

A Critical Analysis of Foreign Language Pre-service Teacher Education in Turkey

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ABSTRACT Although research studies delving into foreign language teacher education in Turkey have been growing exponentially over the last few decades, so much more still lies undiscovered. What is mostly needed is not the synopsis of what Turkish foreign language teacher education policy has gone through, but the critical investigation of how it has been shaped so far, thereby allowing us to better comprehend the underlying challenges, failures, and precepts in teacher education. Yet, this need has received scant attention. This critical study, therefore, aims to display the historical process of foreign language teacher education policy in Turkey and to look into its present situation. Put simply, this study has revealed how pre-service language teacher education in Turkey has progressed through Ottoman and Turkish education era and how it has taken on much greater prominence in recent years. The study also presents some suggestions for language teacher education (hereafter LTE) program developers and teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The history of language teacher education (hereafter LTE) in Turkey, mostly pre-service teacher education has been foci of attention in the last decades. Although LTE in Turkey has an unprecedented 150-year-old history and although it has struggled to ameliorate its education system, specifically involving a series of closely similar practices to those of European countries, LTE in Turkey has still not progressed as much as intended (Demirel 1991). One reason for this setback is not because policy makers have not endeavored to incorporate new developments into education system, but because the history of LTE has not been sufficiently investigated and questioned (Akyuz 1996).

If educational failures and their underlying problems are closely analyzed, if recent educational developments are shaped through the lights of historical realities, and if fundamental precepts of new developments placed into LTE programs are not imitated but successfully adapted to new social context in which they are to grow, then LTE programs should eventually

reach to the desired zone of development. In other words, just as 'the shape and size of the adult plant needs to derive its rain, sun, wind, and space in its own context' (Roberts 1998: 22), so does pre-service teacher education system. Besides the context, it is in fact the 'role of social interaction in the process of co-constructing knowledge' (Mutekwe et al. 2013: 63) that helps accommodate knowledge of teachers in pre-service teacher education programs.

To understand the apparent reasons of failures in LTE, paying critical attention to educational history and to the context where developments are to flourish is of great importance (Isýk 2008). Thus, this study aims to examine and evaluate historical process of pre-service language teacher education in Turkey thoroughly.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: The next section presents a historical and critical overview of pre-service language teacher education system in Ottoman Period, followed by the division of Turkish education system into both 'before Reform movement' and 'after Reform movement' in 1997-1998. The final section delivers the present problems encountered after Reform movement and yields some suggestions for LTE program developers and teachers.

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HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF PRE-SERVICE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN OTTOMAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Foreign language in Ottoman period was generally taught for religious purposes. Two languages, Arabic and Persian, notably their morphological and syntactical structures, were taught so that students could read and comprehend religious texts fully. However, when Ottoman Empire faced with heavy defeats at wars against western countries and when it had increasing difficulty in official correspondences with other countries, some pivotal reforms conforming to those of western countries started. Established to teach foreign languages other than Arabic and Persian, foreign language schools were only some of these reforms. The increase in learning French was just a part of a wider trend. Either native speakers or minority teachers taught these languages. Teacher education, particularly for foreign languages, was not seen as a serious need during that period.

Yet, to meet the growing needs for staff in official issues with other countries and also to teach foreign language, French, effectively, the Ottoman government established *Galatasaray Sultanisi* in 1868. This school proved to be a milestone for foreign language teaching in Ottoman history (Demirel 2003). Upon the publication of *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* in 1869, the government founded new schools and their curricula included foreign languages for the first time in Ottoman Empire. For instance, *Darussafaka* was the first Turkish private school in Istanbul, which was established in 1873 and then it became more famous for teaching Maths, Science, and French than other government schools (Demircan 1988). Native speakers were teachers of these schools. In addition, for the purpose of keeping up with recent developments and also of learning foreign languages, students were sent to European countries.

