

SOME SUGGESTIONS TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMMES IN TURKEY²

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Abstract: The teaching of English language is attached so much importance in the Turkish educational system that it is currently started at the very beginning of the primary education, as of the second grade in the new 4+4+4 system. This high importance of the issue necessitates a satisfying level of quality in English education at all levels ranging from primary to tertiary phase. Under this framework, the training of the English language teachers undertakes a quite significant role. Therefore, the available English language teaching (ELT) programmes at Turkish universities take on the serious responsibility of educating the future English language teachers who are expected to teach the future generations. However, it is not possible to say that everything about these programmes goes flawless. In this study we present some suggestions to enhance the quality of education in the ELT programmes. The major points covered as part of these suggestions range from additions to and extractions from the eight-semester curriculum, the (non)employment of native speaker instructors considering especially the development of oral skills, and the broadening of the alternatives provided under the student exchange programme to the specialization alternatives to be provided for the undergraduate ELT students who want to specialize in teaching English to very young learners. In accordance with the presented broad-range suggestions this study aims to contribute to the elevation of the standards of the training of prospective English language teachers and thus, in the long run, the whole English language education in Turkey.

Keywords: English language teaching programmes, quality, native instructors, Erasmus, curriculum

1. Introduction

The status of the English language as the lingua franca all over the world renders it the most important foreign language among others. Thus the teaching of English to the speakers of other languages has gained an ever-growing gravity in almost all of the developing countries. If they want to keep pace with the recent developments in many fields ranging from technology to education, it appears to be a must for them to have English-knowing qualified citizens. This high importance attached to the English language shows itself in many contexts in Turkey as country that belongs to the Expanding Circle that encompasses the speakers of English as a foreign language according to the classification proposed by Kachru (1985). For example, most of the job vacancies demand a good command of English as a prerequisite. This can be easily observed even in the ordinary vacancy announcements on the daily newspapers. This upper status of English in Turkey is elaborated by Dogancay-Aktuna (1998) as follows:

“In Turkey English carries the instrumental function of being the most studied foreign language and the most popular medium of education after Turkish. On an interpersonal level, it is used as a link language for international business and for tourism while also providing a code that symbolizes modernization and elitism to the educated middle classes and those in the upper strata of the socioeconomic ladder” (p.37).

Likewise, the appointment of other language teachers like German and French account for only a limited percentage of the whole language teacher appointment rate in the Turkish Ministry of Education in September 2013 and 2014. An overwhelming majority of the appointed language teachers belong to the English branch.

² This study is the extended version of the author's oral presentation titled “Some Suggestions to Enhance the Quality of English Language Teaching Programmes in Turkey” at International Conference on Quality in Higher Education 2014 (ICQH) in Sakarya on December 3-5, 2014.

Table 1 below shows the distribution of the language branches in the September-2013 and September-2014 teacher appointment by the Ministry of Education:

Table 1. Distribution of the branches in the September-2013 and September-2014 teacher appointment by the Ministry of Education

Branch	English	German	Arabic	Russian	Chinese	Italian	Spanish	French	Total
Number (September 2013)	5034	420	128	11	3	1	-	-	5597
Number (September 2014)	3931	254	203	3	1	-	1	5	4398

(www.meb.gov.tr)

As it is clear from the Table 1, the English branch dominates the foreign language teacher appointments in Turkey. Even only this numerical datum is enough to demonstrate the significance of the English language and its teaching in Turkish education system. As for the education of these English language teachers, there are distinct programmes centrally based on the English language in the Turkish university education system. These are English language teaching (ELT) which aims to carry out the training of the prospective English language teachers, English translation and interpreting, English linguistics, English language and literature, and American culture and literature. Although the ELT programmes constitute the only pure source of English language teachers, the graduates of the other mentioned programmes become English language teachers provided that they complete a pedagogical formation programme successfully.

The leading universities considering the field of ELT in Turkey are those like Bosphorus University, Middle East Technical University, Hacettepe University, İstanbul University, and Gazi University. Currently, the number of the universities with an active ELT programme has reached 55 according to the 2014-data by the Student Selection and Placement Centre in Turkey (www.osym.gov.tr). According to the 2004-data of OSYM, the total number of the active ELT programmes in Turkish universities appears to be 28 (www.osym.gov.tr). These figures apparently show that the number of the programmes has doubled in the last decade and this figure is expected to rise in the coming years with the opening of new state and foundation universities.

