

Obstacles of Utilizing English at Language Schools in Turkey

Erkan Acar

*Department of Sociology, Suleyman Sah University, Fatih Mh. Tuzla-Orhanli,
Istanbul, Turkey*

E-mail: eacar@ssu.edu.tr, erkanacr@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT English like in many countries around the world became the most popular second language in Turkey. Due to its given importance, English is taught at public and private schools, private language centers and intensively at the language preparatory schools at universities. However, it is well known that language education in Turkey is problematic. Turkish citizens' ability to utilize English is far below than world's average. The purpose of this study is to explore the obstacles of English language learners in language preparatory schools at universities as perceived by English instructors. The study used a qualitative design and semi-structured interviews including ten English instructors at five language preparatory schools. The study revealed four themes regarding students' obstacles when they try to utilize English. Themes included (1) structural differences between the Turkish and English languages, (2) lack of opportunity to use English in daily life, (3) students' and instructors' widespread erroneous "attitude" toward teaching and learning methodologies, and (4) lack of self-confidence.

INTRODUCTION

As it is in most countries, English is accepted as lingua franca in Turkey. English language instruction in the Turkish education system dates back to the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire began the process of westernization (Kirkgoz 2005). Throughout the last century, with the increase in popularity of the English language at all levels of education, English has been taught as part of curricula and, in some schools in the Republic of Turkey, became the medium of instruction. Although French and German are also favored and taught in Turkey, a majority of foreign language learners choose English as a second language (Acar 2004). In Turkey, schools and private language preparation centers offer learning environments for people who are interested in English. Some schools offer English courses as part of their foreign language curriculum, while in others English has become the medium of instruction, which generates prestige and reputation for both the schools and their students (Dogancay-Aktuna and Kiziltepe 2005).

In Turkey, having strong English language skills is a sign of prestige at work and within the community at large. Further, it is a fact that public and private sectors reward people who are good at utilizing English. For instance, many public and private companies have policies that stipulate additional income for those who have specified scores from standardized English tests.

However, in many cases those policies do not require using English for the benefit of the company. In other words, having specified test scores in English is enough to be rewarded, regardless of usage of the language for the company's benefit. Such incentives can increase the monthly salary of an employee (Page 2014). In addition, to extra income significant English skills are important criteria for decisions about employees' other promotions. With strong language skills, applicants are naturally prioritized over other applicants. Although English language skills bring several advantages for the employees proportion of job vacancies that require English in Turkey is high (Ozen et al. 2013). Despite the importance placed upon it by governments and the efforts of educators, success of English language education in Turkey falls far below expectations. Even after years of instruction at schools, English language learners cannot utilize the English in the proper way. They cannot speak, write, read and listen at expected levels (Selvi 2014).

With respect to foreign language education, several theories and teaching methodologies have been developed and applied by educators. Some of these teaching methodologies include the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, the Communicative Approach, and the Cognitive-Code Method (Demirel 1991). However, there is no consensus on the best teaching methodology regarding foreign language education. In the Turkish education system, foreign language has been taught through a teach-

er-centered methodology (Ozen et al. 2013). Teacher-centered methodology simply explains the one way teaching experience that intentionally works with monologues rather than dialogues. In other words, in this methodology, instructors talk, students listen. Further, instructors choose topics and the focus of the class is on forms and structures. Teacher is the sole leader (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). On the other hand, Kilickaya (2010) states that high stakes tests are also problematic for effective foreign language teaching in the Turkish education system. Those tests are designed mostly to measure students' grammar, reading, and vocabulary skills. They do not focus on practice skills (speaking and listening) that are the most essential parts of a new language. All teaching tools, including books and audio materials, are designed with respect to those tests' questions without considering the foreign language as a communication tool. Further, Ozen et al. (2013) argue that foreign language books in Turkish high schools focus only on grammar rules. Students prepare themselves for mostly multiple-choice grammar and reading questions. In other words, grammar knowledge and reading comprehension are the two main criteria used to measure students' success regarding English in the Turkish education system.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the obstacles of English language learners at foreign language preparatory schools from English instructors' perspective. Specifically, the study tries to answer the research question of "how do English instructors at foreign language preparatory schools at Turkish universities perceive their students' obstacles regarding English learning?"

