

Chapter 3

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF TURKEY¹

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey is located between Europe and Asia, thereby combining the two continents. It is a large country with a population of approximately 80 million. The countries which border Turkey are Syria, Iraq, Iran, Greece, Armenia, Bulgaria, and Georgia. Turkey has long been known as the cradle of civilizations as it has been home to a wide range of cultures for ages. It encountered a number of foreign languages such as Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Persian in ancient times. Subsequently, it made use of such western languages as French, German, and English to keep abreast of scientific developments that existed in the western countries. Since it joined the United Nations (UN) and became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the English language became prominent in the education system of Turkey whereas the other western languages, French and German, became optional foreign languages.

Foreign language teaching has long been influenced by the spread of English in the world due to globalization, economy, and innovations in technology and computer. As English is the common language of international communication, it is the most demanded language. Thus, it is mostly taught worldwide. The following reasons may be put forward in connection with the spread of English in the world (Oral, 2010: 61):

- The enduring effects of British colonialism,
- The influence of USA as a strong power due to its political, technological, economic and military effects since the end of the World War II,
- The influence of globalization which has speeded up since the collapse of the Soviet Union and culminated with the great victory of America,

¹ The study was retrieved from the researcher's PhD dissertation titled "Critical Evaluation of Foreign Language Education Policy with Specific Reference to English Language Teaching in Turkey."

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language teaching in the curriculum and Turkish parents required their children to master English for a wide range of reasons.

On the other hand, English language teaching has gone through drastic changes since it was introduced in the programmes of educational institutions in Turkey. For example, duration of English instructions has changed thanks to policy changes in education. Furthermore, globalisation and technical developments in science have led to curriculum changes in the Turkish education context.

The current foreign language education policy of Turkey depends mainly on English language teaching because there has been an increased demand for it. Thus, nearly all the schools teach English rather than the other foreign languages.

Foreign language education policy in Turkey has recently been influenced by the policies pursued by the Council of Europe. Turkish ministry of education tries to keep up with the policies on foreign language education in European countries. Consequently, foreign language education curriculum in Turkey has been formed in accordance with the policies followed by the Council of Europe. For example, foreign language education policy in Turkey suggests that Turkish EFL students should make use of the European Language Portfolio. In doing so, they should acquire learner autonomy and self-assessment. In addition, they should learn about the other countries' cultures.

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