

INNOVATION AND CHANGE IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is a) to analyze the views of the English language instructors at a private university about the positive and negative effects of innovation and change in education on the learning of the students and b) to discover possible improvements in the design of the language courses of prep-classes. This qualitative study with focus group interview data collection method seeks answers to the problems that instructors face in the classrooms in terms of learning outcomes of the students. In Turkey, most private universities accept students who get lower degrees than the others and one year of English instruction is regarded as unnecessary for the students or they lose their interest in the time of eight months. The problems and suggestive ideas are analyzed in two main categories: a) the learning abilities and the quality of instruction in the lessons and b) the motivation, interest and attitude of the students towards English.

Key Words: Innovation, Change, Instructors, Private University.

INTRODUCTION

Baskan (2001) defines the 'higher education' as the system after middle-school including institutions where students study at least for two years. University is regarded as a program which prepares one for the vocation forehead. University students are expected to do scientific research and publications, whose main topics and subjects are determined by the needs of societies (Baskan, 2001). The needs of societies, on the other hand, are changeable with the development of technology and information. In this sense, universities are bound not only to follow the changes in the society and information but also precede them and hold a leading role. They are expected to lead the society and information, and alter their own systems or practices from time to time. The first step of a developed higher education system is the high number of universities in a country.

In Turkey, there has been a drastic increase in the number of private and state universities, from 70 to 170, in the last decade (Hürriyet, 2013). Although all these universities are bound to the regulations of YOK (The Higher Education Council), with the law released in 1946, they have been granted with the permission of being autonomous (Gür, 2011). Universities constitute their own schedule and program as long as they provide certain courses and this autonomy leads to variations in the techniques and methods used in the same departments. This autonomy of the universities has been fancied by many researchers and instructors; however, the board of trustees has been criticized by some researchers as it limits the autonomy of the university and education quality (Gür, 2011).

As for teaching and learning activities, the teaching styles and techniques have been altered in the past years into a more student-centered and more engaging way of teaching (Rogers, 1951). From classrooms where teachers were the only source of information and power, the education has moved to a more humanitarian style which enables the students to participate in the decision making process and distribute their distinctive qualities or interests in the classroom.

History of Higher Education

Humboldt's reform of connecting both the scientific research and education under 'higher education' affected the higher education system in European countries for a long time (Aydin, 2010). This German higher education reform was also effective in the 1933 Turkish Higher Education Reform and universities were required both to do scientific research and to serve the quality education to the students. However, universities were only available for the higher class in Europe and the United States. After the Second World War, they also became available for the people who were not 'elite'. The universities of today, likewise, are serving the majority of the society rather than being exclusive only to some part of it. The new information and technology discovered or invented in universities should be used for the wellness of the society, which requires the universities to examine their academic values, education methodologies and social role. Additionally, Aydin propounds all the universities in Turkey, from the new and local ones in the East to the traditional ones, should become international in terms of sharing information and cultural values of the district.

The first secular institution was founded in 1773 in the Ottoman Empire and three other institutions, respectively one for engineering, one for medical and one for military, followed it (Başkan, 2001). Almost a century later, The Ottoman University was founded in the Ottoman Empire and it was active until 1933 with certain times of inactiveness due to external and governmental reasons. In 1933, The Ottoman University was abolished and transformed into 'Istanbul University' due to the lack of parallelism with the society and the new regulations in new Turkish Republic and education system. Within the same period of time, other universities started to be founded in Ankara and other cities in Anatolia. The higher education system is regarded as being behind the development of the society, which has required it to be reformed in every ten years so far (Aypay, 2003). In 1933, the first institution with the name of "university" was opened in Turkey and, in 1946, universities were made more autonomous. After 1946, universities were meant to be more autonomous with several other reformations in 1964 and 1973. In 1981, The Council of Higher Education was founded and foundation universities were founded after the foundation of the Council of Higher Education. It is stated in the article that governance, organization, the number and quality of instructors, the need for employment, quality, rivalry, the relationship between education and employment and the effect of market mechanism on higher education have a big influence on the development of higher education. The factors noted in the article as the determinative factors creating reformations are: the decrease in the quality of education as a result of a rise in numbers, equality of opportunity, poorness of instructors both in terms of number and quality, the increase in demand, the concentration of powers, universities' relationship with the government, private universities and the idea that higher education institutions should answer to an justify themselves to a higher authority.