With regard to in-house pre-service teacher education, *Darulmuallimin-i Rusdi* for secondary schools in 1848, *Darulmuallimin-i Sibyan* for elementary schools in 1868, and *Darulmuallimat* for both elementary and secondary schools for girls in 1870 were successively started. Later spread over to different parts of Anatolia, at those schools, teacher shortages emerged, and to meet this growing need, graduates of other depart-

ments or soldiers were employed (Akyuz 1989). These short cut solutions to fill teacher shortages, however, would become potentially very harmful to teacher education in the long run. It all sounds decidedly risky, because 'later teacher training or development activities will be a waste of resources as these marginal teachers are apparently lack of basic knowledge and skills' (Roberts 1998: 86)

On the other hand, such marginal teachers, responsible for teaching not only all subjects but also foreign languages, were not eligible pedagogically to teach. To put another way, they were severe lack of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman (1987) identifies

- (i) *content knowledge* as knowledge about the target language systems
- (ii) *pedagogical knowledge* as knowledge about what to present now what to leave for later
- (iii) *pedagogical content knowledge* as a special amalgam of content and pedagogy

All these types of knowledge and their underlying importance in LTE design were disregarded in Ottoman period, as LTE system was not so well planned and organized. The government of Turkish Republic was to fill this gap in pre-service language teacher education, which the next section critically presents as before and after Reform movement.

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF PRE-SERVICE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN TURKISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

When Turkish Republic was founded on October 29, 1923, Turkish foreign LTE system aimed to better plan and institutionalize than ever before. To this end, first and foremost, all schools including foreign schools were structured under the control of Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The foundation of a two-year-teacher education school in 1926, called *Gazi Orta Muallim Mektebi*, became particularly noteworthy and pioneer for the future of newly founded Turkish Republic. Moved to Ankara in 1927, Gazi teacher education school trained teachers until 1946, when it was also renamed as *Gazi Institution of Education*. This institution

started to educate teachers by opening French, English, and German language teaching departments, in 1941, 1944, and 1947, respectively (Demircan 1988).

Besides, Istanbul University was established in 1933, within the structure of which two-year-foreign language teacher education school was also opened in the following years (Demircan 1988). To meet little but rapidly growing need, several LTE departments were founded in 1946 within the structure of Institution of Education in Diyarbakır, Eskisehir, Konya, Bursa, Erzurum, and Izmir. Also the graduates of philology, language and history-geography departments would get much opportunity for teaching foreign languages throughout these years. All those two-year-Institutes of Education providing foreign language teacher education were no longer 2 years but 3 years after 1962. Yet when this law was enacted, no student teacher graduated for one year. Did it become more effective when students could not graduate from teacher education institutes on that year? No it did not. In contrast, it caused a wide gap for schools because they had to wait for another third year when students would graduate.

Turkish teacher education experienced such policy again after sixteen years. All Institutes of Education became 4 years after 1978 and they were transformed into Higher Teacher Education schools (Demirel 1991). But nobody considered well what these policies would cause. Neither did they take into account previously experienced failures after 1962. When it was 1982, all those schools of MoNE were restructured and transferred to Universities and their names were changed as 'Faculty of Education' in 1992 (Duman 1998).

To sum up, the analysis of LTE's historical process in Turkey until 1980s clearly shows that Turkish pre-service education system has experienced a difficult process. Although struggled to be well organized, teacher sources were not sufficient enough to fill shortages. Hence, at those years, it was possible to see language teachers as graduates of day and evening departments of philology, graduates of foreign language higher education schools, graduates of Institutions of Education, graduates of distant education of foreign language programs, graduates of summer courses, graduates of short intensive programs, graduates of other departments but having a certain level of language

proficiency, teachers in elementary schools, and people becoming successful in language teaching qualifying exams done by MoNE (Demircan 1988; Gomleksiz 1999).

BEFORE REFORM MOVEMENT

Prior to reform movement in 1997-1998, Turkish LTE system witnessed to similar applications to those of Ottoman period even after a hundred years later. Short intensive teacher courses or distant teacher education courses through mailing were only a few of them. How these courses provided teachers to have content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and how these activities provided teachers *expertise* in teaching should be considered cautiously. It was ineffective to teacher education, because such courses do not leave room for teachers to reflect and they also have insufficient liaison to their place of work (Roberts 1998).

In addition, teachers were lack of experience in observing different teachers to gain self-awareness of their own models, practices and theories. All this proves conclusively that social and political context in which those developments occurred played a role in failures or realities of Turkish LTE history. Let alone 1970s, we can still come across such teachers in today's Turkish education system. Therefore, even today little progress has still been recorded in teaching foreign language.

Both in LTE system followed after the Republic of Turkey and in Ottoman LTE system, it was common to see marginal teachers or teachers having graduated from two-year intensive programs including 'insufficient reflection time and linkage to work place' (Roberts 1998: 130). In those years, partnership schemes integrating both reflection and experiential learning did not exist (Roberts 1998: 81). Neither did collaboration and emphasis on reflective practice.

