

85. A comparative analysis of the policies to start teaching English language in primary schools around the world and the position of English today

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APA: Gün, S. (2023). A comparative analysis of the policies to start teaching English language in primary schools around the world and the position of English today. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (Ö13), 1364-1373. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1379364.

Abstract

The English language was shaped in the Old English, Middle English and Modern English periods and transformed into the English today. It has gone beyond being a language of a particular nation and has become a common communication tool that responds to the communication needs of individuals around the world with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, in relevant literature English language is described with different labels such as EFL, ESL, WE, ELF, EIL and EICL and countries that use English in different ways are classified as inner, outer and expanding circle countries. The aim of this study is to make a comparative analysis of the grades in which English language is first started to be taught in primary level public schools in outer and expanding circle countries around the world. Within the scope of this study, it was stated that in most of the outer and expanding circle countries around the world, English education started from the first or second grade in public schools, and in Turkey, English education was given in the following classes starting from the second grade of primary school. It has been stated that English education is given importance because it is thought that the English education given in Turkey will help Turkish citizens use the common language effectively to communicate with the citizens of other countries, and thus enable the country to reach an advanced level in political, scientific, military, economic and social fields.

Keywords: English language teaching, English in primary school, English language today

Dünya genelinde ilkokullarda İngilizce öğretimine başlama politikalarının karşılaştırmalı analizi ve İngilizcenin günümüzdeki konumu

Öz

İngilizce dili Eski İngilizce, Orta İngilizce ve Modern İngilizce dönemlerinde şekillenerek bugün kullandığımız İngilizceye dönüşmüştür. Belirli bir milletin dili olmanın ötesine geçerek, dünya çapında farklı anadili ve kültürel birikime sahip bireylerin iletişim ihtiyaçlarına cevap veren ortak bir iletişim aracı haline gelmiştir. Bu nedenle ilgili literatürde İngilizce dili EFL, ESL, WE, ELF, EIL ve EICL gibi farklı etiketlerle tanımlanmakta ve İngilizceyi farklı şekillerde kullanan ülkeler iç, dış ve genişleyen çember ülkeleri olarak sınıflandırılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, İngilizce dilini tanımlamak için kullanılan etiketleri açıklamayı, Türkiye'de dil planlaması ve politikasına ilişkin bazı çalışmaları gözden geçirmeyi ve dünya çapında dış ve genişleyen çember ülkelerdeki devlet okullarının farklı sınıflarında İngilizceyi öğretimine başlama uygulamalarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma kapsamında, dünyadaki dış ve genişleyen çember ülkelerinin çoğunda İngilizce eğitiminin devlet okullarında birinci veya ikinci sınıftan itibaren başladığı, Türkiye'de ise ilkokul ikinci sınıftan itibaren

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ilerleyen sınıflarda İngilizce eğitimi verildiđi belirtilmiřtir. Türkiye'de verilen İngilizce eğitiminin, Türk vatandaşlarının diđer ülke vatandaşları ile iletişim kurmada ortak dili etkin bir şekilde kullanmalarına yardımcı olacađı ve böylece ülkenin siyasi, bilimsel, askeri, ekonomik ve sosyal alanlarda ileri bir seviyeye ulaşmasını sađlayacađı düşünöldüđü için İngilizce eğitime önem verildiđi ifade edilmiřtir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İngilizce öğretilmi, ilkokulda İngilizce, günümüzde İngilizce

1. Introduction

The English language emerges as a linguistic entity of extraordinary complexity, characterized by its complicated historical trajectory and numerous linguistic characteristics. Old English has its roots in the Germanic language family and dates to the early medieval era. In its historical development, the English language was greatly impacted by Latin and Norse languages as a result of historical invasions and clerical influences (Baugh & Cable, 2019). Old Norman and Old French influence from the Norman Conquest in the 11th century led to the development of Middle English, which is distinguished by a linguistic fusion of Germanic and Romance components (Crystal, 2004). During the Renaissance, classical learning was revived, and English vocabulary was characterized by enriching it through Latin and Greek quotations, and this linguistic unity continued to evolve (Blake, 2010). In the period when the British Empire was strong, colonial and exploration activities also accelerated. For this reason, English spread all over the world, giving rise to a wide variety of regional dialects (Migge & Léglise, 2007). The English language has become a global language in the modern era, due to globalization, technological advances, and the rise of the United States as a major cultural and economic power (Crystal, 2003). As a result of these developments, the English language today serves as a common language for worldwide discourse in the fields of education, diplomacy, science and technology and provides intercultural communication.