Language Preparatory Schools at Turkish Universities

Programs at Turkish universities that use English as the medium of instruction are always more popular than the ones that use only Turkish as the instructional language. It is very clear that students with higher scores from the university entrance exams prefer those programs where English is the instructional language. Those programs acceptance rates are always lower than those for which Turkish is the only instructional language (OSYM 2014). Further, it is a practice for university departments to offer the same major in English and in Turkish. For

instance, departments list their programs with indicators, such as "Business Administration (English)" and "Business Administration (Turkish)". Although the subjects that will be taught in these two programs are identical, the instructional languages are different. In this way, students have an opportunity to improve their foreign language skills and become better at utilizing English as a second language while learning course content. However, it is largely accepted that programs in English are more challenging, since the workload of the students naturally increases. In such programs, assignments are also expected to be submitted in English. In other words, students have to overcome the struggles of the instructional foreign language, including speaking, listening, reading and writing obstacles, in addition to the subject matter that they have to comprehend in classes. Some schools even offer programs in which a specified percentage of classes are instructed in English. Generally, these programs are advertised as consisting of thirty or forty percent English instruction.

Almost all private and most of the public universities in Turkey provide obligatory foreign language preparatory programs for their newcomers. The most intensive foreign language learning experience in Turkey takes place at those university preparatory schools, which teach English intensively to newcomers, generally for two semesters. At these preparatory schools, students do not study any other subjects and only focus on English as a second language. Their curriculums are mostly designed with respect to common language skills including speaking, listening, reading and writing. Students take these courses intensively to be able to utilize English (Coskun 2013). On the other hand, students who have strong foreign language background from their high schools with the proof of sufficient standardized foreign language tests can be exempted from the foreign language preparatory year and can start directly to their programs at universities. After one year intensive foreign language education students are expected to receive sufficient minimum scores from specified standardized tests such as TOEFL or IELTS. Those who receive sufficient scores can start freshman year. Those who do not must restudy one more semester or only take the exams without attending the second year until they attain the required score by the end of the second school year (Cetinavci and Topkaya 2012). Meanwhile, foreign

language education in Turkey is also provided at private foreign language preparation centers. People who do not have the opportunity to attend language preparatory schools rely on private foreign language preparation centers that also focus on language education. Since the class schedules and registration requirements of these centers are more flexible, a variety of people of different ages and from different career groups prefer them. Further, unlike the preparatory schools at the universities, the centers offer more options with respect to learning English; students can study business English, academic English, or English for specific standard foreign language tests. Since there is no governmental financial support, classes at these centers are expensive.

It is common knowledge that the overall success of English learning in Turkey is far below than world's average. It is even worse than many third world countries. EF English Proficiency Index (2014) ranks Turkey 47th among 63 countries, behind countries such as Chile, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. Further, with respect to English proficiency, Turkey is ranked the 24th country among 24 European countries. Educators and policy makers always question this reality. Scholars have investigated the many factors that contribute to this shortfall (Aktas 2005; Kirkgoz, 2007; Kizildag 2009; Ozen et al. 2013; Selvi 2014; Yilmaz 2008). Factors include but are not limited to: crowded classes, the low number of qualified foreign language instructors, grading policies, unfamiliarity with new learning techniques and developments, ineffective use of learning materials, lack of institutional support, unrealistic goals, and a lack of curriculum flexibility. These factors should be examined to find solutions for better and more effective foreign language teaching. According to Aktas (2005), English instructors in Turkey face three types of major challenges: (1) socio-economic challenges, (2) institutional challenges, and (3) instructional challenges. It is a socio-economic challenge, for example, that parents of higher socioeconomic levels have a greater awareness of the importance of foreign language learning; accordingly, among children from privileged backgrounds parental support of specific language education is high and becomes a strong motivational factor for both students and the instructors (Akalin and Zengin 2007). Institutional challenges, meanwhile, result from the reality of crowded class-

rooms, the lack of institutional support for foreign language education, and the busy and inflexible workloads of the instructors (Tilfarlioglu and Ozturk 2007). And poor planning, failing curriculum design and inappropriate textbooks are among the instructional challenges faced by English instructors in Turkey. Overall, foreign language education is problematic and questioned (Aktas 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Design and Participants

