

Turkey's Place in the Rankings of The English Proficiency Index

İngilizce Yeterlilik Endeksi Verileri Işığında Türkiye'nin Yeri

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Abstract

The Education First English Proficiency Index is a standardized test aiming to measure a country's level of English proficiency. The index gathered the measurements of adult English proficiency from a total of sixty three countries. According to the data of the 2014 index, Turkey ranks at the forty seventh position. Based on this index, the present research investigates why Turkey has scored so low by focusing on comparing Turkey's various practices to those of Denmark, a country ranking at the first position on the index. According to the findings, the most important factors which are influential in enhancing a country's level of English proficiency are the years of schooling and the defining of English proficiency as a core competency within the school curricula. In Denmark, a country which is classified to have very high human development, the majority of students have completed secondary education. From this aspect, it can be stated that in this proficiency test Turkey and Denmark have not participated on equal terms. However, contemporary efforts in the teaching of English in Turkey and notably the reform in education in 2012 have been influential in enhancing Turkey's level of English proficiency.

Keywords: English Proficiency Index, language testing, Turkey, Denmark.

Öz

Education First (Önce Eğitim) İngilizce Yeterlilik Endeksi standardize edilmiş İngilizce seviye tespit sınavıdır ve amacı bir ülkenin İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesini ölçmektir. 2014 yılı endeksinin verilerine göre Türkiye, altmış üç ülkenin sıralamasında kırk yedinci sırada yer almıştır. Çalışmanın amacı İngilizce Yeterlilik Endeksi tarafından sunulan verilerin ve raporların bilgisi ışığında, kırk yedinci sırada yer alan Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretimi uygulamalarını ve stratejilerini aynı endekste birinci sırada yer alan Danimarka ile karşılaştırma yöntemiyle araştırmaktır. Araştırmanın sonucunda, bir ülkenin İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesinin yüksek olmasında o ülkenin okullaşma oranının ve müfredat programlarında İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olarak okutulmasının en önemli etkenler olduğu saptanmıştır. Durum Türkiye ve Danimarka açısından değerlendirildiğinde Danimarka 'da neredeyse tüm öğrencilerin lise mezunu olması nedeniyle dünyada en iyi İngilizce bilenler seviyesine ulaştıkları buna karşılık Türkiye'nin Danimarka'nın gerilerinde yer aldığı görülmüştür. İngilizce yeterlilik sınavına Türkiye ve insani gelişme endeksine göre en gelişmiş ülkeler arasında yer alan Danimarka ile aynı koşullarda başlamamış olmaları bu durumun temel nedenleri arasında sayılabilir. Bununla birlikte Türkiye'de son dönemde dil öğretiminde gerçekleştirilen belirgin müfredat değişiklikleri ve özellikle de 2012 yılı reformunun Türkiye'ye hız kazandıracağı söylenebilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İngilizce Yeterlilik Endeksi, dil ölçme, Türkiye, Danimarka

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Introduction

Education First (EF) is a private international education company which “was established in 1965 with the mission to break down the barriers in language, culture, and geography (EF EPI, 2011; 20).” The first report published by EF EPI states that the first index was formed when the EF implemented an English Proficiency Index (EPI) to more than two million adults around the world and that “the EF EPI was calculated using combined test taker data from 2007 to 2009 (Ibid.).” The EF EPI used these test scores to compare the levels of English proficiency of the test takers countries. Though there are other standardized tests used for English proficiency examination, the English Proficiency Index was the first proficiency test to use the data to compare the scores of adults participating from a total of 44 countries from Europe, Asia and America. The scores were used as a measurement for cross-country comparisons and were first published on the website of EF EPI in 2011.

Despite the point that the EPI may be questioned in terms of validity relating to a specific country, it is still the one and only available standardized test permitting for comparison between cross-country data on adult English proficiency levels. The EF EPI “is the first index of its kind to give countries a benchmark against which to measure the average English competency of the working population. The index uses a unique set of test data from over two million adults who took free online English tests over a period of three years (Ibid., p.3).” Therefore, the EF EPI was used as the focus point and considered the main measurement in the present study.

The report of the EF EPI published in 2014 (EF EPI-a, 2014) claims that international best practices and strategies aiming to increase a country’s level of English proficiency have emerged and that English proficiency can be improved through evaluation of what the other countries have tried out. Based on this report, common elements shared by successful reforms include: 1- Aligning the education system, 2- Defining English proficiency as a core competency, 3- Implementing comprehensive training programs, 4- Using English as a medium of instruction, 5- Developing assessment standards, 6- Supporting adults in learning English, 7- Lowering barriers to study abroad, 8- Recognizing companies as major investors in English teaching, and 9- Using global events (Ibid., p.38).

Inspired by the findings of the EF EPI final report, the present research attempts to investigate the underlying possible reasons as to why Turkey has scored the English level of “very low proficiency”. Therefore, in order to discover the causal relationships related to language learning proficiency in Turkey, this present research employs the design of structured comparison by adopting the comparison of most different systems. The most different systems compared are the practices of Turkey and practices of Denmark- a country which has scored “very high proficiency” level. The two practices which will be dwelt on are: a- aligning the education system, and b- defining English proficiency as a core competency. The following research questions provided focus and direction for the present study:

- 1- How does the Education First English Proficiency Index assess and evaluate a country’s English proficiency?