As the quantity of universities and ELT programmes increases, the quality and standards of education are also expected to increase with each passing day. There has certainly been a considerable amount of progress; however, there are undeniable problems and shortcomings embedded in the running system of these programmes. The main question here is whether quality accompanies quantity or not. In this paper, the main points of suggestions are shaped considering issues like additions to and extractions from the eight-semester curriculum of the ELT programmes, the (non)employment of native speaker instructors at undergraduate level, the broadening of the country alternatives provided under the exchange programmes like Erasmus, Mevlana, and Farabi, the specialization alternatives to be provided for the undergraduate ELT students who want to specialize in teaching English to very young learners.

2. Suggestions for English Language Teaching Programmes in Turkey

The first suggestion comes as to the curriculum followed in the ELT programmes throughout eight semesters. All of the programmes in Turkish universities follow a framework curriculum determined by the Higher Education Council (YOK); and this brings a certain level of standardization. However, there are two major problems about the current application of the curriculum. The first problem is the existence of courses delivered in Turkish by the instructors of the Department of Educational Sciences. Courses like Introduction to Educational Science, Educational Psychology, Classroom Management, Guidance, and Turkish Education System and School Management are among these. Likewise, the course Assessment and Evaluation is delivered in Turkish in the 6th semester and the similar course Assessment and Evaluation in Foreign Language Teaching is delivered in English in the 8th semester, which gives the impression that testing is carried out in different ways in both languages. The language of instruction in ELT programmes is automatically English. Therefore, there is no need to deliver such courses in Turkish. The teaching staff in the ELT programmes is specialized in the field

of education and can readily offer these courses in English. This will also raise the extent to which the undergraduate students are exposed to the English language, which is also expected to enhance their professional development. Thus, the course Assessment and Evaluation that is normally offered in Turkish can be extracted from the curriculum and Assessment and Evaluation in Foreign Language Teaching can be extended to two semesters. In addition to these points, the curriculum should be enriched with the participation of new elective courses. Elective courses should be open to change and they should be named and shaped in accordance with the changing conditions. For instance, an elective course on the Common European Framework (CEF) can be a good complementary tool for the related courses on materials design and course development. Again related with the curriculum followed in the ELT programmes, we suggest the period allocated to school experience and teaching practice be extended. In the current system, school experience is covered in the 7th semester and teaching practice is covered in the 8th semester. Instead of being left to the last year of the undergraduate education, these two highly important opportunities of practicum should be increased and covered as of the 3rd or 4th semester. No matter what they learn as a university student, every teacher develops a personal teaching style in the classroom where they are in front of their students. Therefore, ELT students as prospective English language teachers should be given broader opportunities to breathe the air of the classroom and should be enabled to shape their original styles through first-hand observations and subsequent teaching practices.

As Turkey is an EFL country, it is quite normal to encounter problems about authenticity in the process of developing language skills. This disadvantage can somehow be compensated in terms of reading, writing, and listening skills especially with the help of internet. However, speaking skill is more demanding to develop in EFL contexts and it is really hard for non-native English-speaking teachers to motivate students to speak in English even in ELT programmes. At this point, the popular dichotomy of NESTs (Native English-speaking teacher) and Non-NESTs (Non-native English-speaking teacher) comes to the agenda. Medgyes (2001: 434) states the following differences between NESTs and Non-NESTs:

- NESTs and Non-NESTs differ in terms of their language proficiency;
- They differ in terms of their teaching behaviour;
- The discrepancy in language proficiency accounts for most of the differences found in their teaching behaviour;
- They can be equally good teachers on their own terms.

NESTs and Non-NESTs naturally differ from each other remarkably in many respects. The important thing here is making utmost use of the strengths of both parties. Therefore, the employment of native speaker instructors can bring serious advantages considering especially the development of oral skills. Native speaker instructors can not only constitute an ideal model in view of speaking but also pose a good helper in developing intercultural competence. In most of the ELT programmes in Turkish universities, there are Fulbright assistants or short-term-working native speaker instructors. Instead of short-term native instructors, ELT programmes can make better use of long-term-working native speaker instructors who are familiar with the Turkish educational system and the characteristics, needs, and expectations of the students. Briefly, ELT programmes in Turkey need at least one experienced native speaker instructor to raise the potential of the offered education.

Authentic experiences are quite important in terms of broadening the horizons of the students. A new university, a new city, and a new country can offer many plus points for ELT students. Accordingly, student exchange programmes like Farabi, Mevlana, and Erasmus hold a strong potential of rich opportunities. The country and university alternatives provided under especially international Erasmus and Mevlana exchange programmes should be broadened each year to address as many students as possible. This is important for the students of all programmes; however, as prospective language teachers ELT students need an overseas experience much more than other students.

