

PREPARATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN TURKEY: A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Mustafa Zülküf Altan

Abstract

This paper, focusing on the foreign language teacher education system, explores ways to prepare teachers for new standards and policies which could be set between foreign language teaching professionals and education policy makers. It is argued that the new standards and policies, presented as challenges, assistance, and guidelines, should occur in response to skills and competencies indirectly shaped by the information technology and global conditions and which are needed for the present market.

Key words: foreign language teacher education, skills, knowledge,

TÜRKİYE'DE YABANCI DİL ÖĞRETMENİ YABANCI DİL ÖĞRETMENİ YETİŞTİRME: 21. YÜZYIL İÇİN BİR KARŞI KOYMA

Özet

Yabancı dil öğretmeni eğitimi üzerine odaklanan bu makale, yabancı dil öğretimi profesyonelleri ve politika oluşturanları tarafından gerçekleştirilebilecek yeni standartlar ve uygulamalar için öğretmen yetiştirme yollarını incelemektedir. Bu makalede, ulaşılması gereken hedefler, yardımlar ve ana hatlar şeklinde sunulan yeni standartların ve politikaların, bilgi teknolojisi ve küresel şartlar tarafından dolaylı olarak şekillenen ve mevcut piyasa şartlarında gereksinim duyulan beceri ve yeterliklere cevap verecek şekilde oluşturulması tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: yabancı dil öğretmeni yetiştirme, beceriler, bilgi

Introduction

In Turkey, the foreign language teaching profession, especially English language teaching today, is faced with increased demand of enrollment and a shortage of qualified teachers. At the same time, a rapidly changing student population, educational reform, and the changing standards for foreign language learning are placing a number of new demands on foreign language teachers. In order to meet these demands, not only should teachers strive for professional development, but also government institutions should strive to assist educators in their professional development endeavors. Foreign language teachers today require a combination of competencies and backgrounds that may be unprecedented in the preparation of language teacher and that strong professional development is critical.

Challenges For Foreign Language Teachers

Perhaps the biggest change in the 90s has been a shift from training teachers as technicians to developing them as autonomous, reflective, informed decision-makers, empowered to depart from procedure and to shape their teaching according to learners' needs. Reflective practice is based on knowing oneself, one's students, and one's socio-educational environment. Here is a list of challenges that can make the teaching of foreign languages effective for the next century. This list emphasizes the need for strong professional development in any context. These challenges are:

- **Being up-to date.** Students' language abilities are farther advanced than ever before as a result of globalization, cultural sharing and internet. Therefore, today's student population requires foreign language teachers to work with students whose needs, educational experiences, and target language exposure are very different from those of students they have typically taught. For example, some students entering foreign language classrooms grew up listening to the music or watching movies or even speaking the target language at home.

- **Being pedagogically informed.** Recent research reveals that students have a variety of reasons for learning foreign languages and different ways they approach their learning. These studies require that foreign language curricula and instruction address a range of student goals and learning styles, strategies and profile of intelligences.

- **Being Competent.** The current emphasis on exclusive use of the target language in the classroom requires that teachers have strong language skills.

- **Being Multi-skilled.** The emphasis on thematic learning demands that teachers be skilled in the thematic areas explored, competent in the vocabulary related to these areas, responsive to student interests in various topics, and able to work in teams with content-area teachers.

- **Being Resourceful.** The emphasis on collaborative learning and student self-directed learning requires that teachers be able to act as facilitators, guides, counselors, and resources, not just as language experts.

- **Being over-qualified.** The new educational system and the shortage of qualified teachers may require foreign language teachers to teach at more grade levels than they have in the past.

- **Being Technologically Informed.** The emphasis on technology for language learning and teaching requires teachers to keep informed about new technologies and their instructional uses.

Skills And Knowledge Foreign Language Teachers Need

In addition to meeting the challenges stated above, effective foreign language teachers need to possess the following skills, and to integrate them into their instruction:

- A high level of language proficiency in all of the four skills of the target language-speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

- The ability to use the language in real-life contexts, for both social and professional purposes.

- The ability to comprehend contemporary media in the foreign language, both oral and written, and to interact successfully with native speakers.

- A strong background in the liberal arts and the content areas.

- Understanding of the social, political, historical, and economic realities of the countries where the language they teach is spoken.

