

## TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ELECTIVE ENGLISH COURSE

Assoc.Prof.Dr. İsmail ÇAKIR  
Erciyes University, Faculty of Education  
Department of English Language Teaching  
Kayseri, TURKEY

Aslıhan ÇELİK  
Teacher of English  
Ministry of National Education  
Kayseri, TURKEY

### ABSTRACT

There are some changes which are being done by the Ministry of Education (MoNE) in Turkey in terms of English language learning and teaching. One of the recent changes in foreign language teaching system is the elective English course offered for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade learners at elementary schools. As it is an elective course for learners, teachers often have difficulties in treating the problems occurring during the implementation. In this respect, the aim of this study is to find out the teachers' attitudes towards elective English course conducted in some secondary schools for fifth grade secondary school learners. Seven teachers participated in the study, and they were required to response to the questionnaire created by the authors. The results indicated that the elective course of English needs to be redesigned to clarify its syllabus, assessment and participation of learners. Furthermore, the participants suggest that there should be more seminars and workshops for teachers to form a more positive attitude towards this course.

**Key Words:** Attitude, elective English course, young learners, syllabus design.

### INTRODUCTION

When designing a foreign language course, whether main or elective, there are many things to consider; such as learners (age, proficiency level, needs, their learning environment etc.), teachers (experience, beliefs, their use of methods etc.), curriculum and syllabus (their types), materials (course book, other prepared materials etc.) and evaluation (how to evaluate the course etc.). It is worth to emphasize that a course is not a process that include all of these and exclude some other factors (parents, institutional factors, administrative procedures, learning and teaching culture etc.). Besides, if it is an elective course, especially it is the teachers who may find it a little bit discouraging or difficult to find available contents to be covered, and materials, all of which may affect the selection of methods and attitudes towards it. For this reason, this study is conducted because of the current changes in English syllabuses for the teachers' of secondary school students in Turkey.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Going back to the midst of twentieth century, there were some changes in education, namely language education, in terms of philosophy of learning and teaching and of approaches. This shifting required new and modern methods which include the focus of the spoken language and the certain changes in syllabus design (Richards, 2001). It includes a structural syllabus together with vocabulary teaching, meaningful presentation of the context and the sequence of the classroom activities as PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production). However, communicative needs arose in 1970s and, similar to the previous syllabus types, created a shift to the conversation and daily life, which directed applied linguistics to vocabulary and grammar in terms of methodology. Especially for communicative purposes, this paved the way for creating and using functional-notional syllabuses (Richards, 2001). Additionally, there are five more syllabus types; such as, grammatical, functional-notional, situational, skill-based, topic-based and task-based (McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

In another aspect for syllabuses, they are subject to change according to institutional or national needs and expectations (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). As an alternative, some courses may include more specific targets or skills in their syllabuses, that is, "a course may be designed to 'meet the needs of learners who need to improve their ability to communicate when socializing, telephoning, making business presentations and taking part in meetings' (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p. 4). Needless to say, if it is an elective course and if there is not an exact selected course book or certain materials, then there may be some specialization and different aspects about the content of the course, which directs us to add teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the course in general. As a result, this study was conducted to consider what types of attitudes teachers have towards this new elective course.

Although course books are considered useful, pedagogically-available, practical and reliable sources, there are indispensable drawbacks as well, namely, containing inauthentic language use and unsuitable content (Tsiplakides, 2011), which can be evaluated as a cons of the course books for an elective course. According to Harwood (2010) materials, even if not well-built theoretically, are another problem before and during a course time. It is because materials can be adopted unnecessarily by some inexperienced teachers (Nation & Macalister, 2010) or they may be inappropriate (levels, age, old-fashioned style in terms of methods and information etc.). Similarly, Bruton (1997) stated that some students and teachers may not want to use course books or they may not inspire them as expected (as cited in Wyatt, 2011). However, they all do not mean that following a course book is not a good way to go through. Instead, it stresses the importance of combining what is available and productive both for teachers and students.

Combining the syllabuses and course books in language education, the last part of the threefold is the learners. It is a must for the learning and teaching environments to analyze learner effects. Therefore, when we get closer to these audiences who are the target population to carry out the teaching (or facilitating) process, it can be stated that these fifth grade students are in a transition period, in other words, they can be both considered as young learners and adolescents. It can be explained as such: Harmer (2007) defines young learners as "those up to the ages of nine ten" (p. 82), who understand the subjects especially by using their five senses instead of colorless and dull explanations, who have a tendency to show their enthusiasm towards the subject and who need approval and feedback from their teachers. The three mentioned features are the common with these eleven-year-old fifth grade students. In spite of these, there are some common points with adolescents, as well. They can be responsible for their own learning, need peer approval and feeling comfortable in front of the class (Harmer, 2007). From these explanations, these fifth grade students need the combination of the mentioned teaching features.

