

51. English education in Turkey: Why are we 'very low level'?

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Abstract

In the education policy of countries, FL education has never played such an important role as it has recently done. Most of the countries decreased FL learning age to the early years of education with a wide array of reasons ranging from the increasing interactions among nations to finding a prosperous occupation. Whatever the reason, every stakeholder expects the results of FL education to be satisfying. However, though some countries achieve better results, some others still fail to succeed as in Turkey. In Turkey, even at tertiary education most of the students are not so good at English which is also officially registered by some tests. Therefore, the current study aimed to scrutinize primary and secondary level English education in Turkey, to compare it to the countries that are among the most successful in learning FLs and in this respect to make suggestions for the improvement of FL education in Turkey. This qualitative study hinged on document analysis of relevant research and texts. As a result, it was found that on paper there are not so many differences among countries. However, having a centralized curriculum in all levels of education, problems in teacher education and training, and incompatibility of FL assessment practices to international tests and to the aims of language teaching are the issues that come into prominence in Turkish FL education and they require immediate action.

Keywords: assessment, comparative analysis, compulsory education, English education, teacher education

Türkiye'de İngilizce eğitimi: Neden 'çok düşük seviyeyiz'?

Öz

Yabancı dil eğitimi yakın zamana kadar ülkelerin eğitim politikasında hiç bu kadar önemli bir rol oynamamıştır. Ülkeler arasındaki etkileşimin artmasından başarılı bir meslek bulmaya kadar çok çeşitli nedenlerle çoğu ülke yabancı dil öğrenme yaşını eğitimin ilk yıllarına kadar indirmiştir. Nedeni ne olursa olsun her paydaş yabancı dil eğitiminin sonuçlarının tatmin edici olmasını bekler. Ancak bazı ülkeler daha iyi sonuçlar elde ederken, bazıları ise Türkiye'de olduğu gibi başarısız olmaktadır. Türkiye'de yükseköğretimde okuyan öğrencilerin dahi İngilizcede çok iyi olmadıkları bir gerçektir ve birçok uluslararası testlerle de bu durum tescillenmiştir. Bu yüzden bu çalışmada Türkiye'deki İngilizce eğitimini incelemek ve yabancı dil öğrenmede en başarılı ülkelerle Türkiye'yi karşılaştırmak bu sayede de Türkiye'deki yabancı dil eğitiminin geliştirilmesi için öneriler getirmek amaçlanmıştır. Bu nitel çalışma, ilgili araştırma ve metinlerin analizine dayanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, kâğıt üzerinde ülkeler arasında çok fazla farklılık olmadığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Ancak, eğitimin her kademesinde merkezi bir müfredata sahip olmak, öğretmen eğitimindeki yetersizlikler, dil öğretimindeki problemler ve yabancı dil ölçme ve değerlendirme uygulamalarının uluslararası

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testlere ve de dil öğretimini amaçlarına uyumsuzluğu Türk yabancı dil eğitiminde ön plana çıkan ve acil eylem gerektiren konulardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: değerlendirme, karşılařtırma analiz, zorunlu eğitim, İngilizce eğitimi, öğretmen yetiřtirme

1. Introduction

With the widespread usage of technology and increase in relations among countries, the necessity of knowing a FL has been widely recognized. This has also given rise to the usage of a common language in communication and today the mostly learnt and used FL by many countries is English. After the WWII, English has spread all over the world being a ‘lingua franca’ of commerce in Europe and in other continents around the world (Mufwane, 2010). Today, a huge number of people in various countries learn and speak English as an L2, FL or native language, as referred in the Kachru’s (1983) concentric circles composed of inner (native speakers), outer (L2 speakers), and expanding circles (FL speakers). Accordingly, the number of countries in expanding circle is more than the other groups, which indicates that the non-native speakers of English are more than the natives. Therefore, most of the interaction in English occurs between the non-native speakers as English is a common language among people having different native languages.

Although the importance of knowing English is understood by many nations, and English is taught as a first FL in many countries even from the beginning of early years of education, these do not mean that every country is good at speaking English. In Turkey, English as a FL has a long history and it has been taught as the first FL for decades, yet, according to the research and reports, people in Turkey are notorious for not learning English well (Doğaçay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005; Egel-Pekkanlı, 2009; Iřık, 2008). One of these reports is the report of the company of Education First (EF) which is an international language education company founded in 1960s by a Swedish. EF has many offices in different countries, and has many language learning options for people from different age groups. Each year since 2011, they publish a report ranking English proficiency of various countries as a result of their standard English tests. Accordingly, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and Finland have been ranking among the top five since the beginning of the report of the company, and it is only Finland once left its place to Estonia and three times to Singapore in the last three reports. On the other hand, Turkey generally ranks among the last countries as ‘low level’ or ‘very low level’ of English which indicates that there are some problems in English teaching in Turkey, and these problems need immediate action.

The countries analyzed in the current study are: Sweden, Hungary, Finland, and Turkey. Although the above mentioned 5 countries are the most successful ones, all of them were not taken into consideration and Swedish was chosen as a representative, as the rest of the countries belong to the same language family with English. As an example, Danish is a North Germanic language, so it is a relative of English and there are many resembling words as well as similar structures in both languages. This may be one of the reasons that makes it easy to people in Netherlands to learn English. Besides, alongside of Swedish, Finnish and Hungarian are included. The reason behind this choice is that Finnish and Hungarian are from the same language family of Turkish which is Ural-Altai language family. In this way, Turkish can be compared with one country from the same family as English and two countries from the same family with Turkish.

