Designing an EFL Oral Communication Course for ELT Students

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the process of designing an Oral Communication Skills course offered in the first year of an undergraduate English Language Teaching program at an English-medium university in Turkey. This course was designed for pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language, considering the environmental factors and needs, by employing Nation and Macalister's (2010) model of curriculum design. Course instructors, pre-service teachers and recent graduates participated in the study. The course design was guided by the results of environment and needs analyses and related literature. Taking students' interests into consideration in topic selection, researchers adopted the theme-based approach with an aim to address communicative, interactional, and intercultural competence by engaging all students in meaningful interaction across various speech events. This study stands as an example of how diverging constraints can be accommodated in a theme-based approach to course design, responding to the needs of the learners.

Speaking is the skill that language learners want to master the most, yet it is a complex skill to learn for various reasons (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Ur, 1996). For Turkish learners of English, grammar-based teaching approach, lack of enough input and psychological aspects (e.g., anxiety, motivation) are cited as the most influential factors creating speaking challenges (Coşkun, 2016). Alptekin and Tatar (2011) argue that speaking is not taught effectively in state schools compared to other language skills in Turkey; as a result, language learners feel anxious to speak when they become university students. There seems to be a widespread agreement that Turkish learners of English across all levels of education do not find themselves proficient in speaking English (Coşkun, 2016), and the last English Proficiency Index - EPI (EF,

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2021) supports this finding: Turkey is the 70th country among 112 countries in the world. In collaboration with the British Council, TEPAV (2014) prepared a report investigating English Language Teaching in Turkish K-12 schools, outlining that the learners are not proficient enough despite many hours of English instruction. When they graduate from high school, they seem to be false beginners (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005). Especially, K-12 learners are reported to fail to communicate in English (TEPAV, 2014). Automatically when these students move on to tertiary level, they may not be ready to use their interactive and productive skills in academic settings (Alptekin & Tatar, 2011). Therefore, these results are also echoed in pre-service teacher education programs that train future English teachers in Turkey. Pre-service teachers (PSTs, henceforth) tend to rate their oral proficiency low (Koşar, 2020; Köksal & Ulum, 2019) and believe that they are not proficient enough (Dinçer & Yeşilyurt, 2013; Kömür, 2010). Likewise, Turkish teachers of English working at state schools see themselves at or below B2 level in spoken interaction and production skills according to CEFR (Taner, 2017).

The apparent need to improve PSTS' oral communication skills in English led us to work on the Oral Communication Skills course offered to first-year students, which is a required course in all English Language Teaching (ELT, henceforth) departments across the country. A model undergraduate ELT curriculum is set by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in Turkey for a 4-year bachelor's degree. Within this common ELT curriculum which sets Oral Communication Skills as a required freshman course, definitions for each course are provided by CoHE. The faculties and departments are free to set their own specific goals and content for each course within the boundaries of CoHE course definitions. In this study, we aim to design a course curriculum for an undergraduate oral communication skills course within this ELT curriculum.

The Oral Communication Skills course at the tertiary level has different functions and importance, especially for PSTs who aim to specialize in language teaching. First, PSTs were not provided with any specific courses on oral communication when they were in high school. Secondly, this course can be considered an English for Academic Purposes (EAP, henceforth) course to prepare students for the upcoming years for their undergraduate courses in English. In Turkey, ELT programs offer English-medium instruction for most of their subject area courses. In other words, these students (PSTs, in our case) are expected to use the language to participate in discussions and present their ideas clearly in addition to being effective listeners engaging in interaction (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). Thirdly, having a good command of English is important for ELT professionals in the long run, as it is both the medium and the content of language teaching. Language proficiency (knowledge of language) is strongly interconnected with the subject matter knowledge (knowledge about language) and the pedagogical practices of teachers (Andrews, 2003, p. 84). In sum, this course is supposed to prepare PSTs to cope with their academic training where the medium of instruction is English and equip them with a good command of language skills to be professional teachers of English in the future. Considering the context and a widespread agreement on a lack of proficiency in oral communication among the target population, we aimed to design an oral communication course for the first-year ELT students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Oral Communication

Oral communication skills were defined mostly by referring to *communicative competence*, which included strategic, grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse competence with speaking at the center (Canale & Swain, 1980). However, the model was found limited in the sense that it concentrated on the knowledge of the speaker and paid little attention to the other parties involved in interaction (Kramsch, 1986; Young, 2011). Young (2011) claims that the construct *interactional competence* better reflects the

situated and co-constructed nature of language use compared to *communicative competence* which can be seen as a more cognitive and *static knowledge of a single person*. Interaction is a collaborative skill which is constructed and achieved with the others. This conceptual shift is also reflected in CEFR, covering interaction as one of the descriptors of language proficiency (CEFR, 2001). In addition to the production of language, interaction as a skill is added to emphasize the role of cooperation between people in interaction. Thus, teaching interactional competence is one of the goals of any language program.

Interactional competence is currently considered to be one component of oral proficiency. In other words, both the transactional function of language (e.g., producing a monologue, presenting information) and the interactional function of language (e.g., engaging in a dialogue, maintaining an interaction) (Nunan, 1989) are part of oral communication. With the interaction gaining importance, they are now complemented with other tasks involving interaction, such as discussions and debates. In CEFR (2001), interactional skills such as developing a topic, holding the floor, or asking for clarification are emphasized as necessary to participate in discussions and debates. Thus, oral communication skills include both production (e.g., sustained monologues) and interaction (e.g., exchanging ideas). In addition, employing communication strategies (Tarone, 1977) to resolve breakdowns is also a part of oral communication.

2.2 Curriculum and Syllabus Design

While there are many language curriculum design (henceforth LCD) models, the route they follow is mostly the same (Crites & Rye, 2020). It requires comprehensive and varied data from different stakeholders to identify the needs of learners, constraints, and the resources available. Contextual knowledge and recent research on language teaching guide designers to reach principles which shape the following steps in the organization of the content and assessment procedures (Graves, 2000; Murdoch, 1989). Finally, general agreement on the outcome is needed among staff, administration, and students (Brown, 1995) to achieve a successfully working curriculum.