In those years, prescriptivism, assuming a set of precisely determined criteria can be effectively taught to all teaching contexts, was seen ideal in teaching language. Yet it was all wrong to assume that people can predict the attitudes of all learners to a teaching strategy. This situation should be taken with consideration, because teaching is not a collection of competencies or a definable theory implemented successfully in all settings. Each context, in contrast, calls for a different practical knowledge (Smith and Lev-

Ari 2005). Practical knowledge is defined as 'job analysis and consensus of the community who are recognized professionals in a particular field' (Tamir 1991). It is also interwoven with personal knowledge, which teachers gain unconsciously through the years. To put simply, only teachers who can associate their personal knowledge and practical knowledge can become expertise. This fact was already established also in Zimbabwe by Wadesango's descriptor research, which showed that teachers' motivation and/or belief increases 'when they are involved in the decision-making faculties which fall within their zone of expertise, experience and interest' (2012: 9).

Prior to 1997-1998 reform movement, pre-service teacher education programs in Turkey had only one practice teaching course in a week (Enginarlar 1996) and thus causing student teachers to have limited teaching experience. Enginarlar (1996) also states that pre-service students were exposed to observation of a single teacher and that the observation phase was only limited to one school setting. This conclusively indicates that pre-service student teachers did not have opportunity to put their own personal theories into practical knowledge. Because of this fractured curriculum, they could not test and confirm or disconfirm their theories.

Prior to reform in 1998, micro teaching, competency based teacher education, and apprenticeship programs were considered essential and efficient. However, they were not sufficient. The real cause of the problem, in fact, lay in the formation of teacher education only with one practice teaching course and limited number of observations and teaching hours (Enginarlar 1996).

Then, to prevent this fractured curriculum, it should have been programmed in such a way that students could observe not one teacher but more, so that they would not feel bored (Seferoglu 2006) and imitate the only available teacher. If student teachers had not passively observed only one teacher but actively seen a few more, they could have been more involved in making their own sense of meaning (Williams and Burden 1997). Through plenty of school experiences and tests of their theories, pre-service teachers could have formed their own way of teaching. In addition, student teachers could have made sense of their 'protracted face to face consequential interactions with established teachers' (Lortie 1975: 61) and of their observations in practicum.

AFTER REFORM MOVEMENT

To fill the shortages encountered in the system, pre-service teacher education has experienced a revolutionary development in recent decades. After 15 years in 1998, this time a far-reaching change happened: Turkish Council of Higher Education (CHE) was dissatisfied with teacher education program and its outdated curricula. So, CHE decided to restructure the pre-service teacher education programs in Faculties of Education in the 1997-1998 academic years.

Largely abolishing prior fractured curriculum and setting up partnership schemes between faculties and schools instead, this new curricula made all students take School Experience I and II and Practice teaching in third, seventh, and eighth semesters, respectively. As a result of this, schools were to be a bridge for student teachers to put their theoretical knowledge into practice as practice teaching activities and observations would be actively made.

This new program also incorporated pedagogical courses such as Introduction to teaching profession, classroom management, teaching methods, textbook analysis, and testing. Such compulsory courses as Literature, Linguistics, and Introduction to translation were substituted mostly by methodology courses, which aimed to increase pre-service teachers' pedagogical knowledge. This new program also reduced the number of credits from 186 to 143 and weekly class hours from 23.2 to 17.9 as in Europe (Salý 2008).

The new program has provided pre-service teachers to enrich both their theoretical and practical knowledge and to keep up with the courses in Europe by means of Erasmus Exchange program. Since the new program has allowed student teachers to observe classes, schools, and school managers and to practice teaching in an authentic classroom atmosphere, it has almost closed gaps between Faculties and schools. Even so, it was not without problems.

PROBLEMS AFTER REFORM MOVEMENT

This new program initiated soon after another comprehensive development: eight-year compulsory education system in 1997. This compulsory education forced language teachers to teach English after 4th grade in primary schools.

But they did not have enough experience of teaching primary school children.

As for the reasons, Council of Higher Education had not educated language teachers for the compulsory education program yet. CHE imposed the new curriculum of Faculties of education one year later in 1998, when the compulsory education had already started. This situation caused many difficulties for language teachers. First, it caused vacancies in schools. To fill these shortages, in addition to graduates of Philology department, graduates of arts and sciences have been allowed to become secondary school teachers when they receive a minimum of 26 credit teaching certificate degree. This clearly shows that even in the last decades, authorities have made the same mistakes as in the previous years.

