Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey

Policies and Practices
Introduction

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In this age of globalization, the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and pedagogical (methods, materials, and similar) aspects of English language teaching have been attracting ever-increasing attention in the field (e.g., Borg, 2006; Braine, 1999; Byram, 1998; Edge, 2006; Grabe, 1991; Jenkins, 2007; Kramsch, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Norton, 2000). The most important reason for this is that English is an international means of communication, used by 1.5 billion people around the world for both instrumental and integrative purposes (Alptekin, 2002; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 1998; Kachru, 1992; McKay, 2002; Pakir, 1999; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Strevens, 1992; Widdowson, 1994). An increasing number of universities, especially in the USA, either provide seminars regarding the uses of English in international contexts, or on how effective methodologies can be developed for teaching an international language – i.e., English – and what can be done to train future English language teachers to teach English to future users of such a global language.

According to Nayar’s (1997) clarification of the terminological confusion about English language teaching in different geographical regions of the World – i.e., English as Second Language (ESL) contexts as opposed to English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, as well as English as Additional Language (EAL) contexts – Turkey clearly falls within the context of English as a Foreign Language. There are, however, very few edited volumes about English language teaching in countries like Turkey, where English is taught as a foreign language.

In this respect, Research Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English in Turkey: Policies and Practices offers a broad picture of English language teaching in the Turkish EFL context. It examines the development of English language teaching and learning in Turkey and illustrates current practices through empirical studies. The sixteen chapters in the book are divided into four thematic sections: 1. Teacher Education in Turkey; 2. English Language Learning in Turkey; 3. Instructional Technologies in English Language Teaching and Learning in Turkey; 4. English Language Education in the Turkish Socio-Cultural Context.

Part 1, “Teacher Education in Turkey,” comprises 7 chapters and gives a richly illustrated social and historical account of English language teacher edu-
cation in Turkey. In this respect, this part is divided into two subsections. In the first section a historical account of English Language Teacher Education in Turkey is given. In this section, there are two chapters on policy making in pre-service English Language Teacher Education in Turkey. In the second section, the results and discussions of various empirical studies based on English Language Teacher Education in Turkey are reported. This section comprises five studies in pre- and in-service English language teacher education in Turkey.

In Chapter 1, “Pre-Service English Language Teacher Education in Turkey,” Akyel describes historical developments in the field of general education, teacher education, and foreign language teacher education in Turkey with a special focus on the reforms of 1980 and 2010. Akyel argues that a “sense of urgency has given rise to a series of reforms improving the education and ultimately the performance of teachers. However, insufficient planning and faltering implementation due to economic and political pressures, combined with the uncoordinated efforts of the two controlling institutions [The Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Institution], have limited the effectiveness of well-intentioned reforms.”

In Chapter 2, “Perspectives on Preservice Education of English Language Teachers in Turkish Primary Schools,” Haznedar gives an overview of the present state of foreign language education in Turkish primary schools, with special reference to the profile and competencies of English language teachers. After presenting a short outline of the Turkish school system and some background information on primary level teaching standards in the world, Haznedar focuses on the nature of teacher knowledge and English language teaching in Turkish primary schools. Based on data provided by current primary school teachers of English as a Foreign Language, Haznedar examines pre-service training and class practice in order to find out how recent advances are incorporated into the training of primary school English language teachers.

In Chapter 3, “Changing Preservice Teachers’ Epistemological Beliefs about Teaching,” Atay examines the beliefs held by Turkish pre-service teachers (PTs) of English and the changes in their beliefs resulting from a case-based teacher education course. Considering that the epistemological beliefs of teachers affect their teaching, Atay argues that “teacher education programs should be designed to challenge PTs’ conceptions rather than presuming they are consistent and uni-dimensional.”

In Chapter 4, “Professional Development and Turkish EFL Teachers: Building Context-Sensitive Pedagogical Knowledge,” Genç looks at the ways in which Turkish teachers connect professional knowledge with their own teaching, think critically about their teaching, articulate their beliefs and knowledge, and do their own research to form pedagogic principles based on their own classroom practices.
In Chapter 5, “The Influence of Feedback on Student Teachers’ Professional Development,” Altınmakas investigates the guidance and feedback pre-service teachers receive from university supervisors and cooperating teachers, delineating these roles from the perspective of practicing teachers.

