



Gülçin Mutlu  
Ali Yıldırım

# Research-driven Curriculum Design

Developing a Language Course

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Opladen • Berlin • Toronto 2021

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from Die Deutsche Bibliothek (The German Library)

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[www.budrich.eu](http://www.budrich.eu)

ISBN 978-3-8474-2426-0  
eISBN 978-3-8474-1563-3  
DOI 10.3224/84742426

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Die Deutsche Bibliothek - CIP-Einheitsaufnahme  
Ein Titeldatensatz für die Publikation ist bei der Deutschen Bibliothek erhältlich.

Verlag Barbara Budrich GmbH  
Stauffenbergstr. 7. D-51379 Leverkusen Opladen, Germany

86 Delma Drive. Toronto, ON M8W 4P6 Canada  
[www.budrich.eu](http://www.budrich.eu)

Jacket illustration by Bettina Lehfeldt, Kleinmachnow, Germany -  
[www.lehfeldtgraphic.de](http://www.lehfeldtgraphic.de)

Typesetting by Anja Borkam, Jena, Germany - [kontakt@lektorat-borkam.de](mailto:kontakt@lektorat-borkam.de)  
E-Book: CPI books GmbH, Leck

# Preface

This book is a study on curriculum design that includes the practices in relation to needs assessment, course development and testing. The aim of the book is to provide the reader with a systematic and research-wise course design primarily in languages and also in other discipline areas. The course design process is a type of research that is to be conducted in several stages by following the academic guidelines in curriculum theory and then reflecting on all this theory during the research-oriented practices. Thus, course design appears to be a process in which curriculum theory is linked to educational research and practice. However, given the currently available books on the market, it appears that there is a need for a source that would include or synthesize theory and practice. That is, there is a lack of available sources that include practical applications of theoretical information on curriculum development in combination with a concrete curriculum and course design process. As most books on course or curriculum design lack a concrete example with all the necessary steps of curriculum design, we believe that this book will fill this gap with its full and detailed explanations as to the necessary steps for course design. Furthermore, this book will meet the above need by emphasizing the course design process as a very important research-driven practice. To serve these ends, we believe that this book will be beneficial for researchers working on educational sciences and foreign languages, as well as for those working as professionals (teachers, lecturers etc.) in the teaching of languages and other discipline areas.

This book is composed of 7 chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introductory part to the study and to all of the other parts of the book. Chapter 2 provides the literature review for language courses and curriculum design and this part centers around three main dimensions: a) conceptual, b) procedural and c) research-wise background to the language curriculum development. Chapter 3 gives information about the needs assessment, which is the first step in the curriculum design process. Chapter 4 discusses the curriculum design model used in the study and its relevant procedures and more specifically the end product of each particular process determined on the curriculum design model. Chapter 5 provides a unit and a sample lesson plan generated as a result of the curriculum development process told in the previous chapters. Chapter 6 gives information about the field testing of the sample lesson plan provided and mentioned in the previous chapter. Chapter 7 concludes the book with a discussion of final comments on the curriculum development process and with the inclusion of some recommendations for future developmental studies in this area. We believe that the procedures and tactics related to course design and development given in this source will be beneficial for those aiming to design their own courses by utilizing the theoretical and practical information provided in this book.

Dr. Gülçin Mutlu & Dr. Ali Yıldırım

\* Preliminary results of the study reported in this book was presented at the European Research Conference (EERA-*ECER 2017 Copenhagen: Reforming Education and the*

*Imperative of Constant Change: Ambivalent roles of policy and educational research) in 2017 in Copenhagen, Denmark.*



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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of the study reported in this book is to develop an advanced level speaking course that will be offered to the freshman students successfully completing the English preparatory program, which was composed of more than 700 hours of English instruction. This target population of students spends their first year of university at the preparatory English school and they have to successfully complete the preparatory school before they start their main faculties. The students at all preparatory classes usually start with the elementary level of proficiency, and they are expected to move towards an upper level of proficiency level within a whole academic year and finally graduate with an upper intermediate to advanced levels of proficiencies. The students are usually aged between 18 and 20 at the preparatory class, and thus for the year that this speaking course is to be offered, students are expected to be generally aged between 19 and 21. To our experience at several universities in Turkey, these students start university after having been exposed to a highly traditional high school period and school culture. That is, they are accustomed to seeing the teacher as an authority as a figure who always provides them with step-by-step explanations of what they are going to do in class. Given the interactional patterns in the classrooms, based upon their earlier experiences at the high schools, they are not very attentive and willing to work with others for their classroom tasks. However, as they spend a relatively more time in the language classroom, they are observed to change their attitudes to a great extent in comparison to their first weeks and behave in a more relaxed and

cooperative manner in the classrooms. Therefore, when they come to the advanced speaking course to be designed for the purposes of this study, they are expected to be already accustomed to a cooperative classroom environment, to teachers behaving like a theater director and guide (not like an authority) and treating the students as active course participants. The course to be designed was named as "Further Speaking Course" (FSC) as the main purpose of this course to make students further their speaking abilities that they have already developed a certain level at the preparatory classes. Hence, this course is built upon the understanding that the target students have a certain level of proficiency in English with regard to language forms, lexical knowledge, use of conversational strategies and registers in communication, and certain level of writing and speaking skills in English.

Given the contextual characteristics, the medium of instruction at the university where we designed this course was Turkish in general. However, the courses are offered with the medium of English on a partial basis in some of the departments and the preparatory class is compulsory for these departments. That is, for some departments, the students study 30 % of the courses in their faculty curriculum in English. The course we attempted to design in this project will be offered to those departments that offer their degree curricula partially in English (i.e. with 30 % of English instruction). This course to be designed in this study will be offered as an elective course for those students who want to further develop their speaking skills. However, in the long run, there may be some departments at the university that will offer all of the degree courses with the medium of English, and in this case, the course to be designed can be offered as a must course. The Further

Speaking Skills course will meet for four hours a week in the fall term of an academic year when the students start their degree studies upon the successful completion of the preparatory school. This makes a period of approximately four months for the course.

The English preparatory program is a strict program in which students receive instruction concerning all of the four major skills (listening, writing reading and speaking) and the three sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) of language. Though we follow a communicative approach to language teaching with a focus upon all four major language skills at the preparatory class from the very beginning of the preparatory semester, it takes time for students to come to a level of production in language for both oral and written purposes. To our experience, their competence (knowledge about the language) precedes their performance (use of the language). However, once they have gained the necessary competence and input in English, they are expected to proceed very well. In this regard, as researchers and teachers we assume that these students develop their competencies to a great extent at the preparatory program; however, they still need more practice for the productive skills of language (for their performance in English). Accordingly, having completed the preparatory class, these students have the ability to produce language on most parts, but there still remain some areas of speaking (e.g. like making speeches before an audience, producing longer stretches of spoken discourse and reflecting on the interlocutors' opinions) for these students to develop further so that they can be fully competent communicators in English. Hence, the Further Speaking Skills course to be developed for this study will answer to this main need. It is