- 2- Based on the first and last edition of the Education First English Proficiency Index, have there been any changes viewed in the English proficiency index of Turkey?
- 3- Since the 1980's how have the years of schooling changed in Turkey and Denmark?
- 4- Are there any differences in the definition of English as a core competency within the schooling systems of Turkey and Denmark?
- 5- Can the aligning of the education system and the defining of English as a core competency have an impact on the results of a country's English Proficiency Index?

The Education First English Proficiency Index

The EF EPI is a standardized test which is the first of its kind because it aims to measure a country's level of English proficiency. The EF EPI is "a standardized measurement of adult English proficiency, comparable between countries and over time (EF EPI, 2011; 3). The EF EPI "stands out from the existing language tests for three reasons: its focus on communicative competence, the unique database on which it is standardized and its availability over the internet. This is the first time that policy-makers, educationalists and researchers have a tool that allows decisions on language teaching to be informed by comparisons with 44 countries and over two million learners (Ibid.)."

The EF EPI, as stated by its creators, "is no guarantee that this particular proficiency score corresponds to the academic and economic goals set by an individual nation, the EF EPI does provide a uniquely standardized comparison of English proficiency (Ibid.)." Another characteristic of the EF EPI is that "the most notable difference between the EPI and previous indices of English proficiency is that the EPI uses a 'modern' interpretation of what good English is, with a focus on English as an international tool of communication (Koru & Akesson 2011; 7)."

At this point it must be noted that the EF EPI has a number of limitations. For example, in the arena of language testing, the concepts 'proficiency' and 'communicative testing' are still prone to questioning. Proficiency is controversial issue dealing from the structure of language (knowledge of grammar, phonology, or vocabulary) to the proficiency of performance skills for which purposes (integration or comprehension)? Communicative testing is also disputatious. "The project of communicative language testing, despite its significant achievements, remains incomplete. Current understanding of the social dimension of communication, it turns out, poses extremely difficult challenges for the conceptualization and implementation of assessment, challenges that to date have not been met" (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.44). Given these accusations, it is possible to argue that since the nature of the EF EPI spans a vast range of countries it is very difficult to achieve a test development approach which is transparent, systematic and above all ensures fairness to all of its test takers. In addi-

tion, at the time of the present study, published EF EPI guidelines for fairness review were not found.

Relating to the limitations of the EF EPI, Koru and Akesson (2011) highlighted the fact that the magazine *The Economist* had pointed out that the EPI subjects took a free test online, meaning that the subjects were engaged in learning English and had internet connection. These researchers also add, "The magazine also notes that test takers are also most likely young and urban. The study is therefore vulnerable to, among other factors, differing degrees of internet access, urbanization and age. It is less representative for example of the entire population in Turkey's case than that of Sweden. Internet connectivity in Turkey is 36.8 percent, while it is 90.3 percent in Sweden (Ibid. p.7)." Here, it can be seen that the EF EPI scores do not endorse the interpretation of data in the social dimension.

The first report of the EF EPI (2011) provides a table displaying the position of the English proficiency index of a total of 44 countries from all around the world. In this edition, the data displayed ranges between the years 2007-2009. According to the results, with an EF EPI score of 69.09 points and level of 'Very High Proficiency' the highest ranking country at first place is Norway, followed by the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden. In addition, the data of this edition also reveals that ranking at 44th position the lowest scoring country is Kazakhstan with an EF EPI score of 31.74 points and level of 'Very Low Proficiency.' Unfortunately, among these 44 countries, Turkey is runner-up for last ranking at 43rd position. During the years 2007-2009, Turkey gained an EF English proficiency index score of 37.66 points which is also grouped in the 'Very Low Proficiency' level (see EF EPI, 2011).

The EF EPI 2014 (Country Fact Sheet, Turkey) claims "Turkey's proficiency score has risen by 10.14 points over the past seven years, more than any country in Europe (EF EPI-b, 2014; 4)." Although Turkey's score has risen, the EF EPI score which is 47.80 is still insufficient because Turkey is positioned 47th out of the participating 63 countries and this rise was not enough to skip the proficiency band labeled 'very low.'

The EF EPI determines the national trends in English proficiency by calculating the difference between countries' EF EPI first edition and fourth edition scores. Any change greater than two points- positive or negative- indicates a significant shift in English ability (EF EPI-a, 2014; 20). According to the EF EPI trends (ibid.), there are three distinctive groups: 1- Trending Up, 2- Slight Change, and 3- Trending Down. According to the EF EPI trends, Turkey with a significant point of '+10.14' has gained the first place in the group "Trending Up". Although Turkey may be in the very low proficiency level, the slow but encouraging increase in English proficiency within the recent years has achieved a distinguishable gain by placing Turkey into the trending up group. This finding proves that during these recent years Turkey has realized various practices which have had an impact on the learning of English. The following sections focus on these possible practices.

