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## ENGLISH TEACHERS' INTEREST IN PROVERBS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### Abstract

In order to see English Teachers' attitudes towards learning and teaching proverbs, descriptive methods and quantitative approaches were used, and a questionnaire was answered by 84 English Teachers from grades 9 through 12 in two different cities Ordu, Turkey and Akhaltsikhe, Georgia.

**Keywords:** Proverb, Culture, Teaching, Method, Education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder (2004), proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. Mieder argues that 'since they belong to the common knowledge of basically all native speakers, they are indeed very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large'. (p. 146).

In another book Mieder also mentions that 'when it comes to foreign language learning, proverbs play a role in the teaching as a part of cultural and metaphorical learning'. Mieder also claims that the use of proverbs in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language is important for the learners' ability to communicate effectively. Mieder also states that 'textbooks on both the teaching of native and foreign languages usually include at least some lists of proverbs and accompanying exercises'. (p. 147).

But unfortunately, proverbs are found to be given insufficient place in input provided for learners in language classrooms or mostly used as time-fillers. When we check our class course books, we see that proverbs are a small part of language teaching and the materials used in language classrooms ignore proverbs and don't provide exercises for learning them. Because there is a tendency for grammar-based courses, teachers are not willing to have classes using authentic materials and there is almost no study carried out in Turkey or Georgia regarding proverb teaching and learning particularly at secondary level from grades 9 to 12.(Gozpinar, 2011)

So we try to draw the picture in English teachers' language classrooms in high schools in Turkey, Georgia related to proverb instruction so that both the students' and the teachers' awareness about proverb teaching can be raised and suggestions can be offered.

## 2. AIM AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to investigate whether and how proverbs are used as a part of English foreign language teaching and what attitudes there are towards the use of proverbs in their teaching amongst 84 (eighty-four) grade 9-12 secondary school teachers from Turkiye, Ordu City (35) and Akhaltsikhe, Georgia (49) areas.

In this part 13 questions were asked to see how much they believe in the inclusion of proverbs in the curriculum, teachers' attitudes towards teaching English proverbs and their place in the coursebooks and materials. The researcher wanted to see how much English teachers think that knowing proverbs improve for skills, writing, reading, speaking, listening. The reasons for considering proverbs significant to learn in the classroom, how proverbs help to communicate effectively and the importance of learning English

proverbs for English language education and effective communication in general were the focusses in this part. Necessity of knowing and using English proverbs outside the classroom was another focus as well.

Descriptive methods and quantitative approaches were used, and a questionnaire was answered by the teachers. The relevant question is "What is your attitude towards learning and teaching of proverbs?" English teachers were asked to give their opinion on how interested they were in teaching proverbs in their EFL classes. Due to a lack of research into proverb teaching in EFL classes generally and particularly of teacher attitudes towards teaching proverbs, it is hoped that this research will reveal some valuable data and will encourage further research in this area.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As an English language teacher of 10 years in Turkey and a teacher of Turkish to foreigners for 5 years, the researcher, has drawn on his own classroom experiences whilst preparing the questionnaire. Care was taken to avoid asking confusing questions or language which may lose the teachers' attention/interest of the topic. The questions in the questionnaire were chosen for their simplicity, directness and to focus the teachers' interest on the teaching of proverbs. The teachers expressed their appreciation for this. After making sure the questions were clear and appropriate, participant were given the accepted 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Questionnaires were completed by Akhaltsikhe and Ordu teachers respectively.

A total of 84 English teachers were surveyed and the researcher dealt with the question of English teachers' attitudes by dividing it into 6 categories, each of which had further sub-questions. These were then presented to the teachers and the data produced is detailed as follows in the table 1:

Table 1: The Categorization of the Questions About English Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Learning and Teaching of English Proverbs.

<b>1. Importance of learning English proverbs for English language education</b>
Learning proverbs is integral to the overall English language learning experience.
<b>2. If proverbs help for effective communication</b>
To communicate effectively in English, you need to learn to use proverbs.
<b>3. The reasons for considering proverbs significant to learn in the classroom</b>
Using proverbs in oral presentations will make them more effective.
Knowing proverbs will improve reading skills.
Using proverbs in written communication will improve my writing skills.
Understanding proverbs improves listening comprehension.
English proverbs are important in understanding cultural differences and similarities.
Knowing English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor.

