



**FROM RETROSPECTIVE**

# LANGUAGE EDUCATION

in Turkish Higher Education

**TO PROSPECTIVE**



a focused workshop to imagine future solutions for current issues



School of Languages

## FORUM REPORT



# EVENT PROGRAMME

03.11.2023

9:00-9.30	<b>Registration &amp; Breakfast</b>
9:30-10.00	<b>Welcome speech</b>
10:00-10.45	<b>Opening Plenary by Prof. Dr. Derin Atay</b>
10:45-11:00	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
11:00-12:30	<b>Forum 1: Expertise sharing focusing on the history and the current state</b>
12:30-13:30	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
13:30-15:00	<b>Forum 2: Forecasting future &amp; Planning actions</b>
15:00-15.30	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
15:30-16:00	<b>Debriefing</b>
16:00-16:15	<b>Final thoughts &amp; Thanking</b>

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# Language Education in Turkish Higher Education: From Retrospective to Prospective

## 1. Introduction

On November 3, 2023, Özyeğin University – School of Languages organized a one-day forum to retrospectively explore ELT in tertiary education in Türkiye and to propose future-oriented solutions to current issues in language teaching. This signature event was to celebrate the centenary of the Republic of Türkiye and the 15th anniversary of Özyeğin University.

From sixteen institutions sixty-three participants including managers, program designers and assessors, teachers, teacher trainers and external stakeholders representing state and foundation universities, accreditation bodies and publishing companies in Türkiye met to share their perspectives on past, present and future of English language teaching and learning in tertiary education in Türkiye.

## 2. Past, Present, and Future of English Language Teaching in Turkish Universities

Prof. Dr. Derin Atay presented an overview of the history of the foundation of universities in Türkiye in her opening plenary entitled "*The Evolution of Tertiary Education in Türkiye*". In her speech, Prof. Atay gave a brief introduction to the establishment of modern universities in the country. She also presented the current statistics related to Turkish universities. How internationalization and Bologna Agreement affected Turkish tertiary education was one of the major topics she explored in her presentation. The presentation also provided an insight into the development of international and national English Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs around the 2000s. For the future of EMI, Prof. Atay emphasized the importance of social justice knowledge as well as already existing technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. Multicultural education, dialogical instruction, social-emotional learning and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills were given as essentials to be considered to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning in EMI programs in Türkiye.

## 3. Stakeholder Perspectives: Strengths, Challenges, and Recommendations

Exploring various aspects of language teaching and learning, groups of managers, program designers and assessors, teachers, teacher trainers and external stakeholders discussed strengths, and key challenges in English language teaching and learning in Türkiye and proposed recommendations relevant to the agreed challenges. Each group's summary of the discussion points is presented below.

### **3.1. Managers**

#### **3.1.1. Strengths**

##### Collaboration

- Effective collaboration and cooperation among the managers of language schools of universities in Türkiye has resulted in a sense of unity and support within the ELT community.
- This enhanced knowledge-sharing among institutions also led to the formation of collaborative platforms such as TESOL Türkiye, FOAI, FOCl, and DEDAK.
- Collective representation through platforms like the annual School of Languages Directors' Meeting enables effective communication with higher education authorities (YÖK), contributing to positive changes.

##### Management

- The adaptability of ELT managers as a cohesive group is highlighted as a strength, allowing for seamless acceptance and incorporation of changes in the rapidly evolving educational landscape.

##### Teachers

- The ability of teachers to adapt to novel teaching methodologies reflects a progressive approach within the ELT community. They are good at embracing change, enhancing the learning, and teaching processes.
- Teachers remain committed despite challenges posed by new generations, regulatory changes, and external factors such as the pandemic.

##### Recruitment

- Recruitment requirements defined by the Higher Education Council in Türkiye, such as the mandatory master's degree, ensure a qualified and diverse teaching staff.

##### Students

- Satisfactory completion rates and a low student retention rate display the success of Preparatory English Programs in promoting student progress and achievement.

##### Publishers

- Publishing companies play a supportive role by providing institutions with digital systems, contributing to the advancement of ELT practices.