In the literature, there are some studies comparing different aspects of EFL teaching in Turkey with countries in Europe. For instance, the study of Çomoğlu and Kic-Drgas (2017) compared English language teacher education programs in Turkey and in Poland. Solak (2016) compared English language teacher training programs in Turkey to Denmark and Sweden. Both of these studies aimed to compare English teacher education in Turkey to some European countries in order to reveal differences and similarities so as to contribute to English teacher education in Turkey. The study of Madalinska-Michalak and Bavli (2018), on the other hand, compared the challenges experienced by EFL teachers working at secondary schools in Turkey and in Poland. A similar study to the present paper was conducted by İrican (2017) who compared basic education EFL curricula of Finland and Turkey with an intention to provide some insights for EFL education in Turkey. Moreover, the study of Alkan and Kartal (2018) compared basic level English education in Turkey to Denmark, Portugal and Hungary to provide suggestions for EFL education in Turkey. In this study Hungary, Finland, and Sweden were selected to make a comparison based on the TOEFL and EF-EPI results and the language family explained above. Comparison studies are of great importance in order to determine the practices that exist in different countries in the context of English language education and to initiate the implementation of these applications that are suitable for the target country.

Overall, the current research intended to compare primary and secondary EFL education in Turkey with the education of successful countries so as to reveal the deficient parts of EFL teaching in Turkey and generate some solutions and suggestions in return by taking some appropriate and useful practices of the compared countries into consideration. In this context, the study aimed to find answers to these questions:

1. What are the present EFL teaching practices in primary and secondary schools in Turkey and the compared countries?

-general compulsory education, FL starting age, and FL hours

-aims and scope of FL teaching

-materials, methods, and activities

-assessment procedure

-FL teacher education practices

2. What can be done to improve FL teaching in primary and secondary schools in Turkey?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

Qualitative research method was utilized in the study. Qualitative studies are “research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010) and “entail collecting primarily textual data and examining it using interpretive analysis” (Crocker, 2009, p.5). In a qualitative study there are three types of data collection: interview, observation, and document analysis. The current study employs the document analysis technique. Document analysis comprises of in-depth analysis and examination of written materials that include information about

the target phenomena. Documents are important sources of knowledge that need to be used effectively in qualitative studies. In this kind of study, the researcher can obtain the required data “without observation and interview” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). While analyzing the documents, the data need to be organized under relevant themes through content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003). Accordingly, the categories/themes identified through the literature review helped the researcher to compose the research questions of the study and the documents collected in this respect were examined according to the research questions.

2.2. Sampling

The general goal of this study is to compare EFL education in Turkey with the most successful countries. When analysed, it was found out that the most successful countries are generally Scandinavian-Nordic countries or the ones that come from the same language family as English. Therefore, in order to eliminate the discussions that would arise from the similarity of language families, one sample from Germanic languages was chosen and this is Swedish. Then, the other countries reported at the EF English Proficiency Index (EF-EPI) were examined to find out countries that are good at English, and come from the same language family as Turkish which is Ural Altaic language group. As a result, Finnish and Hungarian were chosen as they are from the Uralic language family. Moreover, TOEFL results were included into the process to validate the EF-EPI rankings. When TOEFL results and EF-EPI rankings of all the countries were examined, it was revealed that English level of Turkey in both reports is below the others. Table 1 indicates the English scores of each country.

Table 1. TOEFL and EF-EPI results of compared countries

Countries	EF-EPI results (2019)	TOEFL results (2018)
Finland	65.34	95
Sweden	68.74	93
Hungary	61.86	92
Turkey	46.81	78

The EF-EPI results are in line with the TOEFL results of the examined countries, only Finland and Sweden’s results are a bit different, yet this difference is not meaningful as the EF-EPI order of both countries changes according to the years. It is sometimes Finland that takes the place of Sweden or vice versa. Also, as shown in Table 1, the TOEFL scores of the first three countries are nearly the same, yet the score of Turkey is lower than the rest which is in line with the EF-EPI results. To ascertain the skill distribution scores of countries TOEFL results divided into the skills are given in Table 2.

Table 2. TOEFL scores divided into the skills

Countries	Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing
Finland	23	25	24	23
Sweden	21	24	25	22
Hungary	22	24	23	23
Turkey	19	20	19	20

The total score that can be taken from each skill is 30. After each skill is examined, it is seen that Turkey has the lowest scores. For reading and listening Finland is the first. For speaking Sweden is the leader and lastly for writing Finland and Hungary share the first seat.

2.3. Data collection

As this study is based on document analysis, lots of research papers written about the EFL language teaching in the examined countries, official websites of countries and Ministry of Education websites were searched to get the relevant data. Besides, European Education Information Network (Eurydice) documents of these countries as well as Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports were investigated. Among all the national documents especially the recent ones were taken into consideration to reveal the current situation of the countries. For the articles, according to the availability, the most relevant and recent ones were chosen to analyze. In brief, 3 OECD reports, 4 Eurydice reports, 11 Ministry of Education of countries reports, and 17 articles which include answers to the research questions of the study were examined, and they were indicated with an asterisk in the references section.

