

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING AND TEACHING FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Foreign language teaching and foreign language teacher training have been the most discussed field in Turkey for years. Because foreign language teaching has not yielded expected results and language learners have not gone beyond the acquisition of some vocabulary and grammar in spite of money, time and effort spent on it. The purpose of this study is to look at some of the features of language education and language teacher training in some countries, to look at the current state of foreign language education and language teacher training in Turkey, to examine these features in view of language teacher training in Turkey, and to report on what Turkey needs to do to improve the language teaching situation by considering language teacher training. Starting foreign language teaching at an earlier age, reflecting Common European Framework programme on teacher training programmes, considering teachers' personal development, training teachers according to the level they will be teaching upon their graduation, and extending teacher practice are some of the suggestions offered.

Key Words: Language teacher training, language teaching

Introduction

As the concept of globalization is increasingly spoken of, the need to educate language teachers becomes more important because of their key role. Countries, such as Japan, China, and several European countries are well aware of this importance and are making efforts to train suitably qualified teachers. European countries, in particular, have formed a common basis for development of teacher training through "the Common European Framework" (*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, 2001*). Turkey, a candidate for EU membership, should meet the requirements of language learning and teaching in line with this framework, as other candidate countries have done. However, language teaching has been a controversial topic in Turkey for a considerable period despite the input of large amounts of time, effort, and money (Demirel, 1993). This failure has resulted in much discussion focusing on the low quality of teacher training and in decisions implying that English medium schools should be limited (Demircan, 1990; Demirel, 1993). In addition to this, the question of how to design and implement pre-service language teacher training fully appropriate to needs and realities still remains. Therefore, several studies are needed in order to identify problems occurring during the

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adaptation process. This study covers different approaches to language learning and language teacher training in six randomly chosen European countries (Portugal, Austria, Germany, Finland, Estonia, and the Netherlands) and two Asian countries (China and Japan) through existing documents and internet. It also proposes certain actions. In view of the fact that there are many different practices of language teacher training in the world, this study is limited to only language teacher training departments of educational faculties.

The Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching and Foreign Language Teacher Training in Other Countries

It is clear that European countries and Asian countries attach a great deal of importance to foreign language learning, starting language teaching at an early age. In Japan and China, English is the first foreign language in junior and senior high schools with 4 or 5 hours instruction a week and employing highly qualified native and non-native speakers as teachers using communicative activities. Germany, Estonia, the Netherlands and Finland introduce English in the 3rd grade (at the age of 8 or 9) for two hours a week. In Germany, English at elementary level is taught by class teachers who are offered special training and supported by language assistants. In Finland and Estonia students are asked to learn another foreign language in secondary school alongside English. Austria introduces English, a first foreign language, in grade 1 (at the age of 7), followed by French and Italian. In the 1st and 2nd grades, the foreign language is integrated into other subjects taught; but in the 3rd and 4th grades, it is taught as a separate subject. Foreign language at primary level is taught by primary school teachers as in Germany. The aim at lower secondary level is to get students involved with communicative language and computer-assisted language learning. In Portugal, foreign language learning begins in the 5th grade (at the age of 11) and students learn a second foreign language in the 7th grade (at the age of 12 or 13).

Those countries mentioned above also attach a great deal of importance to foreign language teacher training. In Japan, teachers of English are trained at junior colleges and universities and there are different levels of teaching certificates. Graduates of four-year colleges may apply for first class certificates to teach in secondary and high schools while graduates of three-year junior colleges may apply for second class certificates for lower-secondary schools. Degrees for MA and publications giving evidence of research and ability are required to teach at university. With a major policy change pedagogical and psychological subjects, such as principles of education, theories of teaching, educational psychology, and the history of education were increased while English grammar, applied linguistics, American literature and history, British literature and practical four skills courses were decreased. Praxis, or teaching practice, takes place in the final year and lasts two weeks. During praxis, student-teachers are given administrative information about school, schedules of classes, special events of school, layout of school, numbers of students and observation techniques. Before graduation, candidates take the "Teacher Employment Selection Test" administered by boards of education. In-service programs cover training courses, the dispatch of teachers overseas for study, and international meetings. Computer assisted in-service programs are quickly growing in Japan (Yonesaka, 1999; Torii, 1983). It is interesting to note here that teachers of English are trained according to the levels they are required to teach. These programmes are designed accordingly and could be very useful for students to become specialized in.

