

A Class of Cultures: European and Turkish Goals in Language Education versus University Academic Requirements

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ABSTRACT Student expectations and those of educational bureaucracy often set the line between success and failure. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is the basis of Turkish Higher Education Council (HEC) mandates for English Preparatory Year Programs (EPYPs). This paper established that a mismatch exists between the CEFR and HEC mandates and their applications by Duzce University (DU) academic units, and examined the possibility of reconciling the conflict. The EPYP requirements and expectations were determined along with the degree to which they were achieved. Study results generally showed that CEFR, HEC and DU assumptions and goals were incompatible. (1) The CEFR principally meets European needs. (2) The HEC mandates promote relations with the Council of Europe and the European Union. (3) Many DU academic units neither support the CEFR nor respect the HEC mandates. Recommendations include needs surveys and development of curricula and instructional materials appropriate to Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

In the academic year (AY) 2013-2014 at Duzce University (DU), all departments in the Faculty of Forestry and three departments in the Faculty of Engineering decided to end the requirement that their students attend nine months of English Preparatory Year Program (EPYP) classes before continuing their normal four years of instruction in the fields of the departments to which they were admitted. Thus, enrollment in the EPYP was reduced by about a third. From interviews with the Dean, Vice-Dean and two department chairs in the Faculty of Forestry, it was revealed that, despite a few courses having been offered with English as a medium of instruction, not one student had shown an interest in enrolling in such an English medium course. A second factor was that the number of students passing the EPYP with a score of 65 percent had dropped to just a few individuals. The most alarmingly negative and telling dynamic was that a majority of Forestry faculty members voiced their concern that the quality and number of matriculating students

had dropped. They all attributed this situation to the fact that students and their families do not want a five-year program which includes the English preparatory year because at any other forestry faculty in Turkey, they could graduate without English in four years. They finally stated in the interview that they had surveyed the students and most neither wanted to waste a year in the study of English nor did they want to choose courses taught in English. Most such students were looking for a career in government service within Turkey, but a fifth year of university study would mean a lot of extra expense and, even more significantly, would mean the potential loss of income due to a year's delay in starting a government career (Peachy 2014).

A similar story emerged out of the Faculty of Engineering. At the three departments that withdrew from the EPYP, it was felt that the quality of matriculating students had dropped and the consensus in all Engineering departments was that the English competence of students coming to the Faculty had declined. Furthermore, it was reported that no students had chosen electives offered with English-medium instruction. The departments that had not withdrawn from the preparatory program in the faculties of Engineering, Business and Education along with the Higher School of Tourism and Hotel Management either had not offered courses with English as a medium of instruction or had had no enrollees in such courses. Their department heads and deans strongly supported English study, but felt that

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the structure of the relationship between the study of English/study with English as a medium of instruction and the needs of students and faculty for competence in English for academic purposes was inadequate. The sentiment was expressed not only by faculty members who supported a preparatory year for English, but also by those who did not, that a program without the mandatory requirement that students succeed in it was a waste of time. Such is now the case with the preparatory year, and without a mandatory minimum requirement of regular or elective courses in English. It is, at best, like a one-year honeymoon or vacation for those students whose resources are ample, as it was put by one dean who supported mandatory success in the EPYP (Peachy 2014).

The events described below are indicative of the problems faced today in the field of EFL in Turkey. In the student section of the EPYP for which this author was the advisor and one of its three instructors, there were twenty-four (24) students on the roll. By the end of the first semester, only about half were regularly attending the twenty-four (24) hours per week. For the third in-term examination, only five (5) attended the written part of the in-term. Of those five, only two (2) took the separate written examination and the separate oral examination. Except for the four sections that tested higher on the early placement examination and were in a somewhat more challenging program, all sections had similarly poor participation rates. Those figures starkly demonstrate a crisis in the program. In his fifty-seven (57) years in language learning and teaching, this author has never seen or heard of such an affair. Furthermore, this occurrence is not singular to the EPYP at DU. According to information this author has gathered on such programs in many other new state universities of Turkey, this situation is not unique.