The next two chapters explore the cultural knowledge of pre-service teachers. In Chapter 6, “Intercultural Communicative Competence of Preservice Language Teachers in Turkey,” Bektaş-Çetinkaya and Börkan investigate the current intercultural competence levels of English language teachers, specifically their cultural knowledge, awareness, attitudes and skills. Bektaş-Çetinkaya and Börkan argue that knowledge of cultures is a prerequisite for intercultural competence. To this they add a warning: “To develop cultural awareness rather than assimilation with other cultures, the target language culture should be presented as another way of living, not the norm.”

In Chapter 7, “British Culture in the Eyes of Future English Language Teachers in Turkey,” Hatipoğlu examines how teacher candidates at university define culture, what they know about British culture, and how their attitudes and their knowledge of British culture were acquired.

Part 2, “English Language Learning in Turkey,” comprises five chapters, providing examples of empirical studies related to language skills and language learning. In Chapter 8, “An Overview of Research on Skills Instruction in Turkey,” Yaylı provides a catalog of recent research studies conducted in Turkey on the teaching of writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

In Chapter 9, “Possible Effects of Strategy Instruction on L1 and L2 Reading,” Salataçı first examines the current reading strategies of Turkish university students, and then describes a four-week-long project designed to teach them top-down and metacognitive strategies.

In Chapter 10, “Perceived Text Difficulty, Cultural Familiarity, and Lexical Retention of Turkish EFL Learners,” Bakla and Arıkan explore the effect of students’ familiarity with cultural elements in reading materials on their word retention and perceptions of text difficulty. The participants of this study were elementary level learners of English in the preparatory language program of a public university in Turkey. The results revealed that “stories from the native culture were considered to be more familiar, but they were also considered to be slightly more difficult than stories from the target language culture.” Bakla and Arıkan argue that “in the eye of the reader, the most familiar story is not necessarily the easiest one. This means that the readability of a text may be affected by topic, interest, appropriateness, level of elaboration, and vocabulary among many other variables.”

In Chapter 11, “Content-Based Instruction (CBI) at the Tertiary Level in Turkey,” Yağcı investigates the effects of CBI on the content learning and L2
language proficiency of first-year students in an English-medium university. She hypothesizes that CBI is more effective than general language instruction in content learning. The findings of Yalçın’s study illustrate that CBI is as effective as general language instruction in developing L2 proficiency.

In Chapter 12, “EFL Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices Concerning Reading Strategy Instruction,” Varol and Akcan study the beliefs and practices of EFL teachers in pre-intermediate reading classes at a state university. In the process, they uncover “instances of reading strategy instruction, most taught and least taught strategies, and teachers’ preferences among pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading strategies.”

**Part 3, “Instructional Technologies in English Language Teaching,”** investigates the use of instructional technologies in English language learning and teaching in Turkey. In Chapter 13, “The Use of Multimedia Computers in Turkish Classrooms: Perceptions of Foreign Language Teachers,” Yıldız and Tatar investigate the degree of “… the readiness of foreign language teachers at private schools in Istanbul to integrate computer technologies into their English language teaching practice.” They query the extent of the training that language teachers receive and the effect of their training on the purposes and forms of computer assisted instruction in their classrooms.

In Chapter 14, “Turkish EFL Teachers’ Beliefs about the Use of ICT in English Language Teaching,” Koçoğlu provides an in-depth analysis of teachers’ views about integrating technology into foreign language instruction. In Chapter 15, “E-mail Exchanges for Language Learning,” Sevingil reveals what Turkish non-native speakers of English had to say about the use of online e-mail discussions in their language learning. The results of her study show that the students considered the e-mails to be beneficial, having contributed to their learning of English in terms of vocabulary, grammar and, incidentally, their use of e-mail conventions.

**Part 4, “English Language Education in the Turkish Socio-Cultural Context,”** gives an overview of English language education in Turkish socio-cultural context. In her Chapter, entitled “Proposing a Model for English Language Education in the Turkish Socio-Cultural Context,” Bayyurt first presents an overview of the history of English language education in Turkey. Then, she discusses major reforms in the Turkish education system, with special reference to the reforms of 1997 and 2005. Finally, as the goal for foreign language education in Turkey, she proposes a model based on the teaching and learning of English as an international language.
References


