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Globalization, English Language Teaching and Turkey

Mustafa Zülküf ALTAN¹

ABSTRACT

Globalization as a concept has been used both positively and negatively by many different people and in many different contexts. Depending on the point of view, all definitions on globalization state that it has the power of creating a world without boundaries where people communicate, share, and do business with the help of information, communication and transportation technologies. And the medium of all these activities is English language. Therefore, English language curriculum and teachers should be able to help learners to function as successful members in globalized digital-age World. Technological advancements open new areas to use English language as the main medium for communication both for personal and advanced academic needs and these new uses create new challenges for English language teachers to introduce, use, analyze and teach these areas to English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. Where does Turkey stand as a country in this picture? This paper focuses on the effect(s) of globalization on English language teaching (ELT), 21st century skills and English language and current common practice of ELT along with the recent curriculum revision of EFL in Turkey.

Key Words: English Language Teaching, Globalization, Turkey

The universe stops if no change happens; the change becomes blind if it is not enlightened with the wisdom.

Khalil GIBRAN

1. Introduction

Globalization is often synonymous with internationalization, referring to the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions throughout the world. Globalization is both a process and a theory. Although the theory of globalization is relatively new, the process is not. History has been the witness to many globalizing tendencies (Encyclopedia of Education).

Globalization has reshaped the way we live and interact, making the world a seemingly much smaller place. We are no longer just national citizens but also global citizens (Lerche, 1998). Therefore, we should take the necessary steps to prepare the next generations for this reality and the possible challenges of the future.

Historic changes we have been witnessing in modern life are transforming the lives of people in both developed and most developing countries. National economies and even national cultures are globalizing. Globalization means more competition, not just with other companies in the same city or

¹Prof. Dr., Erciyes University, altanmz@erciyes.edu.tr.

the same region. Globalization also means that national borders do not limit a nation's investment, production, services, relations with other nations, and cultures.

Globalization has increased the economic importance of knowledge and as a result education became the key if countries are to benefit from globalization. Although globalization creates new opportunities for educated individuals, it also broadens economic inequalities among countries. Individuals with good skills, such as good command of foreign language(s) are more likely to be in demand by sectors and services that are connected to the international economy, therefore these individuals are the ones most likely to benefit.

According to Epstein (2006)

“In globalization, it is not simply the ties of economic exchange and political agreement that bring nations and societies together, but also the shared consciousness of being part of a global system. That consciousness is conveyed through ever larger transnational movements of people and an array of different media, but most systematically through formal education. The inexorable transformation of consciousness brought on by globalization alters the content and contours of education, as schools take on an increasingly important role in the process” (p. 75).

If knowledge is fundamental to globalization then globalization has a profound impact on transmission of knowledge (Sahlberg, 2006). Since the quality of national education systems is completely compared internationally, the quality of education plays a crucial role in determining the winners and losers of globalization. Therefore, education has to evolve and grow to meet the needs of our ever changing society. In recent years the pace of change has become so rapid in certain areas that education systems have struggled to implement the changes needed to keep pace (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002).

2. The Language of Globalization

In both political and academic discourse, globalization as a concept and reality has become a universally accepted phenomenon. Another indisputable reality is the indisputable dominance of English Language (Graddol, 2000; Altan, 2010).

In his book *English as a Global Language*, Crystal (1997) asserts that “A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (p. 2). It is clear that the only language which has this special role recognized in every country is the English language.

The English language and globalization have spread and continue spreading hand in hand throughout the globe! Indeed, having a global language has assisted globalization and globalization has consolidated the global language (Warchauer, 2000). Though I share the idea behind the vision, I do not consider English as the global language instead, I see it as a means of global/international communication. The term global language is whole another issue.

Globalization as a concept has been used both positively and negatively by many different people and in many different contexts. All of the definitions on globalization share that it has the power of creating a world without boundaries where people communicate, share, and do business with the help of information, communication and transportation technologies and the medium of all these is English language. (Lerche, 1998; Bertucci & Alberti, 2003). Therefore, if globalization is the new imperialism, English language is the language of it! (Altan, 2010; Ricento, 2012; BC, 2013). Therefore, English language curriculum and teachers should be able to help learners to function as successful members in globalized digital-age World.

3. 21st Century Competencies and Language Teaching

European Council document of European Reference Framework (2006) asserts that “as globalization continues to confront the individuals worldwide with new challenges, each citizen will need a wide range of key competences to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world (p.13). This need is mostly attributed to the changes in society, and more particularly, to the rapid development of technology and its impact on the way we live, work and learn. Through Information and Communication Technology our society is changing from an industrial society to information or knowledge society (Voogt, 2008). As a result one of the biggest challenges facing today’s teachers worldwide is making sure that our students are equipped for success in these increasingly knowledge-based, economically interdependent, and demographically diverse societies.