Comparison of Years of Schooling *Years of Schooling in Turkey*

Reports of the fourth edition of EF EPI (EF EPI-a, 2014) have displayed a strong correlation between public education and English proficiency. According to EF EPI, for a country to gain high scores in English proficiency one of the most influential factors is the alignment of the education systems “such that students leaving primary school are ready for secondary school and students leaving secondary school can enter university directly without recourse to remedial classes (Ibid., p. 38).”

Before dwelling on the issue of foreign language teaching in Turkey, at this point it is necessary to take a glimpse at mother-tongue education in the past. Upon the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, in the year 1923 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk- the father of modern Turkey founded the Republic of Turkey. The new identity of Turkey necessitated a purified mother-tongue. The Turkish language needed purification of foreign influences such as Arabic and Persian. At that time, “the revision of the Turkish language was one of the ways of cutting the links with the past and creating a new national identity, as a result groups of minorities within the period of the empire through populism were now Turkish citizens, they all had the same rights and were uniting with the same language –Turkish (Pekkanli, 2011; 83).” Not only was the language purified but also the Latin alphabet was introduced into Turkey.

As can be seen, after the notification of the republic while the unification of its people under a purified language was one of the major concerns another major concern was the illiteracy rate of Turkey. During that period, “authorities were mostly concerned with bringing widespread literacy to the Turkish people, only 6% of whom were literate at the time. Therefore, the focus was on the mother tongue with no emphasis on foreign language education (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998; 26).” However, it must be noted that even before the war period, although foreign language teaching was not emphasized it had been taught- most notably “for children with more privileged backgrounds since private tutors provided for this teaching (Pekkanli, 2011; 85).”

In the early 20th century, increasing the literacy rate of the population of the new rising Turkey aimed to socialize its citizens into the society. During this period the teaching of literacy and numeracy was of primary concern. While the 20th century was based on industrialization, the 21st century- the new millennium is based on technological revolutions highly dramatized by globalization. Therefore, in this new era, the education system in Turkey, like many other countries has the aim of adapting to the changing world and adopting a paradigm of 21st century education.

A glimpse at the recent past of Turkey displays that within this centralized system of education, it was not until the end of the 20th century- 1997, which the Government increased compulsory education from five to eight years (MEB, 1997). The structure of the eight years was allocated as five years of primary and three years of middle/junior high school. Then distinctive reform legislation took place in 2012 (MEB, 2012). This recent reform extended compulsory education from eight to twelve

years by changing the structure to four years of primary, four years of junior high school and four years of senior high school (4+4+4).

Within the history of education in Turkey, it can be seen from these legislative changes that it was not until 2012 that the most significant legislative change aligned elementary and secondary education. Based on this reform, a student is obliged to attend school for a total period of 12 years. After secondary education it is optional for the student to further his/her education by attending a higher education institution which is provided either by state or private universities. In terms of increasing English proficiency, the recent compulsory education reform which increases the years of schooling is one of the major influential practices which will hopefully have an impact on increasing Turkey's proficiency index.

Having addressed the years of mandatory education in Turkey, at this point it is worthy to investigate the average years of schooling attended by the population of fifteen years and over. It is stated by Çekim (2014; 35) that "Considering the average years of schooling in Turkey, it is rather low when it is compared with developed and developing countries. However, a substantial development is observed between 1980 and 2010. For instance, the average year of schooling increased from 2.64 to 4.42 between 1980 and 2010." Table 1 displays the data revealing that in the course of three decades- from 1980 till 2010, while students in Turkey increased their average years of schooling by approximately 18 months, in developing countries this rate was 29 months, and in developed countries the rate was 2.6 months. This finding shows that Turkey is still slow in this process.

Table 1. Average years of schooling total population aged 15 and over (%)

Year	Turkey	Developing Countries	Developed Countries	World
1980	2.64	4.37	8.74	5.34
1990	3.37	5.28	9.55	6.14
2000	4.02	6.33	10.52	7.10
2010	4.42	7.20	11.3	7.89

Source: Çekim, 2014: 27

Another, arduous undertaking for Turkey is the point that students in developed countries have access to 11.3 years of average schooling- more than twice the years in Turkey. This finding supports the EF EPI report of 2014, which claims that "with the increase in years of schooling, the student will have the chance to learn, practice and master the language (EF EPI-a, 2014; 38)." With the new educational reform of 2012, Turkish students are obliged to stay in school for longer years and as a result will have an increasing acquaintance with the subject English.

Years of Schooling in Denmark

Another source of data ensuring cross-country comparability is provided by the United Nations Development Programme under the heading of Human Development Report. Values relating to Human Development Index (HDI) and the ranks for 187

countries and UN-recognized territories are presented in the 2013 Human Development Report (HDR, 2013).

Table 2. Expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling in Denmark

Year	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling
1980	13.4	9
1990	14	9.6
2000	16.2	10.5
2010	16.8	11.4

Source: Human Development Report 2013

Based on the HDR 2013, Table 2 is a summarized version of the original table relating to “Denmark’s HDI trends based on consistent time series data, new component indicators and new methodology”. From Table 2 it is possible to observe that mean years of schooling in Denmark, since 1980 until 2010, increased by 2.4 years and reached a total of 11.4 years. In addition, during this period the expected years of schooling in Denmark increased by 3.4 years. This data displays the fact that the years of schooling spent by Danish students is approximately three times more than that of Turkish students.