Aypay (2003) states in his article that there are three causes of reformations in higher education: a) productivity, b) balanced resource allocation and c) realization of pre-determined social and cultural aims and governments make the regulations in two ways: a) rational model where the regulations are set by the government and applied by the universities and b) self-regulation where universities are in charge of their own regulations.

Innovations in Higher Education

Departments of education and psychology do not teach how to teach as the instructors in these departments lecture in the way they were lectured (Enarson, 1960). Although innovation is seen as vital and encouraged by foundations, teachers in universities seem to have doubts about the efficacy of new teaching styles in the same way printing was rejected by some scholars, the article suggests. In spite of the accepted efficiency of small-sized classrooms for better teaching and learning, faculty members insist on keeping the standard numbers for their universities and classrooms. It is suggested in the article that faculty members should take the classroom

sizes, the optimal benefits of the various techniques and styles for different types of courses into account while preparing the catalogues and schedules of the courses. Enarson also suggests that lectures on televisions include more innovation and they would be more successful than the courses given in faculties of universities in the U.S.

It is stated in the article titled *Teachers' craft knowledge and curriculum innovation in higher engineering education* that innovation in education is not complete unless the teachers are also trained for the innovation being made as teachers' role in the process of innovation is not-to-be-questioned (Van Driel, Verloop, Van Werven & Dekkers, 1997). At the beginning of an innovation process, the teachers' craft knowledge is inquired since it is believed that the craft knowledge of teachers affect the innovation process deeply. Craft knowledge is defined in the article as teachers' knowledge, viewpoints, virtues and notions they develop for teaching. The earlier the viewpoints of teaching are constituted, the harder it becomes to change them. As a result of the high importance of teacher viewpoints, innovations in curriculum are designed according to the past experiences and current beliefs of teachers as well as the present conditions of students and learning environment. In an engineering higher education school in the Netherlands, the management desired to renovate the curriculum of engineering courses to keep up with the contemporary educational and engineering developments and, more importantly, to improve the negative image of the poor achieving students' year over year. The new curriculum was designed as a student-centered one.

In the article titled *Preservice elementary teachers and self-reflection: How innovation in mathematics teacher preparation challenges mathematics beliefs* (Santos, 1995), a new course is analyzed with the methods of observation, document analysis and interviews. It can be concluded from this article that although the students who took the innovated course did not personalize the learning at the beginning of the semester, it helped them increase their awareness of learning, teaching and knowing mathematics.

According to Ghaith and Yaghi (1997), whether tiny or deep, the innovations in education are subject to the practices of teachers in the classrooms. It is stated in the article that self-attitudes are highly influential on the behaviors of the teachers and their attitudes of themselves are improved when they are trained and willing to adopt educational innovations. On the other hand, the teachers who regard themselves as professionally achieving have a stronger determination for educational innovations. Another finding is that the older the teachers are, the less self-efficacy and faith in innovations they have. However, teachers with better self-efficacy have better attitudes towards the innovation introduced.

