

Electronic In-Service Teacher-Training for The New National EFL Curriculum in Turkey

I. Hakkı MIRICI
Akdeniz University
Antalya, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

A new national curriculum in all subject areas is about to be introduced in elementary schools in Turkey. The new curriculum is based on a "Constructivist" approach. This discussion paper focuses on the new curriculum for English as a foreign language, noting that teachers need information about the philosophy of the new curriculum and how its different elements support each other. The paper sets the curriculum reform in the context of international objectives in education such as the Dakar Conference, the Pisa project, Socrates programmes, the Common European Framework for Languages and the European Language Portfolio. The paper discusses the role of electronic learning in in-service training in both ongoing and one-shot teacher training programmes. The paper identifies four specific challenges and proposes solutions for a successful implementation of the new curriculum. The four challenges are how to make up the new curriculum comprehensible to teachers, how to help teachers develop their own materials, how to persuade teachers to participate in training process, and how to help teachers share their ideas.

Keywords: New EFL Curriculum of Turkey, Online Teacher Training, Common European Framework, European Language Portfolio.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of National Education in Turkey is about to roll out a new national curriculum in all subject areas. This innovation will pose a number of challenges to educators in Turkey concerning the approach, purpose and delivery of the curriculum.

The new curriculum is based on a "Constructivist" approach. In a "Constructivist" approach learning is a personal process and what gets learned is closely related to learner's level, interests, personal participation, existing knowledge and the dynamic nature of the interplay between learners and their peers and their teachers and others with whom they interact (Allen, 2004:235; Brown, 2000:286). This approach is based on learners building meaning for themselves: learners actually construct knowledge for themselves, rather than knowledge coming from the teacher' (Muijs and Reynolds 2005:62).

The delivery of a "Constructivist" curriculum should be learner-centred and involve self-assessment activities. Both Steinberg (1998:70) and Harmer (2001:336) point out that in the classroom teachers can help students in the way they learn with strategies for dealing with different kind of activities and problems and by offering them different learning-style alternatives to choose from. Similarly, Nunan (1988:36) states that in order to capture the complexities of the process for a learner-centred curriculum there must be a new element which they call the "negotiated curriculum". The "negotiated curriculum" refers to those curriculum activities which are agreed between teachers and students.

For teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), there will be an urgent need to develop an understanding of how the different elements in the new curriculum fit

together. They are intended to be mutually supporting. In keeping with a Constructivist philosophy there are important cross-curricula features (see ttkb.meb.gov.tr).

This learner-centred approach that focuses on what the learners can do and involves self-assessment is also supported by foreign language teaching initiatives in Europe, for example the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) and European Language Portfolio (ELP). The ELP consists of three elements, the Language Biography, the Language Passport and Dossier and reflects the self-assessment principles of the CEF. The CEF and ELP complement each other bringing together learning from formal examinations, classroom experiences and life experiences that take place outside school. The CEF provides a 'common basis' for language programmes, testing and materials (Council of Europe, 2002:xi). It aims to describe language teaching and learning 'in a comprehensive way' (Council of Europe, 2002:1) based on statements of what learners can do at different levels. The CEF has a strong focus on skills for learning languages and cultures.

The Language Biography in the ELP provides a personal record of users' language achievements, intercultural experiences and self-assessments. Hence it facilitates learner autonomy and a student-centred approach in the classroom. The Dossier also functions as a personal observation of the learning process. The Language Passport summarises information([http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=\\$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/welcome.html](http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/welcome.html); Council of Europe, 2002) in the other two parts of the ELP. Thus the ELP can be seen to support a "Constructivist" approach in EFL teaching.

The purpose of introducing the new curriculum is to raise standards of learning in Turkish schools by focusing on students' thinking abilities. The new curriculum in Turkey shares a common aim and focus with international initiatives such as the Pisa project and the CEF. The common aim is a desire to raise standards by focusing on students' ability to acquire and apply knowledge in education systems. In addition to the CEF and ELP other international initiatives in education in recent years have also sought to contribute to raising standards such as the Socrates Programmes, the Pisa survey and Dakar Conference.

Socrates Programmes encourage innovation and cooperation between institutions (schools, universities and so on) from European Union member and candidate countries. Turkish institutions were eligible to join Socrates programmes in 2000, and many students and staff have already benefited from the opportunities available (Mirici and Demirel, 2002:1).

The Pisa project is an OECD initiative that surveys skills and knowledge of school students in 57 countries. The survey pays attention not only to what students know, but how students can apply their knowledge. Survey results suggest that Turkey needs adequate investment in teacher training facilities to increase teaching quality (<http://www.pisa.oecd.org>; OECD DT, 2005). The Dakar Conference was an initiative set up to work for educational provision for all and to achieve common objectives by 2015 (http://digm.meb.gov.tr/BELGE/BM_dakar.htm).