Another research conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is the Better Life Index, which is a survey that allows for comparison of well-being across countries, based on 11 topics- one of them being education (OECD a, 2014). The findings of the 2014 education index are supportive to that of the HDR 2013. According to this index, the OECD Economic Surveys: Turkey 2014 reveals that “In Turkey, 32% of adults aged 25-64 have earned the equivalent of a high-school degree, much lower than the OECD average of 75% and the lowest rate amongst OECD countries (Ibid.). Whilst, the OECD Economic Surveys: Denmark 2014 states: “In Denmark, 77% of adults aged 25-64 have earned the equivalent of a high-school degree, slightly higher than the OECD average of 75% (Ibid).” With more than two thirds of Denmark’s population being graduated from high school it is not difficult to understand why the English proficiency of Denmark is much higher than that of Turkey.

English Proficiency as a Core Competency

English Proficiency as a Core Competency Within the Education System of Turkey

According to EF EPI (EF EPI-a, 2014; 38), having an index of high proficiency in English, lies in the defining of “English proficiency as a core competency for all graduates. Officially recognizing the importance of English helps align different government entities and generate momentum for reform.” Therefore, at this stage it is

necessary to investigate how English as a foreign language became a core course for Turkish students and to discuss its implementations within the education system.

Ever since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, although Turkish has been the only language with an official status, the teaching of foreign languages— notably that of English, French or German within the framework of public school systems were not neglected at all. As stated by Sebüktekin (1981) “in March 1924, a Western foreign language was made a compulsory school subject for all, with the aim of culturally enriching the Turks.” This western foreign language which was English, French or German was taught at the secondary education level. As can be seen, the advent of foreign language teaching in Turkey is not a new practice: foreign language teaching has existed ever since the founding of the Republic, but somehow this practice has encountered hurdles hindering its full potential.

Coming back to the discussion of recent issues in distinctive foreign language teaching implementation in Turkey, a notable legislation dates back to 1997. With this reform, the Board Of Education, a sub-division the Ministry of National Education (MNE) published the Circular dated October 1997- No. 2481 (MEB, 1997), according to this circular, “it was decided for the acceptance of the elementary school 4th and 5th grade foreign language (English) teaching program to be implemented in order to be practiced and further developed from the 1997-1998 academic year. It was not until this period that the teaching of English as a foreign language was identified as a core subject and it became an important prerequisite for increasing the quality of education in eight-year continuous compulsory education (Pekkanlı, 2011; 94).”

Being a candidate member of the European Union (EU), Turkey has the aim of reaching EU standards and this can be clearly observed in the changing frameworks of the curricula designed by the MNE. For example, after the distinctive 1997 educational reform, the MNE took another important step in the improvement of teaching English by aligning the language learning levels to that of the Common European Framework of References for Languages. “According to the 2006 foreign language teaching policy, 4th and 5th graders have 2 hours of compulsory and 2 hours of elective English language courses per week and are expected to go through A1- Breakthrough and reach A2-Waystage level as Basic Users before graduation from the 8th grade (Arslan, 2012; 95).”

Aiming to improve education in general and as a result foreign language education in Turkey, the latest reform implemented by the MNE was the 2012 reform. Along these lines, “the Ministry of National Education, with another attempt to improve foreign language education, has redesigned foreign language teaching policy in 2012, involving second graders (6 year-old-children in state primary schools) in foreign language courses for two hours a week as of 2013-2014 academic year (MEB, 2012); thereby, adding another two years to this process. According to the regulation, second, third and fourth graders in primary education are expected to receive at least two hours compulsory foreign language courses weekly and it can also be possible to offer optional language courses up to 18 hours for fifth graders in secondary schools (Arslan, 2012; 96).”

Another much recent attempt by the MNE is the revision of the secondary education 9th-12th Grades English Curriculum (MEB, 2014). The MNE in its revising process of the English Curriculum for public high schools, made the process available for public. The new curriculum was designed and “the updates and revisions done in the new 2nd– 8th Grades English Curriculum (MEB, 2013) have called for an update in the 9th-12th Grades English Curriculum (ibid.)” The MNE designed the 9th-12th Grades English Curriculum to be put into implementation in the 2015-2016 academic year and made it public on its website for two weeks – until 10 October 2014. The MNE officially stated that they were sharing this draft curriculum in order to gain feedback, recommendations and criticisms which will be accounted for in the alignment of the final form of the curriculum.

This draft version is presented in both English and Turkish. The sections of the curriculum consist of: the rationale behind the curriculum, use of technology and blended learning environment, characteristics of English teaching and learning environment, model English language curriculum, communicative functions and sample uses of language and suggested materials (MEB, 2014). MNE’s explanation in the rationale behind the new curriculum clearly displays MNE’s high value of teaching English in Turkey. The following quote is from the MNE’s explanation: “There are several interdependent language teaching and language principles reoccurring in the 9th-12th Grades English Curriculum. First of all, English is seen as a lingua franca and international language used in today’s global world.... English is also used mostly as the language of science and technology. In order to share their ideas and culture with other people from different cultures and countries, our learners need to use English actively, productively, and communicatively (Ibid.).”