Using a qualitative research design, seven male and three female foreign language instructors who teach English at foreign language preparatory schools at five different private universities where English is also the medium of instruction have been interviewed (aged between twenty nine-forty two). Four interviewed instructors had six years working experience in their field. Three of them had between eight and ten years working experience. Last three had between fifteen and seventeen years of experience. All of the interviewed instructors were holding Bachelor of Arts degrees in English language teaching. With respect to their perceptions of foreign language learners' obstacles, two-hour in-depth interviews were conducted with these instructors. The researcher pursued this study in order to understand how varied perspectives and different educational practices are related to each other and to the overarching goals of foreign language education. The present study has the purpose of contributing preliminary research for a large-scale analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

All interviewed instructors participated in the study voluntarily. All interviews were tape recorded by the researcher. Tapes were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber; however, for validation purposes, the researcher sent the transcripts to all interviewees for their approval. Transcribed interviews were analyzed according to conventional qualitative methods (Mason 1996). Throughout the process, intercoder reliability checks proved strong agreement between coders and high reliability for the coding scheme (Neuendorf 2002). The interview transcriptions provided a natural inquiry comprising the inter-

viewees' feelings, opinions, experiences and beliefs, as manifested in direct quotations (Patton 1990). Open-ended interview questions were designed with respect to the research question of the study. Those questions also have been customized and approved by the researcher's colleagues for the validation purposes of the study. According to Creswell (2003), open-ended questions allow the participants to form opinions for answering questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher read the transcribed interviews several times. To describe and reveal the themes, the researcher took notes in the margins of the transcription that included repeated common ideas and words. Then the researcher prepared a list of potential themes drawn from the interviews. Accordingly, the researcher carefully analyzed and compared the emergent themes. Subsequently, the study proves that interviewed instructors were clearly aware of the obstacles that they and their students encounter while they are trying to utilize English as a second language in and out of the schools. All interviewed instructors expressed their thoughts precisely by giving specific titles regarding the reasons of failure such as structural obstacles and conflicts. Based on the results of the analysis, the following themes related to foreign language learning obstacles were found: (1) structural differences between the Turkish and English languages, (2) lack of opportunity to use English in daily life, (3) students' and instructors' widespread erroneous "attitude" toward teaching and learning methodologies, and (4) lack of self-confidence. Concluding the study is a description of potential practices for overcoming and minimizing obstacles that lower the success of English language's utilization, as identified by the interviewed instructors.

FINDINGS

Data analysis revealed four themes: (1) structural differences between the Turkish and English languages, (2) lack of opportunity to use English in daily life, (3) students' and instructors' widespread erroneous "attitude" toward teaching and learning methodologies, and (4) lack of self-confidence. In the following section the researcher describe these four themes and ex-

pands how the participant's perspectives, beliefs and practices contribute to the coherence of foreign language preparation program.

Theme One: Structural differences Between the Turkish and English Languages

Structural differences between the Turkish and English languages were revealed by the interviewed instructors as the first theme regarding the obstacles that students face when utilizing English. Instructors highlighted the different characteristics of the foreign languages with solid examples. Eight of the interviewed instructors mentioned language families that are defined and composed by comparative linguistics. Researchers categorize language families with respect to the language's fundamental characteristics, including the grammar and syntax rules. Accordingly, languages with similar features are classified in specific language families (Gell-Mann and Ruhlen 2011). It is known that the Turkish and English languages are not in the same language family; like languages such as French and Italian, English is included in the Indo-European language family, while Turkish is categorized in the Altaic language family. Thus the fundamentals of both languages (for example, grammar, syntax, pronunciation) are noticeably different. Instructors indicated that these differences create obstacles even for themselves while they are teaching English. Students struggle even when they try to understand the syntax rules and their reasons. As a result, even simple rules of the English language confuse learners and lower their overall success. All interviewed instructors indicated that, despite having some English language training and background from their high school years, students consistently fall into the same mistake of trying to translate given sentences word by word directly from Turkish to English, without considering both languages' unique syntax rules. Instructors indicated that this mistake especially affects the students' speaking skills. It slows down students while they are trying to talk during speaking exercises. All interviewed instructors pointed out that most students instinctively use the Turkish language and, accordingly, its unique grammar and syntax as a model while developing English language skills. Instructors stressed that such misguided modeling unfortunately runs contrary to the nature of foreign language learning since the new

language has unique characteristics. One interviewed instructor said:

Students should be informed that the English language has unique grammar rules and characteristic[s]. In my first classes I explain that we do not translate Turkish into English word by word. We actually have to think English with respect to its rules. It is totally a new learning experience and students have to ignore Turkish language's rules. I frequently observe that students unintentionally try composing sentences based on Turkish grammar rules. Though they do not realize, those sentences mostly do not make sense to a listener or a reader. Dramatically, some of those dialogs sound weird.

