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## Criteria for second foreign language preference

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### Abstract

The current study aims to find out what language other than English stands out as a second foreign language in a small scale of study at the faculty of education at Sakarya University. English is a widely spoken and accepted foreign language in Turkey. Families who send their children to state schools wish their children to study English and the case is not different for the families who send their children to private schools. In private schools, the language issue is somehow different because the students in these schools start learning a second foreign language at very early ages usually in well equipped classes and with high qualified teachers. The languages taught in these schools differ according to the school policy. German as a second foreign language seems to be the most popular language taught in these schools. French was the dominant language in Turkey in the 19th century. Language preferences inevitably change in accordance with the global changes. It is a clear fact that English is becoming prominent all over the world and the other languages can have only the second or third place in the order of most used foreign languages in many countries. The USA and The UK spend great effort and budget to spread English worldwide and try to keep English as a dominant foreign language in many countries. Today in many countries like Turkey, English is the dominant foreign language and it is regarded as lingua franca.

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### 1. Introduction

Throughout the history, some languages as French, Arabic and Persian became very popular in Turkey from time to time. For instance, from the 15th century to the early 20th century, Persian was popular. However, as scholars point out, the use of this language was limited to the elite. In other words, Persian had never diffused among masses. Arabic was the language of science and education in Ottoman Empire until the period of

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Reorganisation. With the advent of Reorganisation period, besides Arabic and Persian, French was also started to be taught in Enderun schools. The translation office founded in İstanbul was turned into Language School (Lisan Mektebi) in 1864. In addition to French, Romanian, Bulgarian, German, English and Russian were taught in Lisan Mektebi where foreign language teachers were also educated. With the reformation in Madrasas in 1914, foreign languages were integrated in the Madrasa curricula (Aslan, 2010). In the 19th century, French became popular and yet its use remained limited to intellectual and governing elite. (Yucel, 1982, 21)

English, on the other hand, enjoys a great popularity not only among Turkish elite, but also among ordinary Turks, especially among the Turkish youth, today. Even though there is no statistical data showing what percentage of Turkish people in general or the Turkish youth in specific use English, it is obvious that one can see in the Turkish press, media and television that English has been increasingly used in Turkey. Reasons for the increasing popularity of English in Turkey are closely related to the integration of Turkey into globalization process. Beginning from the 1980s, Turkey has increasingly become influenced by globalization. (as cited in Acar, 2004, 2)

Turkey's economic integration with global economy also contributes to the increase in the use of English in Turkey. Employment pages in Turkish daily newspapers, such as *Hurriyet*, *Milliyet* and *Sabah* show that many companies with international connections require their employers to have knowledge of foreign languages (as cited in Acar, 2004, p2). Among these, the most required language appears to be English. German and French, and Russian are other required languages by the business sector.

In addition to the influence of global developments, such as internet, global economy, tourism, western movies and the emergence of multi-channels, educational policies of Turkish government are major factors in the rising popularity of English in Turkey.

In the past, the first school with foreign language education, Robert College, was opened in 1863 and Uskudar American College followed it in 1871. There was also Galatasaray Imperial Lycee that was opened in September 1869. The education was completely in French in this school (Shaw, 1977, p109). Darüşşafaka, which was the first non-governmental organization started education in 1873. It was nominated as a better school than many others in terms of teaching French and science courses (Demircan, 1988). The mission of Darüşşafaka Association was providing "equity in education." Bright and talented children who have lost one of their parents and who have limited financial resources become eligible to study at Darüşşafaka after passing a competitive exam when they are ten years old, and Darüşşafaka provides them access to quality education at international standards (retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darüşşafaka\\_Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darüşşafaka_Association) on May 15th, 2012).

In the same period, Italians, British and Germans founded their own schools too. After the end of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the new Turkish government declared a new law of education on March 3rd 1924. According to this law, Arabic and Persian were replaced by French, English and German as foreign languages in school programs. Until 1956, Galatasaray Lycee was the only school that gave education in a foreign language. In 1974-75, the number of schools giving education in foreign language, which are called Anatolian high school, was 12 and it reached to 23 in 1982-83 (as cited in Acar, 2004, p2). After this date, the number of Anatolian high school dramatically increased. In a world of competition, these schools felt obligated to raise their standards up to private schools and they added another foreign language to their curricula.

## **2. Methodology:**

### **2.1 Participants**

This study was conducted with 361 freshmen (212 female and 149 male) from different departments at the faculty of education at Sakarya University in 2009-2010 academic year. Convenience sampling method was used in this study.

### **2.2 Procedure**

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