Although regulations for mandating and governing the EPYPs at Turkish universities where Turkish is the primary medium of instruction have been clear for years, most faculties and higher schools in the newer state universities in Turkey appear to have been content to disregard compliance of such programs with those regulations. The regulations stipulated that academic units requesting EPYPs for their students had to meet a minimum requirement of 30 percent of English-medium instruction. Following an administrative court case, it was announced on 26 November

2014 that by law, beginning in the following academic year, AY 2015-2016, participation in the English language program for all but English teacher-training departments were to become optional (T.C. Law No. 6569, Article 28, 2014). Then, from the Higher Education Council Directorate's Office of Education and Training on 19 January 2015, Duzce University received an official directive (Higher Education Council Directive No. 75850160-312/2567, 2015) implementing T.C. Law No. 6569. Accordingly, university foreign language schools that have hosted these programs are faced with a certain amount of shrinkage in enrollment. The degree of that shrinkage has become the subject of pessimistic estimates. While in AY 2014-2015, the enrollment in DU's Hakime Erciyas Higher School of Foreign Languages was in the mid 500's, the highest voiced estimate of next fall's enrollment is 200, and some of the school's instructional staff have estimated that the number could be below 100. The danger is very real, and the consensus of the instructional staff is that no more than 150 new students will enroll in the EPYP in the fall term of AY 2015-2016. In the opinion of this author, the threat of the dissolution of the entire program looms like the legendary sword of Damocles.

Objectives

The first objective of this project was to determine if a mismatch exists between the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Turkish Higher Education Council (HEC) mandates and goals. The second was to examine the subsequent interpretation and application of these mandates by DU and its academic units and to infer what DU faculties and higher schools, especially higher schools of languages or other units administering EPYPs understand from the CEFR and the HEC mandates as demonstrated by the actions and applications undertaken to implement them. In the case of a mismatch being detected, the final objective was to explore methods and possible solutions for dealing with the conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The CEFR is the basis of the Turkish HEC mandates for EPYPs in Turkey. The first objective of this project was to test and determine whether or not a mismatch, that is, an incompat-

ibility, exists between the CEFR and the HEC mandates and goals (Celik 2012; Urkun n.d.), and then to examine the subsequent interpretation and application of the mandates by DU and its academic units and to explore faculty attitudes toward and understanding of them (Peachy 2014). The final aim, if a mismatch was detected, was to offer possible methods to resolve the conflict.

In order to achieve the above mentioned goals, the first step was to deconstruct the discourse, that is, the pertinent language in the public texts of the CEFR (Trim et al. 2001) and those of the HEC mandates for preparatory programs (HEC 1 and HEC 2 n.d.) and to determine whether or not they were in harmony or at least compatible. The texts were consequently enumerated, described and analyzed.

The next step was to infer what DU faculties and higher schools, especially higher schools of languages or other units administering PYEPs have understood from the CEFR and the HEC mandates by the actions and applications they have undertaken to implement them.

The author then attempted to answer the question: What do faculties and higher schools at DU require and expect from such English preparatory programs, and are they getting what they expect or want? Data, particularly from DU, was used to infer and induce the answers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 2001 publication, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Trim et al. 2001:1) states that it “provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe.” Since its introduction, the CEFR has been instrumental in the curriculum design and the review processes of several higher education institutions in Turkey. More recently, and significantly, the CEFR proficiency levels have been used in the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey as foreign language competencies. It is enlightening and germane to examine the rationale behind the great thought and effort which went into the CEFR, and to analyze the immense impact that it has had since its appearance. These words are from the 2001 CEFR book:

The CEFR provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across

Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners’ progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.

The CEFR is intended to overcome the barriers to communication among professionals working in the field of modern languages arising from the different educational systems in Europe. It provides the means for educational administrators, course designers, teachers, teacher trainers, examining bodies, etc., to reflect on their current practice, with a view to situating and coordinating their efforts and to ensuring that they meet the real needs of the learners for whom they are responsible.

By providing a common basis for the explicit description of objectives, content and methods, the Framework will enhance the transparency of courses, syllabuses and qualifications, thus promoting international co-operation in the field of modern languages. The provision of objective criteria for describing language proficiency will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and accordingly will aid European mobility... (Trim et al. 2001:1)

The above is full of heavy and technical jargon, but getting past the initial words, it seems quite admirably professional. It is full of implied criticisms, however. For example, the wording suggests that there had been nothing common or comprehensive in the syllabi, curricula, examinations or textbooks across Europe. Implicitly, learners had not managed to communicate or act effectively nor could they be evaluated reliably. Explicitly, the wording says there were barriers among professionals, administrators, designers, teachers, trainers, and examiners. It implies further that courses, their contents and their aims were so opaque that no one accepted what others did and that Europe was thus immobilized.

