

A Brief History of English Language Teaching in Turkey

Nuray OKUMUŐ CEYLAN

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Hazırlık Kursları: 0312 419 05 60
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Nuray OKUMUŐ CEYLAN

Nuray OkumuŐ CEYLAN received her BA and PhD degree in Department of English Language Teaching from Gazi University and MA from Bilkent University MATEFL program. She started teaching English at a state elementary school in 1999. She worked at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University Obligatory English Preparatory School between 2000-2012. She also worked at Kocaeli University Foreign Languages College between 2012-2015. She has been working as an Associate Professor in Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University English Language and Literature Department. She is interested in learner/ teacher motivation, learner autonomy and academic writing.

ORCID No: 0000-0002-9614-6156

PREFACE

This study aims to present a brief summary of the attempts to make English language as a subject to be taught and a widely accepted foreign language in schools. The history of teaching English dates back to the nineteenth century when the political and commercial relations with England and America led to an interest in English language. As England preceded the navigation, English was added to the curriculum of “Bahriye” brigade, and it was taught at this school until the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Students were also sent to England for education in 1881. English took place in the curriculum of the state middle schools officially after the invasion of Istanbul by the British in 1918 (Demir, 1983).

After the Establishment of the Turkish Republic great steps were taken in education to provide new, modern, and secular education surrounded by the nationalism. The first important move might be considered as forbidding children under the age of compulsory education to study at foreign schools in Council Meeting II in July 1923. Instead of Arabic and Persian being taught for a long time as the foreign languages at the education institutes of the Ottoman Empire, one of the Western languages English was included in the school programs as a foreign language and was identified as an optional language to be taught.

The focus of the book is the development of English language through the changes in the state policies. Therefore, the data was gathered mainly from the documents of the Ministry of National Education and Turkish Educational Board. Moreover, the books written on the subject and the related literature was examined to provide statistical data with the studies conducted on the subject and information to enlighten the subject.

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INTRODUCTION

The interest in English started with the first commercial relationship between Ottoman Empire with England between the end of XIV. century and the beginning of XV. In 1583, William Harborne came to Istanbul as the first English ambassador appointed to Ottoman Empire. Afterwards, Yusuf Agah Efendi became the first permanent Ottoman ambassador appointed to England in 1793. With the appointment of Stadford Canning in 1841, the commercial relations increased, and the number of the English traders in the Ottoman Empire rose to 1061. Meanwhile, America appeared as an independent country in 1783, and it began to establish commercial relations in the Mediterranean Region. The first American commerce ship arrived in İzmir in 1797. As America did not have an official ambassador in Ottoman Empire, English ambassadors assisted them to associate with the Sultan. In 1811, American Trade House was opened, and David Offley became the head. Although he was not the official ambassador, he fulfilled the duties of one. With his successful diplomatic relations with the Sultan, Ottoman Empire signed the first treaty with America in 1830. It included the terms of fruitful commerce for America providing it with the passage to the Mediterranean Region which would make it a powerful country there. However, the fact that Ottoman Empire had just got out of the war against Russia, and France invaded Algeria in 1830 had weakened its foreign trade, and this treaty was not profitable for the Ottoman Empire (Topçu, 2007).

The political and commercial relations with England and America led to an increase in the interest in English language in the nineteenth century. As England preceded the navigation, English was added to the curriculum of “Bahriye” brigade while the language in “Humbaracı” brigade was German. English was taught at this school until the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Students were sent to England for education in 1881. English took place in the curriculum of the state middle schools officially after the invasion of Istanbul by the British in 1918. Later, it became one of the elective languages given together with French and German (Demir, 1983).

Besides, America had strong relations with the minority groups in Anatolia, especially with Armenians. They sent East Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia and Central Anatolia missionaries who were affiliated to American Board to establish Protestant schools. In these schools, courses were taught in English and Armenian

languages in primary schools and “Rüşdiye” high schools, and in the Arabian countries which were bound to the Ottoman Empire the languages were Arabic and English (Ergin, 1977).

Until Tanzimat period, the empire benefitted from the minority groups in translating the documents related to state and commerce affairs, especially the Greeks. In 1820, “Babıali Tercüme Odası” was established to teach Turks foreign languages. For students who were sent to France “Mekteb-i Osmani” was opened in Paris in 1859 to teach them French. As it was not useful, it was closed in 1875. “Lisan Mekteb-i” opened twice in the capital, İstanbul to train foreign officers in 1864 and 1877 was turned into a regular school in 1881 (Ergin, 1977).

In Tanzimat reform era, “Galatasaray Sultanisi” was established as the first state school whose medium of education was a foreign language at middle school level in 1867. Under the diplomatical and cultural influence of the French, the medium of education in this school became French. After the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy II in 1908, French became compulsory in all schools, English and German were elective languages. The first foreign private school established by the foreigners in Tanzimat period was Robert College which started education in 1863. It is regarded as the beginning of English Language Teaching in Turkey in the related literature (Demir, 1983). The goal of this school was to expand American culture; thus, the medium of education was English, and it followed an education program similar to the ones in the modern colleges in England. Abdülhamit banned Turkish children to be educated there. In 1912, higher education unit was added to give Higher education. In 1971-72 education year Higher education unit was left to the Ministry of Education taking the name “Boğaziçi University”.(Demirel, 2004) In this period the French, English and American, German and Italian also opened their own schools to teach their languages. Muslim children could not attend these schools until the end of the nineteenth century. The fact that the state schools could not reach the success of the foreign schools indicated a need for foreign language medium middle schools (Demir, 1983).

The Advisory Board of Education was founded in 1846, and the General Educational Charter was proclaimed in 1869 with 198 clauses which was based on French education system then. As the religious aspect of education was ignored with this charter, it is regarded as the beginning of the process of secularization (Çetin, 1982). The General Educational Charter aimed to make individuals adaptable to the new circumstances and

1. provide compulsory education
2. determine the stages of education
3. reorganize educational and pedagogical techniques
4. train more competent teachers with higher salaries
5. build a central education system and form its provincial organizations
6. develop a rule-governed student-based philosophy
7. encourage the people to contribute towards education (Hayta & Ünal, 2008; Koçer, 1980).

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and the subsequent occupation of Constantinople and partitioning of the Ottoman Empire by the Allies under the terms of the Armistice of Mudros led the national forces unite around the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and pursue the Turkish War of Independence. The political and military activities of the Turkish revolutionaries resulted in the establishment of the new, modern, and secular Republic of Turkey. This new country worked hard to Westernize itself both politically and culturally to modernize through Atatürk's Reforms.

Atatürk regarded education as an indispensable element of the development of Turkish nation. "It is such an education that makes a nation live as a free, independent, glorious and noble society, or that drives into slavery and poverty". This is one of the sentences he declared that indicates the importance of education for him. The innovations in education started with the establishment of the Ministry of National Education on May 2, 1920. İsmail Safa Özler became the first Minister of Education, and the first Education Congress was held under the presidency of Atatürk on July 15, 1921. The issues discussed at the meeting included the numerical data of primary and middle schools, education programs, the necessities of the current education system and the contribution of education to the efficiency of the production. As a result of the discussions at the meeting, it was concluded that the needs of the schools in the villages and the cities differed; thus, this indicated the need for varieties in the primary school programs. Another important point was the immediate need for a new, modern, and secular education system with clearly identified goals. 4-year-primary school education was increased to 5 years with the decision taken then and stayed the same until 2012-2013 education year.

In the following chapters of the book, the focus would be on the developments and changes related to the English language teaching in Turkey.