#### **Educational Background of State Secondary Schools in Turkey**

In state schools of Turkey, language learning is not separated clearly according to the specific needs of the learners. Rather, generalized needs have been the core of the foreign language learning, which makes foreign language learning, say English, as 'general English'. It begins from the fourth grade primary school and lasts until the twelfth grade in high schools. This system changed at the beginning of the 2012-2013 academic year and English will be planned to be a compulsory course for the second and third grade students who will have a two-hour English course in a week for the 2013-2014 academic year, as well. Beginning from this year (2012-2013 academic year), the fifth grade learners who are included in the new system can select different types of courses; one of them is the elective English course. Normally they are attending to a four-hour English class every week but as for the elective course, it is held two hours in a week in certain schools which have students selected this course.

Looking through the objectives of fifth grade compulsory English course, there are some specific subjects; such as describing geographical features and certain locations, asking for and giving directions, asking for and talking about abilities, asking for and talking about likes and dislikes (MoNE, 2012). In a similar vein, examining the content of the yearly plan, it will not be wrong to note that the new elective course plan for English includes nearly the same content and materials in terms of its design; for instance, the subjects like geographical features, countries, cities or school rules in the first semester are the same as the compulsory English course.

For the second semester, the topics farm life, leisure time activities, health are the same for the second semester of the compulsory English course. Another feature for the selective plan is that there are some consolidation parts, which is a good aspect but not enough to depict a selective English course. Therefore, teachers should have some other materials and activities related to the specific topics and the available time for this course. Here what can be a practical but a prominent way while designing a course is that teachers and learners need to work together to make decisions at many parts of the process (Nation & Macalister, 2010). In this respect, the type of syllabus to be developed, which is defined as negotiated syllabus, need to be different from the other well-known ones as the learners and teachers negotiate about the topics to be involved in the course syllabus (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine teachers' attitudes towards this new elective English course and to measure their readiness level and expectations about the course. For this reason, this study is expected to shed light on the future considerations about the course and asks the following research question: *What are the teachers' opinions and attitudes about the elective course?*

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are many limitations of this study. First, there were not many teachers attending to this study, which prevents to gather more information about their attitudes. Second, most of the participants did not know exactly what an elective course should be, especially done in a two-hour period with fifth graders. This resulted in some changes in the calculation of the frequencies. Third, as for the calculation, only the frequencies were estimated instead of grouping the participants according to their attitudes as there were insufficient numbers of participants. In brief, this study can be conducted in larger groups and in the group who still have elective English courses with fifth graders. Choosing the population from these teachers will provide more clear and exact results for the future studies.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

After the authors sent the documents to 12 teachers, only seven of them were responded. Therefore, seven teachers were selected for the survey ( $N=7$ ). It was observed that some of the teachers were not interested in taking part in such a survey. Another reason why most of them was reluctant is that they do not have any elective course and do not even know how many hours the course is and how the way it may be conducted. The last point which should be noted is that this course does not have a set syllabus and a specific course book provided by the MoNE.

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire about the attitudes was handed out to the teachers. It has seven items which has some differences; such as, the first three questions are about the general profile of the teachers (the year of their teaching experience, class sizes and the number of the classes they have), the fourth question has six sub-titles to make the attitudes towards this elective course clearer. The fifth question depicts the ways of conducting the lessons. The reason why the item was included is that, as mentioned, there is not an existing course book for their course, which probably causes to a kind of chaos for the teachers, because course books are generally considered useful and helpful sources by the teachers (Ur, 1991; Cunningsworth, 1995; Haycroft, 1998; Richards, 2001). The sixth one includes the types of involvement the students make for the classes. Finally, seventh item is an open ended question which seeks if there are any obstacles that teachers face. The reason why an open-ended question requiring a written answer is that likert type items sometimes may not reveal the other sides of the medals in the questionnaires (Ballou, 2008). Therefore, it was expected that teachers might give more information about their attitudes towards this type of course.

## RESULTS

The questionnaire was handed out to the teachers both via e-mails and as written materials. SPSS was used to measure the means and standard deviations of the items. In order to present the current situation of teaching elective English course in question, it would be better to get the experiences of teachers. For that reason, three questions of the survey are designed for the teachers in charge. Two of the participants have less than five years teaching experience and five of them stated that their experience in the field is more than five years. The second question intended to find out the number of students in the class taking elective English course. They all stated that they had more than 20 students and each respondent had one or two fifth grade classes.