As West (2012) emphasizes “in today’s hyper-connected world, no nation can launch a fully effective domestic education agenda, without addressing global needs and trends, and nurturing a globally competent citizenship” (p.2). Therefore, nations should be alerted to know how other nations are approaching to meet the ever increasing challenges. And Turkey is no exception!

Albright (2012) indicates that “in a knowledge-based economy that puts a premium on creativity, innovation, and collaboration, one the most important twenty-first century skills students need is global competence. Competences can be defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context and the key competences are those which all individuals needed for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

Mansilla and Jackson (2011) describe global competence as “the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance” (p. xiii). Therefore, developments towards the knowledge society have implications for our education systems (e.g. OECD, 2004; EC, 2002; Voogt, 2008).

“Education in its dual role, both social and economic, has a key role to play in ensuring that each citizen acquires the key competences needed to enable them to adapt flexibly to such changes” (EC, 2006, p.13).

Key competences are those which all individuals needed for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

The Reference Framework sets out eight key competences:

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue;
- 2) Communication in foreign languages;
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- 4) Digital competence;
- 5) Learning to learn;
- 6) Social and civic competences;
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression (EC, 2006, p.13).

The key competences are all considered equally important, because each of them can contribute to a successful life in a knowledge society (EC, 2006, p. 13). Here, I will focus only on the second competence on the list; communication in foreign languages.

“Communication in foreign languages broadly shares the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts (in education and training, work, home and leisure) according to one's wants or needs. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding. An individual's level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and between the different languages, and according to that individual's social and cultural background, environment, needs and/or interests” (EC, 2006, p. 14).

As for the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to this competence:

- ✓ Competence in foreign languages requires knowledge of vocabulary and functional grammar and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of language. Knowledge of societal conventions, and the cultural aspect and variability of languages is important.
- ✓ In the context of Europe's multicultural and multilingual societies, it is recognized that the mother tongue may not in all cases be an official language of the Member State, and that ability to communicate in an official language is a pre-condition for ensuring full participation of the individual in society. In some Member States the mother tongue may be one of several official languages. Measures to address such cases, and apply the definition accordingly, are a matter for individual Member States in accordance with their specific needs and circumstances.

- ✓ It is important to recognize that many Europeans live in bilingual or multilingual families and communities, and that the official language of the country in which they live may not be their mother tongue. For these groups, this competence may refer to an official language, rather than to a foreign language. Their need, motivation, and social and/or economic reasons for developing this competence in support of their integration will differ, for instance, from those learning a foreign language for travel or work. Measures to address such cases, and apply the definition accordingly, are a matter for individual Member States in accordance with their specific needs and circumstances. Essential skills for communication in foreign languages consist of the ability to understand spoken messages, to initiate, sustain and conclude conversations and to read, understand and produce texts appropriate to the individual's needs. Individuals should also be able to use aids appropriately, and learn languages also informally as part of lifelong learning. A positive attitude involves the appreciation of cultural diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication (EC, 2006, p. 15).

Considering the definition of the competence and the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to this competence, it is not difficult to admit that both foreign language education curriculum and the present education model are far too away to prepare Turkish students to have this competence and the skills in order to accomplish the tasks listed.

4. Foreign Language Teaching, Learning and Turkey

Although Turkey is the 17th largest economy in the world (IMF, 2017), when it comes to certain indexes Turkey consistently ranks very low on various measures of English language speaking. For example, in 2013 English Proficiency Index (EPI), Turkey ranked 41st out of 60, in 2017, 51st out of 72 countries. In 2016, the average total Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of both native Turkish speakers and residents of Turkey was 78 over 120 (ETS, 2016). Therefore, as a long term positive effect, early introduction of foreign language instruction from Grade 2 was introduced in 2012 and expected to demonstrate a strong accumulative effect which in turn could impact on all subsequent learning in a positive way.

In January 2017 Ministry of National Education Turkey (MoNE) announced its new curriculum reform in all subject areas including English language to be implemented starting 2017-2018 academic year. In this new curriculum, MoNE has increased the number of chapters in English courses for fifth grade students as part of efforts to turn the grade into a foreign language preparation year in a few years.

