Methodology, Language Acquisition). For that reason, the present study focuses on the changes made in field knowledge courses.

Five broad changes were made in devising the 2006 curriculum. First, some new courses were added (e.g. Language and Pronunciation, Teaching Language Skills), and some courses were disregarded (e.g. Reading Skills, School Experience). Secondly, some courses in the old curriculum were combined (e.g. Advanced Reading Skills and Advanced Writing Skills

courses were included as Advanced Reading and Writing course). Thirdly, some courses were modified (e.g. Speaking Skills course was modified as Oral Communication Skills). Fourthly, the sequences of some courses were changed (e.g. Language Acquisition course was placed in the fourth term rather than the third term). Finally, the teaching hours of some courses were decreased or increased (e.g. Research Skills course is offered two hours a week rather than three hours).

There are a number of studies that have investigated the effectiveness of the 2006 curriculum. Ögeyik (2009) explored students' opinions about the effectiveness of the curriculum through a questionnaire. She revealed that students found the curriculum successful in addressing their needs. The courses were reported to be integrated with practical knowledge. Yavuz and Topkaya (2013) investigated the perceptions of eighteen lecturers by focusing on course-specific changes made in the 2006 curriculum. They found that the addition of new courses such as 'approaches to ELT 2', 'public speaking', and 'teaching language skills' were positive changes. Modifying grammar courses to 'contextual grammar' and combining 'course book evaluation' and 'material evaluation courses' were also revealed as positive changes. On the other hand, offering a 'language acquisition' course before 'linguistics' and 'approaches' courses, removing 'school experience' and 'advanced writing skills' courses, and decreasing the teaching hours of 'research skills' course were reported to be negative changes. Kızıltan (2011) investigated the opinions of 324 students studying at a Turkish university's ELT Department in relation to the 'language acquisition' course. In the 1998 curriculum, this course was offered in the fourth term after students had taken a 'linguistics' course. However, in the 2006 curriculum, these courses were replaced and now, students take language acquisition in the third term and linguistics in the fourth term. According to the findings, this was a negative change, in that participants reported a need for a preliminary course on 'language acquisition'. Using quantitative and qualitative data, Coşkun and Daloğlu's (2010) study illustrated that the 2006 ELT curriculum does not address students' linguistic needs and the teacher participants suggested that more importance should be placed on skill-based courses in the first year of the programme. In a study focused on the effectiveness of teaching English to young learners courses, Çelik and Arıkan (2012) investigated the positive and negative aspects of the 2006 curriculum by conducting interviews with 25 in-service teachers of English in Turkey. The findings showed that practical courses are the most effective aspect of the curriculum. Conversely, the curriculum was reported to be ineffective in terms of training teachers for teaching at state schools, in that some participants reported finding it difficult to determine students' current level and design classes accordingly.

The studies reviewed above are important as they reveal some strong and weak aspects of the curriculum in use. To understand the curricular issues further, it is essential to reveal how practitioners themselves have experienced curricular change because practitioners' involvement in the curriculum change process could influence their perceptions of the new curriculum (Hadley, 1999; Markee, 1997; McKernan, 2008; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Therefore, besides focusing on the strong and weak aspects of the 2006 curriculum, the present study attempts to reveal practitioners' views about the effectiveness of the curriculum change process.

### **3. Conceptualisation of curriculum**

In spite of the common practice of equating syllabus with curriculum, we argue that syllabus is a sub-category of curriculum and an arrangement of the content which identifies what to teach and test in a course (Barrow, 1984; Breen, 2001; McKay, 1980; Richards, 2001).

Curriculum represents a broader perspective where different elements of a teaching procedure are addressed such as aims, content, methodology and evaluation (Breen, 2001).