Teacher Beliefs

According to Knight, Tait and Yorke (2006) educational professional development is a constant development interacting with both the surrounding and self and it is stressed that the learned new ideas or techniques about education or testing will be lost if the working environment is not feasible for these new ideas or the other members of the working team are not eager to apply them. In the study by Knight, Tait & Yorke (2006), for creating their professional knowledge, most of the full-time instructors stated that they learned to teach in higher education by trying and practicing themselves, their own experience as a student in higher education, and collaborating with their colleagues. Part-time instructors agreed with them with only one difference of the answer as "workshops and conferences". It can be concluded from the study that instructors in higher education affect themselves to become better at their jobs, had the motivation for personal development and regarded external world as incentives. Norton, Richardson, Hartley, Newseat & Mayes (2005) explain the effect of teacher views on the education in practice. In their study, they analyze the relationship between the teachers' 'beliefs' and 'intentions' regarding teaching in the higher education. In the article, 'beliefs' are defined as the teachers' personal opinions about teaching teachers while 'intentions' are defined as the professional practices of them. It is concluded from the research that the intentions and beliefs of the teachers in higher education are in parallel with each other. Also, in a study to test the effect of teachers' beliefs of the innovation in a secondary Dutch school and the success of the innovation in practice, the teachers are asked to state their opinions about the newly-introduced home-schooling system (Evers, Brouwers & Tomic, 2002). The teachers' burnout level, their views of self-efficacy and their opinions about the innovated program are

analyzed and it is concluded that teachers' opinions about the program have a positive correlation with their views of self-efficacy.

In this context, this study aims to find out the beliefs of the instructors at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. The instructors' beliefs about the policy change for proficiency exam, as a new assessment type, portfolio, and the modern language teaching techniques will be analyzed.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study tries to analyze the quality of the teaching of English, the motivation of the students, the assessment of the students' level in a private university which was founded four years ago in Istanbul, Turkey. To get the opinions of the instructors at the university, a focus group interview is designed with pre-determined questions about the policy change, the assessment of the students, the motivation level of the students and the quality of the teaching methods. This study is based on a qualitative research technique: focus group interview. A focus group is, according to Lederman (Thomas et al. 1995), a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being 'focused' on a given topic. This data collection technique is used in this study as it must be noted that one year ago, the policy to pass pre-school was changed and the students were made to attend 70 percent of the lessons rather than to pass a proficiency test. Before the policy change, the students had to pass a proficiency test before they could start their departments. However, with the policy change, the obligation to pass the proficiency test was demolished and the attendance requirement was introduced (Yabancı diller bölüm başkanlığı, 2013).

The main objective of the interview is based on two questions: a) what are the instructors' opinions at the foreign languages department of a private university in Istanbul about a reform recently made? b) how effective is the assessment of the students' English from the viewpoint of the instructors at the private university? To collect an extensive data about the viewpoints of the instructors at the university, to get a more deep insight about the instructors' opinions of the methods and new system used at the university, the 'focus groups interview' method of collecting data is chosen. In this study, each instructor was invited to participate in the interview. However, three instructors were on their off-day and they could not have the chance to participate. Among the other instructors who were at school on that day, only eleven accepted willingly to take part in the interview, one of whom came ten minutes late to the interview. The participants are illustrated in the table below.

Participant No	Mother tongue - Nationality	Year of experience
P1	English – United States of America	5
P2	English – United Kingdom	6
P3	Uygur – Uygur	3
P4	Turkish – Turkey	1
P5	Turkish – Turkey	3
P6	Turkish – Turkey	2
P7	Turkish – Turkey	4
P8	Turkish – Turkey	3
P9	Turkish – Turkey	3
P10	Turkish – Turkey	4
P11	Turkish – Turkey	3

Research Procedure

Fatih Sultan Mehmet University is chosen for the study as the policy of foreign languages department changed within the previous year and the instructors who work there for two years could observe the effects of the policy change clearly. Also, the instructors at this department are around the same age level and from the same

education backgrounds, which made it possible to reach a summary of viewpoints about the teaching methods, the new principle being applied and the assessment of the students from the instructors. Most of the instructors at Fatih Sultan Mehmet University (FSMVU) graduated from Bogazici University, Foreign Languages Education, Western Languages and Literature or Translation and Interpreting Studies (15/24), and the rest of the instructors graduated from the same departments (Yabancı diller bölüm başkanlığı, 2013).