#### **3.1.2. Challenges**

##### Management

- There are concerns about sustaining established systems and whether there will be enough qualified individuals, such as managers, course designers, and trainers, to take on these roles.

### Teachers

- It is difficult to find and retain committed and motivated teachers due to uncertain economic conditions in the country. Insufficient salary is considered to be a demotivating factor for teachers in both state and foundation universities.
- The changing priorities of teaching staff, with work no longer being a top priority, pose a challenge. In relation to this, there is also a reluctance to take on additional responsibilities, such as curriculum and assessment work, and there is a preference for part-time and flexible work arrangements.
- The impact of Early Retirement (EYT) and challenges faced during online teaching led to the loss of experienced teachers.
- Working conditions in state universities are considered to be more competitive, which results in experienced teachers leaving foundation universities.

### Recruitment

- Recruitment procedures defined by the Higher Education Council in Türkiye may not allow enough flexibility for universities.
- Hiring international teachers has become more difficult due to increased expenses, decreased attractiveness of the country and the complexities of obtaining work permits.

### Students

- The ongoing changes in K-12 policies and programs have an impact on Preparatory English Programs.
- Meeting the needs of students with evolving expectations and skills, particularly influenced by technology and changes brought about by the pandemic, requires Prep programs to adapt to these shifts in students' attention spans, preferences, and needs.
- It is difficult for students to reach the expected exit level in the Preparatory English Programs over an academic year.

### Publishers

- Publishers face the challenge of providing tailored materials to institutions that meet their diverse needs.

### **3.1.3. Recommendations**

#### Managers

- Developing succession plans, especially for middle management positions
- Creating a pool of potential leaders and identifying teachers' interests in taking up responsibilities

- Implementing rules and regulations specifying tenure for managerial positions
- Promoting talent management through reduced timetables and opportunities for teachers to shadow others
- Providing hands-on practice and training at all levels
- Continuing to foster increased cooperation among institutions
- Organizing more developmental events to increase knowledge, expertise sharing and collaboration
- Planning more focused group meetings to create more quality time to address different issues
- Collaborating with faculties to inform students about opportunities for tertiary-level teaching and considering hiring newly graduated students as sub-teachers and part-time teachers, where possible

### Teachers

- Exploring alternative ways to recruit international teachers, such as hourly payment and part-time positions
- Recognizing the need for a flexible working environment, particularly for the new generation of teachers
- Offering different incentives to motivate teaching staff, ensuring sustainability in providing side benefits

### Advocacy and Policy Changes

- Cooperating with policymakers to address challenges faced by Preparatory English Programs
- Emphasizing the key role of Prep Programs in students' readiness for academic life
- Advocating for systematic data gathering and sharing among universities for benchmarking purposes
- Proposing regulatory changes in the recruitment process of teachers to increase flexibility

### Collaboration

- Collaborating with ELT departments for ELT students to do peer-observation and team-teaching or to take responsibilities in different co-curricular activities such as student clubs in the Preparatory English Programs
- Establishing partnerships with K-12 schools
- Cooperating with faculty members from different departments within institutions

## Change Management

- Responding to the changing educational landscape
- Considering the future role of online education in ELT and addressing its Implications for the profession

### **3.2. Program Designers and Assessors**

#### **3.2.1. Strengths**

##### Curriculum

- Current language programs are goal-oriented, emphasizing specific learning outcomes outlined in a structured curriculum, moving away from traditional reliance on textbooks.
- The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) helps maintain the standard practices and communication among educators.
- Applying needs analysis and designing a curriculum in line with the identified needs help to provide students with the most appropriate and engaging learning experiences.

##### Assessment

- Program designers and assessors are competent in assessment literacy, recognizing the need to adapt assessment practices with technological advancements, such as incorporating AI into testing.
- A continuous focus on assessment practices, including formative assessments and evolving testing methods, ensures a dynamic and effective evaluation process.
- There is an increasing interest in providing opportunities for continuous assessment rather than relying solely on summative assessments.