The CEFR must have been formulated as a partial reaction to the serious problems that could be laid at least partially at the feet of poor foreign- and second-language learning, teaching and evaluation. Perhaps an unexpressed as-

sumption was that two world wars were caused in part by language and cultural misunderstanding. This becomes clearer on the second page of the lengthy document:

The work of the Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe with regard to modern languages, organised since its foundation in a series of medium-term projects, has derived its coherence and continuity from adherence to three basic principles set down in the preamble to Recommendation R (82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

- *that the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding;*
- *that it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination;*
- *that member states, when adopting or developing national policies in the field of modern language learning and teaching, may achieve greater convergence at the European level by means of appropriate arrangements for ongoing co-operation and co-ordination of policies. (Trim et al. 2001: 2)*

Again the wording can be paraphrased. The diversity of European languages should be converted from a barrier to an asset. More knowledge of European languages promotes European mobility, understanding and cooperation, and defeats prejudice and discrimination. European states may cooperate and coordinate through converging in modern language learning and teaching. Finally, the preamble to R(98)6 reaffirms the political objectives of its actions in the field of modern languages:

- *To equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry.*
- *To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural*

diversity through more effective international communication.

- *To maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.*
- *To meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries, which requires a sustained, lifelong effort to be encouraged, put on an organised footing and financed at all levels of education by the competent bodies.*
- *To avert the dangers that might result from the marginalisation of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe. (Trim et al. 2001: 3-4)*

The language of the first and second paragraphs is repetitive of the earlier statements, but paragraph three includes attention to neglected languages, and paragraph four adds, by assumption, a recently controversial political objective: “meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe...” (Sen and Peachy 2012).

Celik and Erbay (2013) looked at the topic from the perspective of Turkish public elementary school instructional materials. Their study concluded that the series examined, in contrast with previous materials, took diverse cultures into account, although with a clear emphasis on Europe. They explicitly acknowledged the great influence of the CEFR. They put it this way:

The CEFR determines the current aim of language education as plurilingualism, which emphasizes the fact that not only the home culture, but also the cultures of other peoples, contribute to the global citizenship of learners. The promotion of plurilingualism is believed to pave the way for the development of intercultural communicative competence by increasing learners’ capacity of new cultural experiences. The framework is sensitive to the presence of intercultural elements in foreign language education in that the ultimate objective of language learning is regarded as enhancing students’ whole personalities through their experiences of other languages and cultures of the world. (Celik and Erbay 2013: 340)

Significantly, one of the two goals of their study was “to find out whether [Ministry of Na-

tional Education] MoNE-authorized language teaching texts account for the development of global citizenship, helping students to look beyond the limits of Turkey, appreciate beauty in cultural diversity, avoid stereotyping of others, and in the end, contribute to global understanding” (Celik and Erbay 2013: 341; Peachy 2013b)

On the other hand, there should be no mystery as to what academic units want from the EPYPs. It should be clear from their applications to the HEC for their new students to spend a year studying an intense nine month program of twenty-four hours per week. A page from the HEC website entitled, “The Bases for Opening a Required Foreign Language Preparatory Class,” gives this instruction:

3. *In the cases where it is requested that at least 30 percent of instruction be given in a foreign language or that instruction is totally given in a foreign language, it is required that faculty members attached to the department also be added to the table. In order for program's language of instruction to be given at 30 percent or totally in the foreign language, five instructional staff employees from the department of the program, with at least three of them being faculty members, must be provided in accordance with the foreign language provisions of Article 7, and their knowledge of the foreign language must be included in the table. (HEC 1, n.d., translated from the original Turkish by the author)*

The language explaining the regulation may not be easy to understand, but there is one obviously unforeseen circumstance. The department requesting the preparatory program may undertake to implement the regulation, but the faculties and other higher schools may not want or be able to implement the required instruction. This has been the case of those faculties and higher schools that students intend to join after finishing the preparatory year.