Learning English proverbs is helpful in expressing oneself using figurative language.

#### 4. The necessity of knowing and using English proverbs outside the classroom.

Outside the classroom, one needs to recognize and understand proverbs when communicating in English.

#### 5. Attitudes towards English proverbs' place in the coursebooks.

Proverbs should be included in English textbooks.

#### 6. Are the proverbs included in English Language Teaching at high school?

Proverbs should be a part of the English language curriculum

I include special time for teaching English proverbs.

### 3.1. Learning Proverbs is Integral to the Overall English Language Learning Experience

The results suggest that the majority of English teachers (58 out of 84 or 69%) think proverbs have a positive effect on the overall English language experience as in table 2.

Table 2: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Learning Proverbs is Integral to the Overall English Language Learning Experience.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	32	65	5	31	2	4
ORDU	26	74	8	23	1	3
TOTAL	58	69	3	27	3	4

Of the 84 teachers who responded, 69% were in agreement, 27% were unsure and 4% expressed disagreement to the statement that proverbs were an integral and necessary part of the English language learning experience.

### 3.2. To Communicate Effectively in English, You Need to Learn to Use Proverbs

As can be seen in Table 3, It reveals that of the 63 English teachers who responded to this question, 75% find proverbs to be essential in effective communication and 21% were not sure if it helped at all in communication. This is one of the primary reasons we believe there is a need for learning proverbs.

Table 3: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think That They Need to Learn to Use Proverbs to Communicate Effectively in English.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	37	76	10	20	2	4
ORDU	26	74	8	23	1	3
TOTAL	63	75	18	21	3	4

This indicates another reason for the necessity of proverbs teaching and supports the views of previous research claims that proverb teaching can help to

produce language more fluently and naturally which can in turn increase motivation (Porto, 1998); and can prove a significant rhetorical force in various modes of communication used by native speakers, not only in friendly chats and powerful political speeches but also in best seller novels and the influential mass media. (Mieder, 2004:1)

### 3.3. Using Proverbs in Oral Presentations Will Make Them More Effective

Whilst preparing for presentations and papers, in addition to reading books and articles, the researchers believe that access to authentic cultural knowledge, including proverbs, would help the efficiency of the topic in oral presentations. For example, proverbs are present in a number of important popular art forms, such as music, songs, poetry, riddles, etc., and their use in oral presentations is thought to attract and engage listeners, improve communication, and aid listeners in remembering what they have learned. However, the current availability of such cultural /authentic materials in today's course material and textbooks is very limited. For this reason, teachers were asked their opinion on how the use of proverbs in oral presentations would help portray topics more effectively. Table 4 shows these results.

The ratio for if using proverbs in oral presentations will make them more effective is 91 % of the teachers in Ordu and 88% in Akhaltsikhe. The table reveals that this number is greater than the ratio which is for the necessity of proverbs for better communication. 89% of the participants in total consider proverbs significant in oral presentation.

Table 4: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Using Proverbs in Oral Presentations Will Make Them More Effective.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	43	88	6	12	0	0
ORDU	32	91	3	9	0	0
TOTAL	75	89	9	11	0	0

### 3.4. Knowing Proverbs Will Improve Reading Skills

Table 5 below shows the importance of proverbs for comprehending a text is seen as important by 78% in Tbilisi and 66% in Ordu. English teachers (61) agree that proverbs should be studied so that students could accurately understand/ interpret proverbs in reading texts and thus encourage/ motivate readers to continue with further reading without problem.

Table 5: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Knowing Proverbs Will Improve Reading Skills.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	38	78	11	22	0	0
ORDU	23	66	10	29	2	6
TOTAL	61	73	21	25	2	2

### 3.5. Using Proverbs in Written Communication Will Improve My Writing Skills

Knowing proverbs is believed that it does not necessarily improve writing skills, the results however, seems to indicate that large percentage of teachers surveyed believe otherwise as shown in table 6 below. Akhaltsikhe teachers 64 % and Ordu teachers 49 % agree for the benefit of proverbs' role in improving writing skills. Our research reveals that a large percentage of teachers, 48 teachers in total, agree that proverb knowledge improves writing skills where this knowledge is applied to strengthen argument in writing.