Apart from the changes made on English by social, cultural and global influences, the English language has a tendency to adopt foreign words and phrases easily, and new words become adaptable while English become a dynamic language (Crystal, 1997). The English language is constantly shaped by sociological, technological and cultural influences, and this is an important indicator of linguistic adaptation and change (Aitchison, 2012). English appears as a complex linguistic mosaic, with roots in Old English's Germanic heritage and later incorporating varied influences from Norse, Latin, French, and other languages (Leben, 2023). A modern universal language that captures the intricacies of historical, cultural, and technical shifts results from this dynamic evolution. Today, the English language has been given the task of being a common means of communication that meets the global need for individuals with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds to communicate globally (Grigoryeva & Zakirova, 2022).

This study aims to make a comparative analysis of the grades in which English language is first started to be taught in primary level public schools in outer and expanding circle countries around the world. As the English language has changed throughout its historical development, a wide variety of regional dialects have emerged and English has been used as a mother tongue, second language and foreign language by communities with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Within the scope of this study, it is emphasized that the English language is used in different ways in different countries and that English is described with different names. In the context of these analyses, the introduction of English language teaching at the primary level has been examined in relation to relevant literature. This

examination makes it possible to see the position of Turkey in comparison with other countries in outer and expanding circle countries regarding the grade of starting to teach English language at primary level state schools.

2. Terms describing the current state of the English language

Due to the changing role and different uses of the English language, many different terms and labels have developed in modern English language studies to distinguish different aspects of the language's widespread usage. "Global English," as proposed by Crystal (2003), denotes the widespread and significant influence of English as a lingua franca on a global scale. It goes beyond its role as a first language to act as a channel for global communication. In non-English speaking areas where English is a foreign or non-dominant language, learning and using English is referred to as "EFL" (English as a Foreign Language) (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In contrast, "ESL" (English as a Second Language) is used to refer to the acquisition of English by non-native speakers in nations where English is the primary language (Brown, 2007).

The term "World English" (WE) focuses on the various forms and varieties of English spoken around the world, highlighting variations of English used in many global contexts and illustrating the rich texture of English (Kachru, 1992). Jenkins (2015) advocates the use of "ELF" (English as a Lingua Franca), which emphasizes the use of English as a medium of communication amongst speakers of different native tongues and highlights its practical importance in intercultural communication. The idea of "EIL" (English as an International Language) emphasizes the vital role of English in international discourse, fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, as stated by Modiano (2011). The phrase "English as an Intercultural Language" (EiCL) emphasizes the intercultural aspect of English use and combines the purpose of learning English with intercultural communication. According to EiCL, English is frequently used in settings where cultures are interacting, and speakers need to be conscious of the cultural aspects of their language use. EiCL refers to the evolving role of English as a medium for intercultural communication and understanding in a globalized world (Kramsch, 2019). These designations provide a sophisticated lens through which to understand English's varied applications and relevance in a constantly changing linguistic context, collectively illuminating its dynamic and multidimensional nature in today's modern, globalized landscape.

After briefly examining how the English language has reached the present day by interacting with other languages starting from the Old English period and how it has been described with different designations in line with its purpose and need, the model developed by Kachru (1985) based on the use of English as a native, second or foreign language by different countries in the world regarding the WE perspective is an alternative framework to summarize the state of English as illustrated in Figure 1.