Added to this is another regulation that *is* followed. At DU, other than the Higher School of Tourism and Hotel Management, students whose intended faculties and schools have not implemented the above regulation are never forced by either the university or the HEC to pass the preparatory year of English instruction. In the “Relevant Regulations for the Bases to be Followed in the Implementation of Foreign Language Instruction and Instruction in a Foreign Language in Institution of Higher Education”, Article 9 of Section Two states:

Students of faculties, institutes or higher schools may continue diploma, bachelor or post-graduate programs even if they are not successful in the foreign language examinations given in preparatory classes at the end of the third and fourth semesters and in the event that they continue at the end of the second semester or wish to do so. However, these students may only take elective courses given in Turkish, not those given partially or totally in the foreign language. (HEC 2, n.d., translated from the original Turkish by the author)

The result has been student demotivation. Most students feel it does not matter whether they pass the EPYP or not. Indeed, they consider the study of English as a waste of time and do not see the need for any sort of English proficiency, least of all at a CEFR level of B2 or C1. Thus, the aforementioned decline in attendance of EPYP classes and examinations at DU can be attributed to this student lack of motivation brought about by the non-compulsory nature of the program.

Language instructors and their units are always attempting to promote success and analyze causes of failure. Motivation may be the single most important factor in a student's success or failure in learning a foreign language, but the reverse is also true. That is, success motivates, while failure demotivates. Abrar-ul-Hasan presents a fine discussion of motivation in the EFL context (Abrar-ul-Hassan 2014). Farmand and Rokni dealt with the opposite phenomenon of de-motivators in the English-as-a-second-language context (Farmand and Rokni 2014). Earlier, Falout also put forward ideas on demotivation and remotivation (Falout 2012). With regard to the issues affecting student motivation, this author has elsewhere delivered presentations on (1) the promotion of successful university English preparatory programs (Peachy 2012a), (2) the influence of the CEFR on such programs (Sen and Peachy 2012), (3) evaluation of the writing skill in such programs (Peachy 2012b), (4) the proper administration of such programs (Peachy 2013a), and (5) the role of instructional materials in promoting or demoting motivation (Peachy 2013b). Richards, in his *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* (Richards 2001), devoted five chapters to issues revolving around motivation. Rightly, he put the horse before the cart with great attention to needs analyses. A good example of the application of this significant fac-

tor can be seen in the needs surveys done by West and Frumina for Russian university students. Their results led to the formulation of appropriate curricula with these needs in mind (West and Frumina 2012). From the present situation in Turkey, it can be seen that the line between success and failure of a language program is often determined by the expectations of the students and by those of the educational bureaucracy, which do not always agree.

CONCLUSION

The expected results of the study that the assumptions and goals of the CEFR, HEC and Turkish academic units are not in harmony were generally confirmed. Indeed, the culturally inspired CEFR goals clash with those of academic units. Specifically, the author concluded that (1) The CEFR came into existence to meet the particular needs of a Europe that did not want to re-experience the situations that led to two world wars in the twentieth century. (2) The HEC mandates have been an attempt to support better and stronger relations with the Council of Europe (CE) and the European Union (EU) with the avowed attempt of successive Turkish governments to join the EU. (3) Many DU Turkish academic units have shown by their actions and applications that they do not support the CEFR nor do they respect the HEC mandates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to the future of the EPYPs, the stakes are high. Academic units at Duzce University and other institutions in Turkey have taken no measures to preserve, or even to promote and develop their EPYPs. On the other hand, they *have* made decisions that undercut, emasculate and kill them. The first and most obvious measure to rescue and improve the EPYPs is a requirement that students pass the preparatory year with a minimum score of 65 percent. Secondly, it is recommended that academic units provide courses taught with English as medium of instruction and require that these constitute a minimum of 30 percent of the total student course load. Thirdly, student needs surveys must be carried out and appropriate curricula formulated with these needs in mind. Needs analyses and new curricula are especially important now that the EPYP has been made optional. Surveys

should focus on the reasons that motivate students to elect to study two semesters of an optional intensive English program. Moreover, academic units must be included in this process in order to facilitate the preparation of the desired optional courses according to student demand. Studies and surveys should be conducted specifically for Turkey and instructional materials should be selected or written to meet the specific cultural requirements and interests of Turkish students in order to stimulate and promote motivation. Finally, radical alternatives should be considered. They could include intensive summer programs or semesters offered as electives, especially to students in the third or fourth year of undergraduate study.

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