- Pedagogical knowledge and skills, including knowledge about human growth and development, learning theory and foreign language acquisition, and a repertoire of strategies for developing proficiency and cultural understanding in all students.

- The ability to use alternate types of assessment answering the needs of the students and integrated with the curriculum.

- The ability to handle conflict in the classroom effectively.

- Knowledge of the various technologies.

Ways In Which Government Institutions Can Assist Teachers

Regardless of the skills and knowledge that foreign language teachers possess when they commence teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process. Therefore, foreign language teachers must maintain proficiency in the target language and stay up to date on current issues related to the target culture. The Ministry of Education in Turkey has a long tradition of offering in-service training through summer seminars or workshops. However, there is a strong belief about the effectiveness and the quality of these services. In addition, INGED (English Language Education Association) offers a range of programs for teachers' continuing education, including afternoon sessions and workshops at universities and local schools. Both the

number and the quality of formal and informal ways that teachers can improve their language proficiency and cultural knowledge could be increased by including participation in study and travel abroad programs, 3 week long summer institutes and seminars, and informal opportunities that can be arranged locally (such as immersion weekends or monthly dinners where current events and other issues are discussed in the target language).

Ways In Which The Higher Education Council Can Ensure High-Quality Teaching In Foreign Languages

Ministry of Education Has developed a long and detailed list of competencies for teachers and teaching profession. The booklet prepared by the Teacher preparation and Education Department of the Ministry of Education is a very useful and compact tool and all programs in the faculties of education should follow it strictly in order to meet the requirements and produce the teachers needed by the market. The list includes the competencies teachers should have and the experiences they need for developing those competencies. The only missing area in the booklet seems to be the resources that are available to aid teachers in their professional development.

Even with all of these efforts stated above, there remains a great deal to be done to ensure high-quality teaching of foreign languages in this country. Here are a number of recommendations for teacher preparation programs and initiatives which could be useful:

A shift from a focus on pre-service training alone to lifelong professional development.

Preparation to teach in more than one level, e.g. the elementary and secondary levels, and both children and adults.

Integration of theory and practice from the start. Although programs have started early field experiences in 1998, we cannot talk about, very positively, about the effectiveness of such practices. The biggest threat to the success of these practices is the lack of quality and commitment on the part of both supervisors and cooperative teachers. Special care should be spent assigning and training these parties.

Expansion of the criteria for graduation beyond language proficiency and academic achievement alone, to include ability to work with diverse learners from many educational backgrounds and in many different educational settings, and ability to use state-of-the-art technologies in their instruction.

The inclusion of conflict resolution within both pre/in service programs and graduate education programs.

Granting of emergency certification to individuals who meet certain criteria (a faculty degree, proficiency in the language, teaching experience, and pedagogy coursework). The Higher Education Council together with the Ministry of Education needs to redesign the available professional development activities such as university courses and summer workshops

facilitating the re-certification or re-licensure of in-service teachers who have a foreign language background. A response to widespread teacher shortages, teacher retirement, and teacher attrition.

Formation of strong partnerships with other area teachers that allow for the sharing of information, curricula, strategies, and support across disciplines, departments, schools, and levels. Partnerships also need to be formed across institutions. Schools, professional organizations, universities, and local and city administrators all need to collaborate to enhance the quality of foreign language education in Turkey.

Standardization of teachers to ensure quality. KPSS (The Selection Examination for Professional Posts in Public Organizations) alone is not enough. Ministry of Education together with the Higher Education Council should start determining the teachers' academic knowledge of their teaching area and knowledge of teaching methods by a national test. A similar test called Praxis or Multiple Subjects Assessment for Teachers is used in the United States. The Praxis I test measures basic academic skills, and the Praxis II test measures general and subject-specific knowledge and teaching skills. The tests leading to a certification process requires candidates to master material around five core propositions developed by the National Board in US: commitment to students and learning; knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy; management and monitoring of student learning; systematic thinking about classroom practice and learning from experience; and participation in learning communities.

Introducing and practicing performance based assessment techniques within the constructivist theory of learning.

Integration of technology into state-of-art methodology in Foreign Language Education departments.

Conclusion

Educational reform, a rapidly changing student clientele, technological development, and new views on assessment are just a few of the pressures that today's foreign language teachers are encountering. If the foreign language profession is to provide first class instruction to its students while keeping up with a growing list of demands, support for high quality teacher preparation and continuing professional development must be given high priority.