2.4. Data analysis

The documents found as a result of relevant search were analyzed with regards to the research questions, and the ones that were found appropriate to the context were collected. Necessary information was gathered about the investigated countries and written under relevant headings. All the process was repeated for each country by paying regard to the research questions. At required intervals and in the end of the study, the opinion of another colleague from the ELT department was also consulted to clarify the collected data, check for correctness, and intelligibility.

3. Results

In this part of the study, the selected countries are compared and contrasted under relevant subheadings.

3.1. General compulsory education, FL starting age, and FL exposure hours

After examining the general compulsory education of the countries, it was found that general compulsory education in Finland, Sweden, and Hungary are similar. The compulsory education begins at the age of 6-7 and ends at 16. Age 6 is the pre-primary schooling age which is compulsory, and 7 is the beginning of basic education (primary plus lower secondary school). Although the terms assigned to basic level of education differ from country to country, to provide integrity and clarity, primary and lower secondary terms are applied throughout the paper. However, the duration of the primary and lower secondary schools varies in the examined countries which was explained in the following paragraphs.

In Finland, the main goal of education is to provide "equal access to high-quality education and training" (Finnish Education in a Nutshell-FEiN, 2017, p. 6). There is a national core curriculum in Finland developed with the collaboration of the government, the National Board of Education, and the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, municipalities have the right to prepare their local curricula by taking the aims and objectives of national core curriculum into consideration (Eurydice, 2020). Having a decentralized education system differs Finnish education from the centralized

countries because teachers take responsibility and have the opportunity to choose or develop their own teaching methods, materials, and textbooks appropriate the age level (Eurydice, 2020). Moreover, there have not been drastic changes in the education policy of Finland since 1970s (Sahlberg, 2007), and this provides solid grounds to the teachers to stand on. Before the basic education, a child attends pre-primary school which is obligatory since 2015 (Mullis, Martin, Goh & Cotter, 2016). Basic education begins at the age of 7 which lasts 9 years: 6-year primary plus 3-year lower secondary school.

In Sweden, similar to Finland, equality in accessing education is at the forefront. Although at the pre-primary education parents pay a fee (except for low income families), basic education is free to all (Skolverket, 2018). The education system in Sweden is decentralized. Although parliament and government state a national curriculum, local authorities have the right to set their own local curricula and syllabus by obeying the general goals of the national curriculum (Skolverket, 2018). The compulsory education continues for 9 years and it is divided into three: lower (Grade 1-3), middle (Grade 4-6), and upper stage (Grade 7-9) (Skolverket, 2018).

In Hungary, it is the state that regulates national curriculum, yet local education institutions are independent to make decisions regarding their own organization (National Core Curriculum of Hungary- NCCoH, 2012). There is a “three-level curriculum in the country: a central core curriculum, a framework curriculum, and local curricula” (OECD, 2015). The compulsory school begins at the age of three with pre-primary school since 2015. Basic education is organized as a single-structure but it is comprised of two stages: primary school for 4 years and lower secondary school for 4 years (Mullis, Martin, Goh & Cotter, 2016).

However, in Turkey, the starting age of compulsory education is 5-6, which ends at the age of 17 after students finish high-school. Similarly, age 5 is the pre-primary school age and 6 is the start of primary school which indicates that starting age to Grade 1 is lower than the other countries. Pre-primary education is not compulsory. There are government and private kindergartens for pre-primary education. According to the OECD (2018), the compulsory education in Turkey is “longer than the typical duration across OECD” countries. The compulsory education is divided into three: primary (4 years), lower secondary (4 years), and upper secondary education (4 years). As the compulsory education in the compared countries ends at the lower secondary school, the upper secondary education of Turkey is not taken into consideration in the current study to provide an even comparison. General compulsory education, FL starting age, and FL exposure hours of students in compulsory education are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Compulsory education, FL starting age, and total FL hours in compulsory education

Countries	Compulsory education	FL starting age	Total FL hours in compulsory education
Finland	6+3 (9 years)	3 rd Grade/ 1 st Grade**	760
Sweden	3+3+3 (9 years)	1 st Grade	480
Hungary	4+4 (8 years)	4 th Grade	555
Turkey	4+4+4(12 years)	2 nd Grade	836

**As of 2020 spring term according to the Act 793/2018, FL teaching in Finland will start in Grade 1 and continue in Grade 2 in the 2020-2021 education year.

FLs are common in many countries and most of the countries even support more than one FL teaching in all levels of schooling. However, because of its being a 'lingua franca', English is the prevalent FL taught at schools and starting age of FL teaching differs among countries.

In Finland, two FLs are compulsory one of which has to be Swedish (or Finnish for Swedish speaking children) and the other one is mostly English (generally 90% of students choose English) (OECD, 2013). FL teaching starts at 3rd Grade, yet according to the Ministry of Education, FL learning will start at 1st Grade as of the spring term of 2020 (Kurki-Suonio, 2018). Therefore, as of 2020 spring term, it is supposed that children at 1st Grade started to learn English. According to the Act 793/2018 language teaching in this grade should be at least 0.5 hours per week. Then the same Act states that as of 2020-2021 students at 2nd Grade will go on language learning for a minimum of 1.5 hours weekly. Then in Grades 3-6 there are 2 hours of English lessons weekly, and from Grade 7 to 9 there are 4 hours of English lessons per week (Finnish National Board of Education-FNBoE, 2016). There are nearly 19 weeks in each term in Finland and thus the total number of FL hours in primary education is 304 hours. In lower secondary education it is 456 hours which is calculated according to the previous FL starting age that is 3rd Grade. The new practice of lowering the FL teaching age to the 1st Grade has newly started in 2020 spring term. With the new Act, FL hours will increase at least 76 hours.

