

A Comparison of the National Early Childhood Curricula in Turkey and England

Hidayet Tok¹ and Olcay Sinan²

¹*Zirve University, School of Education, 27169, Gaziantep, Turkey*
Telephone: +90-342-211-6666; Fax: +90-342-211-4351; E-mail: hidayet.tok@zirve.edu.tr,
hidayettok2000@yahoo.com

²*Baliker University, School of Education, Balikesir, Turkey*

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast preschool education curricula and practices in Turkey and England, examine the cultural aspects and philosophical underpinnings of early childhood education in both countries, and investigate and discuss early childhood curricula in England and Turkey today. Turkey and England have contrasting educational systems. The early childhood education in England has been child-centered, whereas the Turkish early childhood education system is subject-centered and teacher directed. Early childhood education in England emphasizes individual children's interests, free play, firsthand experience, and integrated learning. Turkish childhood education emphasizes egalitarian, direct instructor rather than facilitator.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the preschool period is one of the most influential phases in a child's life; it is the time when personality is shaped and basic knowledge, skills and habits are acquired. It is during this period that the child has the highest potential to learn, thus, preschool institutions are faced with an important task. Research shows that behaviors learned during this period have considerable influence in determining an individual's personality traits, attitudes, habits, beliefs and values into adulthood. In order for the child to benefit from preschool institutions as expected, education and counseling services should be carefully carried out. Therefore, executing education systematically and fulfilling the developmental needs of children, curricula should be meticulously designed (Krough and Slentz 2001; Aral et al. 2002; Eliason and Jenkins 2003).

Curriculum is comprised of objectives, target behaviors, instruction processes and evaluation activities in order to assist children to acquire new behaviors (Kandir 2001). Varis (1996) states that curriculum is the combination of both intramural and extramural activities, designed for children, youngsters and adults to achieve national and institutional goals. Demirel (2010) defines curriculum as a mechanism of learning experiences provided for the learner through activities in school and out-of-school.

Comparative approaches have regained their popularity in the last decade; geographic distance has become insignificant in almost all areas through globalization. In this global age, cross-national problems at the policy level constantly emerge and affect each other with similar triggers and outcomes (Geva-May 2002, cited by Gu 2006). Although countries' structure, culture, or politics are crucial contexts for national policies, governments, today, face the same social-economic, structural, and technological challenges and dilemmas. Comparative studies offer an intellectual arena for "transfer", "borrowing", "lesson drawing", or "pinching" in the international context when they are associated with descriptive accounts of national similarities or dissimilarities in public policies or organizational arrangements, with cross-national generalizations or explanations of differences in public policies and administrative patterns (DeLeon and Resnick-Terry 1998).

The European Union conducted comparative studies of education systems and current implementation of educational programs of member countries.

The Turkish government, since its application to be full member in European Union, has shown an increased interest in comparative studies in the field of education. Various research methods are employed to reflect diverse educational aspects.

McMullen et al. (2005) conducted research titled "Comparing beliefs about appropriate prac-

tice among early childhood education and care professionals from the U.S., China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey". Their goal was to examine what, if anything, caregivers and teachers of 3- to 5-year-old children from the U.S. China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey had in common in terms of self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices related to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's policy statement for developmentally appropriate practices. They found similarities emerged related to those beliefs and teaching practices associated with integration across curriculum, promoting social/emotional development, providing concrete/hands-on materials, and allowing play/choice in the curriculum.

Kwon (2003) compares preschool education in England and Korea. The research examines how early childhood education in two countries was affected by different historical philosophical and government policies. The comparative analysis studies classroom organization, curriculum content, teaching approach, teachers' role and lesson planning. Penn (1997) compares 12 nurseries in three countries (Italy, Spain and UK). The research evaluates models of learning in day nurseries at two different levels: macro and micro. David et al. (2001) compare preschool learning in four countries-Australia, Singapore, France and England. The study reveals differences in cultural understanding about young children's learning.