Our theoretical views of curriculum are informed by the process inquiry model. In this model, rather than setting particular goals and objectives as the basis of curriculum, as in the product-driven model, evaluation is based on the quality of educational experience and content is seen as a process which includes all learning opportunities (McKernan, 2008). As highlighted by the process inquiry model, we believe that learning is comprised of a process where the needs of teachers, learners, and society should be addressed. Additionally, the effectiveness of an educational practice should not solely be determined through evaluating whether learners can perform particular types of activities but their personal growth should be the main educational concern. This, however, does not imply that goals and objectives will play an insignificant role. Kelly (2009, p. 95) captures the essence of the process approach to curriculum stating:

“The modal allows us to have our goals, purposes, intentions, aims as educators but free us from the necessity of having only one, step-by-step predetermined route to their achievement. It allows us to have our content, but frees us from the need to select this by reference to anything other than the principles inherent in our aims and purposes. It thus enables us to focus attention on developing the understanding of the pupil rather than on the ‘delivery’ of predetermined content or the achievement of pre-stated behavioural changes”.

#### **4. Curriculum development and change**

Curriculum development and curriculum change are two inextricable terms signifying similar processes. Richards (2001, p. 2) identifies the focus of curriculum development process as “determining what knowledge, skills and values students learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring about intended learning outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools or educational systems can be planned, measured and evaluated”. This process includes critical thinking about epistemological issues by considering societal and individual expectations about schooling so that an effective content is provided to help learners process appropriate learning experiences.

According to Johnson (1989), there are four stages of curriculum development: ‘curriculum planning’, ‘designing a syllabus’, ‘programme implementation’, and ‘classroom implementation’. In addition to these, ‘evaluation’ is another important issue to be considered in the curriculum development process. Peacock (2009) considers evaluation as the starting point of curriculum development. Considering the cyclical nature of curriculum in terms of being interrelated and interwoven in an endless process (Breen, 2001), evaluation of each step is essential where each decision is rethought critically by taking into account teachers’ roles in the quality of the learning experiences provided.

Similarly, curricular change involves certain stages such as ‘needs and situation analysis’, ‘developing goals and objectives’, ‘selecting an appropriate syllabus’, ‘course structure’, and ‘teaching methods and materials’ (Richards, 2001). Curriculum change should aim at improving the curriculum. Markee (1997, p. 4) confirms this, stating that “the implementation of change in language education occurs within a systematic ecology that either promotes or inhibits innovation”. This ecology refers to the collaboration of people in the curriculum development process where teachers, parents, administrators and sometimes students should be expected to be involved in the innovation process (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

There are two different views of curriculum change: 'curriculum as fact' and 'curriculum as practice'. In the former, curriculum is seen as absolute truth which is not debatable or changeable and designed with a view of knowledge as being external to knowers, both teachers and students (Young, 1998). In the 'curriculum as practice' model, however, the collective contribution of people is essential to understand problems experienced in implementing the curriculum. In this respect, "teachers' practices are crucial in sustaining or challenging prevailing views of knowledge and curriculum" (Young, 1998, p. 27). Instead of regarding knowledge as absolute truth, this view relies on the opinions of different stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, administrators, and policy makers. Knowledge in this model is therefore changing and negotiated.

In the literature, a great amount of criticism has been levelled at the conceptualisation of curriculum as an absolute entity because the effectiveness of curriculum change depends on its implementability. In this respect, teachers are seen as the key players of the change process (Barrow, 1984; Lamie, 2005; Markee, 1997; McKernan, 2008; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Troudi & Alwan, 2010). According to McKernan (2008, p. 85), "it is difficult to believe that classrooms and curriculum can ever be improved without the participation of teachers in that improvement". This is because teachers are the closest to the curriculum and the most knowledgeable of its different elements (Rea-Dickens & Germaine, 1998). For that reason, consulting teachers is essential in each step of curriculum development (Hadley, 1999).

Considering that teachers are the decision-makers in the classroom, it is clear that the implementation of curriculum change depends on the practitioners' perceived value of the changes. This point has been confirmed by Fullan (1993, 1999), a major curriculum change specialist, who argues that one of the conditions for teachers to be able to interact with change is an environment that allows them to have a voice in the change process. According to House (1974, cited in Finch, 1981), although teachers do not always initiate an innovation, they always decide whether to implement it, or on the degree to which they will use it. For that reason, curriculum change should be acceptable to teachers. Teachers should be informed about what the innovations are, who they are for, and why they are being carried out (White, 1995, cited in Hadley, 1999).