The instructors at the university are willing for professional development, and most of them are studying for their master's degree. They design their own lesson materials, pacing schedules, and they select their books with the supervision of the head of the department. They take part in the curriculum design and the assessment of the students with speaking and writing portfolios. It is hypothesized that the ideas of the instructors at this university would create a clear image of the state of the universities and the practices.

Both the foreign and Turkish instructors were invited to participate in the focus group interview. The three foreign participant instructors came from different countries like England, the United States, and the Uygur State. Not all of their native languages are English, but they are highly fluent in the language. The instructors were invited to take part in the study, and the ones who had time to spare and enthusiasm about it participated in the study.

The instructors at FSMVU were interviewed to reach a consensus about the teaching style, assessment and the reform of the policy one year ago. All teachers are familiar with the teaching styles and the methods, assessment and the policy change. A room was set up for the focus group so that they can feel comfortable, neutral, private, free from distractions and easily accessible. The questions emerging from the explored ideas of the group members were asked by the moderator, who was the first author. Interview was tape-recorded for accuracy with the permission obtained from the interviewee. Notes were also taken during interview to check the questions and answers recorded for subsequent transcription. Then, the information generated was coded and summarized for analysis and discovery. Transcripts were carefully read and the data were phrased and grouped into categories so as to form the themes.

RESULTS

The transcribed record of the interview and the notes taken during the interview were compared for the reliability. After categorization and theme forming stage, the following themes came out.

Policy Change

At FSMVU, the students do not have to pass a proficiency exam to finish prep-school and start their departments. However, they had to pass a proficiency exam one year ago and this situation was changed with an innovation in the department of foreign languages. Students can take the proficiency exam and get a certificate for English depending upon their will. The instructors are asked about their opinions of this innovation's effect on the learning of the students and the classroom environment. Most of the instructors' opinions of the new innovation is negative, and they stated clearly that they were not happy with the new policy. P2 expressed the negative effect of the new innovation on the students' motivation as: *"As they have no tests to evaluate their success, their inner motivation decreases."* Also, P6 and P11 teaching at the same module (upper-intermediate) explained the unwillingness of the students to start a higher module as: *"They don't care about the exams. They just want to fail and stay at the level they are already in."* *"Especially this is the case with upper-intermediates. They don't want to pass on the next module and learn more difficult things, because their level is already enough to get a certificate. They don't want to get into more trouble."*

It is believed that the proficiency exam increases the students' motivation for being a tool to evaluate their overall success. P9 indicated that another way of assessment type should be used to evaluate the learning of the students instead of one proficiency test: *"I am not against cancelling the whole exam, but we should use another way for assessment. There should be passing or failing again, but we can use continuous assessment like portfolios."*

On the other hand, P3 who was not teaching at the university before the policy change stated that *"I don't think the students can get to that. Some students are forced to learn a language from zero and some students do not want to learn a language at all. I think it is a very high expectation, it is unrealistic."*

Innovations in Teaching Styles and Methods

Among eleven participants, seven instructors are graduates of foreign languages department at high school and university. They have learned English with the old methods like Grammar Translation-translating English sentences into Turkish-, Audio-lingual Method-where the language drills and repetition are highly valued-, and grammar-based teaching. The grammar was taught explicitly, skills were not regarded as significant, and the assessment and production was mostly accuracy-based. On the other hand, the students of FSMVU were not given a chance or reason to communicate, and writing and speaking skills were ignored at primary, secondary and high school. However, the instructors are encouraged to use communicative approach by the head of the department and the lesson plans and language materials are designed accordingly with this method where students are required to communicate in English via authentic materials and activities.