This study's focus is to compare the preschool curricula of Turkey and England, which have very distinctive culture and historical backgrounds. The Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE) plays a highly centralized dominant role in education policy and curriculum. Historically, there have been radical changes regarding the basic philosophy of the national early childhood education. Prior to 1994, subject- and teacher- centered education was utilized as the general approach in most education institutions in Turkey; after 1994, a child-centered approach was promoted. Curricula were reviewed between 2002 and 2006. The emphasis in the current national preschool education curriculum, implemented in 2006, is on child-centered, play-oriented activities and prioritizes parental involvement.

Early childhood education in England is generally regarded as child-centered. Previously, there was little government intervention in pre-

school curriculum, planning or implementation. However, Kwon (2003) states that the current situation is changing and underlines the fact that the English government is attempting to raise standards and measurable outcomes, highlighting early numeracy and literacy.

In England, the importance and value of involving parents and communities in providing good care and education for young children is increasingly recognized. The *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years* document is a good example of this practice. Current English practices for the involvement of families and communities in childcare and education have strengths, and provides a model for Turkish preschool education.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contextually analyze the similarities and differences in curriculum policy, and to delineate and clarify the relationship between policy, politics, culture and discourses beyond the texts.

Early Childhood Education in Turkey

The General Directorate for Pre-School Education, established in 1992 per law no. 3, National Education, plans, programs, executes, monitors and controls education and training services targeting teachers and students (ECCE 2006).

Turkish preschool education, provided to children 3-5 years old, is optional. Preschool education is provided in kindergartens, preparatory classrooms, application classrooms, day nurseries, nursery schools, day-care homes, and child care homes by various ministries and institutions (that is, municipalities, local governments, public, private, mixed, community-based, etc.) and by the Ministry of National Education. Children may attend preschool for a full day or a half-day.

Preschool education, under the authority of the Ministry of National Education, is provided in Ana Okullari (kindergartens) for children aged 36-72 months, in Ana Siniflari (nursery classes) for children aged 60-72 months or Uygulamali Anasinifi ('practical' nursery classes) for children aged 36-72 months. 'Practical' nursery classes are so named as they were originally established within vocational schools, and perform their practical training there (MONE 2006).

The most recent education policy reform, *the 4+4+4 education reform*, attempts to implement two main changes: 1) It increases the previous eight years of obligatory education to 12 years, and 2) primary education begins at the end of the child's 60th month, instead of the 72nd month. All public pre-primary institutions are free of tuition charges, regardless of the type of setting or the year concerned; parents are responsible for providing meals and cleaning supplies. The personnel in pre-schools are teachers, graduates of four-year higher education, majoring in child development or preschool education and contract status trainers. In addition, administrators, civil servants, drivers, doctors, cooks, attendants, guards, secretaries and technicians are also employed at pre-primary schools.

The 2006 ECCE curriculum was expanded. Teachers were expected to prepare daily and yearly lesson plans describing educational goals and objectives appropriate for the age group of the children. Another highlighted point in the Turkish curriculum is involvement and home-school collaboration. Parental meetings, individual meetings with parents and home-visits are some of the examples given in order to provide home-school collaboration (MONE 2006).

The pre-school education program has been prepared to support the mental, emotional, social and psycho-motor development of children aged 0-72 months. This program takes into account the developmental needs of three age groups: 0-36 months (day nurseries), 36-60 months (kindergartens), and 60-72 months (pre-school classes). The program is as flexible as possible to allow various modalities of implementation; it also includes activities that families can carry out at home. Programs offered in day-nurseries strive to contribute to the physical and moral development of children. Programs offered in kindergartens do not include subject teaching (core area). However, they do include Turkish language practice, preparation for reading and writing, environment and hygiene, drama, etc., so as to provide a sound base for further education (MONE 2010; ECECE 2009).

Education Models and Teaching Approaches in England

Many countries have established programs for children aged 3 to 6 years. The position is more varied with respect to younger children (0

to 3 years). England has specific national programs for very young children.