In Sweden, the dominance of English as a FL has started in the 1940s, yet, it was not until mid-1990s that it became a compulsory language (Lainio, 2001, p.42). However, EFL education in Sweden has a long tradition, and according to Cabau (2014), English along with German and French has been taught in Sweden since the mid-1800s. Although FL learning used to start at 3rd Grade, nowadays English learning starts from the 1st Grade (Skolverket, 2018). Students' early exposure to English language reveals that EFL has a crucial importance in the Swedish society (Skolverket, 2011). Besides, English is a core subject alongside of Swedish and Math in basic education, and these core subjects are the ones that students are responsible in the national exam at the end of 9th Grade. The English lesson hours for students are not directly regulated by the national curriculum, yet, the minimum total hour of English learning is stated to be 480 hours for compulsory education (Ministry of Education and Research-MoER 2016; Toth & Paulsrud, 2017). Accordingly, although Sweden is one of the most successful countries in English learning, the English class hours are the lowest in Sweden (Howe, 2015) which might lead one to question if it is the quality or the quantity that yields better results in language learning.

Compulsory FL education starts at 4th Grade in Hungary which is a bit over the other OECD countries, yet optionally students might start to learn English in Grades 1-3 (Öveges, 2017) depending on the availability of teachers. However, English is not the only FL for students, also it is not obligatory, and students can choose from some other FLs such as German, French, and Chinese. Nevertheless, in many schools there are not many options because of lack of teachers, so most of the students prefer English (Öveges, 2017). Starting from Grade 4 until the end of Grade 8, annual FL learning hours (for each FL) is 111 (Eurydice, 2009). Since an academic year in Hungary lasts for 37 weeks (Eurydice, 2011), nearly 3 hours are allocated for English weekly in each grade in primary and secondary school. This indicates that at the end of basic education students would have got 555 hours of English education.

In Turkey, English has been the dominant compulsory FL for many decades, and as of 2013 the EFL learning age was lowered to Grade 2 which was Grade 4 until the year 2013 (Ministry of National Education-MoNE 2013). Accordingly, starting from Grade 2 until the end of Grade 4, two hours are

allocated for English lessons each week and for Grades 5,6,7 and 8 the hours of the English are four. An education year in Turkey is divided into two semesters each composed of 19 weeks. In total, when students graduate from Grade 8, they would have got 836 hours of English which is more than the other European countries.

3.2. Aims and scopes of English teaching

Throughout history people have learnt FLs for various reasons ranging from military to educational aims. For the military aims short-cut methods were tried and specific, immediate results were expected. However, in the education various methods including the ones advanced for the military were tried out. The ones that did not satisfy the needs of society were eliminated and new methods and approaches, that supplanted the previous ones, were developed. Whatever the reason of FL learning/teaching, the methods enhanced have always aimed to catch the era. Moreover, FLs that serve a purpose to a nation rose to the prominence at that time. Therefore, the history of FL teaching has undergone various aims and scopes, as well as the prominent FLs. Although some of the countries support multilingualism, the most prevalent FL nowadays is English as in the case of the examined countries. Table 4 demonstrates FL learning aims of countries.

Generally, FL learning age has lowered in the last decade in most of the societies. This indicates that younger is better insight that originally come into prominence with the Critical Period Hypothesis of Lenneberg (1967) has dominated FL teaching in recent years. Although the practice of FL teaching at an early age goes even further, interest in the world in general started after the WWI. As the age of learning a FL decreases, the aims and scopes of language teaching shape accordingly.

In Finland, multilingualism is the main aim of FL teaching as every child has the right to learn at least two FLs one of which is Swedish or Finnish (for children of Swedish origin) since the primary education. Then they have the chance to choose from English, German or French, but nine out of ten students choose English (OECD, 2013). Since the compulsory education in Finland is divided as primary and lower secondary education, the aims and scope of the FL teaching change as the level progresses. The objective of English teaching in the primary school especially at low levels/grades is teaching language with communicative activities, attracting interest in learning a FL, and gaining the habit of studying FLs (FNBoE, 2016). For upper levels, teaching basic daily skills and basic spoken language are the main aims of FL curriculum (FNBoE, 2016). Generally, for lower levels speaking and listening are emphasized, yet as the age increases writing and reading are introduced gradually. Creating cultural awareness, introducing basic grammar rules and communicative strategies are also aimed in Grade 3-6. After Grade 6 to the end of the compulsory education, multiliteracy, cultural competence, and interaction gain importance (FEiN, 2017).

In Sweden, there are general aims of FL teaching indicated in the Skolverket (2018) which states the curriculum of compulsory education. Accordingly, the aim of FL teaching during compulsory education is to develop students’ communicative abilities as well as increasing their confidence in using FL in different situations with various reasons (Skolverket, 2018). For early levels writing and reading are delayed until they learn to read and write in their own language. For upper grades understanding and interpreting spoken English in various texts, and using language strategies in dialogues for mutual understanding are aimed (Skolverket, 2018).

