

Problems Faced By Elementary School Second Grade English Subject Matter Teachers

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to determine the problems experienced by subject matter teachers while instructing English lessons in the second grade of elementary school. What are the problems faced by English subject matter teachers when they instruct in 2nd grade lessons? In this research the descriptive modeling, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was employed. In accordance with this objective, we worked with 8 subject matter teachers from 5 different schools in Atakum and Ilkadim districts located in downtown Samsun, through easily accessible case sampling. The semi-structured “English Course Interview Form” was applied to the teachers. In the study, descriptive survey model was employed, since it was aimed to reveal the current status of qualitative research methods. According to the results obtained from the research, the content was configured and presented under 5 themes. They were categorized as: 1. the problems experienced in classroom management, 2. the problems in physical and cognitive readiness, 3. the problems experienced in the learning and teacher process, 4. the problems seen in counseling, 5. the problems experienced in assessment and

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evaluation. In conclusion, the teachers stated that they had problems with managing the classroom, especially with the second grade students, whom are younger than others. It is observed that the change for teaching English at a younger age has been appropriate. Our teachers stated that they required in-service training so as to adapt to this aforementioned change.

Keywords: English teachers, educational system, learning a foreign language at a young age

Introduction

Educational opportunities and institutions possess significance for the society. Educational opportunities indicate the quality of a society and play a major role in students' socialization and process of adapting to the society, in other words ; they shape the society. Educational systems have been constantly changing in the direction of the requirements formed in the era of Urooj & Ahmed (2012) due to the economic and political reasons of Cetkovic, Knezevic, Vujovic & Cerovic (2012).

“Considering the background of educational system in Turkey, matters such as how long elementary education, whose importance has increased with the proclamation of the republic, should last for and through which platforms it be conducted have always been discussed (Güven, 2012), and as a solution to this, attempts have been made so as to renovate the programs. Henderson, Beach & Finkelstein (2011) emphasizes the necessity to analyze the existing educational systems from various perspectives, in order to carry out reforms on them. According to Morpeth & Creed (2012), educational system of many countries do not display expected level of success, in terms of quality and quantity. Thus, countries continue to improve their educational system and carry out reforms and innovations.

Due to the innovation and reform movements taking place in our educational system, there has been a reform regarding the courses instructed at schools and from which grade they start. Turkey has applied one of those policies by adapting the 4+4+4 educational system in the academic year of 2012-2013. The previous educational system, which lasted for 5+3 years continuously for 8 years, has been exchanged for an educational system, which lasts for 4+4+4 years non-continuously, with the resolution taken in 18th Council of National Education (Demir, Doğan & Pınar, 2013). There exist both positive and negative situations caused by this system, which was configured as 4 years of elementary school + 4 years of secondary school + 4 years of highschool.

It is believed that 2nd grade students are one of the most positively or negatively affected classes, by this new system (4+4+4 system) taking place in our educational system. As a result of the fact that second grade students are of a younger age group and teachers come across with that age group for the first time ; students, teachers, class teachers, and families have difficulties.

Examining the previous studies in the literature, it is observed that the subjects, which are believed to give teachers difficulty, are classroom management, readiness, teaching methods, assessment and evaluation. These subjects possess significance in the field of education. “The quality of education and training activities depend on the effectiveness of classroom management” (Demirtaş & Kahveci, 2010). Teachers are expected to behave more sensitively for that matter. Readiness constitutes the foundation of learning (CEF, 2009). Therefore, “a students must have cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic behaviors, which are required for the new behavior, which he or she will obtain” (Başar, 2001). Furthermore, assessment and evaluation includes performance based tests, oral production, written production, open-ended questions, and integrated performance (Brown, 2004). The fact that teachers did not hold written tests in the younger age groups created problems in the phase of assessment.