Some countries, like Nordic countries, plan their policies in terms of curricula and methods for the whole age group 0-6 years, called "unitary settings". Pre-primary classes (ISCED 0) are mainly or solely for 3-6 years. England adopted and is preparing regulations to integrate programs/ curricula for children in the 0-6 years age range (EACEA 2009).

Although some settings catering for over-3's also cater for children under a year of age, these are not included here as 'unitary settings' as providers receive direct funding only for over-3s. There are some exceptions to this, such as the free part-time places for 2-year-olds in disadvantaged areas being introduced in England and Wales and piloted in Northern Ireland, where public sector nurseries may accept 2-year-olds if they have places available. There are also some local arrangements, which include under-2s, such as the London childcare affordability program. England places an emphasis on the importance of protecting vulnerable children from neglect and abuse. Therefore, ECEC is seen as part of the range of services for children and families, which also include health services, parental outreach and family support. Health and safety standards for ECEC not set centrally.

In the literature, two modes in ECEC are identified. Child-centered, teacher-centered, subject-centered. The characteristics of the first model are centered on the notion of the development of the whole person and the promotion of learning through self-determined activity, spontaneous exploration and play. Interactions between peers and co-operative work are favored, and symbolic or pretend play is considered equally important as cultural learning. The role of adults is, on the one hand, to arrange the room, set out equipment for play and activities and organize the schedule and, on the other hand, to engage with the children in a manner which will encourage their cultural learning (such as literacy, numeracy and science). Educators are seen as the means to guide and support children in their social and intellectual growth (ECECE 2009).

In the second model, 'Programs with a teacher-directed approach', early learning is inspired by the theories of education based on the transmission of knowledge and skills by the teacher. Language and academic skills linked to the primary curriculum are favored. Teaching methods

are based on direct instruction, directed activities and reinforcement; a structured and planned curriculum underpins the whole process.

Initiatives targeted at children from at risk groups constitute one of the major axes which underpin current policy developments related to ECEC provision in the United Kingdom (England, Wales) free part-time places for 2-year-olds in disadvantaged areas have been introduced; pilot projects also exist in Northern Ireland where, additionally, public sector nurseries may accept 2-year-olds if they have places available. There are also some local arrangements which include under-2s such as the London childcare affordability program. Known (2002) emphasizes that the main principles of traditional early childhood education in England are child centered and she maintains that key underlying principles of English traditional early childhood education are individualism, free play, developmentalism, and the child-centered perspective of the adult educator.

Individualism

Both Dewey (1959) and Montessori (1972) underline individualism and child-centered education in all types of education. Dewey (1959) emphasizes that education should be based on individual children's needs and interests, and on educators' respect for the differences between individual children. He emphasized individuality, with the curriculum chosen by the child rather than imposed by the teacher. Montessori (1972, cited in Known 2002) believes that the child possesses an intrinsic motivation toward the self-construction of learning. Supporting the view that children are innately curious and display exploratory behavior quite independent of adult intervention,

Free Play

In the English preschool, play is an integral part of the curriculum, founded on the belief that children learn through self-initiated free play in an exploratory environment (Known 2002; Hurst 1997; Curtis 1998).

Developmentalism

Sequential developmentalism is one of the most influential beliefs in English early years

education. The term refers to the way in which the child passes through a naturally ordered sequence of development towards logical and formal thinking (Kwon 2002; Curtis 1998).

The Role of the Adult

The traditional view of the English nursery teacher's role is that he or she is not an expert or authority, but an adviser and facilitator (Known 2002; Curtis 1998; Darling 1994).

According to QCA (2000), practitioners must be able to observe and respond appropriately to children. For example, in a playgroup, practitioners make detailed observations of the children. These help them to recognize patterns in children's play, how they interact with adults and each other, what they are interested in and how learning can be extended. The notes are kept in a portfolio for each child. It is used as a basis for discussion between practitioners and with parents and children.

In England, parents can be an important source of constructive feedback and input to ECEC programs. Moreover, parents are involved in evaluating childcare as well as pre-primary education services. Parents can evaluate services through observations in conjunction with ECEC staff members and management.