English proficiency as a core competency within the education system of Denmark

While Turkey is still working on improving English teaching, the same concern can be observed also in Denmark. As reference, the Danish Ministry of Education website (DME-a: 2013), under the heading ‘Goals for a World-Class Education System’ notes that the Government has set specific goals for all of the levels of the education system. The Government has set the four following specific goals for the primary and lower secondary school (Folkeskole) education system:

- All pupils must have excellent academic skills and knowledge.
- The Folkeskole must provide pupils with knowledge and skills, promote creativity and independence and prepare them for further education.
- The pupils must be among the best in the world in four basic subject areas: reading, mathematics, natural science and English.
- All young people are to gain knowledge and skills that provide them with the basis for actively taking part in a globalized world.

From these goals- notably the third, it is quite clear to observe the Danish Government's ambitious strive to make its students "among the best in the world in four basic subject areas: reading, mathematics, natural science and English." Upon considering the subject area of 'English', the EF EPI 2014 Report (EF EPI, 2014a) certifies that this part of the goal has been fulfilled by Denmark, by ranking Denmark in the first place out of 63 countries with a 'very high proficiency' score of 69.30 points. The Denmark English proficiency index findings of the EF EPI 2014 Report compliments the Danish Ministry of education goal based on learning English.

Until recently, another new reform in Denmark is referenced in Eurypedia European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems (EEE: 2013). This website states that "in June 2013, the government approved a new reform of the Danish public school aiming to improve the standards of the Danish Public School (primary and lower secondary education). The agreement was made between the Danish Government (the Social Democrats, the Social- Liberal Party and the Socialist People's Party), the Liberal Party of Denmark and the Danish People's Party on an improvement of standards in the Danish public school. The new reform will come into effect in the school year 2014/2015 (ibid.)."

Based on the new reform in Denmark, the following goals relate to the teaching of English and a second foreign language:

- Introduction of English lessons at form level 1 and 2 by one extra weekly lesson.
- Introduction of the second foreign language at form level 5 by one extra weekly lesson, and at form level 6 by two extra weekly lessons.

Stated in the new reform, the agreement file dated 7 June 2013 (DME-b, 2013), under the subheading 'Strengthening foreign languages teaching' the importance of teaching English in public schools is worded: "The teaching of foreign languages must be strengthened. The increasing internationalization and the children's early meeting with other countries demand increased knowledge of languages – especially English. Therefore, the students will receive more lessons in foreign languages. It is of utmost importance to master the English language to get on in a global world. Most of the children meet the English language at an early age and they are eager to learn. Therefore, English will be introduced at form level 1. This will be done by an overall net increase of the weekly lessons at all form levels and with one weekly lesson at form level 1 and 2." As can be seen from this quote, Denmark is increasing the students' contact hours with English and immersing them in language learning tasks in order to increase their internalization of the foreign language.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the concerns of teaching English in Turkey and Denmark, English language teaching gains high priority in both Turkish and Danish schools because both countries are striving to make their students participate and communicate effectively in English within the global word. However, as can be seen from the disparities among the two education systems have caused a striking difference between both countries proficiency scores on the EF EPI. While Turkey was dealing with the problems

of increasing the literacy rate of its people and obliging students to graduate from elementary education, Denmark being a developed country had aligned its education system and kept students within its educational institutions at least until they had graduated from the level of secondary education.

Denmark, which is a developed country, has been aware of the importance of English and has embedded English into its national education system for economic development much earlier than Turkey. Based on the findings and scores of the first edition EF EPI, the researchers Koru and Akesson (2011) state that “Turkey’s lacking performance is surprising considering that it is the world’s 16th largest economy and a highly important player in the region” (p. 2). In the same study, Koru and Akesson (2011) raise the question of causation vs. correlation in the discussion of the role of English in Turkey’s economic growth. According to these researchers “people in Turkey will learn English once they reach a level of development similar to that of Europe. This assumes that English proficiency is irrelevant to its economic growth. After all, poor English doesn’t seem to hinder it from being the second fastest growing economy of 2011 (Ibid., p. 4).”

It may be true that economic growth is not parallel to English proficiency, but economic growth does embed potential impacts relating to English proficiency. For example, in the report “Beyond More of the Same: The Top Four Emerging Markets for International Student Recruitment” prepared by Choudaha et al. (2013), four key emerging markets are identified for the United States to recruit international students for their Higher Education Institutions. Of these markets the fourth country is Turkey. According to this report the underlying factor here is that “Turkey’s booming economy showed a GDP annual growth rate of 9.2% in 2010 and 8.5% in 2011....Turkey’s youth population (ages 15-29) is large, making up 30% of the total population, which is the highest in Europe (Ibid.).” As the economy of Turkey develops, the further the alternative chances arise for students to learn English- as in the former case for studying abroad.

The present research has shown that in a country, although there may be a countless number of factors influencing English proficiency, education- if it is a centralized system, it is one of the utmost influential factors in achieving high degrees of English language proficiency. In the final EF EPI 2014 report, Turkey being in the first place for the ‘trending up’ band shows that Turkey’s contemporary government’s recent efforts for teaching English are paying off.