##### **5. Research studies that investigate teacher involvement in the change process**

The need for involving teachers in the change process is supported by several empirical studies. Sharkey's (2004) qualitative study investigating the effects of teacher involvement in curriculum development processes in the USA found that teachers' contextual knowledge contributes to designing an effective curriculum. This is also supported by Kirk and Macdonald (2001) who concluded that teachers' intimate knowledge of their local context, their students, available resources, and the practical characteristics of their work are worth considering in implementing curricular changes. In a case study carried out in Toronto, Beattie and Thiessen (1997) found that collaborative curriculum planning improves the implementability of curriculum change. Similarly, Elliott, Brooker, Macpherson and McInman's (1999) large-scale quantitative study in the Australian context revealed that the low-level of teacher participation obscured the implementability of change. In the Turkish context, Sezgin (2007) carried out a case study at a Turkish university and investigated stakeholders' attitudes towards a new tool generated through following the stages of a needs analysis, setting goals, training, piloting and evaluating. Co-operation between teachers, students and administrators was possible. The results illustrated that following these procedures leads stakeholders to develop positive attitudes towards the innovation. These research studies are good examples of the significance of involving teachers in the change

process. In the light of these findings, one of the objectives of the present study is to reveal lecturers' perceived involvement in the change process of the 2006 ELT department curriculum.

## **6. Methodology**

Our philosophical standpoint in this inquiry is informed by the interpretive paradigm which aims to understand individuals' insights of a particular phenomenon. In this respect, we consider knowledge as personal, subjective, and unique (Cohen, Manion, & Morriison, 2007), and therefore, interaction between individuals and researchers is essential in understanding the social world.

Qualitative data collection methods were used with the aim of obtaining insightful data, which is essential for understanding the reasons behind individuals' interpretations. All ethical procedures for obtaining consent from the participants and ensuring their anonymity and right to confidentiality were followed.

Involving numerous universities was essential to ensure that the study is representative of Turkish universities. We sent invitation e-mails to all lecturers who had taught the former and current ELT curricula in Turkey. The response rate was not satisfactory, in that out of 253 invitation e-mails, only 27 lecturers (15 female, 12 male) working at fifteen different universities responded positively. 20 participants hold doctorates and 7 participants hold a masters' degree. With regard to years of experience as a teacher educator, 5 participants had 1 to 5 years, 12 participants had 6 to 10 years, 5 participants had 11 to 15 years, 4 participants had 16 to 20 years, and 1 participant had more than 21 years of experience.

To select the interviewees, the participants were asked whether they were volunteered to be interviewed. Out of 27, 17 participants from ten different universities volunteered and half of these universities were chosen randomly and telephone interviews were conducted with five participants.

### **6.1. Data collection and analysis**

A questionnaire was selected as the initial data collection method because it is a versatile method that "can be used successfully with a variety of people in a variety of situation targeting a variety of topics" (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 10). However, since the current study also seeks to gain some insight into lecturers' views about curriculum change, it was essential to use qualitative methods which "involve the provision of careful and detailed descriptions as opposed to the quantification of data through measurements, frequencies, scores and ratings" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 162). To this end, interview was selected as a qualitative data collection method which enables researchers to "obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p. 30). The interview was semi-structured as it provides the researcher with the flexibility to encourage the interviewee to go into depth on a given topic (Kvale, 2007). Both data collection methods were conducted in Turkish to ensure that participants expressed their feelings thoroughly.

The interpretive theoretical framework also informed the process of data analysis. While the closed-ended items of the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively by using descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 16, qualitative data were analysed using a constant comparison technique in which "data are compared across a range of situations, times, groups of people, and through a range of methods" (Glaser, 1996,

cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 493). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and interview protocols were coded and categorised in order to understand the phenomenon in question. This generates possible implications for further research studies. Since the language of data collection tools is Turkish, the quotes in the results section are the translated versions of the original data which were checked by a specialist colleague to confirm the accuracy of translations.

