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## English preparatory education from pre-service teachers' perspectives

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### Abstract

The aim of this qualitative case study is to examine the effectiveness of the English Preparatory Education (EPE) at a foundation university in Ankara from the pre-service teachers' perspectives. The study was conducted in the fall term of 2011-2012 academic year. 52 pre-service teachers attending Turkish education, elementary mathematics education, and elementary school education departments at the faculty of education participated in the study. The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire, and then the content was analyzed. The depth of the responses was limited compared to face-to-face interviews since there was no opportunity to follow up on the participants' statements with other questions.

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### 1. Introduction

The incorporation of teaching English into Turkish National Curricula in state schools dates back to 1908. Today, it is a mainstream course subject in Turkish public schools starting from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing until the graduation at 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998). The percentage of students who learn English in the primary education in Turkey is 60.8 and when compared to the European Union member states, Turkey is in the 11<sup>th</sup> place in rank. In the secondary education, the percentage increases to 67% and of the total percentage of students, 6.5% take German and 0.7% take French courses as the second foreign language at school (EEU, 2008). Students at tertiary level are to attend one-year language

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preparatory classes provided that they are enrolled in the English medium departments or in the departments of which curricula include 30% English medium courses (CoHE, 2010).

On the evaluation of primary foreign language education in Turkey, Uysal et. al. (2012) indicate that English medium education is hindered by laws. It is also stated that the rapid spread of English is regarded as a threat, therefore it causes “negative attitudes and policy making” (p. 197). On tertiary education, Cengizhan (2010) compares three Departments of Basic English in different universities and finds out that they have three main commonalities; the materials used are in line with communicative teaching methodology, none of them has a curriculum development office, and neither the participating students nor the teachers think that the targeted language learning objectives are achieved. Bektas-Cetinkaya (2009) conducts a qualitative study on Turkish prep-class students’ attitudes towards English and concludes that they consider the English language as a ‘symbol of power’ and they would like to have an access to it, but they question the dominance of English language and have negative attitudes towards learning it.

According to a research study by Demirtaş and Sert (2010), the students reflect back on their language learning experience at the Department of Basic English and indicate that learners from different profiles are placed in the same classrooms, which results in the discrepancies in their language needs. Besides, the classes are conducted in a teacher-centered manner with an extensive emphasis on the teaching of grammar, and the learners are not able to make use of autonomous learning skills satisfactorily. In another study with complementary findings, Tunc (2009) shares prep-class learners’ thoughts on language education and of the total participants, 39% indicate the listening and 60.2% believe the speaking skills are the least focused ones in the classroom. Similarly, Tiryaki (2009) shares the data collected from students and teachers on English teaching at the Department of English and finds out that the speaking and listening skills are the least emphasized and thus the least developed ones. Besides, Toker (1999) investigates students’ attitudes towards Preparatory school curriculum and finds out that 94.2% of the participants (N=120) agree that it needs improvement; 76.7% of all suggest the inclusion of English for specific purposes course into the curriculum.

In a study conducted in Turkey on English teachers’ attitudes towards language teaching and their actual classroom practices, Coskun (2011) finds out that there exists a discrepancy between English teachers’ attitudes and applications in Turkey. The traditional applications of language teaching is found to be based upon the reasons that the classroom populations are high, the examinations are traditional and grammar based, and teachers do not have sufficient time to prepare communicative materials. On teachers’ perceptions of English culture and knowledge, in a comprehensive study by Arikan (2011) with the participation of 412 prospective teachers, it is found out that future teachers find themselves knowledgeable in the English language; nevertheless, not in the target culture. It is also highlighted that teacher perceptions are influenced by attitudes toward “target language, knowledge of target culture, parental use of target language, family income and father’s job” (p. 232). Even though pre-service teachers do not perceive themselves knowledgeable enough on culture, from the perspectives of learners’ of English in Turkey, having knowledge on culture is among the qualities of an effective language teacher (Arikan, Taser and Sarac, 2007). In the complete list of qualities, the items included are:

- having personal strategies to teach,
- maintaining positive teacher-student interaction,
- creating a positive classroom atmosphere,
- being a model,
- being knowledgeable on target cultures,
- possessing positive personal characteristics,
- having correct pronunciation of English,

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