Table 6: The Number And Percentages of Teachers Who Think Using Proverbs in Written Communication Will Improve My Writing Skills.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	31	64	12	24	6	12
ORDU	17	48	10	29	8	23
TOTAL	48	57	22	26	14	17

### 3.6. Understanding Proverbs Improves Listening Comprehension

In our research, we identified that 57% of teachers agreed that proverb knowledge improves writing skills. Similarly we found that proverb knowledge also improves listening comprehension. Our research in this area highlights that 50% of teachers agree in use of proverbs helps in improved listening comprehension. Results from table 7 below support this view point in that speaker's use of proverbs helps listeners' comprehension of the message. However, our results also highlight that 20% were in disagreement to this proposal. The remaining 30% were neutral to this proposal.

Table 7: The Number And Percentages of Teachers Who Think Understanding Proverbs Improves Listening Comprehension.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	31	63	13	27	5	10
ORDU	11	32	12	34	12	34
TOTAL	42	50	25	30	17	20

### 3.7. English Proverbs are Important in Understanding Cultural Differences and Similarities

As previously stated, the researchers believe that to be an efficient user of a foreign language, speakers should not only be able to receive and produce messages, but they must also possess cultural awareness of the language. For example, a person needs to be culturally literate to achieve comprehension of many texts. Results suggest a relatively high number of teachers agree with the researchers, that proverbs are important in understanding cultural differences and similarities. The numbers were as follows: 94 % in Ordu and 90 % in Akhaltsikhe. Table 8 below shows that almost none of the participants disagree while 7% of all responding teachers are neutral about the place of proverbs in the teaching of cultural values as the table above also indicates.

Table 8: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think English Proverbs are Important in Understanding Cultural Differences and Similarities

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	44	90	5	10	0	0
ORDU	33	94	1	3	1	3
TOTAL	77	92	6	7	1	1

Majority of the participants surveyed (92%) support that knowledge in proverbs are an important aid in understanding cultural differences or similarities. Focus/Teaching on/of proverbs is also seen as a tool to encourage students in developing cultural awareness and to influence their behaviours towards other cultures. In this research sample, our findings provide strong indication with larger percentage of teachers supporting the viewpoint that proverb knowledge is considered very important in understanding of cultural differences.

The survey results show that 77 teachers in total apprise their learners of the contribution of proverbs for the development of cultural and intercultural competence because proverbs give them chance to see how native speakers conceptualize experiences, things and events in their languages. Majority of teachers surveyed (80%) were in agreement that inclusion of proverbs in ELT assists with cultural understanding.

Teachers should integrate intercultural awareness into the language curriculum. Engaging students with the foreign culture through proverbs will be positively accepted by students and prove to be a powerful educational technique for enhancing the development of intercultural competence.

### 3.8. Knowing English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor.

A proverb is often a ready made epigram, sums up the situation effectively, drives home the point, and

appeals to the reader's or hearer's sense of humor (Taylor, 1996 ). To the question if knowing English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor, about 84%, 71 of the participants in total agree with the idea and the definition above by Taylor. In the research, we identified that, 92% in Akhaltsikhe and 74% in Ordu agreed that knowing English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor. This is shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Knowing English Proverbs is Helpful in Understanding English Humor.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	45	92	4	8	0	0
ORDU	26	74	6	17	3	9
TOTAL	71	84	10	12	3	4

### 3.9. Learning English Proverbs is Helpful in Expressing Oneself Using Figurative Language

The proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning. (Norrick, N.1985) According to Lennon, figurative language causes problems for foreign language learners due to its underlying metaphorical character. (Lennon, 1998: 11-30) As can be seen in Table 10, participants from all three cities, Akhaltsikhe (73%), Ordu (80%) agreed that one needs to learn to use proverbs to express himself using figurative language. The results of our survey on the importance of proverb use in expressing oneself figuratively were considerably in support by 85% of the teachers.