Innovations represent a major challenge for educational systems and stakeholders in terms of comprehension, participation, engagement and delivery. Focusing on skills and the application of knowledge will require a considerable reorientation of the education system in Turkey. Teachers in particular need to find out about the new curriculum, take part in training activities, actively share their ideas about new principles and practice and then convert their ideas into classroom activities and supplementary materials.

Nunan (1988:136) suggests that teachers need to engage actively with the 'planned curriculum' in order to create an 'implemented' curriculum: "The planned curriculum

relates to what is set down in curriculum documents and plans; the implemented curriculum is what actually happens during the teaching learning process”.

The success of an innovation is likely to depend on teachers viewing the change as possible, better than past practices yet comprehensible and compatible with existing ideas. Stoller (1994) states curriculum innovations start with consideration of ‘viability’ (practicality or usefulness of the innovation), then work through ‘dissatisfaction’ (with past practices and hopes of improvement) to consideration of ‘balanced divergence’ (clarity and comprehensibility of new proposals, compatibility with past practices).

If Stoller’s view is correct, the introduction of the new curriculum will need firstly to convince teachers that the change is useful, secondly to create a desire for a better curriculum built on existing practices and thirdly to develop teachers’ understanding of the principles and practice of the new curriculum.

This process will require a great deal of in-service training. Use of the internet can make a great contribution to such training by complementing classroom learning with self-access or open learning centres as proposed by Harmer (2001:340). The Ministry of National Education has the capacity to establish a self-access web system for all students and teachers to support the introduction of the new curriculum, and such an approach is entirely in keeping with the principles of the new curriculum. Harmer (2001:344) also states that apart from formal in-service training there is a great deal we can do to ensure that we continue to develop and grow.

In-service teacher training programmes may employ either ongoing or ‘one-shot’ strategies (Daloğlu, 2004:679). Ongoing programmes are generally considered more fruitful and effective in achieving the desired objectives than one-shot teacher training programmes.

A “Constructivist” curriculum implies a “Constructivist” approach to in-service training. Training, like students’ learning, needs to be a personal process closely related to teachers’ interests, based on existing knowledge and using self-assessment. Brown (2001:429) states that one of the characteristics of a good language teacher is the persistent urge to upgrade oneself, and he says growing, dynamic language programmes are a product of an ongoing creative dialogue between and among teachers and those that are assigned to compile curricula. Not to involve teachers in the process is to run the risk of creating programmes that are generated in a vacuum, devoid of a dynamic interaction among student, teacher and administrators (2001:443). Regular and ongoing interaction among teachers, administrators and Ministry experts about students’ problems, teaching tips, curricular issues and administrative affairs may supply a sense of solidarity and purpose as well as a morale boost. An online in-service teacher training program would be ideally suited to the needs of “Constructivist” in-service training.

So far I have identified four challenges for teacher education in the new curriculum: comprehension, participation, engagement and delivery. In the rest of this paper I discuss these challenges and propose some tentative solutions based on training experiences in Turkey and worldwide.

Comprehension

Making the objectives of the curriculum comprehensible to teachers

Teachers often complain about not being informed properly about new curricula. Confusion in the introduction of a new curriculum may result in resistance from teachers. It is not easy to introduce and establish a new system, especially in a country the size of Turkey, with about 18 million students in Elementary and High Schools. Teachers appreciate the support of practical ideas and material in order to both get them to work in the new system and standardise their performance. A good way to guarantee this is supplying assessment grids such as the checklist for the essential characteristics of effective materials, such as the one presented by Daloğlu (2004:679) (see Appendix 1).

Such a grid may help them develop some practical ideas about how to prepare materials for “Constructivist” classroom activities.

In the information age, widespread use of computers and internet access can reduce the risks of innovation failure and teacher confusion can be avoided. Providing comprehensive information about the new curriculum on the internet can contribute to this process.

Participation

Persuading teachers to participate in the training process

Brown (2001:443) reports that at the American Language Institute, the curriculum supervisors are in daily communication with teachers. As teachers consult with them on lesson design, textbook adaptation and pedagogical innovations, new curriculum is born every day. This kind of collaboration results in solicited teacher contributions to course syllabuses which are then adapted and incorporated into established, revised curricula. Thus the curricula for courses are in a slow but constant state of creative change.

In the Turkish context, teachers may be encouraged to participate in a system based on collaborative studies via a professional promotion examination which is based on the knowledge of the implementations in the new EFL curriculum. Another option would be paying teachers for each hour spent contributing to internet study for the new curriculum, using electronic tracking of their participation in E-learning.