The participants of the study were directed a question to compare the old methods they learned English with the contemporary methods they have been using to teach English. The first comments about the old methods of learning English were:

-Well, we all learned English (P11)

-Very well, though (P10)

-Even though it took a lot of time, we know a lot of detail (P11)

-We know every grammatical detail (P6)

-Because they were based on accuracy and we know all the details. But when it comes to speaking, we might face some difficulties.(P5)

-Yes, still. (P11)

-But after learning everything, speaking was easier for me. (P9)

-When I graduated from high school, I remember I couldn't utter a word in English. I knew everything about English, but I never used it for communication until I started university. (P6)

-I learned to speak in English when I started university.(P7)

-But when I started university, I had to communicate in classes with teachers. So, you need to have some kind of communication at the end to use it. (P6)

The participants agreed on the unproductiveness of the old style of learning English and its requirement for accuracy. They knew it takes a long time with the accuracy-based English teaching to produce the language and start communicating. However, they seemed satisfied with the old style of learning English.

When the participants were asked to compare the old style with the contemporary one, they came to a consensus that the communicative approach used at FSMVU requires a real reason to communicate to succeed. P2 expressed: *"The communicative approach depends on a reason to communicate. We are giving the students an opportunity to communicate, not a real reason. And then we test them, and we don't test them in a communicative way."*

The participants were pleased with the results of the old style of teaching English, but they were not satisfied with the lack of authenticity of the lessons as there are no real reasons for the students to communicate and the assessment type since it is not compatible with the teaching method.

Assessment

The participants stated that the assessment and the teaching styles are not compatible with each other, and this makes the students feel less motivated (P2). The communicative approach is adopted in the foreign languages department; however, the students are tested for 'use of English' (grammar) as well as the writing, reading and speaking skills. Although the grammar is presented in an implicit way with only some explicit information, the students are asked to apply the grammar rules in exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks, multiple

choice, matching, etc. P2 stated *"The students come here, and they don't want to talk about volcanoes. I don't want to talk about volcanoes. And then we test them, and we don't test them in a communicative way. Then they don't want to talk to me."* It was accepted by the other teachers that the students lose their motivation when they are taught and tested in different techniques.

One of the participants (P4) who has been teaching in the same university for three years stated *"We should have continuous assessment like portfolios"*, which is a better way to assess for communicative approach. Writing portfolios are started to be used in the department in 2012–2013 education year with a 10% contribution to the overall grades of the students; however, no criteria is determined and suggested for the teachers to use. The participants agreed that the portfolios are not graded objectively as P5 uttered *"Not that much objective. Because each teacher has his/her own criteria. For example some teachers give plus or minus. If I see the homework, I give plus, but some of us grade them"*. P7 expressed that he uses both plus and minus and grading to appreciate both the progress and the work of the students. *"I do them both. I give plus to show that they have done their homework. My other criterion is that I give them grades just to see how much they have focused on their homework. Did they spend only five minutes doing their homework or did they really work for it? If they have done all their homework, the grade is not important, though. I give them one hundred"*. The assessment of the portfolios apparently differed from one instructor to another as P5 remarked *"I give the students pluses and minuses too, but I do not accept their homework unless they really worked for it. If I am not satisfied with the homework, I ask the student to write it again. And they write it again and again until they have done well enough"*.

The participants seemed unhappy with the assessment of the students with the tests, whereas they were content with the portfolios (P4,5,7). Even though they had some concerns about the objectivity of the portfolios, they agree on that each teacher is grading the portfolios objectively: *"Each teacher has his/her own understanding of portfolio. I mean it is objective within a classroom, but it is not objective across the classrooms"*(P9). Most of the other instructors agreed on this statement, and they suggested there should be some criteria to assess the portfolios: *"We should agree on how to assess them"*(P8) *"We should prepare some criteria. We can, or you can prepare criteria to assess them"*(P11).