Curriculum design is a comprehensive process involving taking several interrelated decisions (Finney, 2002). In LCD literature, it is seen that the model designed by Nation and Macalister (2010) is used in many different instructive settings (Crites & Rye, 2020; Nation & Macalister, 2011; Tomak & Ataş, 2019). It offers a more detailed, comprehensive, and user-friendly model compared to other models (e.g., Graves, 2000; Murdoch, 1989). To exemplify, Murdoch's (1989) model does not include "principles, monitoring and assessment" (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Graves' model (2000) is similar to that of Nation and Macalister's (2010); however, we find the latter more compact and easier to implement. Starting with needs and environment analysis and equipped with recent language teaching principles, the model places goals at the center of the process. The goals influence the content and sequencing, format and presentation, and finally, monitoring and assessment procedures.

In this model, syllabus design is covered in content and sequencing steps. When recent syllabus design studies are reviewed, it is seen that instead of dominance of one type of syllabus (structural, situational, or task-based), an eclectic and flexible approach is now being adopted to cater for the needs of learners and the context (Finney, 2002; Flowerdew, 2005). Using language in a meaningful way and engaging learners with meaning-rich tasks that are relevant to their needs is of utmost importance in EAP contexts (Hamp-Lyons, 2011). Therefore, a theme-based design involving various tasks would help in making learning more meaningful.

In the same vein, Stoller and Grabe's (1997) Six T's approach involves *themes, texts, topics, threads, tasks* and *transitions* to design a theme-based language course. They claim that variety in topics and tasks give learners a more purposeful and meaning-rich environment to use language in the classroom (Stoller & Grabe, 1997). This would also ensure increased levels of motivation and interest since seeing such activities would engage learners more in the learning process. Consistency within and across topics in the

same theme and progression from one task to the next will provide opportunities to use language in a meaningful way. It can be suggested that a theme-based curriculum design would suit EAP contexts by promoting opportunities for interaction and meaningful use of language.

3. Methodology

Designing a course is a long process involving lots of essential and basic steps that are interconnected with each other. In this study, the *Oral Communication Skills Course* for freshman ELT students (i.e., PSTs) was designed considering the environmental factors, which include students, teachers, and graduates' opinions about needs, as well as general teaching approaches and principles derived from research and literature, through a methodology based on Nation and Macalister's (2010) model of curriculum design. According to this model, designing a language course curriculum starts with environment and needs analysis steps complemented by principles, which then guide the determination of goals, content and sequencing, format and presentation, monitoring and assessment, and ends with an overall evaluation of the designed curriculum.

The model has inner and outer circles; while inner circles represent the syllabus, the latter makes up the curriculum. The environmental factors, needs analysis and principles (in outer circles) are considered to guide the core components of the courses placed in inner circles: *content and sequencing, format and presentation* and *monitoring and assessment*. In this project, all the steps represented above were addressed, and the process followed a *waterfall model* (Macalister & Sou, 2006) where the "output of one stage becomes the input of the next" (Nation & Macalister 2010, p. 142). The results of needs and environment analyses shaped the principles which then guided the later stages.

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The process started with the environment and needs analyses. To investigate the environment constraints and to identify needs – namely, students' wants, lacks, and the necessities (Nation & Macalister, 2010) - interviews with teachers and graduates were used, along with an adapted version of a previously published needs analysis survey (Nunan & Lamb, 1996) with students. In addition, the environment analysis was conducted with an emic perspective; the researchers (us) were insiders working as course assistants, making the project a form of practitioner research. We also used document analysis and analysed formal documents from CoHE and the university course catalogue.

Participants of this study were two instructors, four recent graduates of the department and 55 freshman students (i.e., PSTs) who would take the course next semester. We paid utmost attention to the ethical conduct in the preparation, collection, and analyses of the data. All participants were provided with clear information about the study and research aims. They were notified that participation was entirely voluntary, and they provided their informed consent to the collection and use of their data for research purposes before the data collection. We were present in all steps of data collection and ensured participants that they might ask any questions or stop or withdraw their participation any time they wished to do so. Their identities are masked here for the purposes of anonymity, and all participants are assigned random participant IDs.

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through semi-structured and structured interviews as well as a questionnaire. Table 1 below summarizes the data collection tools and their contribution to the design process:

Table 1
Data Sources and Tools

Instrument	Medium	Data for	N
Document Analysis	University website Department website Course catalogue CoHE regulations CoHE Curriculum	**Environment Analysis** * Situation and context * Constraints, resources, and opportunities **Goals and Outcomes**	on
Semi-structured Interviews	Instructors	**Environment Analysis** on * Teachers' background and philosophy *Learners background and proficiency *Situation and context *Physical environment **Needs Analysis** on *Lacks *Necessities **Principles, Goals and Outcomes** **Content and Sequencing** * Suggestions on pedagogical focus * Design and recycling Format and Presentation *Suggestions for activities in & beyond classroom **Monitoring and Assessment**	2
Structured interviews	Graduates	**Environment Analysis** **Needs Analysis** on *Necessities **Format and Presentation** *Suggestions for activities and tasks	4
Survey	Students (i.e. "PSTs" taking this course)	**Needs Analysis** on *Wants *Lacks *Necessities **Format and Presentation** *Suggestions for activities *Task types and themes *Materials *Methodological preferences for learning **Monitoring and Assessment**	55

3.1.1 Instructor and Graduate Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with the two instructors who had been and would be offering the course in the following semesters. The instructors are assigned participant IDs to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Henceforth, they will be referred to as Instructor 1 and Instructor 2.