Engagement and Delivery

Helping teachers develop their own materials and share their ideas

Brown (2001:426) points out that one of the most invigorating things about teaching is that you never stop learning. The complexity of the dynamic interplay between teachers, learners and subject matter continually gives birth to an endless number of questions to answer problems to solve and issues to ponder.

In the Turkish context, teachers need to develop their understanding of the new curriculum by sharing their ideas. Responsibility for the training process should be in the hands not only of trained ‘formators’ but also the teachers themselves. Teacher participation can be facilitated by group meetings in each school and by mailing lists of online discussion groups between schools. Any concerns that arise will need to be addressed to enlist teachers’ support for the innovation.

Teachers need practical support in this respect. Practical support can take the form of self-assessment checklists for continuous learning and developing new learning and teaching strategies. Self-assessment checklists for students have already been provided in the ELP by the Council of Europe Modern Languages Division. Teacher self-observation materials such as in Brown (2001:435) can be adapted to the Turkish situation (see Appendix 2) and included for teachers who are about to deliver the new EFL curriculum in Turkey. Such a self-observation form can be supplied for the teachers and the assessment of the teachers may be standardised.

The proposed model for online in-service teacher training is shown in Figure 1. In the suggested system a Ministry of National Education- Curriculum Information Centre could provide an online service, through which classroom teachers, Ministry of National Education-curriculum information, Ministry of National Education experts and school-based experts or ‘formators’ may interact with each other.

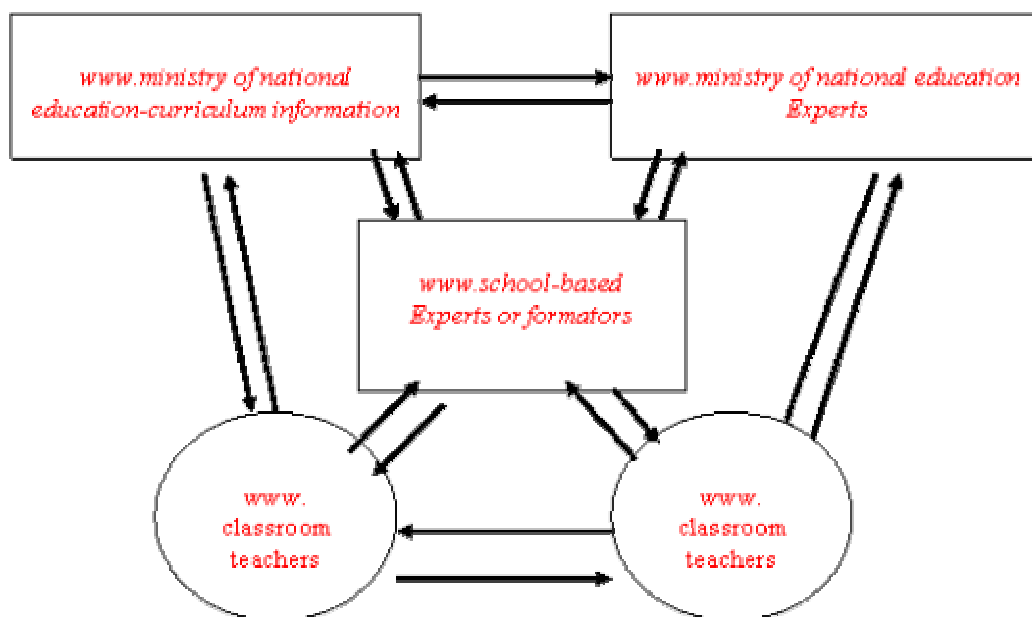


Figure: 1 - A Proposed Model for E-In-Service Teacher Training

CONCLUSION

This paper has briefly discussed issues concerning teacher training for the introduction of the new school curriculum in Turkey for English as a Foreign Language. This training will need to deliver information about curriculum principles and content, encourage participation, and result in engagement and successful delivery by teachers.

In-service teacher training as explained and presented in Figure 1 above will help save time and use resources effectively. The training can both supply teachers with information direct from the Ministry and provide immediate responses. Thus the Ministry will have the chance of evaluating the new system during implementation step by step and take necessary measures on time.

There might be some risks of not convincing all teachers to participate in the training activities but they can be avoided through practical solutions such as a promotion scheme or an online monitoring system, in which each teacher might be scored in accordance with their entrance in the system each time.