Another interviewed instructor said:

I personally believe that students who formulate and memorize the grammar rules less are more successful than the ones who focus on rules sharply. Language cannot be learnt with the same methodology as used for math or chemistry. Language is flexible unlike math. It is a part of a culture.

Yet another interviewed instructor added:

Memorizing the meaning of the words is essential like learning the grammar. However, Turkish grammar rules are very different than English. Students understand the differences in theory but when it comes to practice they hesitate. They do not express themselves. They struggle and this is a common problem among students. The reason is simple. They focus on grammar a lot and they are scared to make [a] mistake.

Theme Two: Lack of Opportunity to Use English in Daily Life

The second obstacle that English learners encounter while trying to utilize English as identified by emergent themes from the interviews is the lack of opportunity to use English in daily life. All interviewed instructors agreed that a new language is learnt and improved best through daily use in conversation. Learners should be able to practice what they learn in classes in real-life situations. Instructors emphasized that though their students at the preparatory school are reaching an advanced level of grammar and reading comprehension, they cannot find regular opportunities to practice what they have learnt. Three interviewed instructors said that

students who have an opportunity to practice (speak) English in real life have better academic success. However, they indicated that few students have both the opportunity to practice and the enthusiasm for practicing. One instructor explained this obstacle with a swimming metaphor. He said:

Swimming cannot be learnt alone through instruction manuals. I am [not even] sure there are such manuals. If someone wants to learn how to swim [he] has to jump into water. Language learning is very similar to learning how to swim. Students need practice. And it must be real not a set up scenario that is written by their instructors in the classes.

Three interviewed instructors indicated that students cannot practice (that is, speak and listen) their English skills in real life since it is difficult to find good English speakers in Turkish society. One interviewed instructor noted that tourists are available for students to communicate with in order to improve foreign language skills. He conceded, however, that only those few students with a deep passion for speaking English would avail themselves of such an opportunity. Students who have the opportunity to talk to English-speaking tourists also encounter cultural barriers. Lack of tourist motivation with respect to their willingness to engage in dialogs with Turkish students is another hindrance that lowers students' enthusiasm. Four interviewed instructors suggested that, for Turkish students, practicing conversation in English is not conducive to the improvement of their foreign language skills. According to those instructors, students who practice English orally do not encounter any real challenge because they regularly revert to Turkish when they run into complexity while expressing themselves. Interviewed instructors indicated that, for students, knowing that the people they are talking to know Turkish creates a comfort zone. On the other hand, the limited English skills of those students do not promote development since most of the conversations turn into repeated simple dialogs. Further, five instructors stressed that, like all other languages, English can be better learnt through dialogs rather than monologues. In other words, these instructors were emphasizing the benefits of having conversations with real people rather than watching movies with English subtitles. One interviewed instructor said:

Students watch TV series with subtitles. This is even questionable. They read the subtitles and try to listen to the conversations in the scenes at the same time. In such situation they unsurprisingly do not have to respond. They simply listen to the dialogs as a passive action. I am even in doubt that such activity improves their listening skills a lot. But, I am very sure it is not helping them to improve their speaking skills. It is like a bird that tries to fly with one wing.

All interviewed instructors also emphasized that the language skills are simply categorized as speaking, reading, writing, and listening, as most of the foreign language schools design their curriculum accordingly. However they all recommended that more social-based skills should be blended with these categories. Socially-based skills include but are not limited to summarizing, describing, and narrating. On the other hand, interviewed instructors emphasized that the speaking part of the language is usually considered to be the most difficult dimension while learning and utilizing it. Instructors highlighted that speaking is a productive action that requires a variety of skills including pronunciation, instant comprehension and response, vocabulary, body language and even facial expressions. In contrast, reading is a receptive and passive action compared to speaking and is thus considered to be an easier dimension than speaking.

