The impact of globalization and information technology on language education policy in Turkey
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Abstract

Globalization and information technology have affected foreign language teaching policy in Turkey. Because English is used as a lingua franca for advancing international trade, business, and economics as well as obtaining information and conducting research all over the world, Turkey has attributed importance to English language teaching with the aim of adapting to globalization process and the EU standards. The fast-growing information technology has also contributed to restructuring English language teaching policy in our country. The renewal of English language curricula of primary schools, revision of English language teacher training curricula of education faculties and establishment of computer laboratories with internet access in schools are concrete indicators of the effect of information technology on language teaching in Turkey.

Keywords: globalization, information technology, language education policy

1. Introduction

Globalization and technological advancement have strikingly changed our ways of learning and teaching English as a lingua franca in the 21st century (Block & Cameron, 2002; Burns & Coffin, 2001; Warschauer, 2000). The fast-growing information technology and the global network society have stimulated us to reconceptualize international language use and foreign language learning and teaching (Crystal, 2001; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002). Globalization, defined by Appadurai (2001) as a multi-way process involving "flows of ideas, ideologies, people, goods, images, messages, technologies and techniques", has maximized the spread of English since nations have needed to utilize English as a lingua franca to develop their international trade, business and economics (Kachru & Smith, 2009). In Zughoul’s (2003) view, while globalization has eased the spread of the English language, the English language also functioned as a tool for international communication to contribute to the globalization process.

As Crystal (2003) states, globalization has also initiated the age of information technology requiring the deployment of the Internet whose main language is English. Markee (2000) indicates that the spread of information technology worldwide is strongly linked with the diffusion of the English language. To put it differently, it can be stated that while English has contributed to the proliferation of this technology, the information technology has also boosted the diffusion of English through Internet communication. Furthermore, because a number of studies in scientific-technological areas have been conducted in English, people are to have a basic knowledge of English to conduct research (Kachru & Smith, 2009). According to Zhu (2003), that people need knowledge of English to obtain...
information has promoted the status of English to lingua franca which in turn has influenced the language teaching in the world. This paper, hence, aims at investigating how globalization and information technology has affected English language teaching policy in Turkey.

2. Globalization, information technology and language education policies in Turkey

Affected by the globalization movements of the world, Turkey altered its foreign language policies by making reforms in English language teaching. In Turkey, the first school offering education in English was Robert College opened in 1863 and the second one providing English medium education for students was Üsküdar American College opened in 1871. While the number of Anadolu Lycées was 12 in 1974-75, it reached to 23 in 1982-83 (Acar, 2004). The establishment of new Anadolu lycées was legally accepted through the Law of Foreign Language Education, no 2923, dated October 14th, 1983. In addition to these schools, the Ministry of Education accepted the opening of Super Lycées within regular Turkish high schools via a new law on foreign language education in secondary and high schools on April 12th 1994. These schools have played a key role in spreading English in Turkey. Because students are required to have the highest secondary school CGPA (4.00) to apply for these schools, these schools are termed super lycées among people (Acar, 2004). Today, there are 770 super lycées and 426 Anadolu lycées in Turkey. In both schools, during the first year, students are exposed to preparatory school education where they take 24 hours of English a week compared to 4 hours of Turkish language. They take 8 hours of English and 4 hours of Turkish language on the 9th grade. However, they take equally four hours of English and Turkish on the 10th and 11th grades. Students in Anadolu lycées take all their courses in English except for Turkish history and Turkish language and Literature. Besides these private and super schools, the Ministry of Education require all high school students in the rest of high schools to take four hours of English and Turkish on the 9th, 10th and 11th grades. (MNE)

In addition to the globalization factor, information technology and Turkey’s being a candidate for the membership of European Union (EU) have also stimulated the country to make reforms in English language teaching with the aim of adapting to the EU standards (Akınoğlu, 2008; Akşit, 2007; Kırkgöz, 2008). Computers were first integrated into Turkish schools in 1984 by initiating Computer-Aided Education (CAE) Project, which was conducted between 1984 and 1986. As Yedekçioğlu (1996) states, the aims of Ministry of Education were to diffuse computer literacy and the deployment of computers as a tool to compensate for the poor quality and persistent weaknesses of suitable teachers. Since 1984, the Ministry of Education has spent remarkable amount of money on diffusioning the employment of ICT in education with a variety of projects. In 1992, General Directorate of Computer Education and Services (BILGEM) was established by the Ministry of Education to plan the deployment of computers in education at every level and type of school, educate operating staff, promote Computer Aided Instruction (CAI) in line with technological innovations, and do tasks with respect to information processing (Ozar & Askar, 1997). Between 1992 and 1995, BILGEM conducted a project in 53 schools to teach 250 teachers how to utilize computers and educational software, which was a significant step on the way to make teachers familiar with how to use computers in education (Altun, 2007).

In 1997, English language curricula of the primary schools were renewed and the age of learning a foreign language became 10 by incorporating English into the 4th grade of state schools (MNE, 1997a). In Kırkgöz’s (2005) viewpoint, this curricular innovation was viewed as a climax for the English language curricula in that it gave rise to the emergence of radical changes in the goals, nature and methods of language teaching by suggesting Communicative Approach as a new concept for English language teaching in Turkey. In parallel to this development, in 1998, English language teacher training programs of education faculties were revised by the Council of Higher Education (YOK) through integrating two courses about information and communications technology (i.e. computer and instructional technologies and materials development) into these programs to enhance the quality of language learning and teaching (Alev, 2003). The contents of these two courses were as follows:

1. Computer: Basic Keyboard skills, word processing, graphic, spreadsheets, working with database programs, basic programming applications, software reviewing and evaluation, working with computer in the classroom.
2. Instructional Technologies and Material Development: Characteristics of various instructional technologies, the place of instructional technologies and their use in teaching process, development of teacher materials (e.g.
spreadsheets, transparencies, slides, video, computer based materials) and evaluation of various types of teaching materials through instructional technologies (YOK, 1998).