In China, a similar application is followed in training language teachers. Pre-service teacher education is conducted at universities, three-year teacher training colleges and secondary teacher training schools. The training programs and models offered by these schools differ and thus, their graduates work at different types of schools. For example, four-year training is required to teach in higher level schools. English language skills are given more importance than pedagogical courses, which results in an inadequacy in training for pre-service teachers. A four-week classroom practice is compulsory. Students are required to take the "National English Examination Band 4", a test of English proficiency at the end of their training. Since graduates go into teaching directly without significant training, they are required to take continuing courses on teaching for two years. These courses cover the following: psychological theory, the art of body language, guidelines on classroom methodology, an awareness of students' innovative and creative abilities development and various pedagogical subjects which include an analysis of students' common mistakes, communicative skills in English teaching, picture-drawing in classroom teaching and tasks of classroom observation (Cheng et al. 2003; *National Report by The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China* 2001). In-service training is supported through distance education and TV. Teachers are also given the opportunity to go abroad or to be trained by English teachers from abroad to improve language skills and teaching methods (Hamp-Lyons et al., 1999, p.59). When systems in Japan and China are compared in terms of programmes, it is seen that Japan has more pedagogical courses while China has more skill courses, which leads to inadequacy in professional skills; however, both countries take in-service training very seriously by sending teachers abroad. Sending teachers abroad could be useful for those Asian teachers who are trained in a country where English is not native language.

Different from Asian countries, in Portugal, departments of education train teachers for the first and second levels. Teachers are trained for 5 years and certified by an independent institution (NIATE- *National Institute for Accreditation of Teacher Evaluation*). University language departments offer rigidly structured programs including elements of language, linguistics, literature, culture and academic courses. Furthermore, greater emphasis is placed on the pedagogical courses in the earlier stages of education. The programs focus on the reflective education of teachers, relevant for their personal development and for learning. The levels of proficiency, stated in the Common European Framework, are usually accepted for training and assessment. The communicative approach is important and constructivist theories of student centered teaching are highlighted. Praxis is a compulsory component of both the integrated and post graduate teacher-training program. After graduating, teaching practice takes a full year and is assessed qualitatively with an overall grade by the supervising teachers. In-service training is supervised by the Department of Basic Education and provided by higher education establishments, training centres, and professionals. (National Report from Portugal, June 2002). Different from Asian countries, in Portugal, reflection and personal development is strongly felt in the training process, which is a cultural approach in several European countries. It is also important to note here that teaching practice takes a full year after graduating, which gives novice teachers an opportunity to be equipped with the skills necessary for their profession.

In Austria, there are two types of teacher training institutions: a 3-year teacher training college, and a 4-year university course leading to an academic degree. Uni-

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versity training is only required for senior language teachers, but not for the primary and secondary level. The curriculum at teacher training colleges includes educational sciences, psychology, sociology and human sciences. Teaching practice is spread over three years. Training at university takes a minimum of four years and successful completion leads to a master's degree. The training mostly covers subject studies with methodological and didactic training. Following this, students have to complete a one-year mentored classroom practice at schools to get qualified. The Erasmus program has become institutionalized and has developed into an important feature in teacher training, helping staff-student mobility, curriculum development and intensive programs. E-learning and knowledge management indicate the direction of future societal development, and pre-service institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to integrate information and communication technology skills across the curriculum. Teachers have the opportunity of participating in in-service training programs covering the curriculum, subject content, organizational matters, and educational theory and methods (Kettemann, et al., 1998). What is interesting to mention here is that teachers are trained according to the levels they will be teaching after graduating. This will lead teachers to be well informed about the methodology and approach related to the age of their learners.