## **7. Findings and discussion**

Lecturers agreed that the stages of the change process which should include ‘needs analysis’, ‘setting goals and defining objectives’, ‘preparing materials’, ‘training and supporting teachers’, ‘teaching approaches and techniques’, ‘assessment of learning’, and ‘evaluation of all the above’ (Alwan, 2006) were missing in the 2006 curriculum for ELT departments. The curriculum development was reported to be limited to deciding on what courses to include and practitioners were informed about the new curriculum only through course descriptions which included general information about the objective of each course.

Although CoHE declared the change process as having a bottom-up nature, the majority of participants claimed that they did not have any voice during the process. Both positive and negative aspects of the curriculum were revealed, which led to suggestions for future curricular innovations that will be discussed below in detail.

### **7.1. Involvement in the change process**

Concerning the teacher voice during the curriculum change process, out of 27, 18 participants claimed that they did not have any opportunity to explain their opinions about what changes to make in designing the new curriculum. On the other hand, 7 participants, who responded positively, reported that they conducted meetings with colleagues in the department.

The analysis of the data revealed that different universities were asked to conduct meetings for different purposes: (i) preparing a report with suggestions for the new curriculum, (ii) writing guidelines for the new curriculum, and (iii) reporting opinions about a draft curriculum sent by CoHE. It is not clear why particular universities had different roles during this stage. This may indicate that the curriculum change process was not transparent. For instance, COHE affirmed that 25 academics worked on designing the new curriculum. Nevertheless, participants reported that there was no information about who these people were and why they were selected as the members of the committee.

The analysis of the interview protocols showed that this lack of information is a negative factor that influenced practitioners’ attitudes towards the efficiency of curriculum change process. This point was illustrated by the following excerpt from Lecturer (L) 13:

We did not have voice during this process. Nobody asked for our opinions. I do not think that anybody’s opinions were taken into consideration. It was a top-down process, as usual.

Another interviewee expressed similar concerns:

They claim that they had involved stakeholders in the process. But when we spoke with colleagues from different universities, nobody told that they had participated in this process. I want to know who participated in the process. (L20)

These findings suggest that despite COHE’s attempts to involve practitioners in the change process teachers did not feel that they had a voice. This lack of teacher involvement was also

uncovered in different research studies. For example, Troudi and Alwan's (2010) qualitative study that investigated teachers' feelings during curriculum change in the United Arab Emirates confirmed that teachers' passive roles during change caused low-morale. Participants reported mixed feelings about change, such as indifference, fear and resistance to change because they were not informed about the change process. The case was the same in Carl's (2005) study had similar findings. Carl (2005) investigated teachers' viewpoints about their involvement in curriculum change processes in South Africa and revealed that teachers only took part in the implementation stage of curriculum development.

## **7.2. Being prepared for the changes offered in the new curriculum**

According to the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire, all participants reported that they had not received any training about how to implement the new curriculum, which indicated a lack of teacher training. 19 participants maintained that they were not well informed about the content of the new courses in the new curriculum which was introduced through course descriptions on COHE's web site. These descriptions are single-paragraphed texts which provide information about the general objective of each course.

One interviewee underlined the insufficiencies of these course descriptions: 'these descriptions are written without providing information about which approach, methods and methodology to address while teaching a course' (L20). As highlighted by L20, the way innovations were introduced was found unsatisfactory in terms of providing practitioners with the information needed. This was one of the concerns of another interviewee who highlighted the difficulties he experienced in implementing a 'contextual grammar' course, which is one of the new courses included in the new curriculum:

Before this curriculum, nobody knew what the contextual grammar was. In this course, you are supposed to teach grammar contextually. There is no coursebook about it; there aren't any model practices anywhere. So how can I teach this course? (L4)

On the other hand, one interviewee considered this an advantage and claimed that these general statements provided her with the opportunity to design the course according to her own interpretation: 'This is a positive problem because at least this gives me an opportunity. Thanks to this, at least, I have a voice now' (L16). These quotes suggest that, in ELT Departments, the decisions on issues such as aims, course contents, techniques, materials and evaluation rely on the interpretation of the lecturer. This is confirmed by L15 who stated that 'course descriptions provide a framework of each course. However, I can follow route A and you can follow route B, our materials might vary according to our interpretation'. This dependence on lecturers' interpretations may contradict the standards of ELT teacher education programmes offered in different universities in Turkey. This is supported by the participants who agreed that they modify courses according to their interpretations:

