Comparing the language curriculums of Turkey and Ireland

Aliye ERDEM*

Ankara University Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Elementary Education, Ankara, 06590, Turkey

Received October 9, 2008; revised December 23, 2008; January 5, 2009

Abstract

The aim of this research was, to compare the 2005 Language (Turkish) Curriculum for Primary Schools to Ireland’s Language Curriculum (English) in terms of their objectives, content, learning and teaching process, and evaluation process. In this research, survey method has been used since the aim of this research was to describe the existing situation. Since the research aims at comparing the similarities and differences of the 2005 Language Curriculum in Turkey to Language Curriculum in Ireland; population and samples were not identified. In the scope of the research, data were gathered through document analysis of the curriculums and literature research. In this research, the 2005 Language (Turkish) Curriculum for Primary Schools is compared to Ireland’s Language Curriculum (English) in terms of their objectives, content, learning and teaching process, and evaluation process. Finally the findings of the research have been interpreted, and results and suggestions were written through the findings.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: Primary education; language curriculum; international comparison.

1. Introduction

Education is one of the distinguishing factors for the status of one country in the world. Education can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skills along with the current changes and an art of adapting those acquired to some specific situations. These all require a modern and contemporary training that is integrated into current changes and developments (Titiz, 2000; Topbaş, 2006).

The quality of education mostly relies on the curriculums implemented. Rapid changes in the scientific and technological areas, international competition, newest contemporary approaches in education, insufficiency of traditional teaching approaches, social and individual demands all put pressure for educational revision. It is expected to raise the quality in education by overcoming the deficiencies and revising the curriculums in line with the most recent changes in the society and science (Erden, 1993). In this respect, the Primary School Turkish Language Curriculum has been updated in Turkey recently.

As a prerequisite of a high quality education, one has to learn his language very well. Therefore, it is a determiner of the individual’s development socially, perceiving and interpreting the world and his success starting from the...
primary school throughout all educational processes (Kılıç, 2002). Language is the reflection of one’s culture. Thus, language education has a prominent place in the international educational policies. Language education is seen within a national perspective through which the language and culture are taught to the new generations; however, it might be an international field of study considering the common qualities and objectives of the nationalities (Karababa, 2005).

Educational system analysis of a country enables us to see what is different from that of another country and if necessary to adopt some missing features for a better program development. Comparative educational studies contribute to understanding and evaluating our past better, to identify the current position and educational planning (Noah, 1984). Educational system comparison leads to a comprehensive system analysis; however, when the base of comparison is curriculum there emerges a rich outline of two cultures that facilitates discovering the reasons of some problems (Büge, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to compare the Turkish Language Curriculum prepared in 2005 with language (English) Curriculum in Ireland. International concepts and improvements need to be integrated into curriculum during the program development process. The comparison of the curriculums will contribute to development of new curriculum by point out the differences and similarities.

2. Methods

In this research, survey method has been used since the aim of this research was to describe the existing situation. Since the research aims at comparing the similarities and differences of the 2005 Language Curriculum in Turkey to Language Curriculum in Ireland; population and samples were not identified. In the scope of the research, data were gathered through document analysis of the curriculums and literature research. The data on 2005 Primary Education Turkish Language Curriculum and that of Ireland are compared in terms of program elements (objectives, content, learning-teaching process and evaluation process).

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Objectives

Language Curriculums both in Turkey and Ireland display some similarities in terms of their objectives like developing basic language skills, positive attitude towards language and effective language use, improving aesthetic and creative skills, building literacy skills, enhancing cognitive and communication skills. The statements under objectives in both curriculums are directed to teacher with an emphasis on ideal student characteristics to be formed. Broad objectives point out acquisition of cognitive, auditory and kinesthetic skills. In addition to the broad objectives, Language Curriculum in Ireland has twenty eight more objectives than that of in Turkey. Some of the objectives stated in Language Curriculum in Ireland are as following (Primary School Curriculum-English 1999:11-12):

• gain pleasure and fulfilment from language activity.
• develop the skill of listening actively and appreciate the significance of tone of voice, facial expression and gesture.
• learn to understand the conventions of oral language interaction and use oral language in a variety of social situations.
• expand his/her vocabulary and develop a command of grammar, syntax and punctuation.
• use computer technology in learning to write and for information retrieval.
• enhance reading and writing development through the involvement of parents or guardians.

Learning objectives are referred to as “gains” in Language Curriculum of Turkey and each is grouped under learning subjects according to different levels. However, Language Curriculum in Ireland has broad objectives concerning the whole program where skills to be acquired are placed into two groups under the content section according to the students’ levels (1–2, 3–4, and 5–6. grades). Gains per grade can be found in the content section in Language Curriculum of Ireland. Broad objectives in Language Curriculum of Ireland also targets students as it is in that of in Turkey. Some of the gains stated in Language Curriculum in Turkey are as following: The student will be able to:
• Make utmost use of lexicon in writing.
• Adopt his/her speech for different contexts.
• Pay attention to intonation and stress in reading aloud.
• Seek the meaning of unknown words.
• Ask and answer related questions to the topic.
• Use communication technology to present his/her knowledge, feeling and ideas.