As a result of instructing younger age groups, teachers are expected to consider their own education levels and conduct a comprehensive assessment by taking into account of their previous experiences they had in the application phase. Bearing all of these situations in mind, the problems they face with will be projected through the interviews and solutions will be offered to solve them.

Methodology

Research design

In this research the descriptive modeling, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was employed. The descriptive modeling aims at explaining the interaction among the situations, by considering the relationships previous events and circumstances have with the current events (Kaptan, 1998 ; Karasar, 2006). The data collected from the face-to-face interviews carried out through interview forms was analyzed via content analysis, within the scope of qualitative research techniques. “In phenomenological researches, it is suggested that the number of participants be limited between 6 and 12, so as to profoundly investigate the subject” (Patton, 2002 ; Punch, 2009 ; Silverman, 2009).

Research sample

In this research, 8 English teachers working at 5 different elementary schools located in Samsun, were interviewed through easy accessible convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is based on circumstances, time, money, place or respondents (Merriam, 2013 ; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). 4 of the participants were females, while 1 of them were a male. The participants' periods of service varies from 11 to 27 years. While choosing the participants, criteria such as instructing an on going second grade subject matter course, and having a period of service for at least three years in order to reliably evaluate the events of past, present, and future were taken into consideration. The names of the participants were not used in the name of research's ethic. For that reason, the participants were given code names starting from T1 to T8. Detailed information regarding the participants are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Information about the Participants of the Study

Code Name	Sex	Bachelor's Degree (Major)	Period of Service (year)	Place of Service
T ₁	Female	English Teaching	27	İlkadım
T ₂	Female	English Teaching	18	İlkadım
T ₃	Female	English Teaching	15	İlkadım
T ₄	Male	English Teaching	14	İlkadım
T ₅	Male	English Teaching	13	Atakum
T ₆	Female	English Teaching	11	Atakum
T ₇	Male	English Teaching	14	Atakum
T ₈	Male	English Teaching	18	Atakum

Research instrument and procedure

In the study “Semi-Structured Interview Form”, which is one of the qualitative research data collection methods and consists of open-ended questions, were used. “In semi-structured interview, researchers prepares interview questions prior to the interview, and may re-arrange his or her questions by providing the interviewee with partial flexibility during the interview (Patton 2002).

Before preparing the interview questions, the decisions taken in the 18th National Education Council, the Elementary School & Education Law numbered 6287, and the Law regarding the Amendments on Certain Laws were investigated in detail ; moreover, the sub-headings determined within the framework of legal

foundations and the studies in the literature were compared at full length. The draft interview form questions, which were prepared based on the comparisons, were evaluated by a lecturer, who is an expert in the field of educational sciences, in terms of its convenience for the objective of the study. Furthermore, the open-ended questions were thoroughly examined by a lecturer, who is an expert of the qualitative research methods. The interview questions were re-arranged based on the feedback received from the experts. Afterwards ; the questions, which could have been incoherent or difficult to understand, were re-evaluated and re-arranged by two Turkish teachers.

The data related to the research were collected through the interviews, which took place in the schools of the participants of the study in a quiet setting, which would not negatively affect the interview. The interviews lasted for October and November of 2014.

Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews carried out through interview forms was analyzed via content analysis, within the scope of qualitative research techniques. In this research, the line-by-line analysis approach discussed by Patton (2002) was employed. In the process of interpreting the data obtained from the interviews ; inductive descriptive analysis, content analysis, and continuous comparison technique were used (Miles & Huberman 1994 ; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The data collected from the interviews conducted with the group, on which interview form was applied, was coded by lining them under one another in a plain text format. The codings were combined under common themes and the content analysis was carried out.

Results

The analysis conducted based on the sub-problems of the research are respectively indicated below.

Findings of First Sub-Problem

What are the problems related to classroom management that English teachers experience with 2nd grade students in English lessons?