Theme Three: Students' and Instructors' Widespread Erroneous "Attitudes" Toward Teaching and Learning Methodologies

The third obstacle that emerged from the interviews was the widespread erroneous "attitude" toward teaching and learning methodologies. According to Wenden (1991), people's attitudes toward the objects include three components namely: (a) behavioral, (b) cognitive, and (c) affective. People simply take position while approaching different situations. Such "attitude" also exists toward teaching and learning methodologies for the English language education. Students and teachers have beliefs regarding language learning and those beliefs may contain erroneous "attitudes" (Ozmen 2012). Interviewed instructors explained this "attitude" from two different perspectives. The first perspective was the erroneous "attitude" that comes from the students regarding learning methodologies. Accord-

ing to the interviewed instructors, students generally think that they will learn English provided they attend classes and complete the assignments that are given by their instructors. Students think that because English is a major, like math or history, parallel efforts and learning strategy will allow them to excel in their English studies. For instance, one interviewed instructor explained that most students think memorizing a specific number of words and their Turkish synonyms is the most fundamental action to learn another language. Students basically think that learning the meaning of the words will lead them to become a good speaker and listener. This problematic perspective cannot reflect the truth. One interviewed instructor said:

Let's take the speaking part of the language learning. To compose sentences we do use the words and if we have a strong vocabulary we can talk and express ourselves better. This is true but incomplete. When we communicate with people orally, we apparently portray a picture by using the words that is formed by grammar, syntax, pronunciation, punctuation, even body language. We form meanings by using all of those fundamental parts of a language. Of course, self-confidence and prior knowledge regarding the topic that we talk about are also extremely important. Memorizing words is essential but this action alone does not escort students to the success. And success in language learning does not mean receiving good test scores.

Another interviewed instructor said:

They (students) take the English classes to receive sufficient scores from standardized tests. I mean that the goal of the language courses is receiving good scores from TOEFL or IELTS exams. I do not blame them since test scores mean a lot in Turkish bureaucracy. When the goal of English classes becomes good test scores I do not expect a real success.

And another interviewed instructor noted:

Students do not separate English classes from the others. It is a class to be passed with completing homework and assignments. Unfortunately grades are the priority for the students. This problem is about overall education system of Turkey and when it comes to language education it turns into a tragedy.

Regarding students' "attitude" toward learning strategies, another interviewed instructor offered a different example concerning grammar

education. The interviewed instructor compared math education and English education to clarify his perspective. The interviewed instructor said:

Most students are coming to us with good prior knowledge about grammar. They know the rules even the tiny details of grammar. When I ask them about a specific grammar rule they promptly answer and explain it. For example: they do know all the rules about simple present tense. They all know that we use it to describe the present activities or to talk about routines. The simple tense is formed by using the base form of the verb. During an in class exam most students are able to convert...affirmative sentences into... negative or interrogative sentences. They focus on the structure. I mean that they memorize and apply the formula, the rules, and answer the question on the paper. However when it comes to speaking exercises, they obviously panic and cannot apply the rules. I personally believe that their approach is wrong. They think that language rules like grammar [work] as formulas in math classes. All you have to do is learn the rule and you are good to go. No way.

The second perspective from which erroneous "attitude" toward teaching methodologies was revealed by the English instructors themselves. The interviewed instructors emphasized that instructors who teach English in Turkey unfortunately use the same teaching methodologies as teachers of other subjects do. In other words, interviewed instructors noted that the curriculum for the English classes focuses sharply on grammar rules and their definitions. The curriculum, and thus naturally the teachers, expect students to memorize those rules. Curriculum designs lead students to become experts about grammar. Assignments, which are mostly in the form of written tests, are also designed to evaluate the students' grammar knowledge rather than their ability to utilize English. Logically, then, students do not focus on language as a communication tool. Further, common problems of the education system in Turkey, like crowded classrooms and tough grading policies, do not encourage students or instructors to practice English in classroom environment. Unfortunately, the instructors end up focusing mostly on the theory part of the foreign language. One interviewed instructor said:

Curricula and teachers focus on the language's structure. Standardized tests do the same thing. Grammar and syntax are the steps while

we teach the language. However, most of the teachers in high schools are stuck with it and ignore the following steps including public speaking and summarizing exercises.

Another interviewed instructor said:

Curriculum does not support the speaking part of the language. Teachers have their own speaking problem anyway. They cannot speak and understand English well. Those teachers learnt the English and teaching methodologies in Turkey anyway. And in Turkey language learning is happening in theory. I mean that the system teaches the grammar in perfect way. Nobody cares about the speaking part. I believe that teachers who teach a foreign language must live in a country for a while to be comfortable while teaching and utilizing it. This way they become better at speaking and listening and become familiar with the language's culture.