3.2. Content

Language Curriculum in Turkey includes eight main themes for the whole academic year; four of which are required whereas the other four are optional as shown in Table 1 (MEB 2005: 180):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN THEMES</th>
<th>OPTIONAL THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATATURK</td>
<td>MY BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY TURKEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUES</td>
<td>IMPROVEMENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>GAMES AND SPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY</td>
<td>THE WORLD AND THE SPACE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION, AND PRODUCTIVITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMAGINATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOUNDATIONS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NATIONAL DISASTERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FINE ARTS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Required and optional themes in Language Curriculum in Turkey vary according to the grades. At each grade, four optional themes are offered in addition to the required ones. Content recommendations and activities are provided stating that it is optional to follow these recommendations. In addition to the themes, main outline of the Language Curriculum in Turkey is as follows (MEB 2005:17–21):

- Listening
  o Practicing the Rules of Listening
  o Listening Comprehension
  o Listening for Specific Types, Method and Techniques
- Speaking
  o Practicing the Rules of Speaking
  o Expressing Oneself Orally
  o Speaking for Specific Types, Method and Techniques
- Reading
  o Practicing the Rules of Reading
  o Reading Comprehension
  o Improving Vocabulary
  o Reading for Specific Types, Method and Techniques
- Writing
  o Practicing the Rules of Writing
  o Expressing Oneself in Writing
  o Writing for Specific Types, Method and Techniques
- Visual Reading and Presentation
  o Visual Reading
  o Visual Presentation

Language Curriculum in Ireland is not organized as having optional or required themes; the content is grouped for two grades and each grade is structured in parallel with the general strands. Each general strand has strand units of ‘oral, reading and writing’. Strands and strand units are provided in Table 2 for grades of 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6 (Primary School Curriculum-English 1999: 23, 35, 47):
Table II: Strands and Strand units in Language Curriculum of Ireland for the grades of 1–2, 3–4, and 5–6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strands</th>
<th>Strand Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receptiveness to language</strong></td>
<td>Oral developing receptiveness to oral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading developing concepts of language and print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing creating and fostering the impulse to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence and confidence in using language</strong></td>
<td>Oral developing competence and confidence in using oral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading developing reading skills and strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing developing competence, confidence and the ability to write independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing cognitive abilities through language</strong></td>
<td>Oral developing cognitive abilities through oral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading developing interests, attitudes and the ability to think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing clarifying thought through writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional and imaginative development through language</strong></td>
<td>Oral developing emotional and imaginative life through oral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading responding to text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing developing emotional and imaginative life through writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When compared, it is observed that Language Curriculum in Turkey offers optional and required themes; whereas, in Ireland strands are organized according to the grades along with the skills to be acquired by the students. Within this respect, the content of the Language Curriculum in Ireland serve as equal to gains in Turkish classes. In other words, skills to be acquired are placed under gains in Language Curriculum in Turkey, while in Ireland they are situated under the content section.

Besides the meaning of content, there are also differences about the construction of the content in both Language Curriculums. Although construction of the content in Language Curriculum in Turkey are “listening, speaking, reading, writing, visual reading and visual writing”; construction of the content in Language Curriculum of Ireland is consisted on strands and strand units. Starands are Receptiveness to language, Competence and confidence in using language, Developing cognitive abilities through language, Emotional and imaginative development through language; strand units are oral, reading, writing.

Although different names are used, in both curriculums contents, basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are equally given importance to be improved.

### 3.3. Learning and teaching process

In the third section of the Language Curriculum in Turkey, explanations on the learning-teaching process, role of the teacher, stages of this process, distribution of gains in the learning-teaching process and some sample activities are provided (MEB 2005:157-249). It is stated that the curriculum is based on the constructivist view that enables learners to contextualize the information by interpreting and to develop skill of generating new information. As required by this view, the emphasis was more on the learning process than the teacher; thus, roles of learning and the teacher are clearly stated in the curriculum.

The constructivist view facilitates cognitive structuring of the information where information received through listening and reading are processed by sequencing, classification, correlation, questioning, analysis and synthesis. Therefore, learning Turkish is seen as a whole process performed by the individual effort of the student. The stages of learning-teaching process in Language Curriculum in Turkey are:
• Activating the prior information
• Comprehension of new information
• Structuring the information
• Practicing the information
• Evaluating the information

Throughout these processes, teachers are expected to consider their students’ individual differences and adopt the curriculum accordingly. Teachers while teaching Turkish are advised to devote more time to methods and techniques like problem solving, cooperative learning, interactive learning to active the prior information of the students (MEB 2005:160).

No specific section is named as learning-teaching process in the Language Curriculum in Ireland. Learning-teaching process is placed under the ‘Introduction’ and ‘Content’ section. In the ‘Introduction’ part, language learning process is introduced; strands in the content part and strand units are explained in detail. Language teaching is planned under four headings in the Language Curriculum of Ireland:
• Receptiveness to language
• Competence and confidence in using language
• Developing cognitive abilities through language
• Emotional and imaginative development

The program does not take language learning as just learning English but rather sees it as a tool to practice. In addition to the language skill and practice skill development, the learner builds up features like personality and potential skills. The learner is expected to form links between the knowledge acquired and to contextualize those in a meaningful way.