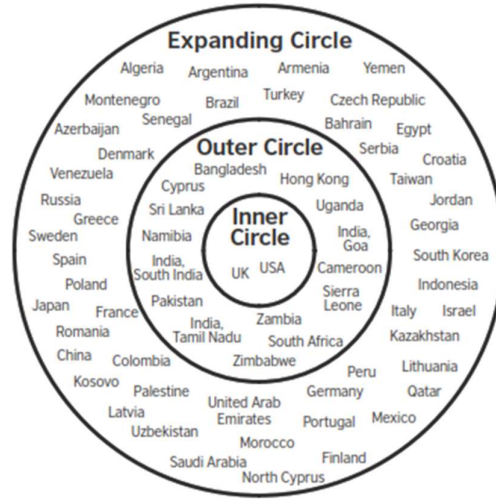


Figure 1. Kachru's three concentric circles model (Rixon, 2013)

Kachru's concentric circles model provides a valuable framework for understanding the global spread and use of the English language. In this model, the world is divided into three concentric circles, each representing distinct aspects of English usage. The "Inner Circle" encompasses countries where English is the native language, including the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. In these countries, English holds a central place in all aspects of daily life. The "Outer Circle" includes countries like India, Nigeria, and Singapore, where English is not the native language but plays significant roles in education, governance, and intergroup communication. Finally, the "Expanding Circle" comprises regions where English is learned as a foreign language, such as Turkey, China, Japan and South Korea. Here, English is primarily used for international communication, business, and academic purposes (Kachru, 1992). Kachru's model underscores the multifaceted nature of English as both a native language and a global lingua franca, reflecting its diverse functions and sociolinguistic dynamics across the world.

Turkey is listed in the Expanding circle in Kachru's three concentric circles model. With the change and development in many major fields such as economy, education and European Union (EU) membership, Turkey gives increasing importance to English as a lingua franca in many sectors in relation to education, business, tourism, technology, international relations and trade (Kırkgöz, 2007; Erkan, 2012). Turkey continues its effort to turn its candidate membership process to EU to full member and be in close relationship with available 27 member countries. EU attached special importance to multilingualism and multiculturalism in parallel with globalization (European Union, 2017). Moreover, Turkey as an expanding circle country in Kachru's (1985) model is also in close relationship with inner and outer circle countries. Due to this reason, the process of teaching and learning English is brought to the fore. Also, it became more convenient to learn about new cultures and languages with the help of technological applications and special courses presented in the international context. There is a basis for multilingualism and multiculturalism. At the same time having a good proficiency in English will increase the possibility of a better future chance of success and favourable job opportunities for Turkish people (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005; Kırkgöz, 1999; Kızıltepe, 2000) and this tendency is in the same direction with EU countries.

With the increasing prestige and significance of English as ELF, EIL and EICL in Turkey, there occur some implications and arrangements in foreign language planning and policy of Turkey. At state schools in Turkey, English is offered as the first foreign language and German and French as the other main foreign languages. English is offered at primary, secondary and tertiary education levels as a compulsory part of the educational syllabus. At primary schools, English is offered as a 2-hour course for 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades; at middle schools as a 3-hour course for 5th, and 6th grades, as a 4-hour course for 7th and 8th grades per week. Also, a 2-hour English course is offered optional per week. At general Anatolian high schools, English is offered as a 4-hour course for 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th graders (MEB, 2017).

3. Studies in Turkey on policies to start teaching English language

One study by Uysal et al. (2007) focused on “the diffusion-of-English and language ecology paradigms” and discussed the spread of English and its effects on education. The researchers made a comparison between the context in Turkey, Latvia and France to comprehend the situation in a better way at primary school levels. They concluded that there was some alteration in the language policy manner of each country, but there was an increase in the English study proportion at the primary school level. The language situation in Turkey was described and the historical development of language was mentioned in a part allocated for the Turkish context. The language planning development in Turkey starting from the foundation of the country was described and some factors affecting the process were mentioned such as the movement of modernization, World War II, international relations with certain countries, globalization trends (Akarsu, 2000; Doğançay-Aktuna, 1995 as cited in Uysal et al., 2007). It was stated that Turkey experienced various language policy differences throughout history; some of which helped the spread of English as an international language and some of which were about trying to oppress English. With the recent developments and Turkey’s relations with European countries, educational reforms have increased, and the general manner started to be more related to the ecology paradigm.