Table 4. Aims of FL education

	Finland	Sweden	Hungary	Turkey
Primary school FL aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *attracting interest *gaining FL studying habit *creating cultural awareness *learning basic grammar rules and communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *developing students' communicative abilities *increasing their confidence in using FL in different situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *to educate and prepare students for real world discussions and challenges *communicative competence *speaking appropriately in different situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *to develop positive attitudes towards learning FLs
Lower secondary school FL aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *teaching basic daily skills and basic spoken language *multiliteracy *cultural competence *interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *understanding and interpreting spoken English in various texts *using language strategies in dialogues *to understand the speaker and be understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *to educate and prepare students for real world discussions and challenges *communicative competence *speaking appropriately in different situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *using FL in real life contexts *increasing the interest of students to language learning

In Hungary, the aim of teaching FLs is to educate students and prepare them for real world discussions and challenges (NCCoH, 2012). Achieving this aim is expected to make them mobile citizens. Moreover, gaining communicative competence and knowing how to speak appropriately in various situations are targeted (NCCoH, 2012). As FL teaching starts at the age of 10 (Grade 4) there are not any information in the examined documents if writing and reading are delayed until students learn these skills in their own language. There are general aims for all levels as shown in Table 4. However, according to Petneki (2009) the local curricula take the age-specific needs of the students into account and suggest a slower language learning phase.

The aim of FL teaching in lower levels (Grade 2-4) in Turkey is to make students develop positive attitudes towards learning FLs (MoNE, 2018). As the learners at this age group do not have cognitive and metacognitive abilities, it is useful to focus on positive attitude development. For upper levels (from Grade 5 to 8) using FL in real life contexts and increasing the interest of students to language learning are aimed (MoNE, 2018), which require a well-designed syllabus as well as designing appropriate materials. In this new curriculum of Turkey, generally FL teaching approach of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was referred.

3.3. Methods, materials and activities of English teaching

Materials and methods of FL teaching need to keep pace with language teaching aims and policy of a country.

In Finland, the aim of FL teaching is based on communication and active participation of students to the process as well as making them acquainted with FLs. Therefore, the teaching method is said to be student-oriented and action-based. For the younger levels, activities which do not include any kinds of reading and writing such as songs, rhymes, and games are suggested. For the upper levels, writing and reading exercises as well as oral skill exercises are highlighted (Saloniemi, 2019). Moreover, versatile

teaching materials are suggested. Although teachers are free to choose from course books, according to Huhta and Leontjev’s (2019) research, teachers in Finland do not prefer to use readily available textbooks, instead they prepare their own materials. Even if they choose to use a textbook, the text book is not used alone, it is supported with aforementioned teacher-build materials. In fact, it should not be forgotten that local autonomy is high in Finland which means that “no national syllabus has been designed for the curriculum” (OECD, 2018, p. 214) and local school management and “teachers are free to adapt their own materials and methods” (OECD, 2018, p. 214).

In Sweden, communicative approach has been utilized in the field of FL teaching methodology (Skolverket, 2018). Gaining communicative competence in a FL increases the opportunities for acting as an active citizen. Thus, communicative approach is accepted by the National Curriculum as the method of FL teaching and learning. In order to employ communication, teachers use many activities such as role plays, pair works, and group works and they check that every child has the opportunity to speak and express themselves (Sundin, 2000). For youngers also songs, rhymes, and drama are suggested. In beginner classes, everything in the class such as puppets, dolls, pictures, and cards is stated to be a way of learning English. Besides, television and computers are also employed to teach English. There are also published materials to be used like course books; however, course books are not accepted as an indispensable part of teaching (Skolverket, 2018). Table 5 indicates teaching methods, approaches, activities, and materials utilized in the examined countries.

Table 5. FL teaching methods, approaches, activities, and materials

	Finland	Sweden	Hungary	Turkey
Methods and approaches	*Student-oriented *Action-based *Communication and active participation	*Communicative approach	*Communicative approach *Life-long learning *Intercultural skills	*Action-oriented *Learner-autonomy *Cummin’s model
Materials	*Versatile *Interactive *Real	*For lower levels: dolls, puppets, pictures, cards etc. *For upper levels: interactive materials, TV, video, computers	*Not-specified	*Textbooks, flashcards, audio-visual materials
Activities	*For lower levels: songs, rhymes and games *For upper levels: oral skills and exercises	*For lower levels: role plays, drama, songs, rhymes *For upper levels: role plays, pair works, group works	*Group work	*For lower levels: total physical response, arts and crafts, drama *For upper levels: drama, role play and theme-based activities

In Hungary, communicative language teaching has been prevalent since 2011 in accordance with the recommendation of European Council (Öveges, 2017). As stated in the National Core Curriculum of Hungary (NCCoH, 2012) “communicative competence is conditional upon the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, text creation, and social and intercultural skills”. Besides, lifelong learning and intercultural skills are emphasized in the same document. Although, communicative competence is not

generally followed in other FL lessons (as there are other FLs taught in the country), it is said to be true to some extent for English teaching as all four skills are aimed to be developed in EFL lessons (Szabo, 2008). As compulsory FL teaching starts at Grade 4, this indicates that the age group is appropriate to study all skills unlike other countries where generally writing and reading are postponed in the beginning years of EFL. Furthermore, according to Szabo (2008), group work is dominant in English lessons, yet the disadvantage of group work is that teachers generally put the better students together and as a result there appears a gap between low and high level students, which is against the principle of equality in learning.

