



## Review of *Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey: Policies and Practices*

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***Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey: Policies and Practices*, Yasemin Bayyurt & Yesim Bektas\_Cetinkaya (Eds.). Peter Lang GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Offord, Wien (2012). 312 pp. ISBN 978-3-631-63334-2 hb. (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-653-02387-9 (eBook).**

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As there is an escalating demand for learning and teaching English both in Turkey and around the world, professionals in the field are obliged to enhance the quality of educational standards in English language teaching and learning. Working as a catalyst of success and excellence, research is apparently an integral part of this endeavor.

The compelling need to develop and emphasize research culture has also been strongly felt for over a decade in Turkey. In their review, focusing on research studies conducted between the years of 2005 and 2009, Alptekin and Tatar (2011) state that the increasing number of ELT conferences, journals published by faculties of education and semi-independent organizations with a university affiliation, and doctoral dissertations inspire more people to do research on English language teaching and learning in Turkey, particularly at the tertiary level as most research is conducted by university-based academics and practitioners. However, as Alptekin and Tatar (2011) highlight, there is still a need for improvement of research studies in the fields of ELL and ELT in countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

In this respect, *Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey: Policies and Practices*, edited by Yasemin Bayyurt and Yeşim Bektaş-Çetinkaya, can be considered as a collection of more recent research, which reflects the big picture of English teaching and learning studies in Turkey. As there are not many edited books compiled of research reports in this field, this particular one can be considered as a valuable source with its authors who are all leading authorities in the field in Turkey.

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The chapters of the book follow a similar outline. However, since research on language learning and language teaching is complex and vast and it is somewhat difficult to compile all the research studies in the field in one book, the editors have gathered them under four thematic sections. These are titled as *Teacher Education in Turkey*, *English Language Learning in Turkey*, *Instructional Technologies in English Language Teaching and Learning in Turkey*, and *English Language Education in the Turkish Socio-Cultural Context*. In these four sections, there are sixteen chapters.

In the first section, *Teacher Education in Turkey*, there are seven chapters. One of them is the historical overview of the general education, teacher education and foreign language teacher education and the others are research reports of selective studies about English Language Teacher Education in Turkey.

As the title of the book is *Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey: Policies and Practices*, it is meaningful that the first section starts with the topic of teacher education. In the first chapter, *Pre-Service English Language Teacher Education in Turkey*, Akyel provides an insight into the historical development of 163-year-old teacher education in Turkey. She describes the historical process of general education, teacher education and particularly foreign language teacher education by focusing on the two major reform movements, which happened between the years 1980 and 2010. With these reform movements, Turkey has attempted to improve the quality of teacher education and bridge the gap between theory and practice of teaching by focusing on the practicum course. However, Akyel claims that the effectiveness of these well-intentioned reform movements was hampered by insufficient planning and faltering implementation due to economic and political pressures and lack of coordination between the two controlling institutions namely The Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Institution. To overcome these problems, Akyel maintains that there is a need for further research to design flexible policies for pre-service teacher education, which can embrace the local needs of universities in different regions of the country.

As a final note, it can be said that this chapter should be read especially by those researchers who have a desire to learn the historical development of teacher education in Turkey and to compare it with the ones in other countries. It provides a detailed reference section pointing out the documents published by the Ministry of National Education.

Over the last two decades, the literature on teacher education has been questioning what teachers need to know in order to be effective. Researchers seek to define teacher competencies, and professional education associations develop standards for teacher competencies. In broad terms, teacher competency is defined as ‘an integrated set of personal characteristics, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed for effective performance in various teaching contexts’ (Tigelaar, Dolmans, Wolfhagen, & Vleuten, 2004, p. 255). Haznedar, in her chapter titled *Perspectives on Pre-service Education of English Language Teachers in Turkish Primary Schools*, examines the teacher competencies of elementary school language teachers as they are specified in

the *Elementary School (K-8) Foreign Language Teacher Education Curriculum*. She first presents an overview of the current state of foreign language education in Turkish primary schools, particularly concentrating on the profile and competency of language teachers. She briefly describes the primary school system in Turkey and general structure of teacher education. She then focuses on the teacher competency and teacher qualifications with a limitation of elementary school English teachers, which is the baseline of her research study. In her study, she attempts to examine the effect of the 1997 educational reform, as a result of which English became a compulsory course for fourth and fifth grades of primary schools, with reference to English language teacher profile in primary schools from the perspective of courses they took in pre-service teacher education. In addition to the striking results about the current English language teachers' profile and competency, the study offers implications for educational policy makers, in-service providers, and professionals in teacher training institutions.