In *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years*, the English government recognizes the importance of involving families and communities in the early education of children (Taguma et al. 2012: 46-47). Taguma et al. maintain that with the help of experts, the government developed the document to guide staff in enhancing family and community engagement and to guide parents and communities in stimulating early development. Hence, this is considered an important step in improving family and community engagement, and it is the starting point for actual changes.

In England, free early education places have been provided for all three- and four-year-olds since April 2004. From September 2010, it was increased from 12.5 to 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year. The government plans to extend it to the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds from 2013 and to around 40% by 2014 (Taguma et al. 2012: 49).

State of the Problem

The analysis of curricula will be based on the following questions:

1. Can you describe the classroom organization, class size, physical appearance, child directed activities in your class?
2. What teaching approaches does teacher perform? (considering child interests and differences, subject teaching, integrated teaching, whole group activity, emphasis on literacy and numeracy)
3. What teacher roles did you observe? (authoritative, facilitator)
4. What do teachers do for kids' development? (individualism, encourage, rewards, self-motivated)

METHODS

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research technique was used. From the qualitative research designs, phenomenology design was also used. For data collection, focus group interview was used. In the research, data about classroom organization, teachers role, lesson planning, the rate of development children, teaching approach, curriculum content is collected.

Participants

For sampling methods, a homogeneous sampling method is utilized. Accordingly, 4 student teachers, observers, having pedagogical courses in teacher training certificate program in the School of Education in Zirve University in Spring term of 2012-2013 academic year, are used as the study sample. These student teachers are registered in practicum courses in preschools-kindergartens in the province of Gaziantep were interviewed. Four student teachers showing good performance in courses volunteered and were selected for purposeful observation. Their ages were 26-29 years. Before they were observed, they were informed what to do and what they should observe by the supervisor and by the researchers. They were scheduled for a focus group to share their observations and perceptions.

Focus group participants were involved in teacher practicum and observation one day per week for 14 weeks. No one participant attended the same school. The schools were well-known for their education, and they were considered to be top state schools in the city. The mentor teacher

of each study participant was female and had 6-15 years teaching experiences.

Data Collection

Focus group interviews can be defined as "a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" Krueger (1994: 6). The purpose of the group is to elicit a discussion that allows the researcher to see the world from the participants' perspectives. Once the facilities were in place, a pilot practice and real interviews were conducted. The time allotted for the interviews was 110 minutes in two separate sessions. The focus group interviews were unstructured, and used open-ended questions.

During the study, a semi-structured form of question was used. The following principles were adhered to during the question development stage by the authors: providing clear questions, avoiding non-multi dimensionality and misguiding questions (Bogdan and Biklen 1992).

The researchers paid particular attention to the following during the group interview: avoiding guidance, non-deviation from the goal, providing equal time to each group participant to speak, and time allocation (Krueger and Casey 2000; Yildirim and Simsek 2005). The focus group was video recorded and, later, transcribed. Sixty eight pages of data were obtained. The reliability of the research was calculated using "Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 110" formula (Miles and Huberman 1994). For providing transferability (external validity), purposeful sampling method was applied.

Data Analysis

"Content analysis" approach from qualitative data analysis was utilized. The main purpose of content analysis is to reach the concept and relations for describing the collected data (Yildirim and Simsek 2005). The thematic and conceptual encoding, applied in the research, was also performed in accordance with the concepts taken from the data. The answers to the questions asked focus group participants were converted to text, and thematic and conceptual encoding was applied.

1) English preschool curriculum guidance emphasizes not only integrated learning but also literacy and numeracy, and specifies particular achievements to be expected of 4- or 5-year-olds (QCA 2000). On the other hand, the Turkish National Pre-school Curriculum does not encourage the teaching and learning of numeracy and literacy at preschool level; instead it stresses the whole child, problem solving, creativity, communication, speaking Turkish well, play-oriented activity (MONE 2006: 16).