In Germany, teacher training is comprised of two main parts; academic study and practical training. Pre-service teachers are trained at universities, teacher training colleges and language teachers hold different titles accordingly. At the primary level, training incorporates the study of elective and specialist subjects, followed by the First State Examination. Pre-service teachers are trained for four years at universities for the secondary level where they study subject specific courses and practice their teaching at the end of their teaching. This is followed by the State Examination. The second stage of teacher training is a one-and-a-half-year internship during which students, while attending weekly seminars in pedagogy and didactics, are assigned to schools under the supervision of expert teachers. Pedagogy and psychology courses cover innovative approaches, multi-sensory learning, the use of media, teaching skills, drama classes, creativity, songs, poetry and communication technologies. This training also includes using voice and speech, legal aspects of teaching, doing research in libraries and information on the state curriculum. This stage ends with a demanding state-administered examination, the "Second State Examination". Mentors play an important role in the training process. They are responsible for the training and supervision of trainees in schools, observations of lessons and feedback, checking of lesson plans and keeping a record of trainees' lessons, collecting the assessments of the other supervisors, and preparing the overall assessment of a trainee for the head teacher. Mentors attend seminars given by higher education tutors in order to update methodology and mentor training. In-service training programs are offered at regional or state education centres, allowing teachers to choose from a variety of courses. Each teacher is eligible for one week per year of in-service training, and courses are financially supported by the state (Ebke, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). When compared with the systems in Portugal and Austria, it is obvious that Germany makes much more effort in training language teachers through giving tough examinations for different level teachers, offering diverse courses in pedagogy and psychology and a mentoring system. In addition to this, having a long-term internship under the supervision of mentors could be a valuable experience for pre-service teachers.

In Finland, foreign language teaching is undertaken by either subject teachers or, in lower grades in particular, by class teachers specializing in a foreign language. Subject teachers complete a master's degree in the subject they teach. Foreign language teacher training is the joint responsibility of language departments and teacher education departments. The program consists of introductory studies to teaching, theoretical and practical bases of subject didactics and also portfolio work through which students learn how to reflect on their own development and progress. Portfolio work, supervised by university teachers, is graded on course completion. Educational technology has strongly impacted learning for pre-service teachers. The new trend is towards information and communication technologies, together with network system because it is believed that all teachers and students should have access to all the services of the internet at any time. Practical studies concentrate on planning, evaluation of teaching, reflection on teaching, and professional practice. In-service training is offered by universities and various institutes in the field. However, it is acknowledged that regular in-service teacher education is needed (Pufahl, Rhodes, Christian. 2001; Tella 2001). Separating teachers by either subject or class teachers according to levels, using technology in training and following a portfolio system for pre-service teachers' personal development, as applied in Finland, can be key points for successful language teaching.

In Estonia, primary and secondary school teachers are trained at universities. "The Common European Framework" is reflected in the curriculum. Students study linguistics, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and methodology, focusing on practical grammar, phonetics, listening comprehension, integrative skill development, critical reading and extensive reading. Students also have an opportunity to learn about mediation and interaction. Psycholinguistic theories of foreign language learning teach them about their perceptual system, attention, mechanism and memory work and they gain an overview of language learning and the teaching process as well as practical skills in dealing with learners' cognitive, affective and personality factors in teaching practice. European Union education programs contribute to the quality of education by supporting co-operation between the educational institutions of different countries and by enabling students and teachers access to learning opportunities throughout Europe. In-service programs aim to broaden teachers' horizons and help them understand their classroom better. Professional development is offered by the British Council, the USIS, the Goethe Institute, and the French Cultural Institute. In order to promote life-long learning, distance learning programs are provided and students can be involved in these programs via the internet all over the world (Liiv, 2001). What is interesting to note here is that pre-service teachers have an opportunity of learning about mediation and psycholinguistic theories of foreign language teaching, which raises pre-service teachers' awareness for the profession.

The Netherlands has developed a specific policy to improve the quality of foreign language education, closely linked to the European agreements. Teacher training is offered at University and includes a four-year curriculum, during which subject studies, methodology, didactics, and educational studies, together with teaching practice, are integrated. The requirements for teaching practice include a portfolio reflecting the quality of practice and observation reports from the students and the mentors, classroom action reports, self-reflection reports of strengths and weaknesses, and final reflective and self-evaluative reports. Prospective teachers are required to under-

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take intensive teaching practice, either a twenty-one-week teaching practice followed by studies at the training institution, or a two-and-a-half-day a week teaching practice throughout the whole year. In the Netherlands, the high level of language proficiency is specifically related to study and work abroad programs. Students intending to become language teachers are likely to have studied abroad while obtaining their first subject area degree (Spöring, 2001). Different from other European countries, the Netherlands offers intensive teaching practice lasting for a year, which gives prospective teachers a chance for self-reflection.