Similar to teacher competencies, understanding what teachers believe about the nature of knowledge and learning and how epistemologies affect curriculum implementation and instructional approaches has been the topic of recent studies since teacher's belief system is defined as "the lens through which the teacher views and shapes instructional practice" (Frey, Smart & Walker, 2004, p. 21). In the following chapter, *Changing Pre-service Teachers' Epistemological Beliefs about Teaching*, Atay explores pre-service teachers' beliefs and changes in their beliefs as a result a course, *Approaches and Methods II*, which is one of the first subject area teaching courses at the faculty. It is a small-scale case study based on the views of six pre-service teachers. Although the findings can be considered as limited and tentative due to the number of participants, the study indicates that educational programs lead to a shift in pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs to some extent. The author also proposes "the teacher educational programs should be designed to challenge pre-service teachers' conceptions rather than presuming they are consistent and unidimensional as their beliefs influence both their learning and teaching process" (p. 69).

The following two chapters are devoted to another essential topic of teacher education, *professional development*, which refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. Specifically, "teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically" (Glatthorn, 1995, p. 41). Therefore, it is considered as a lifelong process, which needs to be investigated. In chapter four, *Professional Development and Turkish EFL Teachers: Building Context-Sensitive Pedagogical Knowledge*, Genç focuses on teachers' knowledge and awareness of tasks, activities, and processes that foster professional development of language teachers. He also explores what they do for professional development and discusses their needs and problems in this process. In the next chapter of this section titled *The Influence of Feedback on Student Teachers' Professional Development*, Altınmakas investigates how effectively pre-service teachers benefit from the guidance and feedback they

receive from university supervisors and cooperating teachers resulting from the practicum course. It is a qualitative study based on the data gathered by 15-minute semi-structured interviews, which might be considered as a weakness of the study as there is no triangulation. In other words, there is a need to gather data from multiple sources to reach a final understanding and interpretation of the results.

In today's world of global village, international mobility transforms the nations and societies into multilingual and multicultural ones. This shift also affects the notion of language teaching, and interculturality has become an increasingly significant component in the field of foreign language teaching. In the past, one of the objectives of language learning was the acquisition of communicative competence in a foreign language, which refers to a person's ability to act in a foreign language in linguistically, socio-linguistically and pragmatically appropriate ways. However, communicative competence is no longer sufficient for the language learners of a globalised world. A new notion of communicative competence is needed, one which recognizes English as a world language. Therefore, intercultural communicative competence has been introduced in the ELT field. It is defined as the capacity to change one's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to be open and flexible to other cultures, and it becomes a critical issue for individuals to survive in the globalized society of the 21st century (Alred & Byram, 2002). In the sixth chapter, *Intercultural Communicative Competence of Pre-service Language Teachers in Turkey*, Bektaş-Çetinkaya and Börkan examine the current intercultural communicative competence levels of pre-service English language teachers in the Turkish EFL context with reference to their current cultural knowledge, attitudes, intercultural skills and cultural awareness. The authors conclude that pre-service English language teachers in the Turkish EFL context do not have sufficient level of this competence and suggest that teacher education programs need to make the development of intercultural competence one of their primary goals.

The last chapter of the first section is another culture related study titled *British Culture in the Eyes of Future English Language Teachers in Turkey*. Hatipoğlu focuses on pre-service teachers' definition of culture, their attitudes towards teaching and learning about culture, and their knowledge about British culture with reference to the university that they attend and the years they spend at the university. In her mixed-method design study, she provides a detailed methodology section, which can guide the future researchers. The results indicate that neither the years the participants spent at the university nor the university they attended had a significant effect on the way they defined culture.