In Turkey, as referred in the MoNE English lesson curriculum (2018, p.8) “no single teaching methodology has been designated, instead action-oriented approach has been adopted” which is in line with international standards. Besides, “learner-autonomy, self-assessment, and appreciation for cultural diversity” (MoNE, 2018, p.8) are remarked. For earlier levels, reading, writing, and grammar structures are not suggested, instead listening and speaking skills are highlighted. The activities for this age group include songs, games, and hands-on activities (MoNE, 2018). In Grades 5-6 short texts are introduced as well as controlled writing activities. For Grade 7-8 since these students have already developed their literacy, reading and writing activities are recommended. In fact, this approach is indicated as Cummin’s model which advocates moving from less-demanding to more demanding, intricate activities. Although the basic material is textbook in a FL class in Turkey, it is supported by flashcards and audio-visual materials. In MoNE (2018), teachers are said to be free to adapt those materials according to the interest of their students. From Grade 2 to 4 total physical response, arts, crafts, and drama; for Grade 5-6 drama and role-play; and for Grades 7-8 theme-based activities are recommended.

3.4. Assessment procedures of English

As an indispensable part of language teaching, assessment is essential in testing the outcomes of a language course for various purposes such as to determine if a topic is understood and to inform different stakeholders about the progress of learners or about the effectiveness of a course. Whatever the reason, in formal learning environments assessment is a necessary component of teaching. Therefore, depending on the aims and scope of FL lessons, every country employs various assessment procedures.

In Finland, there is no national assessment in basic education and it is the duty of teachers to assess on-going progress of their students on the strength of objectives of the national core curriculum. Regardless of the lesson, the aim of assessment in basic education is to promote self-assessment (FNBoE, 2016). Teachers are trusted in their assessment process. From Grade 3 to 6 teachers are free to give oral feedback and verbal assessment, yet starting in Grade 7 it is necessary for teachers to do a final assessment and give grades as a result (FNBoE, 2016). Besides, in the national curriculum it is remarked that teachers might benefit from the Common European Language Portfolio as an assessment tool.

In Sweden, similar to Finland for lower levels (from Grade 1 until the end of Grade 6) formal assessment is not required, and teachers need to assess students orally, and write reports to their families and to the head teacher. However, while doing so, it is highly suggested that teachers make an all-round assessment which means that they need to combine all available information about a student (Skolverket, 2018). Moreover, teachers and parents and even students meet twice in a year to discuss

the success of the students (Sundin, 2000). This all-round assessment is also valid for upper levels where a final grade is also included. At the end of Grade 6 and Grade 9, national tests are applied to the students from core subjects which are English, Math, and Swedish, and accordingly if students fail in one of those core subjects they cannot attend secondary school. However, there are some preparatory education for those students to overcome their deficiency in core subjects and after they compensate for their low grades, they have the right to go on secondary education. On the other hand, there is also a national test at the turn of 3rd Grade, however the students are not graded as a result, as it was not found appropriate to grade students at such a young age (Skolverket, 2020a).

As for Hungary, there are not any detailed assessment techniques offered in the National Core curriculum of Hungary, yet self-evaluation techniques are suggested. Besides, as stated in general not specific to English language, “assessment should promote the discovery and development of students’ talents” (NCCoH, 2012, p.13). On the other hand, the report of OECD (2015) indicates that Hungarian assessment “relies primarily on numerical marks for formal reporting”, and although it is stated in the National Core Curriculum of Hungary (2012) that oral and written assessment need to be done, there is not any specific information on how to conduct such kind of assessment.

In Turkey, assessment procedure is seen as a critical aspect of education because of the fact that an inconsistent assessment may harm all the objectives set and achieved. Therefore, for the first two years of FL education, summative testing is not suggested as it might harm students’ positive attitude towards language learning and the students are too young to complete such kinds of tests (MoNE, 2018). Moreover, it does not match the goals of FL teaching which is to build positive attitudes towards languages. From Grade 4 and onwards, summative and formative assessment procedures are offered in MoNE (2018) as well as self-assessment, alternative assessment, and process-oriented assessment. In general, process-oriented and alternative assessment techniques are suggested as CEFR is used as a base in the new language teaching curriculum. Self-assessment is also supported with a self-assessment checklist which asks some questions placed at the end of each unit (MoNE, 2018).

3.5. English teacher education policy of countries

As a part of language education, teachers are primary agents of FL learning process in all levels of education. For this reason, their education is essential for their professional development.

Finland is renowned for its teacher education world-wide. As stated in OECD (2013) “Finland’s successful education lies in the quality of its teachers”. Before entering a university to study, all candidates take a written exam, apply to the teacher education, and get an aptitude test as well as interview. Based on their subject area the procedure changes (Ministry of Education and Culture-MoEC, 2016). In their second year of university education they are tested again, and if the teachers meet the criteria, then they are offered to be trained as teachers. The selected teachers begin their educational studies in the third year. Besides, every subject teacher is able to teach at least two subjects when they graduate as they have to study a minor subject in the university. Additionally, whatever the study area (class teacher, FL teacher etc.), every teacher has to have a Master’s degree in order to start teaching profession (MoEC, 2016). As a result, every teacher studies three years to get a Bachelor’s Degree and two years to get a Master’s degree. In-service teacher education is also supported both by the government and by the school administration. Lastly, in basic education it is the class teachers that teach English courses. Subject teachers work at lower secondary schools.