Furthermore, several more limitations of the new program are clear. For instance, collaboration between schools and Higher education staff are unfortunately not carefully planned. Nor is the coherence between schools' curricula and those of Higher education. The roles and responsibilities of the triad members; for example, student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers, are inadequately defined, thereby causing poor communication and role confusion between triad members (Roberts 1998). However, it is important to note that 'support cannot only occur through learning materials but it also calls for human interaction' (Heer Menlah 2013: 104). It is this lack of interaction that has caused student teachers not to learn from their school experience courses, but to observe identical activities persistently and thus to feel bored, and finally to get inadequate feedback (Boz and Boz 2006). This result, even after the reform movement, is not a naïve coincidence; rather, it is the result of lack of negotiation and unplanned organization. At the end, all these factors have a great adverse effect on teaching motivation, which was also supported by Selemani-Meke's (2013) study in Malawi.

Seferoglu (2006) in another recent research revealed that it is still easy to see situations where

- ♦ student teachers feel hopeless in teaching classes
- ♦ observations are repetitive and redundant
- ♦ number of teacher observations is limited
- ♦ theories learned in courses are not always of great benefit for student teachers
- ♦ student teachers could not get much help from their cooperating teachers (Boz and Boz 2006).

The main reason for this result can be attested to the fact that cooperating teachers are not trained and student teachers are not well informed about what to observe. The content of the conferences, if any, between cooperating teachers and student teachers may be ineffective at helping pre-service teachers learn to teach. It may be ineffective, because the content of the interactions between them is not reflective, but routine (Borko and Mayfield 1995). Supervisors or university lecturers, sometimes because of the 'dearth of physical presence' (Heer Menlah 2013: 104) or sometimes optimistically because of being 'passing clouds' (Roberts 1998), cannot visit schools frequently enough to give feedback and to supervise. This situation has directly resulted in failures of the new program. The number of student teachers for each of the cooperating teachers is not well-balanced. In addition to all these, there are many more factors in the failure to take into consideration (for instance age; type of pre-service teacher training program attended; qualification; and gender of the teacher), which has been recently founded by a recent explorative study (Selemani-Meke and Rembe 2013).

Furthermore, the new curricula has ignored student teacher efficacy. If the number of micro-teaching classes increases, student teachers can gain awareness of how to behave in classroom, how to plan and organize skills, and how to enrich their classroom management strategies. By doing so, to put simply, their self efficacy beliefs increase or in other words they 'may learn to teach in towers, not in trenches' (Heer Menlah 2013: 103). Although the new curricula aim to equip students with these activities or to have these routines in their repertoire, it has nevertheless some weaknesses. It is an established truth that without mastery experience (practices), vicarious experience (visual experience), and discussions, self-efficacy cannot be gained at one night; rather, it takes a long time. Last but not least, social and political context, monitoring and guidance are reasonably effective in promoting student teachers' efficacy beliefs. All these play potent role in constructing pre-service LTE curricula.

Another serious weakness of the new curricula is lack of action research followed by reflective practice. Student teachers first need scaffolding to reflect and to do action research later. Gore and Zeichner (1991) looked into the effect of action research in student teachers' practice. The results showed that students felt somewhat

more “empowered” by doing action research and making changes where needed. In fact, the research revealed that action research supported student teachers and provided conscious teaching practice. Although Gore and Zeichner (1991) did their research in ESL setting, we can still generalize these results in an EFL context and incorporate such practices into curricula of Education Faculties in Turkey and some other countries. However, while performing this practice in our program, it is important to bear in mind that without ‘human interaction’ (Heer Menlah 2013: 104), guidance, monitoring, collaboration, trust and eventually mutual understanding, action research may result in burn out. If action research cannot be practiced, we can at least give student teachers tasks such as ‘reflective diary, focused writing, supported writing, exercises to provoke childhood memories’ (Spilkova 2001).

CONCLUSION

Pre-service language teacher education is a dynamic process which must be carefully planned, systematically assessed and critically analyzed. Despite its limitations, the new pre-service teacher education program in Turkey is considerably better than the previous programs. Still it is social structure rather than assets that helps learning flourish and develop. Therefore, critical approach and analysis of prior successes and failures is of great importance to pave the way for better improvements in pre-service teacher education programs not only in Turkey but also in other countries.

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