2) In England, the national preschool framework is very goal-oriented, and specifies a large number of learning goals to be achieved by children. Sixty nine goals are outlined in Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999). On the other hand, the Turkish National Preschool Curriculum focuses

on characteristics of child development such as psychomotor development, social- emotional development, language and cognitive development, self-care skills. There are also a large number of learning targets in the curriculum. Learning targets are divided according to the ages of the child such as 36-48 months, 48-60 months, 60-72 months. The Turkish curriculum focuses on content and learning targets rather than teaching methods.

Classroom Organization

Turkish preschool classes are relatively large, compared with the preschool classes in England. In the most of the English preschool classes, there are fewer than 25 children. In Turkey a large

Table 2: Comparison of national preschool curriculum frameworks

<i>Curriculum</i>	<i>Turkey</i>	<i>England</i>
<i>Title</i>	Turkish National Preschool Curriculum	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
<i>The Philosophical Background of Childhood Education</i>	The main principles of early childhood education are child centered.	The main principles of traditional early childhood education are child centered.
<i>Emphasis</i>	- emphasis on child-centered education- content and teaching method-oriented rather than assessment	- emphasis on literacy and numeracy - goals (achieving learning targets) - and assessment oriented
<i>Learning Areas</i>	physical health, social relationships, expression, language and enquiry: the mental, emotional, social development; psycho-motor development; the physical and moral development	personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development and creative development
<i>Inspection</i>	Inspection by Department Education and Inspection	Strong inspection system by Ofsted
<i>Assessment</i>	Inspection report is confidential assessment of child, assessment of program and self assessment of teacher.	Inspection report is published Result is related to funding Observing child, reporting child development
<i>Education Models and Teaching Approaches</i>	- Guidelines and educational objectives are usually established by the ministry that is responsible for ECEC policies, they are laid down in legislation.- National guidelines or curriculum-Programs with a child-centered approach	-Guidelines and educational objectives are usually established by the ministry that is responsible for ECEC policies, they are laid down in legislation. National guidelines or curriculum-Programs with a child-centered approach-Health-related objectives-Programs including literacy and numeracy related learning
<i>Average Number of Hours Per Week and Average Amount of Weeks Per Year</i>	- 30 weekly hours for pre-school classrooms - 42 weekly hours for independent pre- schools Average number of weeks per year: 36 weeks, or at least 180 working days	-23 weekly hours for 7-11-year-olds and 21 hours for 5-7-year-olds. Average number of weeks per year: 38 weeks, or at least 190 working days

proportion of classes had 30-34 children. There are also considerable differences in adult/child ratios between the two countries. In England the adult/child ratio is 1: 10 (Kwon 2003). In Turkey, the adult/child ratio is 1: 20 (MONE 2010).

According to Kwon's research (2003), English pre-education teachers utilize child-directed activities for over 50% of each class session. According to the curriculum, teachers are expected to emphasize child-initiated activities, as opposed to adult-directed activities. In Turkey, preschool educators utilize adult-directed activities; activities in the curriculum are required and led by teacher. This behavior can be accounted for by the cultural differences of the two countries. Traditional Turkish education, emphasizes teacher authority, leadership, and the principles of collectivism, which is reflected in the classroom organization. In England, the emphasis is on individual children's choice and interests, which are reflected in practice (QCA 2000). Another reason explaining this difference may be the physical constraints of Turkish kindergartens: large class size, low adult-child ratio and the lack of classroom assistants. Thus, to meet the organizational demands of large classes, Turkish kindergartens seem to use adult-directed activities more frequently.

Teachers Role

There is a clear difference in the role of adults between the two countries (Table 2). Most of the English educators in this study agreed that the role of the adult was that of facilitator rather than direct instructor (Kwon 2003), Turkish preschool teachers are more dominant and authoritative. The Turkish educational tradition, which emphasizes teacher authority, is still prevalent in preschool classrooms.

Due to a centralized education system in Turkey, early childhood curriculum and the other curricula are written by a commission in the Ministry of Education. Teacher autonomy does not exist in terms of designing curriculum.

Development of Children

Both national frameworks (the Early Learning Goals document in England and the National Preschool Curriculum in Turkey) support the idea that there are differences in the rate of development of children of the same age and that

children should be allowed to progress at their own pace.