The Status of English Language and English Teacher Training in Turkey

Primary schools include two hours foreign language teaching a week since the introduction of eight years of compulsory education in 1997-1998. The purpose of foreign language teaching is to help students speak a language at certain proficiency levels. In the 6th, 7th, and 8th class (at the age of 12, 13 and 14), learning a foreign language is four hours a week. According to the regulations, teachers appointed to eight-year-compulsory elementary schools have to complete four years at a faculty of education. Subject teachers are required to have an MA or MSc degree to teach at secondary school level except subject specialists teaching in foreign languages. Foreign language teachers who graduate from faculties of education can teach either at primary or secondary level (YÖK, 2003).

Language teacher training programs at these faculties include subject courses, professional knowledge and general culture. Subject courses cover those in the four basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), theories of second language acquisition, methodology, linguistics, an introduction to English literature, and phonetics. Professional knowledge courses, on the other hand, cover the introduction to the profession of teaching, classroom management, growth and learning, planning and evaluation of learning, counselling and guidance, and materials development. The final year includes a six-week praxis. Upon graduating, prospective teachers take a central placement test regardless of their area of study. The test covers verbal and numerical questions in Turkish. As the examination is a prerequisite for employment, candidates are well prepared. In-service training is organized by the Ministry of Education, although studies suggest this area lacks organization.

Recommendations For Turkey

English education: The countries mentioned in the study, where foreign language teaching is compulsory, mostly commence second language learning at the ages of eight or nine in the 3rd grade. Foreign language teaching (English) starts in the 4th grade at the age of 10) in Turkey and is also compulsory. Turkey could start teaching foreign language at an earlier age—in the second or third grade. Although English is the most common foreign language taught in the countries mentioned, it is not the only one. However, in Turkey, it is the only language offered at present. Alternatives could be made available at higher levels. Regarding the curriculum, a foreign language at elementary level is taught through games in a communicative atmosphere in Austria and Germany; however, in Turkey, the curriculum is mainly grammar-based and offered by the Ministry of Education in all state elementary and secondary schools. It would be far more motivating and fun to teach language through games to young learners at the elementary level in Turkey.

Teacher Training

Curricular content : The content should provide future teachers with tools in the form of theoretical, practical, cultural and critical knowledge classroom practice. After considering the countries in the study, the recommendations suggested are:

– to adapt the European models: Finland, Estonia, Austria, and the Netherlands have adapted foreign language teaching at the national level to the frameworks and standards of the Council of Europe’s language policy and activities. The framework is a planning instrument that provides a common basis and terminology for describing objectives, methods, examinations, teaching materials, and teacher training programs throughout Europe. It covers the European Language Portfolio Project, which has two main aims: First, to motivate learners by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels. Second, to provide a record of the linguistic and cultural skills they have acquired. Prospective Turkish teachers of English language can learn how to reflect on their own development and progress through the portfolio system, as Finland, Estonia, Portugal and Austria do. This system will help the language learners be aware of their language competencies together with updated knowledge.

– to include psycholinguistic theories of foreign language learning and constructivist theories into program: Learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). As in Portugal, constructivist theories combined with a communicative approach could be emphasized in programs at language teacher training departments in Turkey. Another possibility is to emphasize psycholinguistic theories which enable learners to understand their perceptual apparatus, attention, memory work and to be aware of their cognitive, affective, and personality factors in teaching practice, as in Estonia.

– to include innovative and creative courses in programs for a practical application of teaching materials and resources. Courses highlighting the art of body language, the development of students’ creative abilities, picture drawing in classroom teaching, communication technologies, multi-sensory learning, and the use of media are areas for development in programs in Turkey, as in China and Germany.

– to tailor pedagogy to the needs of particular groups of learners. Language teacher training departments educate all prospective teachers irrespective of level/age group with the same program content in Turkey. Programs should be tailored according to the needs of learners at primary, secondary or upper secondary level as in China, Japan and Austria.

Length of teacher training : There are alternatives for language teacher training in Japan, China, Portugal, and Austria in terms of length, depending on the requirements of the students and the type of institution. Considering the countries in the study, the recommendations are;

– to vary the length of pre-service training

– to train teachers of English to elementary schools for 3 years, focusing on pedagogical courses, drama, teaching styles, songs, and games, as in China

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– to train teachers of English to secondary level for 4 years, focusing on computer assisted language teaching, again as in China

In Turkey all pre-service teachers of language have a 4-year education with the same program content. Specialization for the different levels, primary, secondary, and university would produce better-qualified teachers.