As Altun (2007) stresses, while the first course has been structured to teach basic computer skills to prospective EFL teachers, the second course seems to be more focused on professional skills with respect to ICT. These two courses would be a national guide for education faculties in terms of infusing ICT into teacher education program. However, despite providing a framework to teacher educators about what should be taught with respect to ICT, these two courses could not specify how ICT should be taught to prospective EFL teachers so that they can make use of ICT for pedagogical purposes in the classrooms.

In 1998, the General Directorate of Educational Technology, formerly named the General Directorate of Computer Education and Services (BILGEM), was established to create innovations in science and technology; to foster and diffuse education and instruction via technological innovations; to maximize the quality of education; and to offer distance education to working people. The Department of Information Technology in Education (EBIT), which is under the responsibility of this directorate, tries to plan and carry out basic computer education (computer literacy) and CBE at every level and in all schools. Thus, this department contributes to spreading new technologies in schools (Akkoyunlu, 2002).

The 1997 English language curriculum was also renewed owing to the concern of making the school curricula adaptable to EU standards (Kırkgöz, 2007). At this juncture, the Ministry of Education restructured the English language program of the primary schools and put it into practice commencing from the 4th grade of primary schools gradually in 2005; and in 6th, 7th and 8th grades of primary schools in 2008 (MNE, 2006). Topkaya and Küçük (2010) state that the new English language curriculum is mainly based on constructivism and multiple intelligences theory and that it is more student-oriented, task-based and process oriented. Further, more emphasis is placed on portfolios, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, performance based evaluation and project based evaluation, which are performance-based and authentic assessment procedures (MNE, 2006). Related to the constructivist approach, the new English language curriculum stresses the importance of utilizing task based, collaborative and communicative activities such as dramatization, simulations, games, pair work and group work to attract different learning styles (MNE, 2006). As Erdoğan (2007) indicates, the role of the teacher is to act as a guide, facilitator and motivator in learners’ reaching and constructing the knowledge rather than the transmitter of the knowledge. As for the role of learners, they are expected to create their own knowledge by doing, living, searching, and reasoning (MNE, 2006). At this juncture, the renewed English language curriculum stimulates language learners and teachers to utilize technological devices, especially the computer and the Internet to reach, construct, and share knowledge to realize effective language learning and teaching.

In line with the globally increasing significance of ICT in education, Turkey initiated ICT-related actions, especially in the field of foreign language education. Because the Ministry of National Education (MNE) attempts to diffuse ICT at schools as other countries do to sort out educational problems and to contribute to innovation in education, it establishes computer labs and provides Internet connection at schools. Statistically, the schools with Internet connection in 2005 rose from 40% (World Bank 2007) to 68% in 2006 (SPO 2008). Lastly, in 2008, approximately 87% of 45,973 schools in formal education had Internet connection (MNE, 2008a, 2008b). Conclusively, it is aimed that %96 of students will have access to the Internet at schools in 2010 (SPO, 2006).

3. Conclusion

Globalization and information technology have a remarkable impact on foreign language teaching policy in Turkey. Since English is utilized as an international language for enhancing international trade, business, and economics as well as getting information and doing research all over the globe, Turkey has given prominence to English language teaching to be in consonance with globalization process and the EU standards. The employment of modern technology in teaching languages has significantly increased worldwide during the past ten years (e.g., Chen, Belkada, Okamoto, 2004, Warner, 2004) owing to its versatile uses in language education. Today’s classrooms, otherwise called techno-classrooms, are often furnished with the computer, the internet and the projector enabling
teachers to benefit from a variety of materials and methods in their lessons. Technology altered the teacher’s role from a traditional one to that of facilitator in the classroom (Paraskeva, Bouta, & Papagianni, 2008). In the past, teaching used to center around the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. However, in our times, learning comes from student inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving dependent on information obtained from a variety of sources (Scheffler, 1999). Hence, as Dooley (1999) states, it can be stated that technology has now altered how teachers and students find, collect, analyse, provide, and transmit information by providing them with more power in the classroom.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has not only changed the role of teachers in classrooms but has also presented a variety of software and websites that can be used for educational purposes (Ruthven, Nennessy, & Deane, 2005). Among the most frequently utilized software packages in schools today are PowerPoint, MS Word and Excel and their pedagogical benefits and contributions to learning and teaching have been examined and tested previously (Rozalind and Muir, 2004; Joshua, 2005). Fast technological development provides teachers with new opportunities to test more software packages and websites in their lessons. Google Earth, online games, virtual reality and YouTube are only a few examples of resources which are being tested in classrooms today (Dickey, 2007; Snelson, 2008). In spite of these changes, however, Turkish Teacher Education Institutions were negatively affected by insufficient level of infusion of ICT into the programs. Courses with respect to computers were incorporated into English language teacher training programs by the YOK. However, teacher educators’ lack of experience and competence in ICT is still the most remarkable limitation in our times (Altun, 2007).

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