The questions were designed in line with Nation and Macalister's list of environment constraints (2010, pp. 16-17). First, initial questions regarding constraints like the setting, materials, and time were asked. Thus, the first part of the interviews provided data for the environment analysis. The second part of the interview was related to their views about their learners and focused more specifically on the readiness and proficiency levels of their learners. This set the grounds for the lacks and necessities parts of the needs analysis.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to allow for better identification of common ideas and themes. After transcription, the content analysis method (Creswell, 2003) was used to interpret data. We worked collaboratively on the identification of common points in the interviews and citation of relevant information for the design process.

Structured interviews were used with four recent graduates who took the course in the first year of the program. The data supported the needs and environment analyses, as well as guiding the lesson design process. Two of the four recent graduates were teachers, and two were research assistants doing their masters in ELT. In the first part, they were asked about the benefits of the oral communication course and its contribution to their academic and professional life. The second part got their opinions on the importance of the course for ELT students. The last part asked for their suggestions for improving the course. Therefore, the data provided by the structured interviews supported needs and environment analyses, as well as guiding content and sequencing, and format and presentation steps.

3.1.2 Student Surveys

For the student leg of the needs analysis, a survey including both qualitative and quantitative items was drafted to collect data from the PSTs. In order to elicit data as comprehensive as possible, the survey design was partially guided by the thematic analyses of the instructor and graduate interviews. Additional items were adapted from Nunan and Lamb's (1996) needs analysis surveys. The first draft of the questionnaire was reviewed and edited by the researchers together with a professor specialized in curriculum development. The edited second version of the questionnaire was piloted with three researchers knowledgeable in questionnaire administration and with three students from the target group. The final version included yes-no questions, 5-point Likert scale questions in various scales (e.g., disagree to agree, dislike to like) and open-ended questions, together making up four main parts of the questionnaire.

The first part of the questionnaire intended to get general information about the students. The second part was about their methodological preferences in learning, homework, feedback, materials, activities, and teaching techniques. The third part included 15 items asking what they would like to learn. The final part asked again for their opinions on agency in decision-making about the course, mainly about learner autonomy, what to learn, how to learn, and how to be assessed.

The questionnaire was administered during class hours with the permission of the instructors and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Of the 58 questionnaires distributed, 55 questionnaire papers were returned filled in. The quantitative items were analysed on a statistical analysis software (IBM SPSS 22). Cronbach's alpha was found to be above .83 in each part of the questionnaire, which indicated a quite high level of reliability.

For the processing of qualitative data, open-ended questions were analysed for recurring themes using the content analysis method (Creswell, 2003). We collaboratively worked on the definition of major themes in student answers. As new ideas emerged, existing themes were reviewed and modified. Then, the answers to open-ended questions were listed under major themes. The agreement on the identification of recurring themes is above 90%. In cases of conflicts, we discussed and agreed on a theme, and then categories were revised accordingly.

4. Analyses and Findings

As our curriculum design model offers an integrated and continuous process with each step supporting and feeding the decisions in others, we provide the results of our analyses in relation to each component of the curriculum development procedure, rather than presenting the findings of data collection procedures separately.

4.1 Environment Analysis: Participants and the Context

The people and the context that the course is designed for form the environment the curriculum attempts to address. It not only reports on the people and the context but also defines the constraints and thus shapes the design process. The environmental constraints in curriculum design are analysed in three categories: teachers, learners, and situation. Such factors as age, prior knowledge, purpose in learning, and preferred ways of learning are learner constraints that affect curriculum design together with teacher constraints such as their training, their confidence in using English, and the time they need for preparation and marking. The physical constraints such as classroom, time and resources outline the situation (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 16-17).

4.1.1 Teachers

Both instructors have PhD degrees and have long been offering courses to freshman students; therefore, are well acquainted with the students and know how to approach, motivate, and engage them. They also stated that one hour of preparation per week is enough for them. However, they believe classrooms are overcrowded (they have around 35 students in each class) for an oral communication course.

4.1.2 Learners

Students mostly come from different regions of Turkey, implying diversity in their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This might become an obstacle in topic selection since the themes or topics included should be interesting for as many students as possible. On the other hand, there are indeed common topics of interest as they are almost at the same age (18 or 19). Another commonality is their mother tongue. More than 95% of the students share the same native language (Turkish).
According to questionnaire results, 41 out of 55 students (74.5%) had not attended the language-intensive preparatory year of the university. It can be inferred that they had not taken a specific course on oral communication/speaking previously. We make this inference based on the knowledge that there is no specific speaking or oral communication skills course in the K-12 English language curriculum in Turkey.

4.1.3 Situation

The department is at a top-ranking state university located in Ankara. It currently has 40 undergraduate programs within five faculties and over 150 graduate programs within five graduate schools, all admitting high-profile students through national high-stakes exams. The medium of instruction is English, making the university more attractive for international students. The university hosts 300 international students and 50 researchers/staff members annually. The instructors cite these as positive factors, arguing that the opportunities to communicate in English are abundant on campus, even though the country is an EFL setting.

Many international events, seminars, and conferences are held on the campus throughout the year. Students have access to many campus facilities where they can engage in conversation in English with other students. Dormitories, a shopping centre, library facilities and free wireless coverage all around the campus are among those. For these reasons, the campus provides a rich environment for students to build on their oral communication skills in English.

The department building has eight classrooms and a computer lab. All the classrooms are equipped with overhead projectors (OHPs), computers, whiteboards and movable chairs. The classrooms are not spacious, but the chairs are moveable - which makes it easier and ideal to arrange pair and group work tasks, as confirmed by the instructors in the interviews.