Classroom practice: Teaching practice is a required aspect of any teacher program and consists of observations and apprenticeships in teacher education (Crandall, 1996; Richards, 1990). Research findings emphasize the importance of a practicum and demonstrate that observation of mentor teachers, peer observation and self observations through video recordings, and reflective activities such as journal writing, feedback and discussions, are essential for language teacher preparation and continuing professional development (Crandall, 1996; Fanselow, 1987). Considering the countries in the study; recommendations are:

– to train mentors and supervisors regularly in observational methods, giving feedback, controlling prejudices, using reflective and critical thinking, checking lesson plans, and keeping a record of trainees' lessons, as in Germany,

– to train prospective teachers in peer observation, peer review, and preparing a portfolio as in Finland and the Netherlands,

– to extend the length of the practicum to a minimum of 12 weeks, thus allowing trainees to become more comfortable and competent in the classroom environment, as in the Netherlands and Germany,

– to assess students through oral examinations and to require them to prepare a research project and keep a diary in order to reflect on their ideas at the end of praxis, as in Germany.

Examinations: As in the cases of China and Japan, prospective English teachers are given a proficiency exam in English. In Germany, prospective language teachers are assessed with an oral examination, projects and a state examination. The recommendation is;

– to assess students with a research project/thesis, by presenting demo lessons followed by a proficiency test rather than a multiple choice exam covering verbal and numerical questions in the native language.

In-service training: Certain remedial procedures are vital, such as redesigning the continuing teacher education curriculum for all new and in-service teachers in Turkey. The recommendations are:

– to support life-long programs and distance learning programs, as in Estonia,
– to introduce flexible in-service training systems based on teachers' real needs,

– to provide regular in service programs as in Germany, Austria and China,

– to support exchange programs such as Erasmus for both student-teachers and qualified teachers, as in other countries. As in the Netherlands, England, Japan, and Austria, teachers in Turkey should be given the opportunity of practising the language they will teach. Turkey can increase exchange teaching programs as in Japan with the cooperation of the USIS and the British Council.

Educational technology : Since 1990 efforts to integrate internet use into education have been common in Turkey. A computer network infrastructure for education is lacking because of the tendency of the Turkish Ministry of Education to work slowly due to its highly bureaucratic and centralized nature. Considering the countries in the study, the recommendations are;

- to train prospective language teachers in information and communication technology for pedagogical use in the classroom,
- to train prospective teachers in information and communication technology for personal planning organization and resource discovery, as in Austria,
- to provide in-distant learning programs for teachers, as in Estonia and Finland.

In conclusion, the balance between what is required of teachers and what is offered to them has a significant impact on the composition of the teaching cadre and the quality of teaching. In Turkey, the European dimension should be more thoroughly revealed in the educational content and more in-service training should be provided in order to ensure high quality education. Furthermore, integrated language and subject teaching should be expanded to ensure that students learn foreign languages at an earlier age and that there is a greater variety of second languages offered other than English.

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FARKLI ÜLKELERDEKİ DİL EĞİTİMİ VE DİL BİLGİSİ ÖĞRETMENİ YETİŞTİRME KONUSUNA KISA BİR BAKIŞ

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Özet

Yabancı dil öğretimi ve yabancı dil öğretmeni yetiştirme konuları yıllardır Türkiye’de sıklıkla tartışılan konular olmuştur. Harcanılan zamana, paraya ve çabaya rağmen yabancı dil öğretimi beklenen sonuçları vermemiş ve dil öğrencileri kelime ve dil bilgisinin ötesine geçememişlerdir. Bu çalışmanın amacı farklı ülkelerdeki dil eğitimi ve dil öğretmeni yetiştirme yaklaşımlarını incelemek, bu yaklaşımları Türkiye’deki uygulamalarla karşılaştırmak ve Türkiye’de yabancı dil öğretimi ve yabancı dil öğretmeni yetiştirilmesinde nelerin yapılabileceğine yönelik önerilerde bulunmaktır. İngilizce dil öğretiminin daha küçük yaşlarda başlaması, İngilizce öğretmen yetiştirme programlarına Avrupa Birliği Çerçeve programlarının yansıtılması, öğretmenlerin bireysel gelişimlerinin önemsenmesi, ilkokul, lise ve üniversitede öğretim yapacak öğretmenlerin söz konusu düzeylere uygun olarak yetiştirilmesi ve öğretmenlik uygulamsının daha uzun süreli tutulması yapılan öneriler arasındadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: yabancı dil öğretmeni yetiştirme, dil öğretimi

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