We cannot say that we implement it exactly as described in aims and outcomes. Like other departments, we made some changes. (L12)

These findings show that teachers were not trained to implement the innovations of the 2006 curriculum and there was a lack of communication between curriculum designers and practitioners, which led teachers to design courses according to their interpretations of the general guidelines. The lack of teacher training in our study parallels findings from previous research studies. McGrail (2005) conducted a qualitative study in order to understand teachers' perceptions of a new technology to be introduced and revealed that teachers felt unqualified due to a lack of training during the change process. In her case study in Portugal,



Flores (2005) concluded that although teachers believed that the changes were positive, they felt lost in some areas because of the lack of in-service teacher education. Chan's (2010) qualitative study about how teachers and schools implemented a new curriculum policy in Hong Kong showed that teachers felt confused about their new roles as independent professionals. She concluded that although there were numerous documents about innovations, teachers did not know how to put them into practice.

The findings discussed above illustrate the low level of importance placed on teacher training in curricular innovation. However, teacher training is regarded as one of the most critical steps for curriculum change in the literature. Indeed, "curricular innovation is not about putting into place the latest curriculum; it means changing the cultures of teachers, classrooms, and schools, and making the teachers' role in the process of curriculum development central and crucial" (Shkedi, 2006, p. 719). For this reason, teacher training and support should be provided during the change process so that the practitioners are informed about the changes. This will determine the success or failure of the implementation of a new curriculum.

### **7.3. The positive and negative aspects of the curriculum in use**

The findings revealed that placing more emphasis on practice and field courses were the most effective aspects of the new curriculum. One participant stated that 'in general, courses about language teaching, techniques and methods are planned interdependently by ensuring students' active participation' (L17). Parallel to this, another participant claimed to be 'pleased because the curriculum is focused more on teaching and practice' (L5).

Participants reported that changes made in the curriculum help students carry out practical activities. One participant maintained that this curriculum is very useful because 'it is very good for teacher education. Technically speaking, I believe that it trains teachers who are knowledgeable about objectives, materials and different evaluation techniques' (L9). These positive comments on the 2006 curriculum in terms of providing practice-based learning environment were also made by students in Ögeyik's (2009) study where they reported that the courses are practical in nature and do not solely cover theoretical issues. This also parallels the findings of Çelik and Arıkan (2012) who reported that involving practical courses is one of most positive aspects of the 2006 curriculum.

With regard to the new courses, synthesising different literature courses under a course entitled 'literature and language teaching' was reported to be the most efficient change. Likewise, adding a new 'vocabulary' course, extending 'Approach and Methods' course, placing 'Teaching English to Young learners' courses in two terms, and offering a new course particularly dealing with 'teaching language skills' were other positive changes. The changes made in 'approaches and methods' and 'teaching language skills' courses were also reported as the positive aspects of the new curriculum in Yavuz and Topkaya's study (2013). Also, the effectiveness of synthesising literature courses parallels the findings of Coşkun and Daloğlu's study (2010). This change is important because, as found in Arıkan's study (2005), pre-service teachers believe that literature courses are useful in ELT programmes.

With regard to the negative aspects of the curriculum, removing skill-based courses that focus on improving student's English language competencies were reported to be the most inefficient change:

As a result of problematic foreign language teaching before university education, unfortunately—our students have serious weaknesses in Turkish and English

language competencies. Being overloaded by techniques in their undergraduate education, I believe that students will face the danger of graduating without gaining the ability to express themselves in English (L17).

'Decreasing the class hours of the research skills course', 'removing skill-based courses in the first year' and 'combining advanced reading and writing courses' were the other recurring examples of problematic changes. One interviewee stated that 'the combination of advanced reading and writing courses and offering it in the first year is very bad because students are still in the process of developing their English, critical thinking and writing abilities' (L9). This is also supported by Coşkun and Daloğlu's study (2010) where the main concern of teacher participants is the inability of the 2006 curriculum to address problems with the students' linguistic competences. Regarding the content of school experience courses, one of teaching practicum courses in which students wrote reports by observing classes at state schools, one participant remarked that 'removing the school experience course is negative'. Students now experience the real classroom practices in the last year, which is too late for them' (L14). Participants' views about the ineffectiveness of these changes are in agreement with Yavuz and Topkaya's findings (2013) which revealed that removing 'school experience' and 'advanced writing' skills courses, and decreasing the class hours of 'research skills' were negative changes. Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) also concluded that school experience courses should not be offered in the fourth year only.

