

## A Comparative Case Study on The English Teaching Curriculum in Japan, Sweden, And Turkey

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### Abstract

**Theoretical Background:** Foreign language teaching has been on the agenda of many countries. Despite the efforts spent and improvements made, foreign language learning is still an issue for many countries. For this study, English is chosen as the foreign language studied, as it is the most widely taught foreign language in over 100 countries (Crystal, 2003).

The purpose of this study is to compare the English language teaching (ELT) curriculum in Japan, Sweden and Turkey. The comparison is significant as it covers all elements of curriculum, which include the goals and design of the curriculum, main philosophy, objectives, topics included, foreign language teaching approaches; and assessment and evaluation approaches in ELT in the countries involved.

**Research question:** What differences in the English language curricula exist between the three countries, which could add to an explanation on the differences in proficiency?

**Methodology:** This qualitative research is designed as a multiple (collective) case study. Maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy, is used to compare the ELT curriculum in the countries involved. The researcher purposefully selected the information-rich cases for an in-depth study of the curricula in aforementioned countries to capture and describe common patterns across a variety of cases. To do that a set of criteria has been identified to ensure maximum variation in the countries involved. The criteria were set as the language family that the mother tongue of the country belongs to as it is known that the more distant linguistically from the mother tongue the longer a language takes to learn (Corder, 1994) and the country's achievement level in English on an international level based on English Proficiency Index- EPI conducted by Education First. In this scope, the English language teaching curriculum at compulsory education in Turkey, Sweden and Japan are compared with the curriculum in Turkey based on the set criteria.

**Results and their significance:** The findings show that there is tendency towards implementing modern approaches in ELT curricula designed. Looking at the design, all three curricula are student-centered; all are based on the progressivist philosophy with a main

objective of ensuring communication. Looking at topics covered, it is seen that the content is organized in a spiral way where topics are revisited at different grade levels. The language teaching approach in all three countries were found to be communicative language teaching while the assessment and evaluation approaches included both summative and formative assessments. Although the three countries' curricula are up-to-date, there are differences in their English language achievement level on international levels. So, when the language family of the involved countries' languages are looked into and cross-checked with their achievement levels in EPI, it is seen Sweden where Swedish language belonging to the same language family (Indo-European), same branch (Europe) and same group (German- Scandinavian) is spoken, is ranked in "high proficiency" band in English Proficiency Index (EPI) 2020 while Japan and Turkey, which belong to Altay language family, completely different language family, are ranked in "low" proficiency band (EF, 2020). Based on these findings, it is concluded that structural differences arising from the language family a language belongs to and therefore, differences arising from the distance/similarities between mother tongue and target language, could be one reason behind the difficulties of learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, in addition to implementing up-to-date foreign language approach and curriculum, different strategies could be developed to offer solutions for problems in language teaching arising from the difference in language family and linguists could be involved in curriculum development groups.

**Keywords:** foreign language teaching, curriculum studies, English