Table 10: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Learning English Proverbs is Helpful in Expressing Oneself Using Figurative Language.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	43	88	5	10	1	2
ORDU	28	80	7	20	0	0
TOTAL	71	85	12	14	1	1

In the above section, we see number of different reasons provided with reference to the significance of proverb teaching in the classroom, however, all reasons provided here have one common theme that proverbs are necessary in English language teaching. If proverbs improve writing skills and listening skills outside the classroom is the lowest percentage of agreement in the whole scale, which is 57% for writing and 50% for listening. These findings indicate the importance of proverbs in oral presentations and understanding cultural elements. This part of our survey had the

highest average in support of this proposal. In fact all teachers with one exception were in support of this proposal. It is clear that surveyed teachers consider proverbs as one of the phraseology that has humor, figurative meaning and cultural elements.

### 3.10. Outside the Classroom, One Needs to Recognize and Understand Proverbs When Communicating in English.

Our survey also highlights that teachers are in support the idea that proverb knowledge is important in improved communication in English. Overall 78% of teachers believe that proverbs are needed to be understood and might be used while communicating in English outside the classroom.

Table 11: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Outside the Classroom, One Needs to Recognize and Understand Proverbs When Communicating in English.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	40	82	5	10	4	8
ORDU	25	71	8	23	2	6
TOTAL	65	78	13	15	6	7

### 3.11. Proverbs Should be Included in English Textbooks.

Mieder states that textbooks on both the teaching of native and foreign languages usually include at least some lists of proverbs and accompanying exercises Mieder,W.(2004). The participants of our research agree that the occurrence of the proverbs in text books and exams should be more frequent and teachers should focus on attitudes toward using the proverbs in classes.

Table 12 below shows, on average, 69% of teachers disagree with the books which are mostly grammar-based and think that authentic materials such as proverbs should be dealt with in the coursebooks that act as main materials for English language teaching.

Table 12: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Proverbs Should be Included in English Textbooks.

Proverbs should be included in English textbooks.	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
	58	69	21	25	5	6

Table 13 shows 59% of the teachers in Akhaltsikhe and 83% of Ordu teachers agree that proverbs should be included in English textbooks.

Table 13: The Number and Percentages of Teachers' Who Think Proverbs Should be Included in English Textbooks.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	29	59	18	37	2	4

ORDU	29	83	3	9	3	9
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Written course material should include frequently used and commonly known proverbs by native speakers of English. Different aspects of proverbs should be taught by giving different examples of proverbs. McGrath (2006:171) argues that coursebooks are a central element in teaching-learning. They will tend to dictate what is taught in what order and to some extent how as well as what learners learn.

### 3.12. Proverbs Should be a Part of the English Language Curriculum

Table 14 shows 92 in Akhaltsikhe and 77% in Ordu supported the importance of proverbs in teaching English to students as a second language. They argue that including proverbs into the curriculum helps students improve all aspects of language skills.

Table 14: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Think Proverbs Should be a Part of the English Language Curriculum

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	45	92	2	4	2	4
ORDU	27	77	6	17	2	6

The content and the format of the exam show the incompatibility between the curriculum and the examination, which brings out limitations in actual language teaching practices in the classroom (Kızıldağ, 2009). As table 15 shows below, 72 teachers out of 84, 85% support the importance of integrating proverbs in English language curriculum.

This result is encouraging for our research topic and as such we recommend that material writers and curriculum designers give emphasis to use of proverbs in language teachings.

Table 15: The number and percentages of teachers who think proverbs should be a part of the English language curriculum.

Proverbs should be a part of the English language curriculum.	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
	72	85	8	10	4	5

### 3.13. I Include Special Time For Teaching English Proverbs

Although teachers consistently express a very positive attitude towards the teaching of proverbs, in reality, only 21 teachers (25%) said they teach proverbs in classes and 29% of the teachers were not sure if they would teach and 46% did not include time for proverbs into their course material. These results are recorded in table 16.

Table 16: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Include Special Time For Teaching English Proverbs.