Teacher education in general has been taking place at university level since 1977 in Sweden (Ostinelli, 2009). FL teacher training in Sweden is also an important factor in the success of language teaching as in every subject. Nevertheless, it is the primary school teachers who are expected to teach EFL in Sweden. Thus, as Sundin (2000) states "primary school teachers will either have English in their pre-service education, which means they have a 15-20-week study program, or they can take equivalent additional courses at the university as in-service training" (p.153). Primary school class teachers teach English from Grade 1 to 6. Subject teachers are able to teach English from Grade 4 and forward. In-service teacher training is common as well as head teacher training programs supported by the government (Skolverket, 2020b). A head teacher is the pedagogical leader in the school who is responsible from all the educational activities conducted during a day (Johansson, 2001) and receives training to get the position.

As to Hungary, after the Bologna process in 2006 teacher education has changed (Eurydice, 2021). Lower primary school teachers need to have a Bachelor's degree and teachers at these schools get both specialist subjects and pedagogic education (Mullis, Martin, Goh & Cotter, 2016). Primary and secondary school teachers, on the other hand, need to have a Master's degree which is provided through 10/12 semesters of undivided education (BA+MA) (Eurydice, 2021). In their last year, students need to get 8-10 weeks of teacher practicum which requires them to attend practicum schools to make practice (Eurydice, 2021). When they start their career, first two years are counted as compulsory traineeship at the end of which there is an evaluation exam (Eurydice, 2021). Language teachers need to have an Advanced level (C1) certificate in order to teach at primary and secondary schools (Eurydice, 2021). Lastly, there are obligatory in-service trainings for teachers that last 120 hours and are renewed every seven years (Eurydice, 2021).

FL teacher education in Turkey has been conducted by ELT departments of universities for a long time. The duration of the university education is normally four years, each year composed of two semesters, and some universities also require intensive preparatory classes that last one year before the students attend four years of teacher education. Each university follows a standard of obligatory program although selective courses might differ as well the materials, textbooks, and exams (Karakaş, 2012). The highly centralized curriculum does not leave much room for freedom even if occasionally there occur changes to the ELT programs, but generally these changes occur in the curricular level rather than systemic alterations (Öztürk & Aydın, 2018). ELT teacher candidates attend teaching practice at the last year of university education where they are required to observe and teach some lessons under the observation of their mentor at the practicum school and sometimes their supervisor from the university. After graduation, teacher candidates need to take a national exam which aims to rank them according to the grades they get and assign them to the schools at different parts of Turkey. The ones getting the required score are also interviewed by the officers of Ministry of Education (MoNE), and if they get enough score, then they can be appointed to primary, secondary or high schools as FL teachers. The newly appointed teachers get their traineeship during the first year of profession, and at the end of the year they again enter an exam to be qualified as teacher. Moreover, there are in-service trainings both at the beginning and at the end of an academic year that last nearly for two weeks for all teachers. In primary education, it is generally the class teacher that teaches English and subject teachers start to teach English from Grade 5. However, if there are enough English teachers then these teachers might give English lessons in lower grades. In this case, primary school class teachers also need in-service education on how to teach English at this age group because even if they knew English this does not mean that they are aware of the English needs of this age group.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Foreign languages, especially with the increase in commercial exchange between countries, have played a major role in the education policy of countries for so long. Depending on the direction of trade many languages have come and gone as trade balances change. FL teaching in Turkey is also greatly impacted by the policies of the country's exchange with other countries. German and French, which were once popular, replaced by English over time. However, no matter how crucial it is, English language is difficult for some countries to be learnt and Turkey is one them. Even though, one part of Turkey is in Europe and has many neighbors located in each side of the country, people in Turkey still are not so much motivated to learn English. As a result, in international tests as well as the ones conducted in the country, students cannot display the desired performance. In this respect, the current study aimed to compare Turkey with the countries that are successful in teaching English. The purpose of this comparison was to shed light on the deficiencies in teaching English in Turkey and to offer solutions in return as in the studies conducted in Turkey (e.g., Kırkgöz, 2007; Işık, 2008; Sarıçoban, 2012).

The results regarding the first research question indicated that general compulsory education in Turkey is longer than the other three countries. As this increase in compulsory education years is relatively new, its results can only be tested in the long term. However, with this modification in the education, FL starting age has also lowered to 2nd Grade which is younger than Hungary but similar to Finland and Sweden. This led to an increase in the number of FL lessons. EFL hours in Turkey are more than the other examined countries and especially almost twice that of Sweden. Nevertheless, is it the quantity or the quality that makes it perfect? According to a study carried by Munoz (2014, p.463) “contact with high quality input has a stronger association with measures of oral performance than FL starting age”. Although starting to learn a FL at an early age is not an obstacle to the FL development, in that case the quality of FL education needs to be assured as well.