To conclude, the present study displayed that it was not surprising to see that a developed country such as Denmark had achieved the highest scores on the EF EPI 2014 because Denmark when compared to Turkey was already equipped and trained for the challenge of English proficiency. In the challenge for English proficiency Turkey had a false start because Turkey and Denmark did not show up with equal opportunities at the starting line of the race. However, the promising increase in Turkey’s EF

EPI scores display that Turkey is doing its best and taking substantial steps to prepare for the upcoming years.

Suggestions for Further Study

Due to the point that EF EPI results are statistically-oriented, it is possible that in many-country comparisons there may also be problems relating to the validity and reliability of measures used in comparisons. This is also poses a shortcoming of the present research. It is also possible to suggest that further studies EF EPI could increase the number of cases (countries or territories) for purposes of statistical validity and richer data collection measures could be employed for data triangulation. Another important point for future research is the recommendation of an empirical study that examines various psychometric issues relating to the EF EPI.

Özet

Giriş

Dil öğrenimini yurtdışı seyahatle birleştirmeyi hedef alan ve temelleri 1965 yılında kurulan Education First (kısaca EF) adındaki bir eğitim şirketi, 2007 yılı itibariyle, ana dili İngilizce olmayan bir ülkenin İngilizce seviyesini tespit edebilmek için o ülkedeki yetişkinlerin İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesini ölçmeye başladı. Bu amaç doğrultusunda Education First English Proficiency Index (EF İngilizce Yeterlilik Endeksi) adı altında İngilizce yeterlilik sınavlarını hazırladı ve uygulamaya sundu.

EF EPI bugüne kadar toplam 63 ülkeden ana dili İngilizce olmayan ülkelerdeki yetişkinlerin İngilizce yeterliliğini değerlendiren bir sınav sistemidir ve iki milyondan daha fazla yetişkinin İngilizce seviyesini ölçmüştür (EF EPI, 2011). EF EPI, yetişkinlerin ücretsiz olarak katıldığı ve çevrimiçi uygulanan İngilizce seviye tespit sınavlarının verilerine dayanarak ülkelerin İngilizce yeterlilik endekslerini sergiler. 2014 yılında yayımlanan EF EPI 2014 Country Fact Sheet (EF EPI-b, 2014) göze alınarak, Türkiye'nin 63 ülke arasında 47. sırada yer alarak 'çok düşük seviyede' İngilizce yeterliliğe sahip olduğu ve Danimarka'nın ise ülke sıralamasında 1. sırada yer alarak 'çok yüksek seviyede' İngilizce yeterliliğe sahip olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır.

Bu çalışma karşılaştırma yöntemine dayanarak, iki ülkenin birbirinden tamamen farklı eğitim sistemlerini ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı EF EPI tarafından sunulan endekslerin ve raporların bilgisi ışığında, İngilizce yeterlilik sıralamasında 47. sırada yer alan Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretimi uygulamalarını endekste 1. sırada yer alan Danimarka'nın uygulamaları ile karşılaştırarak Türkiye'nin son sıralarda yer almasının olası sebeplerini araştırmaktır. Aşağıdaki araştırma soruları çalışmanın odak noktalarını ve yönünü belirlemektedir:

- 1- EF EPI'nin bir ülkenin İngilizce endeksini belirlemede kullandığı ölçme ve değerlendirme yöntemi nedir?
- 2- EF EPI tarafından yayımlanan birinci ve son endeks temel alınarak, Türkiye'nin İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesinde gösterdiği farklılıklar nelerdir?
- 3- Türkiye ve Danimarka'da, 1980'li yılları sonrası on beş yaş üstü bireylerin okullaşma oranları değişkenlik gösterdi mi?

- 4- Türkiye ve Danimarka'nın eğitim sisteminde İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olarak yeri nedir?
- 5- Eğitim sistemini düzenlemek ve İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olarak okutulması bir ülkenin İngilizce Yeterlilik Endeksi sonuçlarını etkiler mi?

Tartışma

EF EPI toplamış olduğu verileri 2011 ile 2014 yılları arasında toplam dört rapor halinde okuyucuların bilgisine sunmuştur. EF EPI alanında ilk sınav türüdür, ancak EF EPI'nin de bazı yetersizlikleri olduğu kaçınılmaz bir gerçektir. En önemli sorunlardan bir tanesi ise bu sınavın doğası gereği 'iletişimsel sınama' ve 'yeterlilik' kavramlarını içermektedir. Bu kavramların tanımları alanda hala tartışma konusudur. Ayrıca, iletişimsel sınavın da sosyal boyutu bu sınav türlerin uygulamasında da halen büyük sıkıntılar yaratmaktadır (McNamara & Roeber, 2006; 44).

EF EPI sonuçlarına dair diğer bir eleştiri ise Kuru & Akesson (2011; 7)'nin çalışmasında yer almıştır. Bu araştırmacılar Economist dergisinin bu EF EPI sınavlarının çevrimiçi olarak uygulandığını ve bu uygulama yönteminin hatalı sonuçlar verebileceğini anlatmış. Bu dergide Türkiye'de internete bağlanma oranının %36.8 ve İsveç'te bu oranın %90.3 olduğu belirtilerek EF EPI sonuçlarının Türkiye'nin tüm nüfusunun bir göstergesi olamayacağını belirtilmiştir.