A criticism to this chapter is that the notion of culture in Hatipoğlu's study is incompatible with recent thinking of interculturality and the concept of new Englishes or world Englishes in which English language is considered as an international language. In her study, culture is particularly associated with British culture, which is an outdated culture-English language paradigm.

In the second section, *English Language Learning in Turkey*, there are five chapters. The first chapter is a literature review of the recent research studies related to language skills and language-learning studies in Turkey and the other chapters are research studies providing examples of skills instruction and learning. Although this section is devoted to language skills, the research studies in this section mostly focus on reading skill, vocabulary and writing skill, but listening and speaking skills are not mentioned, which can be considered as a shortcoming.

Throughout the history of ELT research, the instruction of the four skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking – has been a major research topic. The second section starts with a catalogue of the research on skills instruction in Turkey from the years 2001 to 2011. Yaylı particularly focuses on each skill with an introductory part and offers a brief report tag about each study's focus, participants, research technique, and results. It is a functional source for researchers interested in language skills studies and the author provides valuable implications by pointing the necessity of qualitative and mixed studies in this field.

In the next chapter of the book, *Possible Effects of Strategy Instruction on L1 and L2 Reading*, Salatacı examines the effect of a 4-week strategy instruction on the Turkish EFL university students' reading strategies in L1 (Turkish) and L2 (English). The study also attempts to find out the effect of strategy training on students' attitudes to reading in English and reading in Turkish. The results confirm that reading strategy instruction in English affected the participants' strategy use both in Turkish and in English and the transfer process between languages is bi-directional and interactive. Furthermore, the study is valuable in terms of its clear methodology. There are various data sources such as think-aloud protocols, semi-structured interviews, the reading component of the Preliminary English Test and the author presents a detailed data analysis part including the rubric for think-aloud protocols.

In the previous section, it is again emphasized that there is a growing interest in cultural studies in language learning and teaching due to social interaction, in other words, globalization. Since the 1980s, the effect of cultural familiarity or topic familiarity on reading comprehension has also been one of the contemporary topics for language researchers as it is closely related to schema theory. In the chapter titled *Perceived Text Difficulty, Cultural Familiarity, and Lexical Retention of Turkish EFL Learners*, Bakla and Arıkan focus on lexical retention and learner perception of text difficulty and enjoyment in comparison of the stories from Turkish culture and target language culture. In the study, the authors endeavor to discover whether the familiarity of the cultural context is a significant factor on vocabulary learning. The results reveal that text familiarity is a considerable factor in organizing the reading syllabus. However, the readers of the study claim that the most familiar story is not necessarily the easiest one as the readability of a text may be affected by some other factors such as topic, interest, appropriateness, level of elaboration and vocabulary. In addition, the authors of the study generously provide an appendix section including the activity samples, vocabulary test and familiarity questionnaire, which can be beneficial for further similar studies.

Content-Based Instruction, as an instructional design, is extensively studied in the field of language teaching and learning since it offers an additional gain to language learning in which the subject matter and the target language are learned at the same time, simultaneously rather than sequentially (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). However, most of the previous research has investigated the effect of CBI on language learning. In the eleventh chapter, *Content-Based Instruction (CBI) at the Tertiary Level in Turkey*, Yalçın carries out an experimental study in which she explores the effect of language and content integration on content learning, L2 writing development, and L2 reading proficiency of 61 first-year EFL students at an English medium university in Turkey. The results divulge that the treatment group outperformed the control group in two measures of content learning without falling behind in language learning regarding L2 writing and L2 reading development.

As it is mentioned in Yaylı's review of the skills studies in Turkey, one of the focuses of the recent reading research is cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. Teachers' beliefs are important concepts in understanding their thought processes, instructional practices, and change and learning to teach. In the twelfth chapter, *EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Concerning Reading Strategy Instruction*, Varol and Akcan focus on these two essential concepts. They explore 42 EFL teachers' beliefs about strategy instruction and their current practices in pre-intermediate reading classes at a state university with a mixed-method design. They also endeavor to describe instances of reading strategy instruction, most taught and least taught strategies, and teachers' strategy preferences among pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading ones. The results of the study reveal that the teachers in this study value pre-reading strategies more highly than while-reading and post-reading ones. In addition to these results, the authors highlight some problems encountered in the study such as students' lack of motivation in learning reading strategies and their limited vocabulary knowledge and provide implications for these problems.