Common features of Language Curriculums in Turkey and Ireland are as following:
• Prior language learning knowledge of the learner plays a role in language learning.
• Language learning needs to be considered holistically.
• Learners improve their cognitive skills by using strategies as naming, classification, defining, and organizing.
• Learners should be encouraged to involve in discussion, questioning, problem solving activities during the learning-teaching process.
• Learning-teaching process should be organized considering the individual differences and different learning needs.
• The learner should develop self-confidence and use the language confidently.
• Student-teacher, student-student interaction should be active during the process.
• Learners need to be encouraged to make use of information technology and mass media communication tools, and to question the information received and to share as well.
• The learning-teaching process should be enriched by different resources and materials.
• Methods and techniques such as cooperative learning, problem solving, interactive learning, and inquiry-based learning need to be referred.
• The learner should be guided by the teacher and be led to actively engage in his/her learning process.
• Learners need to handwrite.

Different from the Language Curriculum of Turkey, “receptiveness to language, competence and confidence in using language” are the most important strands in Language Curriculum in Ireland. Because the aim of the strands “developing cognitive abilities through language, emotional and imaginative development” are general development of the children.

‘Listening and speaking’ skills are termed as ‘oral’ in the Language Curriculum in Ireland emphasizing its core role for language proficiency development during the learning-teaching process and as a prerequisite for cognitive and socio-communicative skill improvement. Language Curriculum in Ireland attaches importance to not only learners’ feelings and intuitions but also imagination. Learners are anticipated to reflect their feelings, intuitions and imagination; thereby to discover one and the others.

In terms of learning-teaching process planning, Language Curriculum in Turkey covers stages of learning-teaching process, activities for each stage, and sample tasks for each subject. On the other hand, Language Curriculum in Ireland states that planning will be based on broad strands under the strand units provided in a holistic view by the teachers; there are no explanations or sample activities to display how to achieve the broad strands.
3.4. Evaluation process

Some common features on evaluation process of the Language Curriculums in Turkey and Ireland are as following:

- Evaluation and assessment is an essential part of the learning-teaching process.
- Evaluation and assessment tasks help teachers to collect information on learner achievements, progress, and weak points and also on the effectiveness of teaching methods in practice.
- In each stage of learning-teaching process, there are process evaluation and a summative evaluation at the end of the process.
- Teachers evaluate learners using “Observation checklist”, learners self-assess themselves by “Self-assessment checklist”; in addition, project work and portfolios are used for evaluation.
- Tests are used for final product evaluation.

Besides the common characteristics, there are some different aspects of the evaluation and assessment practices in these two countries. Language Curriculum in Ireland aims to teach the language so that learners might practice it; therefore, in the evaluation process activities and tasks in broad strand units are given importance. The overall aim of the English curriculum is to enable children to learn language and to learn through language. Assessment will, therefore, focus on learning activities that are envisaged in each of the strands. Evaluation and assessment is not restricted only to English language course, its holistic structure considers language practices in other courses as well. Furthermore, Language Curriculum in Ireland includes use of ‘Pupil profile cards’ to get better information on the learner and his/her developments. It is strongly underlined that parents need to be contacted regularly and be informed about the progress of their children.

All of the evaluation and assessment practices in the Language Curriculum in Turkey are also seen in that of Ireland. Additionally, the curriculum in Ireland integrates the concept of “to learn the language and to learn through language”, “pupil profile cards”, interdisciplinary evaluation procedure and parental involvement. When compared to the program component evaluation and assessment in Turkey, Language Curriculum in Ireland can be called more comprehensive and detailed.

4. Conclusion

It might be recommended that the following statements need to be integrated into the compulsory education Language Curriculums with a focus on objectives, content, learning-teaching process and evaluation-assessment:

- Broad objectives, in line with the current needs, should aim improving language, cognitive skills and the cultural aspect.
- Basic language skills development need to be emphasized in Language Curriculums.
- Learning outcomes need to be directed to the learners.
- Development of the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) needs to be integrated to the program in detail.
- Disciplinary learning subjects within the Language Curriculums need to be considered as a whole and presented in correlation.
- Teachers should be supported with necessary training for learning-teaching process planning.
- Parents should be contacted and informed about the updated progress of their children.
- Other subjects should be paid attention for the development of language proficiency and its evaluation.
- The program needs to be structured in a way that enables following the process of learners’ language development.
- Evaluation and assessment procedures need to be considered as a part of learning-teaching process.

References


MEB İlköğretim Türkçe Dersi Öğretim Programı ve Kilavuzu (1-5. Sınıflar), İstanbul, Milli Eğitim Basmevi, 2000
“Primary School Curriculum” (Curaclam na Bunscoile), Dublin, Government Publications, 1999
“Primary School Curriculum-English” (Curaclam na Bunscoile), Dublin, Government Publications, 1999