#### **7.4. Lecturers' views about the strong and weak aspects of curriculum change in Turkey**

Participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of curriculum change carried out in Turkey revealed some positive and negative aspects. Despite the weaknesses, curricular innovation attempts were reported to be well-intended efforts. As L7 says 'it is possible to state that there are positive changes. We have had great improvements in the last ten-fifteen years'.

Participants also made some suggestions that should be taken into consideration for future curriculum change processes. The recurring theme as a factor hindering the effectiveness of the change processes is the teachers' 'lack of voice'. Almost all participants refer to this as the main drawback of curriculum change processes: 'everything was top-down, practitioners' opinions and challenges were not taken into consideration' (L13).

The top-down process was reported to be the source of other problems in curriculum change: 'it is mostly not useful because of it being top-down' (L27). 'Impracticality' and 'lack of feedback' were other themes which were mentioned as negative aspects of curriculum change: 'I believe that the decisions were made by people who had not taught at the bachelor level and who were not knowledgeable about the realities of classroom practices' (L21). This is what Kelly (2009) refers to as change from without instead of from within.

The questionnaire item concerning points to be considered in designing the new curriculum supported the significance of a needs analysis. L9 emphasised the role of a needs analysis in his statement: 'Firstly, a needs analysis should be conducted and the expected outcomes of the programme should be identified. The courses and activities which will be useful to reach these outcomes should be included'.

Impracticality, lack of feedback, and the absence of a needs analysis reflect the top-down nature of curriculum change. These models are not efficient as they solely focus on input and output with little emphasis on the actual process of change (O'Sullivan, 2004). The weakness of top-down approaches was also confirmed by empirical studies where the findings showed

that the consideration of change as an absolute rule governed by outsiders obscures the usefulness of curriculum change (e.g. Beattie & Thiessen, 1997; Borko, 2004; Elliott et al., 1999; McGrail, 2005; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Sharkey, 2004).

Another disregarded step was the evaluation of the curriculum. The participants agreed that no feedback was received from practitioners about problems experienced in implementing the 2006 curriculum. This is maintained by L15 as follows:

It is necessary to hear the opinions of people in the driving seat. Nobody asked for our opinions. It is done and OK. Opinions of teachers should be taken after the implementation of the curriculum. What do they need most? What kind of difficulties do they face? Which courses are more useful? Which ones are unnecessary? There has not been such an effort so far.

These concerns were also voiced during the interviews. Participants emphasised the need for carrying out empirical studies to gather data from all universities in Turkey, and changes should be made with reference to the results of these studies. Although the evaluation of the new curriculum is generally neglected in curriculum change, it plays an important role in understanding how change works. Hence, as suggested by Troudi and Alwan (2010, p. 118), “evaluation of change should reach all the aspects of the curriculum on an ongoing basis and curriculum evaluation needs to be continuous and its results utilised in modifying the various components of the curriculum”.

## **8. Conclusions and implications**

This study was designed to understand lecturers’ views about the effectiveness of the curricular changes made in the 2006 curriculum at ELT Departments. Considering the complex nature of curriculum change processes, a number of concerns were identified, which allows for some tentative conclusions to be suggested for future curriculum change processes. The present study revealed both strong and weak aspects of the 2006 curriculum. Lecturers reported that the curriculum is useful in terms of placing emphasis on practical issues. Furthermore, ‘combining separate literature courses’, ‘adding a vocabulary course’, ‘extending class hours of approaches and methods and teaching English to young learners courses’ were reported as useful changes. Conversely, ‘removing skill-based courses’, ‘decreasing class hours of research skills course’, ‘combining advanced reading and advanced writing courses’, and ‘removing school experience course’ were found to be negative aspects of the 2006 curriculum.