Another study by Kahraman (2012) underlined the importance of language planning and examined the Turkish foreign language policy. It is criticized that the language policy has been changed so often although the policy of countries should be consistent and reliable. Educational policies shouldn’t depend on individuals or administrators, instead, they should be developmental. Kahraman also stressed the importance of piloting language policies.

The renewal of the English language teaching program in Turkey was examined by Kırkgöz (2007). This examination was in micro- and macro-levels. Firstly, the approach toward English and its main role in Turkey was described regarding Turkey’s position as an expanding circle country in the classification of Kachru (1997) for World Englishes. Macro-level planning for English language policy in Turkey was examined and a research study about the implementation of language policies in micro-level was described with conclusion and implementations.

Another study by Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe (2005) examined English in Turkey and its roles in relation to educational policy and planning. The interplay between national English language policy and the English language and the ideas and attitudes toward English were discussed and the use and appropriateness of English by different socio-economical groups were handled with examples.

4. Policies to start teaching English language in outer and expanding circle countries

There are various practices for the optimum age and grade for teaching English at a school around the world in outer and expanding circle countries. These practices are directly related to the language planning and policy of each country. The survey conducted by the British Council about Policy and Practice in Primary English Language Teaching Worldwide makes the present structure more visible in these countries (Rixon, 2013).

According to the wide-range survey by Rixon (2013), English is presented as a compulsory course in preschool curriculum at state schools in some countries such as Armenia, Cameroon, China: Hong Kong, Georgia, India, Tamil Nadu, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Namibia, North Cyprus, Pakistan, Qatar, Sierra Leone, Sweden, and Uzbekistan. Therefore, these countries make it possible to expose to English in preschools at an early age for their citizens. On the other hand, there are some other examples of presentation of English courses at the preschool level, but they are via private preschool institutions in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Greece, India: Goa, Indonesia, Kosovo, Palestine, Peru, Romania, Senegal, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Zambia. It can be stated that English is regarded as a prestigious language and parents tend to recruit their children to private preschools which are offering English courses. Turkey is one of these countries offering English courses at the preschool level via private schools.

With the global function and prestige of the English language, it has been observed that in some countries English language teaching is introduced in public preschool curriculum, but in most countries English language teaching is introduced in primary education in public schools, and in this study, the introduction of English language teaching at the primary level is scrutinized.

4.1. Introducing the English language at the primary school level

There are different arrangements for introducing English at primary schools in outer and expanding circle countries which is similar to introducing English at the preschool level (Rixon, 2013). At primary school, some countries introduce English even at the 1st grade while some delay it to after 5th grade.

Grade	The Countries
Grade 1:	Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, China: Hong Kong, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, India: Goa, India: South India, India: Tamil Nadu, Italy, Jordan, Montenegro, Namibia, North Cyprus, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, United Arab Emirates, Zimbabwe,
Grade 2:	France, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Russia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Zambia
Grade 3:	Armenia, Czech Republic, Finland, Kosovo, Latvia, Romania, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Uganda
Grade 4:	Argentina, Denmark, Israel
Grade 5:	Brazil, Japan
After Grade 5:	Algeria, Colombia, Indonesia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Yemen
Regions differ:	Germany
Others:	Mexico, Peru, Sweden, Venezuela

Table 1: Year of officially starting English teaching at primary schools (adapted from Rixon, 2013)

As indicated in Table 1, 30 countries introduced English as a compulsory part of their primary school curriculum. It can be stated that having proficiency in English is important and English is offered widely through teaching-learning programs in these countries as English is offered as a compulsory course at the first grade as a national policy by these countries and their administrators. In second grade, English is offered by 6 countries. In third grade, English is offered by 11 countries. However, Turkey has updated its primary school language policy and started to offer English in second grade recently. In fourth grade, 3 countries and in fifth grade 2 countries offer compulsory English courses. On the other hand, 7 countries are on the side of offering compulsory English courses after fifth grade. Also, in Germany, there is a difference among the regions, so there isn't one national arrangement. Additionally, 5 countries are presented in other dimensions.