EF EPI 2014'te yayımlanan rapora göre İngilizce öğretimi alanında gerçekleştirilen başarılı reformlardan bazı ortak maddeler ortaya çıkmıştır. Toplam dokuz madde sıralanmıştır; 1- Eğitim sisteminin düzenlenmesi ve 2- İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olarak okutulması 3-Kapsamlı yetiştirme programları uygulamak, 4- Öğretim dilinin İngilizce olması, 5- Değerlendirme standartları geliştirmek, 6- Yetişkinlerin İngilizce öğrenmesini desteklemek, 7- Yurt dışı eğitimin engellerini azaltmak, 8- Şirketlerin İngilizce öğretimi konusunda önemli yatırımcılar olarak tanınması ve 9- Global etkinlikler düzenlemek (EF EPI 2014a; 38). Bu çalışmada, yukarıda belirtilen ilk iki madde esas alınarak; Türkiye ve Danimarka'daki eğitim sisteminin düzenlenmesi ve İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olarak okutulması ele alınmıştır.

Türkiye de günümüzde uygulanan zorunlu eğitim sistemine değinmeden önce, Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin ilk döneminden söz etmek gerekir çünkü Türkiye'de, Cumhuriyet ilan edildikten sonra nüfusun sadece yüzde altısı okur-yazardı. Bu nedenle, o dönemdeki yetkililerin eğitim alanındaki temel endişesi nüfusun çoğunu okur-yazar haline getirmektir. "Bu sebepten dolayı yabancı dil öğretimi vurgulanmaz iken eğitimdeki odak nokta ana-dil öğretimi idi (Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998; 26;)." Ayrıca, o dönemde Türk dilinin zenginleştirilmesi ve yabancı sözcüklerden arınması, Osmanlı alfabesinin resmi kullanımının son bulması ve yerine Latin alfabesinin kabulü sürecine de girilmişti. Diğer bir önemli konu ise Türkiye'deki azınlık grupları da bu dönemde Türk vatandaşı oldu ve tek bir dilin-Türkçe'nin çatısı altında birlik ve beraberlik oluşturuldu (Pekkanlı, 2011; 83).

Çoğunlukla sanayi devrimlerinin yaşandığı 20. yüzyılda, Türkiye'nin temel hedefi nüfusuna okur-yazarlığı kazandırma ve yabancı dil öğrenimini güçlendirmektir idi

(Sebüktekin, 1981). Ancak 21. yüzyıl küreselleşmenin hız kazandırdığı *teknoloji devrimlerine dayanmaktadır ve Türkiye diğer ülkelerde de görüldüğü gibi, bu değişen dünyaya ve 21. yüzyıl eğitimi paradigmalarına adapte olmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu yeni yüzyılda dikkat çeken noktalar ise zorunlu eğitim süresinin artışı ve çok dilli vatandaşların yetiştirilmesi vurgusudur.*

Türkiye’de öğrencilerin büyük bir çoğunluğu okula devam etme konusunda oldukça yetersiz kalmıştır. Türkiye’de 1980 yılında on beş yaş ve üstü olan toplam nüfusun okullaşma oranı sadece 2.64 yıl ve 1990 yılında ise bu oran 3.37 yıl idi. Bu oranlar 1980 yılı gelişmekte olan ülkeler için 4.37 yıl ve gelişmiş ülkeler için 8.74 yıl idi (Çekim, 2014). Oysa Türkiye’nin yakın tarihine baktığımızda, okullaşma oranını ciddi olarak etkileyecek adımın ancak 20. yüzyılın sonuna doğru atıldığını görmekteyiz. Bu önemli adım 1997 yılında uygulamaya konan temel *eğitim reformudur çünkü bu reform sayesinde sekiz yıllık zorunlu ve kesintisiz eğitime geçildi (MEB, 1997)*. Bu reformdan sonra alınan verilerde yükseliş görülmüş ve 2000 yılında okullaşma oranı 4.02, 2010 yılında 4.42 yıl olduğu saptanmıştır (Çekim, 2014). Türkiye’de 2012 yılında ise yayımlanan 2012/20 sayılı "12 Yıllık Zorunlu Eğitime Yönelik Uygulamalar" konulu genelgeyle, kamuoyunda 4+4+4 olarak bilinen 6287 İlköğretim ve Eğitim Kanunu (MEB, 2012) yürürlüğe girmiştir. Bu kanun’ un sayesinde Türkiye’de okullaşma oranında önemli artışların gerçekleşmesi beklenmektedir.

Gelişmiş ülkeler arasında yer alan Danimarka’da ise 1980 yılında okullaşma oranı 9 yıl ve 1990 yılında ise bu oran 9.6 yıl idi. Oysa 1980-1990 yıllarında Danimarka’nın hedeflediği okullaşma oranı yaklaşık 14 yılı bulmaktaydı. Danimarka’da 2000 yılında ortalama okullaşma oranı 10.5 yıl ve 2010 yılında ise 11.4 yıl olarak kaydedildi. Danimarka için bu ortalamalar yine beklenen oranın altındaydı çünkü bu dönemde öğrencilerin yükseköğrenimlerini de tamamlamaları istenildiği için beklenen oran 16 yıl ve üstü idi (HDR, 2013).