This is supported by Known's research; she states, "English preschool educators operate *ability grouping* in which the children are divided into several groups according to their perceived ability". MONE (2006) does not mention ability grouping within the classroom. It stresses carrying out the same activities and tasks in the classrooms. QCA (2000) recommends educators in English preschools to put individual differences into consideration. MONE (2010) and opinions of focus group participants, recommend an egalitarian approach, with less emphasis on individual differences and particular needs.

Teaching Approach

QCA (2000) emphasizes integrated teaching in preschool classrooms. In general, staff is expected to integrate subjects across the curriculum and exploit practical experiences and play, as vehicles of learning. Teachers are encouraged to introduce literacy and numeracy at the same time for children. However, the current Turkish National Preschool Curriculum does not emphasize integrated teaching, and a thematic approach. Current programs do not include subject teaching, but do include Turkish language practice, preparation for reading and writing, environment and hygiene, drama, etc., so as to provide a sound base for further education.

Curriculum Content

The curricula of both countries promote home corner, imaginative play, art, story-telling and construction toys. However, English preschool curriculum emphasizes increased exploratory activities such as water play, sand play, physical activity and construction toys, usually available during free activity time. Turkish preschool curriculum emphasizes whole development, educational activities such as free time activities, literature activities, play activities, music activities, field trips, literacy activities, science and math activities (MONE 2006).

DISCUSSION

A major issue that emerged from this study is the government policy and implementation aspects of early childhood education in England

and Turkey. This study reveals early childhood education is embedded in social and cultural contexts; there are substantial cultural differences between the two countries. In England, the liberal tradition emphasizes individual's rights and autonomy. In accordance with this tradition, preschool education emphasizes the individuality and autonomy of young children. In contrast, Turkey's preschool education, influenced by a centralized government system, reflects traditional educational values such as the authority of the teacher, the teacher's strong control, and the emphasis on whole-group activities. It can be inferred from the curriculum of both countries there are cultural differences in preschool education settings. It can be inferred that preschool settings in England operate by ability grouping, in which the children are divided into several groups according to their perceived ability instead of whole class activities. However, the Turkish preschool curriculum does not encourage grouping activities, instead, all the children in the class do the same task at the same time. There is also a clear difference in the role of the adults in the classroom. The traditional view of English early childhood educators is as facilitator and arranger of the environment; English educators are recommended to encourage children to solve their own problems and to be independent. However, in Turkish classrooms, the role of the teacher is viewed as an authority figure, a director of activities.

In the Turkish National Preschool Education Curriculum (MONE) Curriculum assessment is divided in three basic categories; assessment of child, the program and self-assessment of the teacher. According to the MONE Teacher Handbook, the teacher must be very familiar with each child in the class. The teacher should know the developmental characteristics of each child; teachers can use observational forms, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, standardized tests, portfolios and developmental reports in the assessment process. Examples of aforementioned assessment tools are provided in the handbook.

Program assessment is accomplished by subjectively analyzing the goals and objectives of activities executed in the classroom. Teachers are advised to plan the goals and objectives of classroom activities by considering each child's responses to various activities and to assess the yearly or monthly program by using their own reflective viewpoint.

Self-assessment is completed by subjectively comparing the child's assessment and program evaluation results. Indeed, by analyzing the progression of development of students and the effectiveness of their program, teachers assess their own progress in an informal way.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals how early childhood education, of two countries, is affected by cultural and philosophical backgrounds and educational systems. The findings illustrate a range of commonalities and differences in early childhood education in England and Turkey, in terms of classroom organization, teaching and curriculum content. This study reveals that recent English government policy, especially the introduction of curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, combined with the statutory inspection process, appears to have had a strong influence on classroom planning in preschool settings. On the other hand, the highly child-centered Turkish national preschool curriculum appears to have had no significant influence on planning in preschool classrooms due to physical constraints and cultural influence. After thorough examination of the curricula and preschool education systems of England and Turkey, the researchers realize the preschool education system and implementation in Turkey and England are diverse due to contrasting cultures and traditions

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