Based on Table 1, it is implied that there are different arrangements for the introduction of English at primary schools in outer circle and expanding circle countries. These different arrangements may depend on the physical infrastructure, economic situation, attitude toward foreign language and national governmental layout. However, it can be concluded that there is a main tendency toward introducing English in the early grades of primary school when the frequencies of countries are taken into consideration.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The English language, which is thought to have first emerged as a West Germanic language in England in the 5th century AD, is accepted to have evolved into the modern English language that is used today by interacting with other languages and cultures in a way that is considered linguistically natural (Gün, 2021). Today, however, the English language has become more than a basic means of communication for a community of people living in a limited geographical area. Due to different hegemonic reasons such as colonization, exploration and power issues, the English language has been able to appeal to more individuals on a global scale and has been accepted as a common means of communication for all individuals who use it, belonging to no one, enabling communication between individuals with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011; Pennycook, 1994). A good example of the international and intercultural communicative function that the English language has acquired today is the fact that the number of people who speak English as a native language has fallen far behind the number of non-native speakers of English language. Depending on the purpose for which English is used, different designations have been made and the most common ones mentioned in this article are as follows: "EFL" (English as a Foreign Language), "ESL" (English as a Second Language), "WE" (World Englishes), "ELF" (English as a Lingua Franca), "EIL" (English as an International Language) and "EiCL" (English as an Intercultural Language). Then, the three concentric circles model developed by Kachru (1985) was mentioned to classify the countries in which English language is used in various contexts with different purposes. In this context, the grades from which the English language is taught as a subject in public schools in different 'outer' and 'expanding' circle countries are explained in detail in relation to Turkey's position in this ranking.

Turkey as a country in expanding circle gives significant importance to teaching and learning English because of economic, developmental, technological, scientific and political matters (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005; Kırkgöz, 1999; Kızıltepe, 2000; Erkan, 2012). According to official statements, English language teaching in Turkey aims to help Turkish citizens use a common language effectively in order to enable them to communicate with citizens of other countries and thus to enable the country to

reach the advanced level it deserves in political, scientific, military, economic and social fields (MEB, 2006).

Turkey is intensifying its efforts to improve the English proficiency of its citizens by offering English courses at preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary level schools. Also, the English language lesson is taught in public schools from the second grade of primary school and it is taught in all grades of middle and high schools, indicating that English proficiency is an important language skill that must be acquired after the mother tongue. Probably, there will be sequential arrangements in relation to the introduction of English at state schools. It is apparent that the hours of English language courses offered at schools are increasing and it should be taken into consideration that quantity brings achievement only with quality, therefore the quality of English courses offered at schools in Turkey should be a matter of fact.

A comparison of the grades considered appropriate for starting English language teaching in outer and expanding circle countries shows that 30 countries or regions include English language teaching in the first grade of the primary school curriculum. After that, it was found that 7 countries include English language education starting from the second grade of primary schools. Unlike many countries, it is estimated that the preference for English lessons from the second grade onwards may be due to the prioritization of mother tongue instruction over second language instruction and the prioritization of students' physical and cognitive development. There are fewer countries with higher grades of starting English language teaching. Therefore, it can be concluded that English language teaching is given importance among the countries in the outer and expanding circle.

Consequently, in this study the transformation of the English language into an international and intercultural language is explained by referring to the changes it has experienced in its historical process, and a comparative analysis is conducted to examine the grades in which English language is first started to be taught in primary level public schools in outer and expanding circle countries around the world.

Since the teaching of a language as a mother tongue or as a non-native language is characterized by different processes, this study excludes the inner circle countries where English is taught as a mother tongue in public schools and the study is limited to the introduction of English in public schools in the outer circle and expanding circle countries. For further studies, the process of starting to learn English in public schools, which was analyzed quantitatively in this study, can be examined both qualitatively and quantitatively in a way to highlight strengths and weaknesses. English curriculum programs of different grades can be compared. The advantages and disadvantages of learning a language other than the mother tongue at an early age can be identified.

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