Table 2: Teachers' attitude towards classroom management

Teacher	Classroom Management	f	%
T ₁₋₄₋₅₋₇	The students do anything their class teachers tell them to do, but not what we tell them to do.	5	62.5
T ₁₋₂₋₃₋₄₋₅	I really have a hard time with classroom management, I really do.	5	62.5
T ₁₋₃₋₅	I have difficulty with it, extremely.	3	37.5
T ₁₋₃₋₄	They always ask to go to restroom.	3	37.5
T ₄₋₇₋₈	The students view it as an idle class rather than an English lesson.	3	37.5
T ₂₋₄₋₈	They get up quite often. They go outside.	3	37.5
T ₆₋₇₋₈	They do not sit at their desks, they constantly want or argue about something.	3	37.5
T ₁₋₂	When we first started the second grade of elementary school, we definitely were not able to make students write anything, they did not know how to write. Most of them come into the classroom forgetting how to read and write.	2	25.0
T ₂₋₆	It is hard to decrease yourself down to their age but we got used to it more compared to last year	2	25.0
T ₃₋₈	They all talk at the same time, at first we could not handle it.	2	25.0
T ₅₋₇	They are occupied with a new activity every week, they do not focus on the lesson.	2	25.0
T ₆₋₇	They feel the need to eat.	2	25.0
T ₅₋₈	They view us different from their class teacher, I cannot catch their attention	2	25.0
T ₆	They do not pay attention to my warnings.	1	12.5
T ₆	We have difficulty with properly dominating the classroom to a great extent.	1	12.5
T ₃	We got used to it since they are much more innocent than the second grade.	1	12.5
T ₈	They make bracelets with bands, they do not listen to the lesson	1	12.5
T ₄	No problem, because they are still at the phase of playing games and English is based on games.	1	12.5
T ₄	We were floundering for a month.	1	12.5

In Table 2, majority of the teachers expressed that the students paid attention to what their class teacher said but not what their they said as their English teacher. They mentioned that they had difficulties in the classroom due to the aforementioned reason. The teachers also discussed that the students have difficulty with adapting to lessons since they are of a younger age, thus often have the urge to go to the restroom and eat. They also stated that they experienced a set of problems due to being inexperienced in their first year, however, in the next years they were rather able to overcome those problems.

Findings of Second Sub-Problem

What are the problems related to students' physical and cognitive readiness that English teachers experience with 2nd grade students in English lessons?

Table 3: Teachers' attitude towards students' physical and cognitive readiness

Teacher	Physical and Cognitive Readiness	f	%
T ₁₋₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	The kids are willing to learn a foreign language.	7	87.5
T ₁₋₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇	However, we had a hard time teaching them since they were of a younger age group, I wish we had been provided with a seminar.	7	87.5
T ₃₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	I believe that it would work if a substructure for the younger age group was prepared and a primary formation for that specific age group were offered, of course a proper formation, not a so-called one.	6	75.0
T ₂₋₄₋₆₋₇₋₈	The first problem we experienced was with the book, it could have been prepared in a more convenient way, and we could have instructed a better lesson if we had had more materials.	5	62.5
T ₃₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇	In my opinion, second grade is too late to start teaching English, the younger the students the more permanently they learn English.	5	62.5
T ₃₋₆₋₇₋₈	I believe that during their university education teachers should be trained in a way that will appeal to this age group.	4	50.0
T ₂₋₅₋₇₋₈	We could have been trained on how to treat them, since their age group is new to us.	4	50.0
T ₃₋₅₋₈	In my opinion, it should start way sooner, because the sooner the better, I believe it should start at the age of 4.	3	37.5
T ₄₋₈₋₈	What they learn, which is not suitable for the level of second graders, can be learned by first graders even by kids attending kindergarten.	3	37.5
T ₁₋₄₋₇	The kids are not able to write, absolutely not, they have difficulty with it.	3	37.5
T ₁	They do not bring either their books or notebooks, plus they cannot write, they have already learned laziness.	1	12.5
T ₁	The class teacher has the right to shout at them, but you do not. The kids get scared of you when you try to shut them down to make them listen to the lesson, and this constitutes a problem from the point of the teacher and parents.	1	12.5