I include special time for teaching English proverbs.	agree	%	Not sure	%	Disagree	%
	21	25	24	29	39	46

The results show that proverbs are a small part of the EFL teaching in the classroom. Although there is a positive attitude and awareness among the teachers with reference to value of proverbs, it is not so commonly practiced in the classroom. Teachers that confirmed inclusion of proverb teachings in their course material were in the minority. Table 17 below shows 37% of teachers in Akhaltsikhe and 9% in Ordu who include special time for teaching English proverbs.

Table 17: The Number and Percentages of Teachers Who Include Special Time For Teaching English Proverbs.

City name	agree	%	Not sure	%	disagree	%
AKHALTSIKHE	18	37	12	24	19	39
ORDU	3	9	12	34	20	57

## 4. RESULTS

Majority of the teachers who participated in the research were in agreement to the importance of learning English proverbs for effective communication. Proverb education helps with language education and is considered integral to the overall English language learning experience. Proverbs also help develop effective communication skills. The reasons that support proverb education include benefits such as; improved oral presentation effectiveness, improved reading skills, improved written communication skills, improved listening and comprehension. English proverbs are considered vital in understanding cultural differences and similarities. Knowledge of English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor and learning English proverbs is helpful in expressing oneself by using figurative language. Additionally, English proverb knowledge is necessary with the use of and comprehension of English language outside the classroom. Teachers agree that English proverbs should have a place in the coursebooks and teaching English proverbs is important so proverbs should be a part of the English language curriculum.

According to Can, N. (2011) not only the coursebooks but also the curriculum and the assessment need to emphasize the teaching of proverbs so that both teachers and students feel the need to pay more attention to the proverbs incorporated in the coursebooks. Teachers should select coursebooks appropriate for proverb instruction or adapt them to better meet their need for proverbs. In order to bring proverbs to the fore, stakeholders' awareness about various aspects of proverbs needs to be raised.

If the administrators don't include teaching proverbs in curriculum, then it would be the teachers' responsibility to know the content and nature of the course, so they can design materials. But this will create extra effort for them or will not have extra time to prepare new materials due to lack of time. Although proverbs are needed by the learners, less attention by the curriculum designers will cause lack of confidence in proverbs. The curriculum designers should discuss the importance and possibilities of including cultural components into ELT curriculum. The researcher thinks that growth of English as an international language causes the inclusion of culture in EFL curriculum.

The results of this research suggest that teachers are in support of the claims of paremiologists that the learning of proverbs has a positive effect on the learning of English in relation to the development of cultural learning, metaphorical understanding, and the development of effective communicative skills.

Teachers felt that a knowledge and understanding of proverbs made oral presentations more effective, improved reading and writing skills and listening comprehension, furthermore, outside of the classroom, English proverbs were thought to be important for the understanding of cultural differences and similarities, English humor and for expressing oneself using figurative language.

Teachers also agreed that English proverbs should have a place in coursebooks and be a part of the English language curriculum. Overall, the results suggest a reasonable argument for the inclusion of proverbs in ELT classes. These findings were consistent in both Georgia and Turkey.

With this study, we aim to motivate for the designing of new materials for teachers to use in the classroom to increase their awareness for teaching proverbs. Our findings support the view that proverbs play a key role in cultural understandings and support development of ELT teaching. However, we have identified a contradiction between the views and practice of teachers in this regard. The belief that proverbs are an integral part of learning is evident, but the practice of such teaching is absent. We believe that material development is necessary in this area to support teachers with proverb education.

The teachers unfortunately don't allocate special time for the use of proverbs to improve the various skills discussed. That data shows that they don't teach proverbs in English language classes and the use of proverbs is insufficient for different language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, listening etc. Unfortunately English teachers don't deal with proverbs and considered as less efficient materials for the

development of learners. The data reveals that the use of proverbs in the teaching of grammar, listening and writing skills are the most disagreed ones.

The students have a great opportunity to learn proverbs either from teachers or coursebooks and thereby improve their English communicative abilities. As it is seen in the previous questions, the teachers are not so much interested in teaching proverbs. If the coursebooks also don't include a list of proverbs or the teachers don't use those exercises, then how will learners deal with proverbs?

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