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**EFL POLICY OF TURKEY: PAST AND PRESENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The language policy of Turkey regarding the evaluation phase of English language education issue was investigated following the comments on the issue from a diverse point of view. Nowadays, Turkey's language policy seems to have been much more improved since the education reform in 1997 bringing a rise in the curriculum development, course book design and teacher development programs. In conclusion, the advancement practices in EFL education have been initiated in Turkey or even in Ottoman Empire formerly, however these improvement attempts are still unfulfilled.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Globalization has a great influence on multidimensional aspects of our life containing the language policies of several countries (Kırkgöz, 2008). Language policy is a concern of extensive ethical, political, and legal significance in authorities all over the world (Patten, 2001, p.691). According to Spolsky (2004) language policy means all the language procedures, practices, beliefs and organizational preferences of a society. He points out that while some countries specify their language policy in their laws, others do not do it and also while some countries carry out their recorded policies, others simply do not put them into action. Some countries can present documents pertaining to the quantity of people speaking different languages while others do not ever inquire that issue in their national census (Spolsky, 2004). Language policy contains not only the ordinary motives of selection, but also beliefs about these selections, values of varieties and variants and also the endeavors to alter the preferences and beliefs of others (Spolsky, 2004). A language policy reinforces language planning and language revival activities in a society as well as supplying a scheme for control of the language and its future in the society (Franks and Gessner, 2013, p.11). Küçüköğlü (2013) implies that Turkish policy regulations with reference to language go back to the Ottoman Era and foreign language policies have shifted according to the requirements of the

country and also according to its relations with other countries since then. Besides, he refers to the issue that the reason of the foreign language selection is based on the effects of other countries in touch with the Empire. Nergis (2011) states that the policy and philosophy aspects should be taken much importance when designing educational programs containing pre-service and in-service stages. We can easily specify political decisions of historical periods but not the philosophy giving route to decisions as to language teacher education which is an important aspect of foreign language education policy, he also mentions. All the countries worldwide have come up with language policies as well as Turkey where English has appeared to be a vital tool for especially young people with the aim of achieving international communication and not missing the recent developments (Küçüköğlü, 2013).

Sarıçoban (2012) and Sarıçoban (2012) indicate that Turkey, being situated between Asia and Europe and close to the Middle East and Africa, is strategically significant in terms of culture and geopolitics which makes the learning of English especially vital for Turkey to achieve global communication and to catch up with the necessary developments. They also mention that Turkey is a member of NATO and debates with the European Union (EU) with the aim of a full membership. Owing to such reasons, each government in Turkey has conducted language policies to expand and improve learning and teaching of English, and consequently English is the most popular foreign language in our country according to what G. Sarıçoban (2012) and A. Sarıçoban (2012) put forward.

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Furthermore, they state that Today, Turkey's current language policy seems to have been much improved because the 1997 curriculum revision, textbook updating, teaching methods and teacher training facilities particularly in primary schools and higher education. Labor market is known to be the direct reason of learning and teaching of English in Turkey with regard to the aims and objectives of English as a foreign language and it is believed that an enhancement in educational standards will boost an English speaking labor force among young workers, as a result building a supportive position that lets Turkey get into the European Union (English Language Education Policies, n.d.).

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to offer accurate data regarding the English Foreign Language policy of Turkey both at present and in the past by going into depth through the provided pictures of a variety of already conducted studies in hand, that's to say by means of document analysis technique. With all the mentioned data in mind, this study attempts to bring a light to the EFL policy of Turkey in its developmental process.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This specific study is built on a qualitative research design having resource to the document analysis technique which has been used as the method of analysis in this study. There are various methods applicable for researchers, some of which cover participant observation, statistical analysis, questionnaires, life histories, interviews, and document analysis (Owen, 2014). When using the document analysis technique, the researcher examines the records or documents available (Karasar, 2012). Namely, the employment of document analysis technique refers to the analysis of documents that involves information about the issue studied (Bailey, 1994).