This will be an invaluable opportunity for both the Ministry and the teachers to find practical solutions to the problems stemmed from unfamiliarity of some pedagogical innovations or use of new teaching materials.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- **The Ministry of National Education could form an expert team for the new curriculum.**
- **The Ministry of National Education could set up an internet web between schools.**
- **Schools could supply an internet room for teachers.**
- **School administrators could include at least two hours for curriculum work online at school in teachers' weekly programmes.**
- **School administrators could organise weekly think-tank meetings on the implementation of the new curriculum.**

- Teachers could be encouraged to possess a personal computer with internet connection.
- Teachers could be encouraged to share their problems and their practical solutions to these problems with each other and the experts through internet.
- Teachers could be supplied with standard assessment forms for personal teaching observation and material assessment and they could be encouraged to develop these forms in accordance with their practice in the system.
- The suggested model could also be disseminated to all fields such as social sciences and natural sciences.

BIODATA and ADDRESSES of AUTHOR



Ismail Hakki MIRICI, Ph. D., Assistant Professor and the Head of the Foreign Languages Teacher Training Department of Akdeniz University, Antalya, Turkey. He has served in the steering committees of various national and international projects such as the Designing new EFL Curricula of Secondary Education for the Ministry of Turkish National Education, and Preparation of the European Language Portfolio Turkish Model. He is also the founder of WCCI (World Council for Curriculum and Instruction) Turkish Chapter.

I. Hakki MIRICI

Address : Akdeniz University Faculty of Education Campus, Antalya-Turkey
Telephone : +90 242 226 19 50/6625
Fax : +90 242 226 19 53
E-mail : ismailm@tr.net

REFERENCES

Allen. L. Q. (2004). "Implementing Culture Portfolio Project within a Constructivist Paradigm". *Foreign Language Annals*. 37/2, London: Routledge

Brown, H.D. 2000. Principles of Language Learning and Teaching. New York: Longman

Brown, H.D. 2001. Teaching by Principles An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. San Francisco: San Francisco State University

Council of Europe. (2002). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge:CUP

Daloglu, A. (2004). "A Professional Development Program for Primary School English Language Teachers in Turkey: designing a materials bank". *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24 (2004), 677-690

Harmer, J. 2001. The Practice of English Language Teaching. Essex: Longman

[http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=\\$t/208-1-0-/main_pages/welcome.html](http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=$t/208-1-0-/main_pages/welcome.html)

http://digm.meb.gov.tr/BELGE/BM_dakar.htm

<http://www.pisa.oecd.orgv>

<http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr>

Mirici, I.Hakkı, Ozcan Demirel. 2002. "Yabancı Dil Eğitiminde Öğrenen Özerkliği[Freedom of Lerner in Foreign Language Education]". *Milli Eğitim Dergisi*. Ankara: MEB Yayınlar Dairesi Başkanlığı

Muijs, D., David Reynolds. 2005. *Effective teaching*. London: SAGE Publications

Nunan, D. 1988. *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*. Cambridge: CUP

OECD DT. (2005). *OECD Türkiye Temel Eğitim Politikaları İncelemesi Hakkında Not[Note for Investigating Main Turkish Education Policies]*. 20 Ekim 2005.

Steinberg, A. 1998. *Real Learning, Real Work*. New York: Routledge

Stoller, F. 1994. "The Diffusion of Innovations in Intensive ESL Programmes". *Applied Linguistics*, 15/3, 300-327

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Checklist for the Essential Characteristics of an Effective Material

	QUESTIONS	YES	I HAVE NO IDEA	NO
1	Does the material address a specific learner goal/need?			
2	Is the material learner-centred?			
3	Does the material address the objectives of the curriculum?			
4	Are the instructions for the learners clear and satisfactory?			
5	Is the language demanded by the tasks appropriate for the proficiency level of the learners?			
6	Does the material progress from simple to complex?			
7	Are the activities meaningful and communicative?			
8	Is the length of the material appropriate for the objective and for the specific age group?			
9	Are the activities based on integrated skills?			
10	Does the material facilitate interactive learning?			
11	Does the material appeal to a variety learning styles or multiple intelligences?			
12	Does the material provide variety in activities and tasks?			
13	Does the material include a component that assesses learners' achievement of the objectives?			
14	Is the material up-to-date?			
15	Is the material interesting and visually attractive?			
16	Is the material practical to use?			
17	Can the material be used in mixed ability groups?			