The fourth question of the survey seeks if English course is offered as elective to the fifth grade learners in the schools the participants work. If the responses are positive, they are also required to fill in the 5- point likert type scale including the options of *Strongly Disagree*, *Disagree*, *Not sure*, *Agree* and *Totally Agree*. The results are presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Views about the classroom implication of the elective English course (Question 4).

Statements	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.Dev.
I think two-hour elective English course is enough for my students to improve their English.	7	,00	3,00	,85	1,21
This elective English course should be more than two hours.	7	,00	5,00	2,0	2,51
I think this elective course is beneficial to my students.	7	,00	4,00	1,42	1,81
There should be different contents in the elective course syllabus instead of making revisions of the compulsory course syllabus.	7	,00	5,00	1,85	2,34
I think there should be formative assessment in the elective course.	7	,00	5,00	1,57	2,14
I have observed that fifth graders' motivation level to the current compulsory English course is high.	7	,00	4,00	1,28	1,70

As shown in the Appendix 1, there are some significant differences among the items. To begin with, two highest SDs can be observed. First, question four (b) has the greatest SD among all, because three of the seven participants chose fourth and fifth likert items (4 and 5), which increased the deviation. This can be considered that elective course should be more than two hours according to the participants answering the likert scale (the whole parts of the fourth question). This belief was supported by the question four (a), which deals with the same view, its availability to improve their English in terms of time (most of the teachers chose low marked items, such as 1, 2 or 3). Despite this, due to the lacking of enough samples in the whole population, there should be a leaving space for taking account of the views of the teachers who participated in the study but have not been currently conducting such a course. It is because their blurred views about this course created a constraint against the survey results to present the larger bodies of teachers' views and attitudes towards this course. The second highest SD belongs to the question four (d), which may be because of the choosing the fourth and fifth likert items (4 and 5) a lot among the teachers having elective courses.

On the other hand, most teachers do not believe the effectiveness of this two hour course to enable their students to improve their English in terms of the expected standards (for the question four (b),  $M= 2$ ,  $SD= 2,5$ ). Of note, the ones who participated in the survey but did not answer the set of fourth questions could not be included for this calculation.

For the other questions, the seventh question includes an open-ended question for teachers who are still elective course teachers. They are asked whether they were facing any obstacles for this course. Only three of them replied and stated that there is not a planned assessment for this course. Besides, what makes this course troublesome is that there are large classes with loose attendance in big schools. One of the teachers answered it as such (she used phrases summarizing this point): "no assessment, no obligation of attendance, crowded classes". These three teachers were on the same point of view with each other. Based on these

answers, it can be concluded that there should be added more to define what an English elective course is (goals should be set clearly) and how it should be conducted (methods, materials), whether there are any criteria to select which students should take this course and whether there should be more hours to add.

## DISCUSSION

It can be said that most of the teachers had medium or large classes in their schools, which means that this elective course may result in more difficult classroom management and less time available for each student. This can be evaluated in terms of 'motivation and positive attitudes' sides from this perspective: the mutuality and interrelation of the teacher and student attitudes. In other words, as Mantle-Bromley (1995) pointed out, there will not be a successful classroom unless teachers and students work together to build a warm and professional classrooms. Even if she conducted a study on students' attitudes towards foreign languages, French and Spanish, she made one of her conclusion about her study results for time effect on the language learning and teaching: "if we are to move closer to having more proficient speakers, we must, of course, have students in language classes for more than just a short time" (p. 383).

It is obvious from the samples that teachers are not sure how to conduct this course not only there are some current problems (large classes, attendance and assessment) about the course but also there is still uncertainty about the contents and format of it. For this reason, the framework of the elective course has not been drawn yet in their minds. This was depicted by Dupuis (1974) as follows:

"When we look at electives, we must ask our-selves if we have in fact deceived ourselves and our students with some of our early optimism. Have we made honest choices available to students or teachers?... To what extent, then, are the "choices" really a restatement of old courses or cut-down versions of earlier courses?... Another kind of deception is the suggestion that teachers will have choices as well as students: "If teachers have choices, then students won't." (p. 30-31).

## CONCLUSION

What the scores of the small sample told that there should be more seminars and in-service training about the scope and the implementation of this elective course. It seems that even if there are some teachers who do not have any elective English courses in their schools, they even do not have any idea about what it should be and how it should be conducted (the fifth item in the questionnaire has some intentions to reveal how the course should begin and keep going). In brief, the current practices for this elective English course are not enough both for increasing more positive teacher attitude and for arranging the lessons.

## BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF THE AUTHORS



İsmail ÇAKIR is an associate professor in the Department of Foreign Language Education at Erciyes University, Turkey. Dr. Çakır holds a master's of education degree in ELT and a doctoral degree in English Language Teaching from Hacettepe University, Turkey. Some of Dr. Çakır's professional interests include teaching language skills, teaching methods and approaches to English language, teaching of culture, teaching vocabulary, and materials development and evaluation in foreign language teaching.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İsmail ÇAKIR  
Erciyes University  
Faculty of Education Kayseri- TURKEY  
E. Mail: [ismailcakir@erciyes.edu.tr](mailto:ismailcakir@erciyes.edu.tr)



Aslihan ÇELİK is a teacher in Kayseri, Turkey. She holds a bachelor's degree in the Department of English Language and Literature and is still a master student in the same field Erciyes University. She is taking courses on English Language Teaching.

Aslihan ÇELİK  
Teacher of English  
Ministry of National Education  
Kayseri-TURKEY  
E. Mail: [celik.aslihan@hotmail.com](mailto:celik.aslihan@hotmail.com)

#### REFERENCES

- Ballou, J. (2008). Open-ended question. In P. Lavrakas (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of survey research methods*. (pp. 548-550). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947.n350>.
- Breen, M.P. & Littlejohn A. (2000). *Classroom Decision Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995) *Choosing your Coursebook*. Oxford: Macmillan Heineman ELT.
- Dupuis, M. M. (1974). Undeceiving and decision making: Some thoughts on electives and mini-courses in English. *English Journal*, 63(4), pp. 29–33. Retrieved May 23, 2013 from <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/813644?uid=3739192&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21102344826607>
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson, Longman.
- Harwood, N. (2010). *English language teaching materials*. United States: Cambridge University Press.
- Haycraft, J. (1998). *An Introduction to English Language Teaching*. London: Longman
- Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995). Positive attitudes and realistic beliefs: Links to proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(3), pp. 372–386. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.1995.tb01114.
- McDonough, J. & Shaw, C. (2003). *Materials and methods in ELT*. Australia: Blackwell Publishing.
- MEB, 2012. Fourth and fifth grade English course yearly plan. <http://www.ingilizcecin.com/doc/2873/2012-2013-8-sinif-ingilizce-yillik-plani-indir.html>
- Nation, I.S.P. & Macalister, J. (2010). *Language curriculum design*. New York: Routledge.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. New York, United States: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsiplakides, I. (2011). Selecting an English Coursebook: Theory and Practice. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, (1)7, pp. 758–764. doi: 10.4304/tpls.1.7.758-764
- Ur, P. (1991). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wyatt, M. (2011). Becoming a Do-it-yourself Designer of English Language Teaching Materials. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1). Retrieved April 30, 2013 from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101334>

### Appendix 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the survey.

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
S1	7	1,00	3,00	1,85	,89
S2	7	2,00	3,00	2,42	,53
S3	7	1,00	2,00	1,28	,48
S4a	7	,00	3,00	,85	1,21
S4b	7	,00	5,00	2,00	2,51
S4c	7	,00	4,00	1,42	1,81
S4d	7	,00	5,00	1,85	2,34
S4e	7	,00	5,00	1,57	2,14
S4f	7	,00	4,00	1,28	1,70
S5	7	5,00	5,00	5,00	,00
S6a	7	,00	1,00	,28	,48
S6b	7	,00	1,00	,14	,37
S6c	7	,00	3,00	1,42	1,51
S6d	7	,00	4,00	2,14	1,77

### Appendix 2.

#### Research Questionnaire

- How many years have you been teaching for secondary school students?  
 a) A year                                      b) Two-five years                                      c) Five years or more
- How large is your class-size?  
 a) Less than 10 students                                      b) 10-20                                      c) More than 20 students
- How many 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes do you have?  
 a) 1-2                                      b) 3-4                                      c) 5 and more
- Do you have elective English courses in your school now? If yes, then tick the suitable options below.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Totally Agree
a I think two-hour elective English course is enough for my students to improve their English.					
b This elective English course should be more than two hours.					
c I think this elective course is beneficial to my students.					
d There should be different contents in the elective course syllabus instead of making revisions of the compulsory course syllabus.					
e I think there should be formative assessment in the elective course.					
f I have observed that fifth graders' motivation level to the current compulsory English course is high.					



5. How do you conduct your elective lessons?
  - By a course book you choose
  - By a course book students choose
  - By a course book parents suggested
  - By a course book administration suggested
  - By daily/weekly worksheets
  - By negotiating with students about the syllabus at the beginning of the term.
  - Other:
  
6. I think fifth grade learners can be got involved into the course well when... (Circle the selected items. You can choose more than one):
  - a. They make peer-evaluation.
  - b. They get involved in the activities required some analytical abilities.
  - c. They usually get positive feedback and approval for themselves.
  - d. They do the activities suit to their identity and interests
  - e. Other....
  
7. Are there any obstacles that you have for your elective English courses? If yes, what are they?