In Table 3, the majority of the teachers uttered that the students are willing to learn a foreign language, however, are too late to start learning it. The teachers claim that they do not receive a training intended for this age group throughout their university education, thus have difficulty, and emphasize the need to be provided with a qualified formation training towards this aim and suggest that the students studying at English Teaching departments be trained with such an education. Besides, they mentioned that their existing books and materials are inefficient for teaching and are not suitable to the level of students. They stated that they had a hard time with making students write and bring their books and notebooks, and added that students were not responsible.

Findings of Third Sub-Problem

What are the problems related to the process of learning and teaching that English teachers experience with 2nd grade students in English lessons?

Table 4: Teachers' attitude towards the process of learning and teaching

Teacher	Learning –Teaching Process	f	%
T ₁₋₂₋₃₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	I attempt to literally apply the book, as I told you before, you should not make them write at all, but play games, draw, and paint all the time, then they like the lessons.	8	100
T ₂₋₄₋₅₋₇₋₈	The students of this age group ask for more games, and contribute to the lesson more when I make them play more games, in other words, they participate more when games are involved.	5	62.5
T ₂₋₃₋₄₋₅₋₇	We have to make them repeat the words they learn every lesson, they forget very quickly and it becomes necessary to make them repeat very often.	5	62.5
T ₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	The timeframe we spare for these children is far more than the one we spare for normal students, I mean secondary school students, in terms of course hours.	5	62.5
T ₂₋₄₋₆₋₈	They give us a harder time than 4 th grade students do.	4	50.0
T ₃₋₄₋₅	It is two hours, and we have to spend 20 times to ensure classroom order because they are much younger.	3	37.5
T ₃₋₅₋₆	We get up and down, and listen to their complaints for 20 minutes and the education we provide them for the other 20 mins is everything.	3	37.5
T ₃₋₇₋₈	They do not study at home either, and therefore we have difficulties.	3	37.5
T ₁	When I ask them to write for a few times, one third of the classroom properly writes it, but two thirds of the classroom do not write at all, their aim is not to learn.	1	12.5
T ₄	In 5 or 6 hours, we attempted to teach them what we could teach other students in 2 or 4 hours.	1	12.5

In Table 4, all of the teachers mentioned that they were not able to efficiently apply the activities in the book. They mentioned that they had difficulty with conducting writing activities, and thus tried to fulfil this need through games. In that case, they expressed, the students tend to always want to play games and not do their writing activities. They emphasized on the significance of making students repeat since they quickly forget what they learn. The teachers also stated that the families are not supportive towards them. They also expressed that instructing higher grade students takes much less than instructing this age group and younger age group students have to repeat quite often since they easily forget what they learn and thus the time spared for a subject is a long period. In addition, they also mentioned that in classroom management they spend 20 minutes to bring the class together because the problems they have prevent learning and teaching, and added that they have to try to rush to finish the course for the other 20 minutes of the lesson, thus have shortage of time.

Findings of Fourth Sub-Problem

What are the problems related to counseling that English teachers experience with 2nd grade students in English lessons?

Table 5: Teachers' attitude towards counseling

Teacher	Counseling	f	%
T ₂₋₄₋₅₋₇	When we have a problem we can share it with the guidance counselor.	4	50.0
T ₃₋₇₋₈	They have a problem with succeeding since they quickly forget what they learn.	3	37.5
T ₃₋₅₋₆	We cannot immediately retrieve what we taught.	3	37.5
T ₃₋₄₋₅	However, they are quite willing and more eager than the second grade.	3	37.5
T ₂₋₄	When we have problems we share them with the class teacher.	2	25.0
T ₁	They blame you when you consult one of our teachers about a problem.	1	12.5
T ₁	Neither the student nor the parents are not considered to be guilty, but you are.	1	12.5
T ₃	It is a very new application, I cannot utter precise things on behalf of my friends from my own branch.	1	12.5
T ₃	The only problem is that we cannot ensure classroom management since they are quite young, and our guidance counselor were not able to help with this situation.	1	12.5

Table 5 suggests that half of the teachers received help from the guidance counselor when they had a problem, while one of the teachers mentioned that he/she was not able to obtain help regarding this matter. They expressed that while they could easily test whether students learned the information at higher grades ; they failed to do so with this age group.