##### Change Management

- Program designers and assessors exhibit a shared mindset of embracing change, acknowledging that advancements and shifts in technology are inherent in the evolving landscape of education.

##### Technology Integration

- The integration of technology facilitates educators' use of various tools and platforms for enhanced engagement, helping to achieve program goals.
- Digitalization is evident in the use of Learning Management Systems and collaborative platforms, enriching the educational experience.
- Digital resources, including online libraries and multimedia tools, offer a wealth of materials, enhancing the richness of content in language teaching.



### Resources

- Abundant resources are readily accessible, supporting continuous professional development for program designers, assessors, and teachers.
- Teachers and students have easy access to available resources to reach the course goals beyond the classroom.

### **3.2.2. Challenges**

#### Curriculum

- The duration of Preparatory English Programs poses a challenge for students coming with a low or no level of English. It is difficult for these students to reach the expected exit level in an academic year.

#### Assessment

- Technological advancements, particularly AI, have posed challenges in formative assessment, with students relying on it to complete their work instead of engaging in independent learning, which affects the integrity and reliability of the assessment process.
- The lack of authenticity of the task types in assessment may prevent the tests from effectively measuring the language proficiency or specific abilities needed in real-life situations.

#### Change Management

- The rapid evolution of teaching paradigms, often fueled by new applications and trends, creates the need to keep up with these novelties and integrate these changes in a balanced and cohesive way into language programs.
- Keeping up with this paradigm shift contributes to a sense of potential burnout among program designers, assessors, and teachers.

#### Student Profile

- It is difficult to continuously ensure that programs maintain student engagement, motivation, and concentration at a prominent level, especially in the face of the challenges posed by the new generation.
- Incorporating action-oriented and project-based learning faces challenges as students show signs of boredom, potentially indicating issues with study skills and motivation.

### **3.2.3. Recommendations**

#### Flexibility and Adaptability

- Encouraging program designers and assessors to evaluate the latest trends based on the primary program goals and make the necessary adaptations in the program

- Collaborating with publishers to create customizable materials and resources in line with the specific needs of the program rather than using published books written for a larger audience
- Training program designers, assessors, and teachers in how to utilize technology (e.g., generative AI) in line with their roles and responsibilities

### Assessment

- Shifting from employing task types measuring students' receptive skills to integrating more authentic task types measuring their real-life language production
- Encouraging program designers and assessors to use AI as an assistant for creating objectives, timelines, content, and personalized feedback to save time

### Support Systems

- Establishing support centers (e.g., writing centers, tech units) to assist program designers, assessors, and teachers in integrating tools and practices into the program effectively

### Collaboration

- Urging collaboration between Preparatory English Programs and faculty to align programs with the actual needs of students
- Enhancing the collaboration among program designers and assessors in different universities to disseminate the expertise

## **3.3. Teachers**

### **3.3.1. Strengths**

#### Teacher Profile

- In the past, teachers were more of an authoritative figure in the classroom, but the role they adopt now is more as a facilitator of learning, so they can establish better rapport with students.
- Their attitude towards change is more flexible now, so they can adapt to change and embrace novel approaches more readily.
- Teachers are aware of the challenges of diverse student groups. Embracing diversity, they ensure an inclusive classroom environment.
- They do not simply teach a language anymore, but they also teach life skills to help students be more prepared for authentic situations.

### Professional Development

- Most universities now have a separate department or unit for professional development (PD), which facilitates and fosters professional development because PD units work closely with teachers and focus more on needs-based professional development, in-service teacher training and experience sharing.
- The awareness of the importance and benefit of action research has increased, which is a positive direction as learning and development occur in the classroom when research and practice are combined.
- Teachers value the role of lesson observations in fostering professional development.

### Course Design and Delivery

- Course design and delivery are more student-centered with collaborative tasks and projects because of the shift from traditional approaches to the communicative and inductive approach.
- A more eclectic approach is adopted by teachers in this age with the incorporation of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and technology into the classroom.
- Formal assessment is not the only way of evaluating students' language performance, but more opportunities for critical thinking and autonomy are provided to students.
- Increased incorporation of formative assessment is evident, and this helps to increase student engagement.