A third interviewed instructor added:

Foreign Language Test (YDS) that is the only standardized test designed and scheduled by Turkish education system is specifically focusing on measuring students' grammar and reading skills. Unlike TOEFL and IELTS there are no speaking and listening parts. Grammar is the major work and believe me it is ridiculously tough. I personally believe that this much intensive grammar negatively affects overall performance of the students.

Theme Four: Lack of Self-Confidence

The fourth and final obstacle emerged from the interviews was the reality of students' lack of self-confidence. Self-confidence and student learning are positively linked in several studies (Baumeister et al. 2005; Carr et al. 1991; Dedmond 2009; Egertson 2006; El-Anzi 2005). Students who have high levels of self-confidence perform better socially and academically. Atsuta (2003) states that "at the heart of all learning is a person's belief in his or her ability to accomplish the task". When it comes to foreign language learning, self-confidence also plays a critical role in achieving targeted goals (Rubio and Rubio 2007). Interviewed instructors highlighted that the Turkish education system is especially unsupportive of developing self-confidence in students. Interviewed instructors asserted that, given the presence of intense social and cultural pressures, students cannot develop enough self-confidence to share their ideas and express themselves in

and out of classes. Although several educational reforms have been enacted by governments, it is also traditional teaching habits themselves that discourage students from expressing themselves confidently (Selvi 2014). This lack of self-confidence unfortunately becomes more dramatic when the students try to speak English. Interviewed instructors pointed out that students are scared to make mistakes, and that most students think that if they make mistakes people will laugh at them. They hesitate while they are practicing and expressing their thoughts in English. This lowers their speed. One interviewed instructor said:

Lack of self-esteem is one of the most powerful effects that lowers the real success. This is a reality for the overall education system of Turkey. System works and worked with monologs rather than dialogs. Teachers talk, students listen. Under this condition do not expect self-esteem from the students. We are teaching the language, however I leave time for motivation speeches during my class hours. If they believe that they can accomplish, they really can. Otherwise, it is impossible.

Another interviewed instructor said:

Students think that if they make mistakes they ruin everything. This is something related to their subconscious and their educational background created this perception. System does not encourage students to talk.

Another interviewed instructor added:

They know the theory part of the language. I mean that they know the grammar. They have good vocabulary. However, when it comes to the action they cannot move to the next stage. Reading and writing are also affected by self-confidence however the impact is low.

DISCUSSION

Foreign language preparatory schools at Turkish universities provide the most intensive and challenging foreign language education for their students. Most students encounter with such intensive and challenging experience for the first time. It is fundamentally important to study utilization failure of English among Turkish students from the language instructors' perspective at the foreign language preparatory schools in Turkey. Language instructors' opinions and experiences provide important data set for the obstacles of students. Accordingly, po-

tential solutions regarding utilization failure of English can be proposed (Ozen et al. 2013).

This study shows that interviewed instructors were clearly aware of the obstacles regarding utilizing English. Interviewed instructors clearly listed, with concrete examples, their perspectives regarding the obstacles of their students. Instructors used specific examples from their schools. However, they used specific examples to express general obstacles regarding English utilizations procedure in Turkey. The study also showed that instructors' thoughts and perspectives in most cases were identical. Structural obstacles emerged as the first theme in the study. The unique characteristics of each language impede the foreign language learning, since students unintentionally try to build up the new language's skills with their native language's references, including syntax and grammar rules. This fundamental problem was clearly emphasized by all interviewed instructors and with multiple examples. The common perspective for the examples was the reality of the different language families. Language families are given as examples to clarify and support the structural challenges for Turkish learners.

The second theme revealed was the lack of opportunity to use English in daily life. All interviewed instructors emphasized the necessity of challenging foreign language experience in real life, rather than artificial scenarios in classrooms. Cetinkaya's study (2005) found that language learning can not be limited to theory learning. It must be practiced, and this activity must be available in real life. In this way, students can advance their speaking and listening skills in particular. Otherwise, they start losing even the theory part of the language skills. Speaking English with native speakers, or at least with advanced level speakers, improves learning and boosts courage. Cetinkaya (2005: 16) states that "they (students) were willing to engage in communication in English with close friends or in small groups, but generally felt that the idea of communication in a foreign language with their Turkish classmates or instructors was absurd".