Findings of Fifth Sub-Problem

What are the problems related to assessment and evaluation that English teachers experience with 2nd grade students in English lessons?

Table 6: Teachers’ attitude towards assessment and evaluation

Teacher	Assessment and Evalutaion	f	%
T ₁₋₂₋₃₋₄₋₅₋₇₋₈	Based on the in-class activities of students	7	87.5
T ₁₋₂₋₃₋₄₋₅₋₇₋₈	We evaluated them based on their participation to the lesson	7	87.5
T ₁₋₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	There is not a serious evaluation as there is with higher grade students.	7	87.5
T ₂₋₃₋₄₋₅₋₇	Writing does not have an objective, the evaluation is already at second and third graders, but we still provided them with a written material.	5	62.5
T ₁	We give them higher marks since they are of a younger age, and even when we give them lower marks their parents come and ask us why their marks are low and if their children are not good enough.	1	12.5
T ₁	As they progress up to higher grades, we start giving them their real marks and usually the real marks of student’s surface at the fourth grade.	1	12.5

Table 6 suggests that the majority of the teachers evaluated the students based on in-class activities and class participation. They mentioned that they did not seriously evaluate them as they did the higher grade students. Also, they stated that some teacher performed written exams, despite the fact that they were forbidden. One of the teachers uttered that the teachers gave higher marks to students than what they deserved, which was due to the fact that the parents complain to the teachers when their children receive lower marks. However, it was also mentioned that the actual status of the students come out when they go on to higher classes.

Findings of Sixth Sub-Problem

What are the emotions experienced by English teachers while instructing the 2nd grade students in English lessons?

Table 7: The emotions experienced by English teachers while instructing the 2nd grade students in English lessons

Teacher	Emotions	f	%
T ₁₋₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	The younger age group is entertaining, but frankly, the fact that the students and their parents are spoiled deters me from my positive approach to the course.	7	87.5
T ₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	I was unhappy last year because I had had more difficulties.	6	75.0
T ₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	This year I am happy now that I do not have too many difficulties.	6	75.0
T ₂₋₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	We floundered for 2-3 months, therefore wasted time.	6	75.0
T ₄₋₅₋₆₋₇₋₈	We were not subjected to inservice training for elementary school, which made me unhappy.	5	62.5
T ₄₋₈	When I first entered into the classroom, I thought to myself I wish I complete 3 years so that I could go back to teaching at a secondary school.	2	25.0
T ₃	It is a beautiful feeling, because they are eager.	1	12.5
T ₃	I enjoy it because they are very innocent.	1	12.5
T ₁	I cannot walk after I finish teaching the second grade students.	1	12.5
T ₁	You cannot conquer 7 year-old children, they will not listen to you.	1	12.5
T ₁	You become more than happy when you see the good ones, but you feel depressed when you see the bad ones.	1	12.5

In Table 7, most of the teachers expressed that their perspectives are deterred by the fact that the parents raise their children spoiled since neither the students nor the parents were disciplined enough. They mentioned that they were unhappy because of the negativity they experienced. Besides, they stated that they gained more and more experience as years went by, however, meanwhile formed a lost generation. They also discussed the difficulty caused by their lack of inservice training. While one of the teachers mentioned being happy due to the eagerness displayed by the students, another teacher uttered that they had a great deal of difficulty due to not being able to dominate the classroom.