### Technological Advancements

- Teachers have been able to adapt to recent developments quickly and integrate them into their lessons.
- AI can help to provide authentic situations for students to practice language.

### Students

- Students are more aware of the importance of English through globalization and internationalization.
- They are more aware of their needs, more motivated to learn the language and actively participate in their learning process.

### **3.3.2. Challenges**

#### Teacher Profile

- Some teachers may be unwilling to adapt to changes and/or novel approaches, which disrupts the standardization of teaching and quality in an institution.
- The role of the teacher might change with each recent development, trend, or change, which may be tiring and demotivating for teachers.

- Though internationalization brings diversity to the classroom, it also poses a challenge because teachers may have difficulty in integrating certain areas into the lesson practice (e.g., religion, traditions of specific countries).

#### Professional Development

- When the expectations and purpose of the lesson observations are not clarified enough, and when expectations of the observers and observees are not aligned, observations may not fulfill their function.
- Institutional policies or resources often fall short in assisting teachers in their professional development path because a lack of time, flexibility, or financial resources prevent teachers from being engaged in developmental activities.

#### Course Design and Delivery

- Although it is necessary to have a standard course design and syllabus, this also reduces flexibility and autonomy in course delivery.

#### Policies

- The uncertainty and increase in the student numbers enrolled in the universities may affect the lesson delivery.

#### Technology Advancements

- Teachers need to adapt to the new developments in technology quickly and integrate technology into lesson practice.
- The emergence of AI has affected student production in a negative way.

#### Students

- Continuous change in the student profile (e.g., language proficiency, shorter attention span, lack of study skills) requires teachers to be active all the time with the need to continuously adapt approaches, materials and feedback based on student profile.
- It is also observable that students' intellectual levels are higher now compared to the past, which means more preparation and adaptation on the part of the teacher.
- International students may have difficulty in adapting to the culture and teaching methodology, which can be a barrier to creating a positive learning environment or establishing good rapport.

### **3.3.3. Recommendations**

#### Teacher Profile

- Having the flexibility and authority to address student needs more effectively

- Being open to feedback, change and improvement

#### Professional Development

- Providing teachers with the space and resources to improve themselves professionally
- Implementing more structured systems to foster reflection at institutions
- Adopting a growth-mindset and having training sessions
- Offering more opportunities for expertise sharing and learning in collaboration with all parties at an institution, Preparatory English Programs, faculties, or across universities
- Establishing mutual trust between the observer and the observee, and clarifying the observation purpose and procedures

#### Course Design

- Giving students more options with regards to materials, learning processes/methods and exposing them to more experimental methods of teaching
- Adapting and selecting the coursebooks based on emerging trends, needs, or diversity

#### Technology Advancements

- Assessing the necessity and usefulness of technological tools or AI and being selective in the language learning process

#### Administration

- Implementing needs analysis systematically both for students and teachers to identify needs and apply classroom or institutional practices accordingly
- Appreciating teachers and ensuring their motivation through systems and practices applied by institutions and managers
- Having more time and opportunity so that the teachers can take care of their well-being and establish a better work-life balance

### **3.4. Teacher Trainers**

#### **3.4.1. Strengths**

##### Resources

- English language teachers at the tertiary level are required to complete their bachelor's and master's degrees in a relevant field. Consequently, they are expected to possess comprehensive theoretical ELT knowledge.
- ELT teachers and trainers have a diverse array of opportunities for professional development. Courses such as CELTA, DELTA, and TEFL–TESOL qualifications and in-house

developmental efforts contribute to the advancement of English language teachers in Türkiye.

- Professional development standards and global frameworks to ensure high-quality language education are readily accessible.
- Local and global accreditation bodies positively impact the ELT field in Turkish higher education.
- A wide variety of opportunities now exist, including Special Interest Groups (SIGs), training courses, regular webinars, recorded videos, and forums, allowing English language teachers greater convenience.