Diğer verilere bakıldığında, örneğin OECD tarafından yayımlanan raporlarda (OECD-a, 2014) ise 2014 yılında Türkiye’deki yetişkinlerin (25-64 yaş) sadece %34 oranı ortaöğretimi tamamlamış oysa OECD ortalaması %75 olarak belirlenmiştir. Danimarka ise OECD’nin ortalamasını aşarak %77 oranına ulaşmıştır (OECD-b, 2014).

Yakın dönem Türk eğitim tarihine bakıldığında, 1997 yılında 2481 Sayılı Tebliğler Dergisinde (MEB, 1997) yayımlanan, kesintisiz ‘sekiz yıllık temel eğitim reformu’ sayesinde ilköğretim sisteminde daha önce 5 yıl olan zorunlu eğitim 8 yıla çıkarılmış oldu. Bu reform zorunlu eğitimin süresini 3 yıl daha arttırmanın yanı sıra daha önce ortaöğretim seviyesinde okutulan yabancı dil dersi olan İngilizcenin ilköğretim 4. sınıftan itibaren zorunlu ders olarak okutulmasında da önemli katkıda bulundu, ayrıca ilköğretim 6. sınıfta seçmeli ikinci yabancı dil dersi de müfredat programına eklenmiş oldu. Bu uygulama ile ilköğretim öğrencilerinin 8. sınıftan mezun olmadan önce İngilizce yeterliliklerinin Avrupa Ortak Dilleri Başvuru Metninde belirtilmiş olan A2- Temel Kullanıcı yabancı dil seviyesine ulaşmış olması beklendi (Arslan, 2012; 95).

Türkiye’de günümüzde ise 6287 Sayılı İlköğretim ve Eğitim Kanunu ile 2012 yılında uygulanmaya başlayan 12 yıllık zorunlu kesintisiz (kamuoyunda 4+4+4 olarak bilinen) eğitim reformu ile eğitim sisteminde yapısal değişiklikler meydana gelmiştir

(MEB, 2012). Bu reform sayesinde İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak okutulması daha erken bir döneme çekilerek ilköğretim 2. sınıftan itibaren zorunlu ders olarak okutulmaktadır.

Danimarka'nın eğitim sistemine baktığımızda, yakın tarihte Danimarka Eğitim Bakanlığının web sayfasında (DME-a, 2013) yayımlanan ilköğretim ve ortaöğretimin alt kademesi için hedeflenen dört temel amaç 'Goals for a World-Class Education System' (Dünya-Standartları Eğitim Sistemi için Hedefler) başlığı altında yer almaktadır. Bu amaçlardan bir tanesi ise "tüm öğrenciler dört temel derste dünyanın en iyileri arasında olmalı, bu dersler; okuma, matematik, doğal bilimler ve İngilizce." İngilizcenin önemi bu maddede açıkça görülmektedir.

Danimarka Eğitim Bakanlığı bu hedefe ulaşmak için 2013 yılında yeni bir reforma imza attı ve bu reform 2014-2015 öğrenim yılında yürürlüğe girmiştir (EEE, 2013). Danimarka bu hedefe ulaşmak için 2013 yılı reformu ile İngilizce derslerini ilköğretim 1. sınıfta başlatmış ve tüm sınıflarda İngilizce ders saatlerinde artış gerçekleştirmiştir (DME-b, 2013).

Sonuç

Bu araştırmanın sonucunda, bir ülkenin İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesinin yüksek olmasında o ülkenin okullaşma oranının ve müfredat programlarında İngilizcenin zorunlu ders olarak okutulmasının en önemli etkenler olduğu saptanmıştır. Yakın tarihe baktığımız zaman Türkiye'de ancak 1997 reformu ve özellikle de 2012 yılı reformundan sonra okullaşma oranlarının olumlu yönde etkileneceği ve aynı zamanda ülkenin İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesinin artacağı tahmin edilebilir (Choudaha et al., 2013). Diğer yandan ise Danimarka'daki eğitim sisteminin hedefleri tüm öğrencilerin üniversite mezunu olması ve dünyada en iyi İngilizce bilenler seviyesine ulaşmalarıdır. Nitekim EF EPI raporları Danimarka'nın bu hedefe ulaştıklarını göstermektedir.

Türkiye'nin EF EPI raporlarına göre en düşük ve Danimarka'nın en yüksek seviyede İngilizce yeterliliğine sahip olması sonucu çok da şaşırtıcı değildir çünkü bu İngilizce yeterlilik sınavında Türkiye ve en gelişmiş ülkeler arasında yer alan Danimarka aynı koşullarda çıkış almadı. Ancak Türkiye'de son dönemde dil öğretiminde gerçekleştirilen belirgin müfredat değişiklikleri ve özellikle de 2012 yılı reformu ile Türkiye bu konuda gelecek yıllarda daha çok hız alacaktır.

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