Discussion

The content was divided into 5 themes, in accordance with the responses given by the students in the interviews. They were categorized as firstly ; the problems experienced in classroom management, secondly ; the problems in physical and cognitive readiness, secondly ; the problems experienced in the learning and teacher process, fourthly ; the problems seen in counseling, and fifthly ; the problems experienced in assessment and evaluation.

It is a must that the process of education and training be fruitful, thus, classroom management is quite a significant factor for helping students to comprehend what they learn in a peaceful environment. However, it is observed that there exists a set of problems regarding this issue in our new educational system, as experienced in our previous educational systems. One of the most outstanding problems experienced within this framework is ensuring the in-class discipline (İlgar, 2007). This question was posed to the teachers, whom experience problems with ensuring in-class discipline and other issues ; and are responsible for the classroom management. The teachers stated that they had problems with managing the classroom, especially with the second grade students, whom are younger than others. The most common problematic behaviors were listed as students' speaking to each other, intentionally interrupting the flow of the lesson, complaining about each other, being occupied with things unrelated to the lesson.

Moreover, some of the teachers discussed that they had trouble with stooping themselves to students' level, while ; one of the teachers mentioned that he/she did not have difficulty with doing so since he/she received education suitable for younger age levels. Some of the teachers stated that they had inservice training, while ; some of them acquainted with such training. They specifically mentioned that they were in need of inservice training.

Readiness, which is of high significance for the process of education and training, is an important input of the learning system (Bloom, 1995). The data analysis suggests that teachers and students are faced with a high number of problems throughout the process of learning and teaching, regarding readiness. According to Hayes (2008), the act of learning is beneficial for this age group ; feeling the ability to succeed motivates the students ; feeding their imagination makes them creative ; and arousing their curiosity is of significance (Cihan, 2001 ; Cihan, 2009). They expressed that they had difficulty with drawing students' attention since they were of a small age group, and made them play games so as to overcome this problem. However, they also mentioned that the students lost interest in the lesson because they always wanted to play games. Köydemir (2001) emphasizes that during this phase children perceives the aim of language teaching as exploring the language and that including the activates related to games and music possess importance for the process of learning.

The general opinion of the teachers proposes that it is positive to start teaching children English at an early age. The younger the children, the closer the learning (MEB, 2006). The students learning a foreign language at an early age have a natural tendency towards approaching new problems in a more eager manner (Driscoll, 1999). From that perspective, starting education at an early age is a positive case. The report prepared by Girard (1974) presents a detailed explanation on various language learning projects throughout the Europe. According to this report, the specific skills the students bare be taken advantage of ; and foreign language learning at an early age be integrated to the other knowledge taught at the elementary school level (Op. cit. Cihan & Grlen, 2013). The general opinion of the teachers presents that the existing books are inadequate. According to Center for Applied Linguistics (2009), starting language teaching at an early age enriches the mental development of children, provides students with flexibility at thinking and a great deal of sensibility towards language, and furthermore ; enables children to better comprehend their own vernacular (Op. cit. Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2004).

In consideration of the interviews, it is observed that the change towards teaching English at an early age has been appropriate. It is also apparent that the teachers require inservice training so as to adapt to this change. It is believed that teachers should explain parents that they should not intervene with education, and teachers also should warn students to change their attitude towards other teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teachers stated that they had problems with managing the classroom, especially with the second grade students, whom are younger than others. It is observed that the change for teaching English at a younger age has been appropriate. Our teachers stated that they required in-service training so as to adapt to this aforementioned change.

Recommendations

It can be presumed that the lack of time for applying activities in the classroom results from the inefficient weekly class hours spared for English course. Weekly class hours ought to be increased. Weekly class hours of English course could be raised in order to make students' learning more permanent, and allow for more activities and practices towards language learning.

It is also suggested that The Ministry of National Educations organize inservice seminars and workshops for English teachers teaching elementary school first grade students, regarding teaching younger students English.

Note

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