### **3.4.2. Challenges**

#### Resistance

- It is difficult to achieve uniform levels of intrinsic motivation among teachers despite available resources.
- There might be resistance towards PD caused by a top-down approach to it.
- Lack of ownership and shared decision-making pertaining to PD practices by all parties in institutions may result in stakeholders feeling excluded and displaying resistance.

#### Practical Knowledge

- While ELT departments provide high-quality theoretical education, practical knowledge may sometimes be overlooked due to the lack of extensive practicum opportunities. Ongoing support is needed for graduates working in higher education institutions to incorporate theoretical knowledge into classroom practice.
- ELT departments focus on K-12 pedagogy; therefore, graduates pursuing careers in higher education institutions need training in English Medium Instruction (EMI), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).
- When PD sessions in higher education institutions do not address individualized and contextual needs, generalized sessions may not be perceived as beneficial by teachers who do not see practical implications in their classrooms.

#### Communication

- Communication among units and teams in different higher education institutions working for institutional development is not at the expected standard.
- Communication among development units, Preparatory English Program directors, and the Higher Education Council is not at the desired level.

### **3.4.3. Recommendations**

#### Holistic Development Initiatives

- Adopting a whole-school holistic approach to development, with accountability and available opportunities for continuous training extending beyond teachers to all stakeholders
- Embedding PD policy into the strategic plan of educational institutions and implementing a 360° feedback system to contribute to an institutional development mindset
- Instead of providing the same set of training for all the parties, offering data-based differentiated training opportunities for teachers, trainers, and managers to contribute to the holistic development plan of the schools

#### ELT Education

- Education faculties to incorporate more practical components into their curriculum to better equip undergraduate students with practical knowledge alongside theoretical understanding and revise already available practical components to enhance their effectiveness
- Education faculties to offer specialized courses as electives (e.g., teaching EAP courses) for students who would like to pursue different paths other than teaching in K-12 institutions.

#### Communication

- Transparently sharing development plans and objectives with the rationale behind them with all the relevant parties
- Establishing platforms where teachers can voice their aims and needs to transparently promote mutual agreement instead of top-down imposition
- Increasing active participation and representation in relevant existing PD platforms

### **3.5. External Stakeholders**

#### **3.5.1. Strengths**

##### Communication

- There is effective communication between the schools and external stakeholders, which enables them to support each other.

##### Systematic Approaches

- There is a systematic approach through the existence of structured units within institutions to manage the challenges and development at schools.

- Schools apply different frameworks, such as CEFR and accreditation standards.

#### Accreditation

- There is a massive change in awareness of the value of accreditation and how accreditation helps schools develop continuously.
- Accreditation bodies guide schools and help them improve rather than prescribing certain standards with no flexibility.

#### Publishers

- Publishers try to consider and cater for the schools' needs by defining themselves as solution partners to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the schools.

### **3.5.2. Challenges**

#### Catering for the Needs of EMI Students

- Making students achieve the desired exit level at the EMI context at the tertiary level in Türkiye puts pressure on all the stakeholders as all students have to complete the Preparatory English Programs in a year.

#### Student Profile

- Turkish student expectations might contradict with the global trends regarding book contents and task types.

### **3.5.3. Recommendations**

- Extending the duration of the Preparatory English Programs in a way that it is completed in 1.5 years rather than one year
- Increasing the use of English as the medium of communication as well as instruction across universities as part of their culture
- Universities to recruit more international students
- English teachers to work more closely with faculty members from different departments at the university to make EMI more effective

## **4. Conclusion**

The forum provided a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the strengths, challenges, and recommendations from diverse perspectives.

As the forum highlighted the dynamic nature of ELT in Turkish higher education institutions and the synthesis of varied viewpoints emphasized the necessity of further improvements and adaptation to changes. Addressing challenges and building on strengths require a concerted effort involving educators, administrators, and policymakers. Moving forward, we believe that



the insights gained from this forum might serve as valuable guideposts for the continual improvement and evolution of English language teaching in Turkish higher education. As Özyeğin University School of Languages, we look forward to the continued collaboration with all our stakeholders in the field of English language education in Turkish higher education.

## 5. Acknowledgments

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