As for FL learning aims of countries, the recent curriculums of all the countries benefit from CEFR, because even if stated with different words, the aims and scopes of FL learning are nearly the same in each country. It seems that all countries try to catch the modern era and raise students who are able to fulfil the requirements of the age. It is again Finland and Sweden that differ from Hungary and Turkey. In Sweden and Finland multilingualism is one of the aims of FL teaching. Their ability in learning English as a FL might result from the policy of raising multilingual people as each student is introduced to two FLs in the beginning of their education. This multilingual approach to language teaching can be beneficial in raising multicultural nations. However, this is also noteworthy that English is a core subject in Sweden along with Swedish and Math’s, therefore students are more motivated to learn English as they need to take national tests. If they fail in English, they do not have the right to continue their education. They need to study these core subjects until they pass them, which provides a solid justification to study English for students unlike other countries. In Turkey, students enter LGS exam to enter high school. In this exam they are required to answer questions from different subjects including English. However, LGS is a pen and paper exam, and only reading and grammar skills of students are tested which contradicts FL teaching objectives of the curriculum (Alkan & Kartal, 2018). Moreover, students can compensate their inadequacy in English with the correct answers in other sections. Therefore, the importance of English is not similar to Sweden. This indicates that authorities need to place more emphasis on English in the national exams as in Sweden.

FL teaching methods, materials and activities are also similar in each country. Generally, communication and communicative activities are desired by the national curriculum of the countries. However, in practice, there are differences among countries because of the centralization/decentralization of education. In Sweden, Finland and Hungary (to some extent) teachers are allowed to choose their own materials, methods and activities by paying regard to the national aims and objects of the curriculum. However, in Turkey because of the centralized education system, teachers do not have total freedom to choose their own materials and methods, instead they are only allowed to shape existing materials and textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education. At this point, Alkan and Kartal (2018) suggest "partial localization" which they believe that will be beneficial in increasing success in education. Moreover, in the national curriculum in Turkey FL teaching at younger levels is stated to be communicative with a focus on speaking and listening skills, however national exams require the opposite. As İrican (2017) states even though reading and writing skills are not suggested for beginner levels, teachers inevitably use textbooks to prepare students to the national exams which require students to answer multiple choice tests.

Assessment is another issue to be discussed as it is a crucial part of teaching. In Finland and Sweden on-going assessment is suggested. In Finland teachers are required to give oral and written feedback to the parents and administration, and there is not a national assessment until the end of basic education. In Sweden, on the other hand, there are three assessments conducted at 3rd, 6th, and 9th Grades. The national exam on 3rd Grade is not done for giving grades, yet the others are graded according to the grade levels. In Hungary, self-evaluation as well as oral and written assessment are emphasized, yet there are not any specific details about how to conduct assessment. In Turkey in the national curriculum it is stated that for the first two grades there should not be a formal assessment, and that formal and summative assessment can start at Grade 4. There are not national exams until the end of the basic education, however LGS exam conducted at the end of the basic education does not assess speaking, listening, and writing skills. In this way, the national curriculum contradicts itself. Teachers are asked to teach communicative skills in a communicative way, yet when students finish basic education they are not tested communicatively, instead they are required to answer grammar and reading questions.

As regards to teacher education (TE), in Finland being a teacher requires passing from various elimination phases and at the end the ones that are really applicable to the profession are left. Besides, every teacher needs to do Master's to start the job. In Sweden, in the primary education class teachers teach English, yet, they are required to get pre-service and in-service education to teach English. In Turkey, teachers working at compulsory education do not have to have a Master's degree and when there is a shortage of English teachers, it is the class teacher that gives English lessons in primary education. Even though it seems similar to the system in Sweden where English is taught by the class teacher, the studies conducted in Turkey about teacher education revealed lots of problems in in-service or pre-service training programs. In a study, Arıkan (2015) reported that the reading and writing classes that teachers take at university do not prepare them to teach other skills, and especially they are not good at teaching young learners. The study of Gürsoy (2018) criticized teacher education from another angle and she remarked that FL teachers are neither aware of the changes in the new FL curriculum nor interested in learning the new methods and approaches via an in-service training. Although the teachers are the main agents of change, their indifference to the changes leads one to question the effectiveness of the implementations of the curriculum. Moreover, in ELT departments of universities there are generally centralized curriculum changes which do not generally focus on

systemic alterations, and the renovations are usually limited to curricular level (Öztürk & Aydın, 2018).

To answer the second research question, first issue to discuss is centralization. In this regard, it is suggested to leave some more freedom to the teacher and academics in designing their own courses. Besides, teachers might be required to do Master’s similar to Finland and Hungary because they need to study like academics to track the developments and changes in the curriculum and then they can have the ability to design their own materials and activities. In-service trainings of teachers also need to be conducted seriously and professionally, and primary teachers who teach English need to get necessary training on how to teach English to this age group as in Sweden. Some actions also need to be taken to encourage teachers to participate in the development of the curriculum, to attend the discussions on how to teach FLs, and to get the necessary training regarding the innovations in FL teaching area. As a suggestion for FL assessment in Turkey, in the national exams students might be responsible from each English skill as in the international exams like TOEFL and IELTS which would require learners to focus on learning English. As a result, teachers would need to focus on listening and speaking skills to prepare their students to the national exam.

In sum, lowering FL teaching age and designing the national curriculum according to the trends are not enough to achieve the desired effect. Single reform on an area is useless, unless it is supported by the reforms in relevant areas. In this regard, while reducing the FL learning age or designing the curriculum to follow the developments in the world, teachers and teacher candidates also had to be prepared for this process with pre-service and in-service trainings. Moreover, national tests should be appropriate to the assessments conducted in class. Integrity in all areas is necessary for an effective FL teaching.

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