As of the 2012-2013 school year, the 4+4+4 system was launched in the Turkish primary, elementary, and secondary education. According to this new system English course begins in the 2nd grade of the primary education. This means that English language teachers are expected to address children of ages 7 and 8. Naturally, teaching English to a child at the age of 7 and an adolescent at the age of 17 shows radical differences. Communicating with little children and teaching a totally new language to them requires a special talent and flexibility. Therefore, at the undergraduate level, specialization alternatives can be provided for ELT students who want to specialize in teaching English to very young learners. This can be achieved through offering extra courses for those who are volunteers to teach English to little children when they begin professional life. It does not seem possible to divide the ELT programme into two as is the case with the two different mathematics

education programmes in Turkey, elementary mathematics education programme and secondary mathematics education programme. However, at least some extra elective courses on how to teach English to very young learners and accordingly shaped extra teaching practice opportunities at primary schools can be offered to the voluntary undergraduate ELT students.

The last point we cover as a part of our suggestions is the professional efficacy of the teaching staff in the ELT programmes. The number of both state and foundation universities and the active ELT programmes (see Appendix) is on the increase. Nevertheless, quantity should not be allowed to shadow quality. The quality of the offered education should be always maximized. To this end, the professional development of the academic staff should be strongly encouraged and supported. Their regular participation in the academic events like national and international symposiums, conferences, and workshops is quite important. Likewise, being an active part of professional organizations like INGED, IATEFL, and TESOL can bring many benefits professionally. Similarly, they should be encouraged to produce scholarly publications on a regular basis. Such academic activities will not only help academic staff develop themselves personally and professionally but also contribute to their command of the lessons and classroom management.

3. Conclusion

In this study, we have identified some specific problems posing a barrier for the quality of the ELT programmes at Turkish universities. In terms of focusing on physical problems, we have tried to put the human factor in the very centre of the issue. Therefore, our suggestions are presented with the aim of helping both students and academic staff throughout the whole education process. Their personal and professional development should be attached utmost importance. Under this framework, the presented suggestions about the curriculum, the employment of native speaker instructors, student exchange programmes, teaching English to very young learners, and the participation of the academic staff in academic events are expected to make contributions to the quality standards of the ELT programmes at Turkish universities.

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Appendix

Alphabetical List of the Universities in Turkey with an Active ELT Programme

University Name	Status	City
Abant İzzet Baysal University	State	Bolu
Akdeniz University	State	Antalya
Aksaray University	State	Aksaray
Amasya University	State	Amasya
Anadolu University	State	Eskişehir

Atatürk University	State	Erzurum
Bahçeşehir University	Foundation	İstanbul
Balıkesir University	State	Balıkesir
Başkent University	Foundation	Ankara
Boğaziçi University	State	İstanbul
Canik Başarı University	Foundation	Samsun
Cumhuriyet University	State	Sivas
Çağ University	Foundation	Mersin
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University	State	Çanakkale
Çukurova University	State	Adana
Dicle University	State	Diyarbakır
Dokuz Eylül University	State	İzmir
Erciyes University	State	Kayseri
Eskişehir Osmangazi University	State	Eskişehir
Fatih University	Foundation	İstanbul
Gazi University	State	Ankara
Gaziantep University	State	Gaziantep
Hacettepe University	State	Ankara
Hakkari University	State	Hakkari
İnönü University	State	Malatya
İstanbul Aydın University	Foundation	İstanbul
İstanbul Bilgi University	Foundation	İstanbul
İstanbul Kültür University	Foundation	İstanbul
İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	Foundation	İstanbul
İstanbul University	State	İstanbul

İzmir University	Foundation	İzmir
Karadeniz Technical University	State	Trabzon
Kocaeli University	State	Kocaeli
Maltepe University	Foundation	İstanbul
Marmara University	State	İstanbul
Mehmet Akif Ersoy University	State	Burdur
Mersin University	State	Mersin
Mevlana University	Foundation	Konya
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	State	Muğla
Mustafa Kemal University	State	Hatay
Necmettin Erbakan University	State	Ankara
Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University	State	Nevşehir
Middle East Technical University	State	Ankara
Okan University	Foundation	İstanbul
Ondokuz Mayıs University	State	Samsun
Pamukkale University	State	Denizli
Sakarya University	State	Sakarya
Süleyman Demirel University	State	Isparta
Trakya University	State	Edirne
Ufuk University	Foundation	Ankara
Uludağ University	State	Bursa
Yeditepe University	Foundation	İstanbul
Yıldız Technical University	State	İstanbul
Yüzüncü Yıl University	State	Van
Zirve University	Foundation	Gaziantep