### **The Role of EFL Teachers' Education in the Language Policy**

Aydoğan and Çilsal (2007) put forward that the value of foreign language teaching is continuously rising internationally and many countries educate their foreign language teachers according to the requirements of employment and arrange education programs on this way. They also state that these countries specifically send their teachers abroad and give much more attention to teaching foreign languages. Bilir (2011) points out that the first teacher education in our country dates back to Darulmuallimin (Teacher Education School), which was established on the 16th of March, 1848, in the Ottoman Empire Period. This school educated pre-service teachers for three years (İnceçaya, 2011). Education of qualified and professional teachers has been a fundamental question since the foundation of the institution (Bilir, 2011). Afterwards, in the Turkish Republic Era, there was a huge need to educate foreign language teachers, starting from the year 1938, and foreign language departments were founded in two education institutes, one in Gazi, Ankara and the other in Çapa, İstanbul (Demircan, 1988).

Currently, by means of its education policy Turkey has made high commitment to improve ELT occupation in order to make ELT teachers more empowered (Kırkgöz, 2005). Feasibly the most outstanding innovation of the 90s has been a shift from educating teachers as technicians for empowering them as autonomous, reflective, informed decision-makers, developed to escape from procedures and to form their teaching according to students' needs. (Altan, 2006). Preparing competent EFL teachers has become a major point of thought in educational policies for many countries (Cepik and Polat, 2013). To start the issue, we must initially have a look at the policy of foreign language education, indeed. The policy of our country as to foreign language education was always in the trial of development by following the improvements of the West, by sending learners for training and inviting teachers to teach languages in the schools.

When the Republic of Turkey was established a new phase took start for any aspects of people's life containing foreign language training. Turkey saw the West as a role model and observed and followed the improvements in western countries after the declaration of Turkish Republic. As a result, the western languages were chosen to be taught in our schools, but the selection of any of these languages was based on the political relations with those westerners. Initially, French was the selected language upon the establishment of Turkish Republic and afterwards German was the popular language in 1960s, however the rising political and social relations with the USA and the rising power of the USA again gave a way to English language to be the highly opted foreign language not only in our country but also in the world as well. As a result of all these happenings and the rising requirement for foreign language, a demand for educational policies on foreign language teacher education took place in our country (İnceçay, 2011).

### **Foreign Language Teaching Before and After the Republic of Turkey**

Foreign language teaching came out as a chunk of religious education and won great significance as time passed in the history of Turkish national education, (Nergis, 2011). Foreign language teaching in the Ottoman Empire was mostly shaped by religious objectives and upon looking at educational dimension it can be easily seen that Arabic and Persian were the most focused languages in which structural characteristics of these languages were considered important and literature had much significance (Işık, 2008). Besides, what Işık (2008) refers is that in the late phases of the Empire, reform works took start as a result of being defeated by the West, then foreign language education gained significance in order to catch up with the West in terms of political, commercial and military issues, consequently. That's to say, up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire had formed a very firm political access to foreign alliances; therefore, Western languages were not given any importance in foreign language teaching. Sarıçoban (2012) and Sarıçoban (2012) indicate that the Tanzimat period having a significant role in education as it initiates the Westernization movements goes back to second half the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman Era. The main characteristics of Tanzimat period is that the previously religion based education turned into the government based education, being in the state

control (Bilir, 2011). Furthermore, Sarıçoban (2012) and Sarıçoban (2012) put forward that early works to teach a western language appeared as a result of a necessity to learn about western military technology in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so close relationships with France were gained during the mentioned Ottoman period. G. Sarıçoban (2012) and A. Sarıçoban (2012) specify the issue as In the context of the attempts for the renewal and modernization of the Ottoman institutions, particularly the military structure, the teaching of French first started in military training institutions in 1773. Later, French was included in the curricula of the Medical School (*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Adliye-i Şahane*) and the School of Political Sciences (*Mekteb-i Mülkiye*). The successful attempts observed in the teaching of French were in the *Mekteb-i Sultani (Galatasaray Lisesi* or *Lycee de Galatasaray*) which was opened in İstanbul in 1867.

When it comes to the issue of English language, according to *History of Bogazici University* (as cited in Zok, 2010), possibly the most promising action in the initial history of English in terms of our country was that when the Ottoman Empire initially gave Christian missionaries the freedom of teaching within its borders. Zok (2010) brings a light to the issue as Cyrus Hamlin, supported by a New York businessman financially in 1863, opened a school near the Bosphorus named Robert College. Hamlin opened the school after a long struggle with the government, though. Hamlin decided to teach in English, as well as Arabic, since English would be a neutral language among students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Robert College has since been renamed as Bogazici University which is currently one of the most famous universities in Turkey. Furthermore, American missionary schools had already been established for about two decades prior, and their numbers rising enormously (Zok, 2010).

