

WHO IS THE IDEAL TEACHER ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL ELT CURRICULUM (2-8th GRADES)

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Abstract

Each curriculum specifies what is to be taught and in what order. In addition to this aspect of curriculum which serves as a road-map to instruction, the fact that it also outlines the qualities expected from a teacher who will eventually use, in better words, realize it in the classroom. In short, each curriculum portrays the ideal teacher. This paper looks into our national curriculum to understand the qualities of the ideal teacher by reviewing the curriculum as a document. It tries to portray the ideal teacher who must successfully realize the curriculum in hand. Findings of this study will help academics and curriculum developers understand the relationship between the curriculum and the teacher by focusing on the teacher as postulated in official documents. Such findings will also shed light on the need for professional development for teachers who will realize the curriculum in their schools.

Keywords: ideal language teacher, curriculum, language teacher qualities, professional development

1. Introduction

As articulated by Arıkan (2017) “Prior to the 2014-2015 school year, English language courses used to start at the fourth grade in Turkish primary schools. Starting in the 2014-2015 school year, second graders in Turkish primary schools started to take English language courses with the implementation of the new national curriculum for primary schools’ grades 2 to 8. What made this curriculum different from previous ones was its insistence on curricular gains that were designed in consideration of communicative language teaching and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)” (p. 34). This new national English language curriculum was revised in accordance with the general objectives of Turkish National Education as defined in the Basic Law of the National Education No. 1739, along with the Main Principles of Turkish National Education. The present revision includes two major dimensions with three sub-dimensions for each, as follows:

1. Revision of the theoretical framework; a. Reviewing the curriculum with regards to values education b. Including the basic skills as themes c. Expanding certain subsections, such as testing and evaluation, and suggestions
2. Revision of each grade by; a. Revision of the target language skills and their linguistic realizations b. Evaluation and the update of the contexts, tasks and activities c. Analysis and general update of the curriculum in terms of functions and forms covered (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018, p. 3).

In designing the new English language curriculum, the principles and descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) were closely followed. The CEFR particularly stresses the need for students to put their learning into real-life practice in order to support fluency, proficiency and language

retention (CoE, 2001); accordingly, the new curricular model emphasizes language use in an authentic communicative environment.

As no single language teaching methodology was seen as flexible enough to meet the needs of learners at various stages and to address a wide range of learning styles, an eclectic mix of instructional techniques has been adopted, drawing on an action oriented approach in order to allow learners to experience English as a means of communication, rather than focusing on the language as a topic of study (p. 3). Key competences specified by the CEFR are:

Traditional Skills:

- o Communication in mother tongue
- o Communication in foreign languages

Digital Skills:

- o Literacy
- o Basic skills in math and science

Horizontal Skills:

- o Learning to learn
- o Social and civic responsibility
- o Initiative and entrepreneurship
- o Cultural awareness and creativity (p. 5)

These skills, apart from the traditional ones specified above, are rather new in our context because of what it includes such as the basic skills of math and science and having social and civic responsibility. In addition to these, raising cultural awareness and creativity is also new in our foreign language curriculum. Turkish national curriculum does not only specify the skills that should be mastered by the learners, but it mentions the values that should be transferred to students. The values specified in the document are friendship, justice, honesty, self-control, patience, respect, love, responsibility, patriotism, and altruism (p. 6).

Each curriculum as a document, be it at the national or the local level, specifies what is to be taught and in what order. Considering this, we can easily assume that each curriculum outlines the qualities expected from a teacher who will eventually use, in better words, realize it in the classroom. In short, each curriculum portrays the ideal teacher. In that sense, we can accept that the skills and values specified in our national curriculum can give us hints about the ideal teacher and the learner. In this study, then, I look into our national curriculum in a way to understand the qualities of the ideal teacher. By reviewing the curriculum as a document, I try to portray the ideal teacher who must successfully realize the curriculum in hand.

2. Method

A qualitative review of the EL teaching curricula by means of a document analysis procedure was followed in this study. By following a close-reading procedure of the Ministry of National Education's curriculum for 2nd through 8th grades, a content analytical procedure was used. Emerging points that showed the qualities of the ideal teacher were categorized and coded, and a colleague compared the notes to the findings reached by the researcher to ensure that the emerging qualities could be read comprehensively.

3. Findings

Emotionality is an important aspect of the curriculum. According to the document, “Teachers must be able to transform learning into an enjoyable process” and “Teachers must be able to create love for learning a foreign language in learners” (p. 3). These findings show that according to the curriculum, teachers’ knowledge and skills towards developing positive emotional relationships in the classroom is demanded.