Table 2

Environment Constraints and their Reflection in Course Design

Constraints	Environment Analysis	Reflection in our curriculum
Learners	*Aged 18-19 *Majoring in English Language Teaching *L1 Turkish, high L2 English proficiency *No oral communication/speaking course taken previously, interactional skills mostly ignored in earlier learning. * English for Academic Purposes (English-medium instruction, EMI) and English for Specific Purposes (profession: EFL teacher trainees) *Diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds	**Age:** Topics that might interest them. Suitable tasks such as discussions, debates rather than games. **Proficiency**: Make use of prior knowledge. Student-centred activities rather than teacher-led **Experience**: Integrate receptive skills to build on prior knowledge, recycle to move from basics to advanced interactional skills **Purposes**: Learners in EMI, trainees for profession; communication as the focus. Discussion, debate, (un-)prepared speech, various interactional settings **Background**: Intercultural competence, resolving communication breakdowns, strategy training
Teachers	Training: PhD 5 years of experience in this course Research interest in fluency & oral communication Quite experienced in teaching oral communication and offering the same course for a long time- no difficulty in planning & teaching phase	Instructors are competent and experienced. One more instructor might be needed to share the teaching load and reduce the number of the students in each class.
Situation	- Limited Class Time, limited exposure - Overcrowded Classrooms + Resources - international staff, students, and conferences on campus	- Employing pair & group work in class to increase speaking time for each student - Having smaller classes with 20 students. + Extended tasks on campus: attending international conferences, interaction tasks on campus with international students

Legend:	Positive and negative situation constraints above are indicated with "+" and "-", respectively. Symbol "*" denotes general findings.

The Table 2 above illustrates the environment constraints and their effects on curriculum design. According to the instructors, the physical constraints are the large class sizes, limited class-time and the heavy course load on students. Other positive factors are availability of resources, opportunities for communication on campus, students' access to technology via smart phones, and personal computers.

4.2 Needs Analysis

Needs analysis gives insights into *wants*, *lacks* and *necessities* (Nation & Macalister, 2010). It sits at the core of course design; therefore, all the decisions taken in subsequent steps are grounded on this analysis. In this section, teachers' and students' views on these areas will be summarized. Table 3 below presents the *wants* reported by the students. Next, Table 4 presents *lacks* and *necessities* and the reflections of needs in course design. These reflections are shaped, to a great extent, by the students' *wants* as well as the *lacks* and *necessities*:

Table 3

Summary of the Students' Wants

Wants	General:
by	* fluency-oriented activities to address *speaking like a native-speaker desired by the students,* emphasis
Students	on pronunciation, practice, colloquial speech, and familiarising with different accents. The two most
	common themes are fluency and native-like speech.
	Methodological:
	:) Group & Pair work
	:(Whole class
	:) *listening and speaking on what you hear* and *reading and speaking on what you read*
	:(impromptu speech and doing project work
	:) more than 65% believe in the benefits of homework
	Materials and tools:
	:) movies, songs and videos
	:(textbooks, pictures and posters, computer programs (or applications)
	* They value interpersonal communication rather than machine-assisted speaking practices, adding
	that they like talking about different cultures and traditions.
	Teacher-Learner Relationship
	* I want the teacher to give reasons for what we are learning and how we are learning" M=*4.24* out of
	5.
	Feedback
	Teacher correction at the end of each activity: delayed on-site feedback. They do not want to get
	immediate correction and peer-feedback.
	Topics
	Culture, Social Relationships

Legend:	Likes are indicated with ":) " while dislikes are marked with " :(". Symbol "*" denotes general findings.

The opinions by the students guided content and sequencing of the course in terms of topic and theme selection, format and presentation in terms of the tasks and activities as well as materials, and finally monitoring and assessment in terms of feedback and testing. The instructors and graduates' suggestions also helped shape these strands of the curriculum. The lacks and necessities were also described by the participants. The following table (Table 4) summarizes how lacks and necessities are reflected in our curriculum by considering the students' wants:

Table 4

Lacks and Necessities and their Reflections in Curriculum

	Needs Described	Findings	Reflections in the course considering *wants*
Lacks	by Instructors	*Students lack sufficient language resources and confidence to speak English *They need to read more to develop their vocabulary and world knowledge so that they can speak more *Problems in linking which affect their fluency negatively * Above-mentioned factors lead to a decrease in motivation.	-fluency focused activities, -pre-speaking activities to help them research and find ideas -exposure to authentic listening texts, e.g., movie tasks, debates -agency in decision making for motivation
	by Students	78% reporting difficulty in speaking English due to: * Lack of Practice: 63% * Speaking anxiety: 29% * Retrieval of relevant vocabulary: 25%. * Pronunciation: 9% (this is also linked to increased anxiety and native-like fluency) *Other reasons: organisation of speech, fluency, being in an EFL setting, lack of enough input, lacking native-like fluency.	-repeated practice and recycling for fluency and retrieval -address anxiety through pair-group work -pair/small group discussion tasks for meaningful input & output -emphasis on intelligibility -prepared speech tasks for organisation of speech -extended tasks on campus & conferences etc.
Necessities	by Instructors and Graduates	Students need this course for: * Personal reasons, such as conveying their message across and tolerating ambiguities one can experience. * Professional reasons, explained as being a good teacher and model for their future students. **Graduates** also talk about the necessity of this course for their professional life. *a teacher of English should be a good model for their students.	Communication is the focus, either as an individual or as a professional, tasks on cultural topics relationships Strategy training, addressing communication breakdowns Variety and diversity in types of speech tasks, creating opportunities for language use
	by Students	91% believed in the necessity of speaking English for: * their profession * intercultural communication	Teaching strategies in interaction and integrating communication skills through movies and tasks. Intercultural communication as a theme

The tables above presented the results of the environment and needs analysis and the implications of the results for the course design. In line with analysis results, selected teaching and learning principles will be presented and goals of the course will be revisited in the next section. Decisions taken related to content and sequencing, format and presentation, and monitoring and assessment phases will be justified with reference to the analysis results and principles as well as the existing research in these areas.