Eskicumalı and Türedi (2010) state it should be noticed that English absolutely acquired a way to enter Ottoman Empire, specifically with the foundation of the Robert College in 1863, which means English appeared in the race along with the French and German languages. We can see it clearly that with Tanzimat period, French became prestigious; with Abdulhamit II German became popular; and after 1863 English found a place for itself (Eskicumalı and Türedi, 2010). Kırkgöz (2007) puts forward that there was a scientific and technological boom in the world when Turkey founded the Republic and with the employment of various means of communication the countries were closer to each other. This setting caused Turkey to struggle to develop itself and catch up with other countries in terms of improvements in foreign language learning and teaching (Kırkgöz, 2007). What Kırkgöz (2007) also states in her study is that the numbers of schools teaching English enhanced at this time and just upon the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, innovations and reforms were realized through closer connections with Europe and the USA accelerating the spread of ELT in Turkey. In addition, she states that English achieved dominance over other foreign languages such as French, which was widely selected previously in diplomacy, education and also in art. The following picture shows the foreign languages taught after the establishment of the Republic as Demir (as shown in Eskicumalı and Türedi, 2010) represents Yal (2011) defines

that the issue of language in Turkish Republic evolved around westernization ideal and the national policy about the language was routed in two main ways: the first one is the adoption of the Latin script in 1928 and the second one is the assuming of pure Turkish by removing all foreign elements.

**Table 1. Foreign Languages taught after the establishment of the Republic (as stated by Demir, 2015)**

	1924	1927	1935	1941	1950	1960
Germany	+	+	+	+	+	+
French	+	+	+	+	+	+
English	+	+	+	+	+	+
Italian	+	+	+	+	+	+
Latin	-	-	-	+	+	-
Arabic	+	+	-	-	+	+
Persian	+	-	-	-	+	+

The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk meant the end of the Ottoman Empire and the start of a search to officiate the Turkish language as a segment of its independence (Yal, 2011). In a short period, the spoken language was transcribed into Latin orthography and borrowed Persian and Arabic concepts and words were replaced with Turkish equivalents as Yal (2011) also states. Furthermore, Eskicumalı and Türedi (2010) put forward that English has spread inevitably as a result of Turkey's response to the requirements of globalization and its official language education policies in the last five decades. They add that before World War II, Turkey was mainly affected by European culture and the rich learnt French as the diplomatic language and also German as a foreign language. Additionally, they refer to the issue that only after World War II, Turkey enhanced its admiration with Western culture and way of life, especially the United States', and the rise of English in Turkey took start. To sum up, various aspects have been credited to the fast spread of English containing Turkey's wish to catch up with the requirements of globalization, global commerce, and academia (Yal, 2011).

## Conclusion

In this study language policy of Turkey has been described reflecting the state applications of both past and present situations. A brilliant foreign language arrangement should be situated on practical, accurate, rational and scientific data (Canagarajah, 2006). Foreign language in Ottoman Era was mostly taught for religious aims. In order for students to be able to read and understand religious scripts competently, Arabic and Persian, particularly their morphological and syntactical structures, were taught. Once Ottoman Empire encountered serious defeats at the battles against western countries and once it had rising dilemma in formal correspondences with enemy countries, some necessary innovations to adapt those enemy countries were initiated. Founded to teach foreign languages rather than Arabic and Persian, foreign language schools were just some of these innovations.

Furthermore, when Turkish Republic was established on October 29, 1923, Turkish foreign language teacher education system focused on a more superior plan than ever before. First and foremost, all schools in homeland containing even foreign

schools were formed under the authority of the Ministry of National Education. In this study, I have looked back the language policy of Turkey, particularly in terms of the formation process of English language education and then tried to comment on the issue from a different perspective. Currently, Turkey's language policy appears to have been much more progressed since the education reform of 1997 bringing curriculum development, course book renovations and teacher empowerment programs and the continuing innovations have given way to promising improvements as a result (G. Sarıçoban and A. Sarıçoban, 2012). Considering an aspect of the country's language policy, the point of foreign language teacher education in Turkey is not flawless yet (Nergis, 2011). Moreover, at macro level, Turkey's national policy has been formed to serve the political ends while the teaching and learning practices at micro policy level are not conformed to macro political aims (Kırkgöz, 2008). To sum up, the feature improvement attempts in EFL education have already taken start in Turkey or even in Ottoman Empire previously, however the developmental innovations are still unfinished.

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