Similarly, values are an important asset of the curriculum. Because the curriculum underlines the importance of values education, teachers must have sound knowledge of values and values education. Furthermore, knowing the student is emphasized as teachers must make use of a variety of instructional techniques incorporating different learning styles and cognitive characteristics of the students that is in line with students’ developmental characteristics (p. 7). The curriculum insistence on values education suggests that teachers must have developed a strong sense of moral, ethical, and value-related codes before entering the classroom.

Coursebook dependence is a problem as specified in the curriculum. According to the curriculum, teachers must make use of a variety of instructional techniques incorporating different learning styles and cognitive characteristics of the students that is in line with students’ developmental characteristics (p. 7). These findings also suggest that the curriculum considers all aspects related with foreign language teaching as a closely related entity of variety in teaching techniques.

Assessment of the four skills is also underlined in the curriculum. As specified in the curriculum, teachers must be able assess all four skills in a competent manner. While “All measurement must include the knowledge of and competence in the four skills,” “Reflection and feedback must be used by teachers” (p. 7). Furthermore, alternative assessment methods and techniques must be known and used by teachers successfully. This need is especially targeting 2nd and 3rd grades’ lessons and starting with the 5th grade, a variety of alternative assessment methods and techniques must be used by teachers (pp. 6-7). Among some others, because “Portfolio is proposed as an example of performance-based and authentic assessment” in our curriculum, teachers must be informed about these assessment types including self assessment through which “language learners gain responsibility for monitoring their own language learning” (Kırkgöz, 2012, p. 29).

The important place of knowledge of cultures has been approved by the curriculum makers as well. Because students must have a working knowledge of their own culture, the target cultures and other cultures, teachers must have competence in teaching and raising awareness on all these three types of cultures (pp. 6, 8, and 9).

Finally, it is specified in the curriculum that “Teachers must use drama and gestures and change their voices as appropriate, especially while voicing a different character” (p. 13). Hence, the curriculum recognizes the developmental qualities of young learners in a way that teachers’ dramatic capabilities are recognized as of utmost importance.

4. Implications

This study provides a glimpse into our national curriculum to understand what is expected from English language teachers teaching 2nd to 8th grades. It is believed that results of this and similar studies will contribute both to our understanding of our curriculum as well as of the ideal teacher and student that is targeted by the curriculum designers. Results of this study further show that a series of actions should be taken to increase the quality of teaching. In order to do that, following actions should be taken seriously.

Learners' psychometric qualities such as what constitutes as elements of their cognitive and emotional development must skillfully be understood and carefully taken into account during the preparation and implementation of the curriculum by teachers. This was also acknowledged by Genç (2014) who states that "It is a fact that a teacher who knows his or her students while understanding their interests and needs is most likely to be successful" (p. 134). Furthermore, knowing that "there is a close relationship between emotions and learning" (Peker, 2014, p. 68), both students and teachers must be sensitized towards their emotions that are constantly being regulated in the classroom environment. Yule (2006) argues that learners with increased motivation are more likely to attain more successful results. Hence, because teachers must work to increase students' motivation, they must be informed about educational psychology in a way to increase their students' motivation.

Drama and use of the body is fundamentally important for teachers in realizing the curriculum. Knowing that the most significant difference between young and adult learners is the "way" they learn, that is, the former learning in social interaction, talk, noise and whole body movement whereas the latter learns in silence, necessity for educating teachers as accomplished drama and physical activity agents becomes obvious. Hence, the statement put forward by Bayyurt (2014) is especially true: "Unless one receives formation towards teaching young learners, one cannot teach languages to children at that age" (p. 125).

As suggested by Gürsoy (2012), "Topics and themes provide meaningful contexts for learning a foreign language by giving children a concrete setting for learning" (p. 75). Because there are various units, each being structured under a certain theme or topic, teachers must have general knowledge to make the flow of course content meaningful. Hence, courses focusing on values, digital literacy, humor, games and activities, and global/environmental issues must be added to the teacher education curricula mainly because the topics suggested by the curriculum necessitates teachers' working knowledge of such topics.

The reading of the document also showed that alternative assessment methods and techniques must successfully used by teachers, hence, such knowledge and skills must be taught unto prospective teachers in the BA programs.

While the question if current teacher selection procedures help selecting the most qualified teachers must be picked up by researchers as well as curriculum designers carefully and urgently, future research must focus on to what extent teacher education curricula and certification procedures prepare prospective teachers towards fulfilling the roles demanded by the curriculum.

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