4.3 Principles

Nation and Macalister (2010) list *The Twenty Principles of Language Teaching* that are grouped under the three components of the curriculum design at the core of their Model (p. 39). Taking all the findings from the needs and environment analyses into consideration, the following principles are adapted to our context and adopted for our design (see Table 5):

Table 5.
Summary of the Principles Followed in the Design Process

Content and Sequencing	1. Strategies & Autonomy 2. Keep moving forward 3. Frequency
Format and Presentation	4. Motivation 5. Friendly Encouraging Atmosphere 6. Fluency 7. Four Strands 8. Output
Monitoring and Assessment	9. Ongoing Needs & Environment Analysis 10. Feedback

We aim to prepare PSTs for life-long learning; the most important principle is to teach them how to be independent learners who continuously monitor their own learning. Therefore, the guiding principle for the content and sequencing step will be the *Strategy and Autonomy* principle. Besides, the students also wanted to have agency in decision making, and to take responsibility in their own development. For the format and presentation, all the principles are relevant for our context, with the four strands principle - that is, meaningful input and output should be integrated - (Nation & Yamamoto, 2012) dominating with a focus on fluency. This principle was also voiced by the instructors, with Instructor 1 clearly stating that:

> Listening and speaking always go together. We never do 'this is listening day and we are not doing speaking'. So if you want to speak, you should listen a lot. You have to also read a lot. You have to also read a lot to increase your vocabulary. Isn't it the same thing? Those who read a lot of books are good at writing? There is a link between. When you read, you are cognitively stimulated. It is like a brain gym. If you don't read, your vocabulary knowledge and the way you look at things are very limited.

Language is a whole and the language skills cannot be separated from each other. Therefore, this course should strive to include meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, and meaning-focused output alongside fluency (Nation & Yamamoto, 2012), which is also stated by both instructors and students alike in our needs analysis.

For monitoring and assessment of learning, feedback is an essential component of a language course, especially when students expect their teacher to correct them at the end of each activity. Therefore, because of this stated need, students will be provided with teacher feedback, as well as rubrics that they can use for their own evaluation. Self-evaluation is also instrumental in developing critical thinking and

reflection, which are vital for autonomous learning. This also goes hand-in-hand with our autonomy principle.

4.4 Goals

The course goals are determined considering the principles adopted on needs and environment analyses. As mentioned above, in the common curriculum provided by CoHE in Turkey, the Oral Communication course definition includes a very generic description on communication-oriented speaking and lists activities *such as discussions, individual presentations and other interactive tasks, formal and informal language, (...)*.

Within the common definition of CoHE, we identified goals and aims specific to our context. The overall aim of our course emerges as enhancing PSTs' communicative and interactional competence. In the light of needs and environment analyses and the principles, other goals might be listed as:

- Developing a sense of autonomy and responsibility for students' own learning processes
- Improving students' fluency in (un)prepared speech and participating in naturally occurring interaction
- Decreasing speaking anxiety level through a more friendly atmosphere in which they feel secure and do not hesitate to speak.
- Maximising opportunities for students to use language and practice speaking beyond the classroom.

4.5 Content and Sequencing

Results show that the most problematic areas are fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. We adopted the thematic approach and matrix curriculum to design our course. The reasons for this decision are various. First, the students are advanced learners. Even though participants believe students have certain lacks regarding language, they have a high degree of grammar and vocabulary knowledge as they are among the top-ranking students at the English component of the nationwide university entrance exam. However, they are not good at using this knowledge in interaction. This is also reflected in the comments on their poor levels of fluency noted by the instructors, and by the students themselves. Therefore, by using a matrix model, they will have more chances to practice a variety of topics and tasks. A reflection of the needs and environment analysis is that students should be provided with opportunities to practice more. Second, this variety in topics and tasks gives them a more purposeful and meaningful environment to use language in the classroom (Stoller & Grabe, 1997). This would also ensure an increased level of motivation and interest, since seeing purposeful and meaningful activities would engage learners more in the learning process.

4.5.1 Theme-based Approach

Specifically, the course will be based on the Six T's approach which includes *themes, texts, topics, threads, tasks and transitions* (Stoller & Grabe, 1997). The Six T's approach defines themes as "the central ideas that organize major curricular units" (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 82) which should be appropriate to the special context. Therefore, in line with students' *wants*, the selected **themes** are *personal relationships* and *intercultural relationships*. Familiarity and relevance of the themes would encourage and motivate them to participate in the activities and ease their speaking anxiety.

The second "T" in the Six T's approach is **texts** which are "content resources (written and aural) which drive the basic planning of the theme units" (Stoller & Grabe 1997, p. 82). While selecting texts, the overall context (needs and interests of the students, instructional appropriateness) was considered. Along various reading texts, songs, and listening texts such as radio broadcasts, the main texts will be movies. The movies will mostly be related to school life, and relationships of students with teachers, and their friends. These emerge as our **topics,** "which are the subunits of content which explore more specific aspects of the theme" (Stoller & Grabe 1997, p. 82). Then, we need something to create links between themes which are called **threads**. The threads "are linkages across themes which create greater curricular coherence. They are, in general, not directly tied to the central idea controlling each theme unit" (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 83). Therefore, our threads will be *communication breakdowns* which will connect themes (i.e., personal and cultural relationships). Under threads, the **tasks** will be specified. According to Stoller and Grabe (1997), "devising a series of tasks which leads forward a final culminating activity or project - one which incorporates the learning from various tasks in the theme unit is particularly effective" and such an approach would "provide a sense of successful completion for students as well" (p. 84). Therefore, tasks should be interrelated with each other, and all the tasks should be related to the final project of the course. For instance, students might watch a movie, discuss communication breakdowns that they observed in the movie in small group activities in class, suggest solutions and act out their solutions as role plays in class. Following this, for a *final culminating activity*, students might help international students on campus by solving an important communication breakdown, for example, when they are doing course registrations or shopping. Such a design would engage learners and make interaction (input and output) more authentic and meaningful. Finally, Stoller and Grabe (1997) state that **transitions** are not easy to finalize before the theme unit begins. However, transitional activities might include "predicting new topics", "discuss the importance of other tasks", "consider issues that prior tasks did not address", "brainstorm additional concepts and associations", "relate personal experiences to past- and upcoming tasks". (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 86). Considering the essence of transitional activities in creating a sense of coherence and unity, students are always asked to relate past and current tasks to their personal lives and create and construct their own meanings out of them.