According to the English teaching program released by the ministry, the content of the fifth grade English course was broadened, with the number of chapters increasing from 10 to 40. The new curriculum will first be used in pilot schools chosen by the ministry in the starting 2017-2018 academic year. In this new curriculum, MoNE has increased the number of chapters in English courses for fifth grade students as part of efforts to turn the grade into a foreign language preparation year in a few years. According to the English teaching program released by the ministry, the content of the fifth grade English course has been broadened, with the number of chapters increasing from 10 to 40. The new curriculum will first be used in pilot schools chosen by the ministry in the starting 2017-2018 academic year.

It is also admitted that the curriculum aims especially to improve students' speaking and reading skills though in another part of the new curriculum it says "the new program places more emphasis on enhancing the writing and speaking skills of students, which is limited in the current curriculum" (MoNE, 2017). This multiple focus deficiency might be considered as a possible future problematic area during the classroom implementation. Chapters included in the new curriculum also focus more on technological and scientific terminology in order to make students more aware and relate them into the topics.

It can also be observed from the new curriculum that while class time allocated for grammar has been decreased, more time will be allocated for improving writing skills. As pointed out elsewhere in the paper, everything seems alright on the paper. Implementation of the curriculum will show us how it will work and how this ambitious vision of the ministry about the English language proficiency will be accomplished in order to produce students with the foreign language skills necessary to contribute effectively to the ambition to position Turkey as one of the top ten global economies by 2023.

5. What Does Lead to a Successful Foreign Language Teaching and Learning? Optimal Conditions to Learn a Foreign Language

Everybody wants to have a working foreign language but the majority of the people struggle with learning and as a result neither individuals nor the policy makers are happy with the result! Many things could be said here but it is out of the scope of this paper. Changing the curriculum is just one part of the problem. It is necessary to question if optimal conditions to learn a foreign language are met or not? Optimal conditions should be met in order to have effective foreign language teaching and learning. What are these optimal conditions?

In Turkey foreign language learning starts in the second grade. Although we know that the main difference occurs in pronunciation, early start is vital. However, there is no doubt that the trend of an early start is more complicated than some may acknowledge. We already know that those who experience language learning at an early stage could reach higher levels of proficiency than those who had begun in puberty. We are also aware that older children's superiority in grasping L2 grammar, syntax and morphology help this group of learners outperform young learners. Therefore, 'younger is better' debate is considered highly controversial. The optimal conditions of foreign languages in Primary Education should be met in order to get advantage of starting early. Therefore, 'younger is better' alone will not meet the desired vision (Altan, 2017b).

As in all areas of education, foreign language learning requires well-trained teaching professionals. This is considered a prerequisite to quality foreign language education. Policy makers always advocate the effective implementation of foreign language learning starting at primary level. However, they usually neglect preparing teachers at both pre and in-service levels to meet this vision.

Many language learners practice the foreign language within the limits of the classroom. Therefore, it is essential that the learning process be handled in such a way that it benefits children learning languages. That is, pedagogical content knowledge and an up-dated, realistic and effective foreign language teaching methodology of the teacher should be able to bring outside into the classroom in order to create an effective learning environment.

The strategies a language teacher uses have a vital impact on language learning. How does the teacher help students understand the concepts of a language? How does the teacher take individual differences into account, as well as different levels of comprehension? For example, offering an immersion experience helps students connect the language learning to their everyday lives, but rote vocabulary memorization and grammar drills create meaningless and abstract language context resulting in meaningless lessons.

Materials should also be designed to provide appropriate exposure to the learners and cultivate the desired language learning experience. Exposure to natural language plays a pivotal role in the language acquisition process. We are already aware that authentic materials derived from L1 Culture and not specifically designed for classroom use give positive attitude towards language learning rather than those specifically designed for language learning. However, in most of the classes students are taught using traditional materials and audio materials that do not prepare them to encounter real life situations. It should also be admitted that, though the most important skill to acquire a foreign language is listening, unfortunately it is the least touched skill in classrooms in Turkey (Altan, 2017b).

Another condition to be met for effective foreign language teaching/learning is how comfortable students feel in their language learning environment. Do classrooms feel cold and tense, or positive and relaxing? What's the culture and beliefs of schools about language learning? We already know that students' learning environment has an impact on their motivation and effective learning.

Yet another condition worth mentioning is language teachers' way(s) of assessing their students. Assessment is usually defined as the process of gathering information about student learning. Therefore, it should focus on learning rather than what students do not remember or cannot do! Many teachers are familiar with traditional forms of assessment such as multiple-choice tests, fill-in-blanks, comprehension questions, etc. But such ways of assessment, tests are just one way of gathering information about student learning and they are not the only way assessing student learning. Language assessment based on tests is bound to failure, unhappiness and finally will bear no fruits! The language classroom has many resources available for assessing students, including both formal and informal assessments. Language teachers should be competent in finding effective ways to determine what and how much their students are learning. Teachers should be able to analyze their instructional goals and what kinds of assessments support these goals. It should be noted that assessment should definitely follow the pattern of classroom teaching. That is assessing the way the language is taught! (Altan, 2017b).