Comparison of the Public and Private Universities

The participants were asked to evaluate the university as a whole for the academic performance and almost all of them seemed content with the teaching methods used at the university. They also agreed on not to compare FSMVU with the famous and old universities as P10 stated: *"If we compare our university with the old and big universities, we will see big differences. So, we should compare our university with the new-established ones"*. When they are asked to compare the university with the state universities P8 who worked at a state university three years ago explained: *"The quality of the staff, I mean the instructors, and the materials are more or less the same with the other new private universities. As for students, there will always be differences. Ours may not have future concerns. Our students may not internalize English language lessons. When we compare our university with state universities, ours is better. Our classroom application, the teaching staff is much better than state universities. They do not integrate technology into classes, they have traditional model of lessons, and they just take their course books and go to the classrooms."*

The other instructors also agreed that FSMVU and its teaching style is much better than the state universities as P6 reported: *"Teachers in state universities are always older"* and P11 affirmed: *"They start working there, they feel comfortable and they never leave."*

Despite the agreement of the instructors on the quality of FSMVU, P9 of the instructors stated: *"Unless we really become a part of other universities' systems, we can never understand what it is like to teach or study there Also, I have a friend who works at an old famous university, he also complains about the students because they don't study enough"* to prove that other universities also have motivation problems as they do.

Having a Say at the Decision Phase of the University

The participants were asked whether they feel comfortable for not having a say in the decision phase for the innovation at university and their department, and P4 uttered: *"Other universities are not different, I guess. They don't also have choices"*. P9 stated that they lack the experience to make important decisions for the university pronouncing *"Without experience nobody can know the results. We should have experience first"*. Also, P7 - who has been working at FSMVU for three - years expressed: *"We could have said yes for the policy change, too"*. It can be concluded that the instructors feel satisfied with their position in decision-making process and they accept it as the other universities also apply the same regulations.

Motivation

When the participants were asked about the policy change introduced last year, P8 stated: *"Students see the prep-school as instrumentative. They don't have inner motivation for English. As they have no tests to evaluate their success, their inner motivation decreases."* Also, P3 uttered the difficulty to motivate the students as *"I find it quite difficult to motivate 19-20 year old students. We should have goals for them to reach. I am not saying that it is impossible to motivate them, but it is very difficult to do it"*. Moreover, when the participants were asked about the innovations in the language teaching methods they remarked there is a lack of motivation because of the assessment styles, the presentation of English in Turkey and the importance given to English in higher education. P2 remarked the inconsistency between the teaching method and the assessment decreases the motivation as: *"The students come here, and they don't want to talk about volcanoes. I don't want to talk about volcanoes. And then we test them, and we don't test them in a communicative way. Then they don't want to talk to me."* The conversation between the participants about the presentation of English in Turkey and the importance given to it by The Higher Education Council is:

P2: *"It is so much easier to motivate the students in England, for example. Because they have to speak English to communicate with a person next to them, they have no other option. And also the project one of our instructors heading they have to speak English to communicate with people in Austria motivates them. And it makes them realize that one day they are going to speak in English to communicate with another person."*

P3: *"There is a lack of realization. When it is the press language of the country, it is essential. I think, for me, half of the problem we cannot deal with. It is with the YOK (The Higher Education Council), they have to deal with it. And the other half, we can do."*

P1: *"And also, the television is also dubbed in Turkey. In countries like Germany, or Holland foreign programs have subtitles."*

It was noted that the other instructors nodded when the statements above were made. The instructors at FSMVU believe that students lack motivation to learn English, and this is due to the media, the policy of YOK (The Higher Education Council) and the assessment style of the university itself.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the data obtained, the assessment and the students' motivation needs improvement for a more successful university. Participants state clearly that abolishment of the proficiency requirement for the students to start their departments decrease the motivation of the students. Also, they point out the inconsistency of the methods of assessment and teaching and its result in the motivation of the students and the quality of the lessons. For the portfolio assessment which was started to be used in 2013 is not objective across the classrooms as each instructor has his/her own portfolio criteria. It can also be inferred that the assessment style and the teaching style need to be hand in hand for better education quality. Moreover, the criteria of a new assessment type are better to be determined and the instructors can be trained for the new assessment type to make it more objective.

Furthermore, the participants signify the motivation of the students to be kept at a high level for better learning and teaching. For language prep-schools, the language taught is better to be used in the departments so that the students can grasp the significance and the future benefits of the language being taught. Moreover,

a proficiency exam is a good target for the students to assess themselves and understand the need to learn the language.

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