Learning a foreign language is closely related to the erroneous attitudes towards the languages (Starks and Paltridge 1996). Several studies (Arani 2004; Hohental 1998; Karahan 2007; Mugaddam 2006; Ozmen 2012) link peoples' attitudes to English learning in different countries. Students' and instructors' widespread erroneous

“attitude” toward teaching and learning methodologies was the third theme revealed in the study. All interviewed instructors highlighted the uniqueness of teaching methodologies for foreign language education. They often compared foreign language teaching methodologies to the methodologies used for other subjects, including math and physics. Emphasis on grammar education in the curriculum and the lack of speaking and listening practices were listed as ineffective methodologies for teaching foreign languages. Evaluation and assessment criteria that are designed to measure students’ grammar knowledge are also given as examples that inhibit effective foreign language teaching methodology alternatives in Turkish schools. On the other hand, the study also shows that students do not distinguish English courses from others they encounter inschool. Receiving passing grades is the primary goal for the students. The content and the experiences that are learnt in those courses will be forgotten, as is the case for all other courses.

Successful foreign language learners always have higher self-confidence than the ones whose self-confidence is deficient (Richard and Amato 2003). As a corresponding fact to this statement, students’ lack of self-confidence was the last theme revealed after the interviews. Interviewed instructors were aware of the strong scientific literature regarding the positive relationship between self-confidence and foreign language learning. They stressed that in Turkey, various socio-cultural factors do not promote self-confident learners. As indicated by the interviewed instructors, educational practices in Turkey work mostly with monologs rather than dialogs. In other words, students listen to the teachers and take notes. Crowded classes and peer pressure also discourage students from participation and from expressing their thoughts. Although classroom approaches are changing with new educational reforms, old fashioned teaching habits are still applied (Ozen et al. 2013).

Future studies (that is, qualitative, quantitative, mixed method) may investigate specific foreign language learning obstacles. By narrowing down, researchers may investigate major language learning obstacles (that is, listening, speaking) that Turkish students encounter while learning and utilizing at language preparatory schools. Further, potential studies may include students’ perspectives since they are the central figures

regarding overall language learning failure in Turkey. Lastly, school administrators and policy makers’ perception may be investigated regarding such failure.

CONCLUSION

Turkey is a developing country and the past ten years of its history included success stories regarding its economic growth. Competing with China as one of the three fastest growing countries earned the Turkish economy a good reputation. Turkey has become the 17th largest economy in the world, and politicians have started talking about the next potential milestone for the Turkish economy: a spot in the top ten by the year 2023, which is also the centennial year for the Republic of Turkey. This economic success, however, was not mirrored by healthy development in the field of education. Statistics show very clearly that, overall, the Turkish education system is not competing well with other countries. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (2012), which includes 68 countries from around the world, confirms that Turkish students do not excel in writing, reading or math. Further, each year only one or two Turkish universities are ranked in top five hundred universities by the independent international institutions. Moreover, with respect to foreign language education, there is no consistent and continuous countrywide education policy in Turkey. Obviously, the failure of foreign language education is always a hot topic among the educators in Turkey. Policy developments for the solutions, however, are limited and still in the early stages.

To create improvements on English language education in Turkey potential actions may include (1) comprehensive and sustainable system for teacher training for English teachers. In other words, new system should focus on English as a tool for communication not a system of strict grammar rules. Teachers’ perception regarding the productivity of English, as communication tool should be changed. In current system the productivity is about memorizing the syntax and grammar rules of English. To do so, current system needs (2) revision of existing curriculum and teaching materials. In current English language teaching, students and teachers struggle to link themselves to the content and methodology. They cannot internalize the con-

tents in textbooks and in other learning materials. This problematic internalization and linkage matter cause lack of interest and motivation that leads low achievement about learning and utilizing English language as a communication tool. Further (3) the new system should change the teacher-centered, monologue-style instruction to student-centered, dialogue-style practices. Last but not least action can be launching a national campaign to form awareness about the importance of English as a second language for the future of the country in a globalized world.

LIMITATIONS

First but not foremost limitation of this case study was the limited number of interviewees. It is the very nature of qualitative studies to employ small sample sizes during inquiry. The second limitation was the specific characteristics of the interviewed instructors, who all had similar educational backgrounds. Such similar educational backgrounds instinctively affect the responses and perspectives of interviewed instructors. Accordingly, though instructors were working at different universities this study and its conclusion cannot be generalized.

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