Regarding the change process, it is seen that a number of essential steps were missing and change was made at course level mainly by offering new courses and changing the class hours or sequences of the courses. However, curriculum development requires making decisions about several issues involving what students learn along with how they learn it, and how teachers help them, what materials to use, styles, methods, assessment and facilities (Rodgers, 1989, cited in Richards, 2001). To do so, an analysis of the context through situation and needs analysis is seen as one of the initial steps of curriculum design (Nation & Macalister, 2010). However, this essential step was missing in the 2006 curriculum. This flaw was reported to be a leading factor hindering the connection between students’ levels of language abilities and the courses aiming to develop their competencies. To address this, before taking other steps, it is essential to understand the needs of students which “can serve as the basis for developing tests, materials, teaching activities, evaluation strategies as well as re-evaluating the precision and accuracy of the original needs assessments” (Brown, 1995, p. 35).

This study also showed that the process was not transparent and this non-transparency can be a hurdle to forming positive attitudes towards the curriculum change process. To avoid this, more efforts should be devoted to introducing transparency through informing stakeholders about the people involved in the process, and the selection criteria of curriculum designers. Additionally, studies should be carried out and the rationale for changes should be made. It is also worth considering the extent to which teachers feel that they are involved in the curriculum change process. Involving teachers as agents in the process is considered to be a focal point of designing an implementable curriculum because “the teacher, like the artist, the philosopher, and the man of letters, can only perform his work adequately if he feels himself to be an individual directed by an inner creative impulse, not dominated and fettered by an outside authority” (Russell, 1950, p. 159, cited in Lamie, 2005). We suggest, as evidenced in the literature, that a top-down or a centre-periphery approach is a major factor behind the inefficiency of implementing curriculum change. Kelly (2009, p. 129) explains that “there is a wide gap between the idea of a project held by its central planners and the realities of its implementation, if that is even the word, in the classroom by the teachers”. Along these lines, Eisner (2000, p. 347) confirms that “teachers are central to the improvement of schooling and need to have a substantial role to play in shaping the direction, content and form of the changes being proposed”.

Another limitation of the curriculum change was reported to be the lack of teacher training. Teacher training is an important factor influencing the implementation of a curriculum. According to Roberts (1998), unless the teacher is developing, development in schooling will not occur. Furthermore, it may be problematic to expect teachers to implement innovations that they are not competent enough to carry out. Carless (1999, p. 355) asserts that “if teachers are to implement an innovation, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of the proposed change”. Without doubt, teacher training and support are the only ways to fulfil this. Therefore, training teachers should be one of the main concerns of curriculum designers in order to ensure the implementability of the curriculum.

The current study also revealed that participants did not think that they were well informed about the new curriculum as there was no communication between curriculum designers and practitioners. However, this is essential for effective curriculum change because the clarity of goals of innovation is of critical importance in enabling practitioners to understand the characteristics of the new curriculum (Fullan, 2001a, 2001b; Lamie, 2005). Therefore, different communication channels should be established to inform practitioners about the characteristics of the new curriculum. The absence of communication between stakeholders could decrease the quality of ELT teacher education provided in Turkey, in that practitioners cannot perceive the innovative aspects of the new curriculum. To ensure this, curriculum development should be cyclical in nature, being interrelated and interwoven in an endless process (Breen, 2001). In addition to this, curriculum evaluation provides rich and valuable data as “it focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language program in order to understand how the program works, and how successfully it works, enabling different kinds of decisions to be made about the program” (Richards, 2001, p. 286). Considering this, policy-makers should take into account this important role of curriculum evaluation and see this process as one of the essential steps of curriculum development.

Considering the paucity of empirical studies in this area, we feel this study has contributed to an understanding of lecturers’ views, which is essential for future curriculum studies. The conclusions of this study, however, offer partial explanations of the situation because only the views and perceptions of a number of lecturers working at particular universities were

addressed. Therefore, more empirical evidence is needed to understand the effectiveness of the curriculum in use and to reveal issues to take into consideration while implementing curriculum change procedures in future.

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