We designed the sequence of the content following the principles of Six T's Approach, and Figure 1 below shows the matrix organization of our theme-based unit. As mentioned earlier, the following curriculum design approach is the *Matrix model* (Nation & Macalister, 2010) as it suits the findings and principles identified.
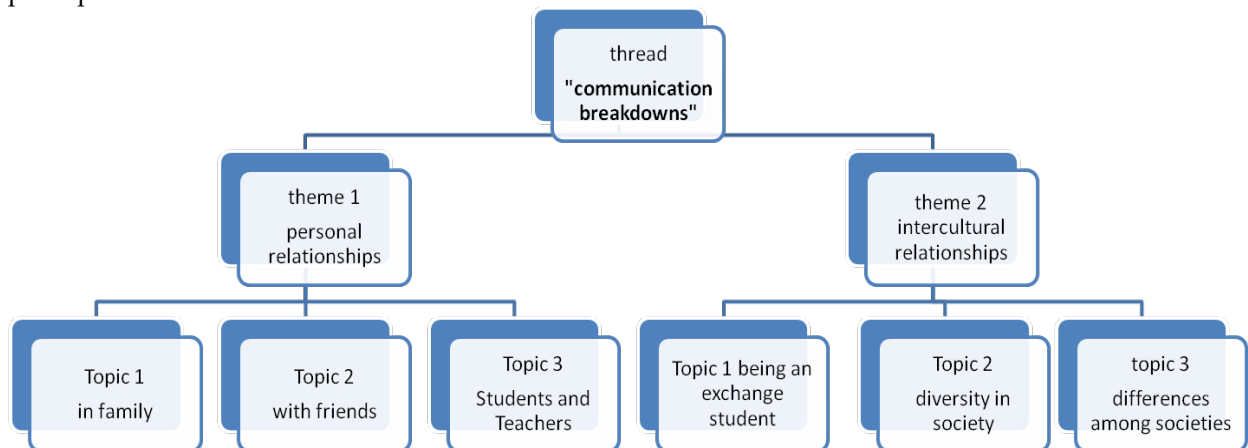

Figure 1. The Thematic Design of the Oral Communication Course

4.5.2 Matrix Curriculum Model

In terms of sequencing the content, we employed the Matrix model (Nation and Macalister, 2010) which is a linear approach to sequencing aiming to revisit and recycle the language content of a course across diverse tasks and contexts. The following matrix (see Table 6) was developed to sequence the course content with a thematic perspective.

Table 6
Oral Communication Course Matrix

			Debate tasks **Reading** **Note-taking** **Pair work &** **Small group** **discussion**	**Listening &** **Note-taking** **Pronunciation** **Strategy** **learning** **Debates**	*Movie tasks* **Extensive** **Reading** **Listening** **Small group** **discussion**	**Impromptu** **Phonetics &** **Pronunciation** **Feedback** **Strategy** **learning** **Act-outs**
Communication	**Personal relationships**	**within family**	Week 2 Lesson 1	Week 2 Lesson 2	Week 3 Lesson 3	Week 3 Lesson 4
		with Friends	Week 4 Lesson 1	Week 4 Lesson 2	Week 5 Lesson 3	Week 5 Lesson 4
		Students and Teachers	Week 6 Lesson 1	Week 6 Lesson 2	Week 7 Lesson 3	Week 7 Lesson 4
	Cultural relationships	**Being an exchange student**	Week 8 Lesson 1	Week 8 Lesson 2	Week 9 Lesson 3	Week 9 Lesson 4
		Diversity in a society	Week 10 Lesson 1	Week 10 Lesson 2	Week 11 Lesson 3	Week 11 Lesson 4
		Cultural differences among the societies	Week 12 Lesson 1	Week 12 Lesson 2	Week 13 Lesson 3	Week 13 Lesson 4

As seen in the matrix model above, there are four threads in terms of activities: a) reading, note-taking, discussion, b) listening and note-taking, pronunciation, strategy learning, and debate, c) extended movie tasks (e.g., role-plays, prepared short speech, dialogues, act-out), listening and discussion, d) impromptu speech, feedback, and strategy teaching. The first week is reserved for the introduction of the course and the final week is for the students' presentations.

4.6 Format and Presentation

Considering the analyses on needs and environment, and based on the principles adopted, we determined the format and presentation of the course. The needs analysis showed that students wanted to learn mostly in small groups. It also suits the matrix model approach and the thematic approach. Table 7 below summarizes the suggestions of instructors and graduates related to format and presentation:

Table 7

Suggestions on Format and Presentation by the Instructors and Graduates

Suggestions	by Instructors	-limiting presentation tasks
		-integrating film practice & role play
		-themes (combining songs & poems & integrating artwork)
	by Graduates	-phonetic transcription
		-impromptu speech
		-practicing with friends
		-contrastive analysis of Turkish & English sounds
		-sharing personal stories & anecdotes

Instructors' suggestions lead us to include more interactive tasks where learners communicate with each other. Since learners produce only monologues in presentation tasks and they do not have enough opportunity to engage in interaction. In a similar vein, the graduates also suggested the use of practice with friends to enhance interactional skills. Therefore, we integrated different task types such as movie discussion, role-plays and pronunciation tasks for contrastive analysis and intelligibility.

4.6.1. Movie tasks

For these prepared small group discussions, we designed movie tasks. Students in groups of four come together to watch a specific movie every two weeks. They assume different roles for the movie discussion: movie plot summarizer, character analyser, movie critic, and word and idiom finder. Such activities in the matrix necessitate reading, note-taking and speaking from notes, listening to each other in small groups, and prepared speech. Therefore, they are also instrumental in balancing the four strands (Nation and Yamamoto, 2012); namely, language focused learning, meaning focused input and output, and fluency development.