The world has become a place where technology is omnipresent. Therefore, technology and internet reshapes our lives. Pedagogy of language teaching methodologies also changes and phrases as e-learning, digital natives/immigrants, computer assisted language learning, interactive boards, etc. have become contemporary issues of language learning and teaching research. Thus, this book does not miss the opportunity to include a section titled *Instructional Technologies in English Language Teaching* to shed light on some studies done in the EFL field in Turkey, which are presented in three chapters in this section.

In the first chapter of this section (Chapter 13), *The Use of Multimedia Computers in Turkish Classrooms: Perceptions of Foreign Language Teachers*, Yıldız and Tatar investigate the readiness of foreign language teachers (English and German) to integrate computer technologies into language teaching at private schools in İstanbul. In this process, they analyse teachers' attitudes towards the role of computers and CALL in language teaching, their familiarity with multimedia computers, their experience with CALL, the opportunities of technology and CALL materials at schools

and the support that they receive when implementing CALL in their classes. Even though the results conclude that participants had positive attitudes towards computer technologies and thought of computers as tools to complement their teaching, the focus group in this study is limited by private school teachers.

A similar study, *Turkish EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the Use of ICT in English Language Teaching*, is reported in the next chapter. Koçoğlu conducted a qualitative study in which Turkish EFL teachers' beliefs about information and communication technology (ICT) use in their teaching were analyzed thoroughly. This case study uncovers the reality of digital immigrant concept as the participants attribute their initial reluctance in using ICT to their lack of technical competence. The author strongly recommends that ICT should be integrated into language teacher training programs for pre-service teachers as pedagogy rather than teaching computer literacy skills and professional development programs should be designed for in-service teachers.

Due to the advances in information and communication technologies, correspondence between parties has also been shifted and computer-mediated communication has become the common ground of communication between the individuals who are far apart. In the final chapter of this section, *E-mail Exchanges for Language Learning*, Sevingil examines the perceptions of university students about the contribution of computer-mediated communication (CMC) tool in the form of e-mail to their foreign language learning. The e-mail exchanges improve the participants' vocabulary and vocabulary usage, e-mail conventions and grammar. The author also provides implications for both teaching and research.

In the final section, *English Language Education in the Turkish Socio-Cultural Context*, there is only one chapter about the concept of English as an international language.

Another impact of globalization and technological advances on educational environment is the concept of new Englishes or world Englishes in which the notion that English belongs to one or two nations in the world has become an outdated paradigm (Kachru & Nelson, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Furthermore, non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers of English, and the assumption that learners of English will only communicate with native speakers is outdated (Matsuda, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to update the curriculum of English language teaching by considering English as an international language. In the chapter, *Proposing a Model for English Language Education in the Turkish Socio-cultural Context*, Bayyurt first provides an overview of the history of English in Turkey and then she presents how foreign language education policy has become English language education policy with reference to the major educational reforms of 1997 and 2005. She finally proposes a model, which is based on the teaching and learning of English as an international Language. She suggests that a foreign language education policy, the ultimate aim of which is to teach English as an International language, would be the best practice for Turkish educational system.

In brief, *Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey: Policies and Practices* is a comprehensive book stating the current knowledge and research on language learning and teaching in Turkey.

It is also a user-friendly book in which the sections are arranged according to the topics. Readers can easily read the part that they are interested in more. Even though it can be criticized by its divergent writing style, it is somewhat unavoidable in a book written by so many authors from different backgrounds.

In conclusion, the book is an invaluable source for researchers especially dealing with language teaching and learning studies in Turkey as the book provides detailed methodology sections, data analysis sections, and actual survey and interview questions. It is particularly beneficial for English language studies departments offering MA and PhD degrees where the book can serve as a reference book. Furthermore, the empirical studies reported in all sections can guide new researchers in the field and they can be replicated or redesigned by following the implications for further research. In addition, the extensive references at the end of each article direct the reader to associated publications.

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