Parental support and engagement and their previous experience with foreign language is another condition which plays an important role in the process of foreign language learning and teaching (Altan, 2017b).

As suggested by Nunan (2003), if English is a necessity, certain steps should be taken to ensure that teachers are adequately trained in language teaching methodology appropriate to a range of learner ages and stages, that teachers' own language skills are significantly enhanced, that classroom realities meet curricular rhetoric, and that students have sufficient exposure to English in instructional contexts.

How these aforementioned conditions and both internal and external factors are dealt with in Turkey? Our answers will ultimately define the success of our efforts.

6. Present EFL Practices in Turkey and Actual Needs of Today

20th century has witnessed a great amount of methods and approaches in language teaching. The most attractive one and still is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Briefly put, the goal of communicative competence was to prepare learners to make utterances appropriately in order to complete a specific goal, praising, apologizing, complaining, etc. This type of language teaching and learning is not a desired goal any more with the needs of 21st century society. We need new teaching purposes! Foreign language teachers need to develop tasks and activities in line with 21st century competences and skills that learners would need today and in future.

With present CLT practices, though in ill-form and even with the very good intentions hold in the new curriculum prepared by the Ministry of Education (MoNE) and which will be implemented starting 2017-2018 academic year, EFL in Turkey is faced with a great mismatch between desired aim and the language required by 21st century learners in academic and scientific areas.

What is required from today's EFL teachers is to be able to prepare students for more advanced and specialized language in order to meet academic and scientific as well as social needs of the learners. Learners usually participate in global contexts where they would need to communicate both orally and written.

The contexts where learners of English would access vary from online games to social media, from googling for information to conducting research, from listening and watching YouTube videos to reading blogs, from attending seminars to attending academic programs abroad. Present practices and desired aims in new curriculum are far away accomplishing this fact.

21st century EFL classrooms are not the places where learners need to use solely, textbooks anymore. Variety of other options are present and all these options require different types of competences both verbally and written.

Writing is the second most neglected skill in Turkish EFL classrooms after listening. 21st century EFL learners need to practice writing for different purposes in order to achieve higher levels of specific academic language. Learners would need this type writing competence in international exams like IELTS, GRE and TOEFL too. Prevailing textbooks used in classrooms and teacher practices regarding writing skill in Turkey today are again far away accomplishing this need.

7. 21st Century Skills and Vision

EFL classrooms should be able to engage students with practices focusing on acquiring and developing 21st century skills. Critical thinking, problem solving, creative/innovative thinking, team work, effective communicating, information Literacy, media Literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, initiative and risk taking, social Skills, productivity and leadership. These skills are not new and have always been important for living successful lives since Socrates time but they became more important in 21st century.

All these skills force EFL teachers to integrate meaningful and effective ways to help learners not only learn Basic English but also to build the necessary mindset to understand world around in order to live happily and creatively with others. Curriculum should be able to provide all these skills and the teachers should be able to perform these tasks for successful learning.

EFL classrooms should be able not only to enforce learners to achieve high command of language skills needed in life but also will be able to help learners gain formal academic skills required for further education! Therefore, EFL classrooms need to move away from traditional methods focusing on the mastery of language but include new ways of integrating global issues along with content, culture, technology and aforementioned 21st century life skills. In fact, in such an interdependent and interwoven world, successful global citizenship forces individuals to have more than one foreign language. Today's EFL classrooms must not only focus on cognitive skills but also focus on affective and aesthetic skills which we have neglected in late few decades due to heavy emphasis on assembly line type of schooling.

Despite what it is generally declared in formal documents of MoNE, it should be confessed that present and common foreign language teaching practice(s) which could be explained as "the stand-and-deliver" model of teaching and learning, with the teacher at the center of instruction, is increasingly insufficient with today's competences and the vision put in formal documents! We definitely need effective EFL teachers practicing more differentiated methods founded on research about how children think, learn and create. For this to happen, teacher education, curriculum, teacher training practices, textbooks, classroom settings, etc. should be changed in accordance so that students develop competences which are needed in the 21st century in order the desired change to happen.