To illustrate, watching movies helps learners learn new words and phrases with a special focus on pronunciation. Instructors guide them especially to identify the sounds that Turkish speakers of L2 English have difficulty producing, emphasizing intelligibility. In addition, movies provide examples of different accents and improve learners' comprehension of those variations in the target language.

Then, when they come to class, they participate in small group discussions performing their assigned roles. In addition to discussion, they collaboratively rewrite endings and act out selected parts of movies to suggest solutions to communication breakdowns. During act-outs, instructors formatively and continually assess sound production and intonation. At micro level, we aim to help decrease speaking anxiety by using small group tasks, which was a desired method by the students. At macro level, gradually moving from prepared to unprepared speech tasks across the matrix a couple of times, we aim to familiarise students with speaking to an audience, thus helping with their anxiety and promoting fluency.

4.6.2. Debates and strategy learning

In addition to movie tasks, every two weeks, students prepare for an in-class debate task (see details in Appendix 1). They first read a text with the relevant theme, take notes, and then speak from

their notes in small groups to develop their stance. Later, they listen to a discussion or a debate on a similar topic. The instructor guides them in identifying arguments and counterarguments. Through attentive listening, students are familiarized with debate structure, with a specific focus on argumentation and interactional moves such as turn-taking, holding the floor, and giving the floor. As a culminating activity, they are assigned their *stance* (for/against) and a *motion* (debate topic), then prepare for discussion. These debate tasks involve active listening to counter arguments and using communication strategies such as paraphrasing, asking for assistance or using gestures (Tarone, 1977) to successfully participate in debates. Instructors provide feedback on strategy use, pronunciation, and intonation after the debate, as the students favored delayed individual feedback. Sample course plans to illustrate these activities can be found in Appendix 1. It includes plans for two weeks (4 lessons) of the course, presenting one cycle of our matrix approach.

4.7 Monitoring and Assessment

Teacher's main role is to monitor students throughout the course. As the class is too crowded for an ideal speaking class, in-class and group work activities are preferred. In addition to the teacher, students evaluate their own progress to develop their autonomy and make them feel responsible for their own learning. Students and teachers have their rubrics to evaluate and monitor the development of speaking in all in-class activities.

Both the instructors and the students reported that students should also have their voice in assessment. For this reason, the rubrics and grading system are negotiated with students in the first week. For students' self-evaluation and instructors' grading, similar rubrics should be used to ensure comparability. Rubrics also serve as guides for students for the focus areas in their learning.

4.8 Evaluation

Evaluation is the last component of Nation and Macalister's (2010) model. It is different from *monitoring and assessment* in that it refers to evaluating the designed curriculum rather than the student performance throughout the course. The evaluation of the course design usually involves opinions of the instructors, students and designers at the end of the course, as well as any relevant information on the efficiency of the course in achieving the proposed aims.

For the overall evaluation of the curriculum, the university administers online and anonymous course-evaluation forms at the end of each term. These forms are very comprehensive and have sections on course content, attitudes of learners and instructors, learning, feedback, and activities, as well as open-ended comments sections for the evaluation of the course and the instructor. However, the evaluation of our curriculum is currently an implication for further research for us - for we have not yet used our curriculum with real learners. Instead, we would like to provide a reflection on and an overall evaluation of our curriculum through our discussion of findings in the next section.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our main aim in designing an Oral Communication Course was to develop freshman ELT students' speaking skills and ensure that they would be able to use language in the EAP setting. EAP settings have always been becoming more and more interactive (Ferris & Tagg, 1996) which means, in our setting, learners are expected to use the language to participate in discussions and present their ideas clearly, in addition to being effective listeners. In this sense, this will be a basic course to teach those skills to the students and help them manage their learning processes through their university education. Furthermore,

as they are training to become teachers, this course might potentially have long-term effects on their professional lives.

As part of the curriculum design process, needs and environment analyses were conducted to better understand the context. The general results indicated that the students had low proficiency levels in speaking and high levels of speaking anxiety, as suggested in the literature (Alptekin & Tatar, 2011). The results are also in line with the recent literature on pre-service ELT teachers in Turkey (Dinçer & Yeşilyurt, 2013; Kömür, 2010; Koşar, 2020); the PSTs in those studies also considered their oral proficiency to be low. In addition, our participants were not motivated to speak and participate in the course and needed and wanted more practice. In order to help students to improve their oral skills, participate in the EAP settings to learn and help them use the language, we target improving the communicative and interactional competence of the students.

In addition to reporting their needs on familiarising themselves with various accents, our students in our context wanted to "speak native-like"; however, recent research on pronunciation and speaking advocate intelligibility (Levis, 2005). For this reason, we aim to introduce the concept of intelligibility and raise PSTs' awareness of this approach. This is also well in line with the tasks we designed; the selected movies include various accents, and exposure to foreign accents might help them better comprehend the idea of intelligibility.

To address the challenges of an oral communication class such as anxiety, we used the matrix design, revisiting and recycling activities and tasks. They advance step by step, getting familiar with and then fluent in tasks. In a friendly atmosphere, students will first work individually, then with their partners and in small groups so that they feel ready and prepared to speak in front of the whole class at the end of the course. Since language learners were found to feel anxious when they were unprepared or exposed to an instant question from the teacher (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014), working in groups and having a preparation time might ease their anxiety.

We adopted a thematic unit based on the Six T's approach to suit the needs and interests of the students. Our themes communication and relationships emerged from our students' interests and paired with our general aim of developing their interactional competence. Through reading texts and movies, we will address communication breakdowns and their resolutions in different settings since they are thought to be relevant for ELT teachers and their future learners. As students reflect on the importance of communication in people's lives through discussions, they are expected to gain awareness and create solutions to resolve breakdowns and become effective communicators. "Establishing effective communication and cooperation with students, colleagues, families, and other stakeholders" is one of the competence indicators in the official General Competencies for Teaching Profession Document (MEB, 2017, p. 14). In this sense, the course would both improve their interactional and intercultural competencies and equip them with the necessary social skills for their future professional lives.