Appendix 2-Teacher Self-Observation Form

TEACHER SELF-ASSESSMENT STATEMENTS		
<p>Think about your teaching and rate yourself as in the following: 3=Excellent 2=Good 1=Needs Improvement 0=Not applicable Write your ratings in the blanks and when you have finished, give overall consideration to each area.</p>		
I. EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT		
A. Relationship to students		
1	I can establish good eye contact with my class and keep up my monitoring during the class hour.	
2	I can pay attention to all my students equally at all times.	
3	I can set up homogenous groups in different size and composition, varying with the objective of the group activity.	
4	I can treat my students in the way I expect them to behave.	
5	I can show I know that my students will use their foreign language for communicative purposes.	
B. The Classroom		
1	I can arrange the seating in my class to suit the class activities.	
2	I can consider the physical comfort of the room, such as sound pollution, fresh air, heat and light.	
3	I can have the materials and equipment set up before the class begins.	
4	I can arrange the seating position of the students keeping the characteristics of the students in mind.	
C. Presentation		
1	I can make my handwriting on the chalkboard and charts legible from all locations in the classroom.	
2	I can speak loudly enough to be heard in all parts of the classroom.	
3	I can prepare varied exercises in class, alternating rapid and slow-paced activities to keep up the maximum interest in the class.	
4	I can give a variety of explanations, models, or descriptions for all students.	
5	I can help my students develop their own working principles and generalisations.	
6	I can help my students use new skills or concepts long enough so that future application can be possible.	
7	I can leave my students some "thinking time" so that they can recognise their thoughts and plan what they are going to say or do.	
8	I can prepare "one-centred" activities that give all students an opportunity at some point to feel important and accepted.	
9	I can promote group work and project work.	
10	I can encourage my students to show their actual performance in the classroom.	
11	I can encourage my students to correct themselves when they make mistakes.	
12	I can invite my students to correct each other's mistakes.	
13	I can correct my students' errors when they cannot self-correct.	
14	I can clearly and briefly explain the aims of each lesson to my students at the start of the lesson.	

D. Culture and Adjustment		
1	I can plan my lessons in accordance with the cultural differences between my students.	
2	I can keep the cultural background(s) of my students in mind when planning daily activities to avoid misunderstandings.	
3	I can keep the cultural differences between my students and the foreign cultures in mind when planning daily activities to avoid misunderstandings.	
4	I can promote an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect among my students.	
II. THE INDIVIDUALS		
A. Physical Health		
1	I can determine which students have visual or aural impairments and seat them as close to my usual teaching positions as possible.	
2	I can recognise that a student's attention span varies from day to day, depending on mental and physical health and outside distractions.	
3	I can begin my class with a simple activity to awaken my students' interests, and get them to work together.	
4	I can challenge my students to do their best.	
5	I can let my students know if I am having a bad day and feel it might affect my normal teaching style it so there is no misunderstanding about my feelings for them.	
B. Aptitude and Perception		
1	I can determine which students are visual receptive, which are motor-receptive, and which are audio-receptive.	
2	I can prepare various type of exercises; visual, aural, oral, and kinaesthetic. I can provide models, examples, and experiences to maximise learning each of these areas.	
C. Reinforcement		
1	I can tell students when they have done well, but don't let praise become mechanical.	
2	I can finish my class period in a way that will review the new concepts presented during the class period. My students can immediately evaluate their understanding of those concepts.	
3	I can produce well-planned tests.	
4	I can make my system of grading clear to my students so that there are no misunderstandings of expectations.	
5	I can clearly and briefly summarise learning points to my students at the end of the lesson.	
D. Development		
1	I can keep up to date new techniques in the EFL profession by attending conferences and workshops and by reading professional articles and books.	
2	I can realise that there is no one right way to present a lesson.	
3	I can try new ideas where and when I feel appropriate.	
4	I can observe other EFL teachers so that I can get other ideas and compare them to my own teaching style.	
5	I can have several ideas for teaching one concept.	
III. THE ACTIVITY		
A. Interaction		
1	I can minimise my dominance in the classroom in conducting activities.	
2	I can create interaction among students which is appropriate in	

	real life situations.	
3	I can create activities to maximise student involvement.	
4	I can create activities which promote spontaneity or experimentation on the part of the learner.	
5	I can create activities that generally transfer attention away from the "self" and towards a "task".	
6	I can create the activities which ensure a high success rate, leaving enough room for error to make the activity challenging.	
7	I can choose an appropriate amount of correction for the activity.	
B. Language		
1	I can set up a classroom atmosphere in which the language is focused.	
2	I can present the content of a skill in an easily transferable way for use outside the class.	
3	I can design activities which are geared to the proficiency level of my class or slightly beyond.	
4	I can prepare activities which are not too sophisticated for my students.	
5	I can make the content of the activity relevant and meaningful to my students' world.	
6	I can identify my students' pronunciation errors and help them correct their errors.	
7	I can set up activities in class for my students to practice language points from the course book.	