Differentiated instruction generally emphasizes the importance of adjusting teaching strategies to the needs of different groups and individual differences present among students; learning styles, strategies, brain dominance, aptitude, field dependence/independence, motivation, anxiety level, general intelligence, MI profiles, personality types among others.

Differentiated instruction asserts that, contrary to traditional common practice, teachers should be flexible and be able to modify curriculum and instruction in relation to the individual differences among students in each class, rather than expecting students to fit a curriculum, one size fits all philosophy. Differentiated instruction encourages teachers to use varied teaching strategies, including peer and group work, ongoing and alternative assessment techniques measuring both teaching effectiveness and student progress, and a variety of student products as measures of achievement instead of multiple choice and lower order thinking paper and pencil type of assessment.

Strategies for differentiated learning supports both novice and veteran teachers, with real-life experiences resulting in student achievement assessed with alternative techniques, effective classroom management, and using alternative ways with children struggling to overcome learning differences and to give credit for their unique talents that might not be nurtured in traditional teaching settings. (Tomlinson, 2001; Sizer, 1999; Holloway, 2000).

8. Conclusion

21st century advancements open new areas to use English language as the main medium for communication both for personal and advanced academic needs and these new uses create new challenges for English language teachers to introduce, use, analyze and teach these areas to EFL students.

The English Language curriculum which will start being implemented next academic year and the present teaching practices and teacher education programs do not help to bring this vision to come true. The aims of the curriculum usually are either to improve teaching the existing content, to facilitate the learning of new goals, or to facilitate a new vision on teaching and learning. It is my belief that the new English Language teaching curriculum is away from accomplishing this usual task.

Such so called “top-down” models of reform efforts have been tried for a very long time with different names to solve our education problems. However, usually same poor results have been obtained. All of these efforts were no doubt sincere efforts to improve education but they all seemed to assume that if you could invent some kind of magical curriculum for schools more kids graduate from schools with better knowledge, fewer dropouts and as it is in this case with better command of English language proficiency.

As Altan (2017a) notes the most important element of such top down reform processes (does not matter whether all parties have been included in the process or not) are those who will implement the change. And in educational reforms, change and innovation processes, teachers are in the front and hot line. That is teachers’ beliefs and efforts related to the reform and change and how to include them into their daily routines determine the success and fail of such reform efforts. Teachers and their teachings is the key of such processes.

But it is clear that there is something really wrong with the “top down” magical curriculum approaches. “As the executors of the process, unless teachers’ believes, values and attitudes do not change, it is impossible for the change to happen! Particularly in an organization with nine thousand teachers, nineteen million students and six hundred fifty-two classes, it is rather impossible to create a desired curricular reform without considering teachers and their classroom practices including what type(s) of assessment used” (Altan, 2017a, para. 8).

Altan (2017a) raises some highly critical questions by asserting that “When we consider the changes introduced and expected new ways of classroom implementaions, it is crucial to ask whether the teachers are ready to implement the proposed agenda both mentally and physically or not. Have they received such a raining during their education? What are the backgrounds of teachers? Where are the sources of teachers? Do teacher education programs implement a teacher education program in accordance with the MoNE’S proposed curriculum?” (para. 10)

Altan (2017a) highlights that

“Curriculum is not a holy book to start from the first page and continue to cover till the last page without skipping any page or chapter! In addition, saying that “here is my curriculum and apply it” and assuming that the curriculum will be implemented as proposed is more than funny! Curriculum is usually a road map and gives detailed directions to follow and it is the teacher with his/her students to decide how to reach the destination. Therefore, it is rather an optimistic expectation to believe that the proposed curriculum will be used as directed by both present and future teachers considering both their backgrounds and their education they have and will take. This simple fact was also behind the former unsuccessful reform efforts in the past. But it has generally been ignored and therefore, facts on the papers and in reality have never been the same” (para. 11).

New areas, new ways and new needs of learners require that teachers must be prepared to introduce, use, analyze, and teach English for such occasions. Today’s global society inquires new thinking skills as discussed earlier and higher levels of educational achievement and these qualities are also required from English learners too. Every student must be ready for the situations they will come across and not only on paper. And this readiness must not only be for today but more importantly for the future.

It is obvious that globally competent students require globally competent curriculum and teachers. And globally competent teachers require globally competent teacher educators. To achieve this, teacher preparation programs need to take concrete steps to internationalize their curriculums and provide meaningful experiences for teacher candidates, as well as provide the faculty who are responsible for training the next generation of teachers with opportunities to develop their own global competence.

What are the needs of the learners and what English should teachers in Turkey teach to meet their needs? These two fundamental questions should determine the path of English language learning and teaching in Turkey.

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