Movies involving communication breakdowns and extended speaking tasks on campus with international students will also address the intercultural competence of the students. Since the language is closely tied to culture, language teachers should be aware of intercultural differences and assumptions of their own and others (Sercu, 2005). Movies will provide meaningful content, engaging tasks, and space for reflection on language and culture. As prospective language teachers, they have positive attitudes to the culture of the target language, so the movies could motivate them to participate in the class. Moreover, the theme is relevant, and the discussions that might emerge are beneficial for the group since they will always be involved in communication with students when they become teachers.

For such a course, monitoring and assessment procedure in large classes is challenging. Rubrics are not only the assessment tools but also guides for students for understanding the areas in need of improvement (Dunbar et al., 2006). As the students asked for autonomy and authority, we aim to structure assessment components accordingly. We negotiate grading with our students, to reflect student

agency, and self and peer evaluation for autonomy in our design. This is also supported with extensive tasks beyond the classroom where they become responsible for their own learning, which is very important for developing autonomy and life-long learning abilities of teachers throughout their teaching career (Coolahan, 2002).

The evaluation of a designed curriculum is a rather cyclical, formative and ongoing process involving the collaboration of all stakeholders. Student views during and after the training should be taken to formatively evaluate the course and enhance effectiveness in the short and long run. Strategic curricular decisions might also be enhanced by working with their instructors, other faculty members that will teach them in the upcoming years, and their future employers. Conducting these steps would both complete the final component of the adopted curriculum design model, and at the same time, start a new frame for improvement.

All in all, we believe our Oral Communication course proposal might be effective in that it is designed with careful consideration of the environmental constraints as well as the needs and interests of the future teachers of English. The activities provide more practice and interaction opportunities in and beyond the classroom and address students' preferences and needs. We hope this design process might stand as an example of how specific contextual factors identified through research might be reflected in decisions regarding the course design, and eventually translate into a successful practice.

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Appendix 1
Sample lesson plans

Theme: Personal Relationships			**Week 6**
Topic: Student and Teacher Relationship **Thread:** Communication breakdowns **Class size:** 20-25 students			
Lesson 1			
5′	Warm up	Individual question-answer	T asks whether Ss experience communication problems with their teachers; if yes, elicits examples.
5′		Individual question-answer	T asks the reasons for these problems
10′	Pre-discussion	Silent reading	T distributes an article about "communication breakdowns that Ss create in a classroom", asks Ss to read and take some notes about the reasons
10′	Pre-Discussion	Pair work	T asks Ss to work in pairs and compare their notes and add some other reasons.
15′	Pre-Discussion	Individual	T wants some Ss to talk about the reasons they found.
10′	Pre-Discussion	Silent reading	T distributes an article about "communication breakdowns that teachers create in a classroom", asks Ss to read and take some notes about the reasons
10′	Pre-Discussion	Pair work	T asks Ss to work in pairs and compare their notes and add some other reasons.
5′	Pre-Discussion	Individual	T wants some Ss to talk about the reasons they found.
Lesson 2			
10′	Pre-discussion	Individual	T asks Ss to listen to a debate on classroom violence. T wants them to take notes about the teachers' and students' comments. T draws attention to specific words and their pronunciation.
10′	Pre-discussion	Small group	T wants Ss to work in groups of five and comment on the arguments from both sides.
10′	Pre-discussion	Whole class	T draws attention to argumentation and interactional moves in the debate. Ss listen to the debate again and are asked to pay attention to the communication strategies speakers use.

10′	Pre-discussion	Large two groups	T announces that they are going to have a debate. T divides the whole class into two groups. T selects 3 students from the class and wants them to take the jury role. Group A will be on the teachers' side. Group B will be on the students' side. Each group will argue that they are right. T gives five minutes for preparation.
20′	Discussion	Whole Class (debate)	T moderates discussion and ensures that everyone in a group will speak for at least one minute. The debate will be recorded, and after the class, everyone will listen to the recording to evaluate themselves.
10′	Post-discussion	Whole Class	The jury negotiates and chooses one group, then justifies their decision in front of the two groups. T wraps up the lesson by referring to interactional tools and communication strategies used by the Ss.

Homework: Listen to the debate recording and evaluate your speech. On the day before the class, come together and watch the movie stated in the plan. While watching the movie, take notes about the movie in order to fill in your role cards assigned to you beforehand.

Theme: Personal Relationships **Topic:** Student and Teacher Relationship **Thread:** Communication breakdowns **Class size:** 20-25 students	**Week 7**

Lesson 3

5′	Warm up	Whole class	T asks whether they liked the movie and why.
10′	Pre-discussion	Small-Group	Ss with the same movie task roles come together and share their research results and learn from each other (character analysers in one group, plot summarizers in one group etc.)
30′	Discussion	Speaking Circle	T asks Ss to work in their movie circle that is formed of four or five students with different roles. Each student talks for five minutes to share the findings.
15′	Post-discussion	Whole class	Discussion leaders from each group reports on their group work.
5′	Post-discussion	Whole class	Ss will listen to a song from the movie.
10′	Post discussion	Small group	Ss will talk about how teachers can motivate their students to be successful.

Lesson 4

| 15′ | Speaking | Individual impromptu | T invites a student to talk about his/her inspiring teacher, how s/he inspired and what their characteristics were. |

			5 students will be invited to speak, each for 2 or 3 minutes.
10′	Post speaking	Giving feedback	T gives feedback to the students who did impromptu speech. T also focuses on the phonetics of problematic sounds T identified in debate recordings from the previous week.
10′	Strategy learning	Whole class	T asks Ss for the evaluation of their recordings. Identifies a common interactional/communication problem and provides feedback and strategies to cope with it. Also, some parts of the debate can be listened to again.
10′	Pre-act-out	Small group work	Each group rehearses for the 3-minute act out of the ending or a selected scene from the movie. They listen to soundtracks or songs from the movie during preparation.
25′	Act out	Small groups to whole class	Each group performs their roles. A short peer and teacher feedback following each performance.