

## Evaluation of the Views of American Teaching Assistants on the English Language Education Offered at Universities in Turkey

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**Abstract:** Higher Education Council of Turkey assigned English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) from USA at 54 universities in Turkey in 2010 through Fulbright Scholarship in order to improve the quality of English language instruction at universities. A survey consisting of 19 likert-type items and 5 open-ended items was implemented on 25 ETAs working at different universities in Turkey. ETAs rated the Turkish instructors of English below average for using contemporary teaching methods, being dedicated to their job, being good at their job and motivating their students except for two items, lacking the necessary materials and equipment and their English competency, the mean scores of which were just above average. As for university students, ETAs disagree with the ideas that Turkish university students are motivated to learn English, lack technological facilities and like English. They agree that students lack the environment to support their learning English and a considerable number of them think that students have an aptitude to learn English. In addition, they rated the physical facilities, weekly hours allotted to English instruction, books and administrations below average. They believe that they shared information and experience with Turkish instructors and contributed significantly to English instruction. Finally, they suggest that homogeneous classes should be formed and foreign teaching assistants should be frequently employed.

**Key Words:** English Teaching Assistants, Views, Higher Education Council, English instruction, Universities

## Amerikan Öğretim Asistanlarının Türkiye'deki Üniversitelerde Verilen İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Hakkındaki Görüşlerinin Değerlendirilmesi

**Özet:** Yükseköğretim Kurulu 2010-2011 akademik yılında, Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde verilen İngilizce eğitiminin niteliğini artırmak amacıyla 37 üniversitede 54 Amerikalı İngilizce Öğretim Asistanı (İÖA) görevlendirmiştir. Bu öğretim asistanlarına 19'u likert, 5'i açık uçlu olmak üzere toplam 24 maddeden oluşan bir anket verilmiş ve bu anketi 25 katılımcı cevaplamıştır. Yabancı öğretim asistanları Türk öğretim elemanlarını çağdaş öğretim yöntemleri kullanma, işlerine adanmış olma, işlerinde iyi olma ve öğrencilerini motive etme konularında ortalamanın altında değerlendirmişler; gerekli materyal ve ekipmanlardan yoksun olmaları ve İngilizce yeterlikleri konusunda ise ortalamanın biraz üzerinde değerlendirmişlerdir. Üniversite öğrencileri söz konusu olduğunda, öğretim asistanları öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenmeye güdülenmiş olmaları, teknolojik imkanlardan yoksun olmaları ve İngilizceyi sevmeleri ile ilgili olan maddelere katılmamışlar; öğrencilerin dil öğrenmelerini destekleyecek çevreden yoksun olduklarına katılmışlar ve hatırı sayılır bir kısmı ise öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenme yeteneklerinin olduğuna inancını vurgulamıştır. Buna ek olarak, fiziki imkanlar, dil öğretimine ayrılan haftalık ders saatleri, ders kitaplarının nitelikleri ve yönetimlerin destekleri konusunda ortalamanın altında değerlendirmede bulunmuşlardır. Öğretim elemanlarıyla bilgi ve tecrübe paylaşımında bulduklarını ve İngilizce derslerine anlamlı düzeyde katkıda bulduklarını düşünmektedirler. Homojen sınıfların oluşturulmasını ve Türkiye'de yabancı okutmanların sıklıkla görevlendirilmesini önermişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İngilizce Öğretim Asistanları, Görüşler, Yükseköğretim Kurulu, İngilizce öğretimi, Üniversiteler

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English is the main language in today's world which is used as a means of communication among people who don't speak the same language. This makes it quite important for individuals and governments as well. So, countries around the world assign great importance to English instruction (Çelik, Bayraktar-Çepni and İlyas, 2013; Kızıldağ, 2009) and it is included in the curricula of schools at every level (Gömleksiz and Kan, 2007). Teaching English that can be used in daily life easily is one of the main challenges that a lot of countries including Turkey face at present.

Speaking English offers some advantages and therefore individuals spend a lot of time to learn it. In Turkey, for example, individuals targeting a well-paid job are expected to learn English. Most of the people in Turkey are aware of the importance of English for a career and they spend a lot of time and money to master it. English is a prerequisite to be employed in some private companies and sometimes in government positions as well. Moreover, one has to be successful in English exams so as to get a graduate or post graduate degree. The additional advantages of speaking English such as ease in communication with foreigners, following the international media, using internet more effectively can be added to the list. Indeed, the case is no different in the rest of the world other than the English speaking countries since English is considered as the lingua franca of our age.

As a result of this, English language is assigned great importance by the government in Turkey and English classes are provided in all educational levels; primary schools, secondary schools and universities (Gömleksiz and Kan, 2007). In addition, private schools also offer intensive foreign language education from nursery schools to universities. However, the quality of English language education in Turkey has been questioned for a long time and it is claimed that predetermined objectives in the English language curricula cannot be reached despite all the efforts and thus most of the students cannot learn English adequately (Gömleksiz, 1993; Atay, 2004; Çelebi, 2006, Işık, 2007) although they are exposed to English classes for a considerable period of time. The basic criticism is that only grammar and rules are taught and students have difficulty in speaking and listening. Teachers of English are also questioned (Demirezen, 2007; Yılmaz, 2007) as learner success in English instruction depends on the effectiveness of teachers (Çelik, Macianskiene and Aytın, 2013). Their educational

background and professional qualifications as well as methods they employ in teaching English are often criticised (Aslan, 2007).

English language education at universities in Turkey is no exception when it comes to the questioning of the quality of foreign language education. It is known that most university graduates have problems in using English in their personal and professional life. Universities have different applications in order to teach English to their students. The only application in common is that all of the first year students have to get a two or three-hour English class a week. Some universities provide English classes in the following years, too. In addition, most of the universities have one-year obligatory preparation class for the students who fail in the proficiency exams given by the university. Some universities prefer to offer one-year elective preparatory class. In preparatory classes, students are involved in intensive English courses between 20-30 hours a week. Also, universities provide vocational foreign language classes in accordance with students' departments.

In order to improve the quality of English language instruction at universities, Higher Education Council of Turkey decided to employ English Teaching Assistants (ETAs hereafter) from the United States of America at universities in Turkey as a result of cooperation with Fulbright Commission in the year 2010. The main aim of the programme was to improve the English speaking skills of university students through communicative approach by practising with native speakers of English in real life conditions ([basin.yok.gov.tr](http://basin.yok.gov.tr)). ETAs assisted the English language instructors in teaching English for one year at the universities where they were assigned.

As emphasized above, English language education is often questioned within Turkey. However, the views of foreigners, especially the native speakers of English, can contribute a lot to the improvement of foreign language education in Turkey as they have a different viewpoint. There are not many studies in literature on the evaluations or views of foreigners on the foreign language education offered at universities in Turkey. This study is very important as it reveals the views of native speakers of English on the English language education implemented at universities in Turkey and repeating such a study is quite hard.

The aim of this study is to reveal the views of English Teaching Assistants from the United States of America who worked at various universities in Turkey for one year on the English language education offered at the universities in Turkey.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Research Design

The study is a qualitative one and survey design (Karasar, 2005) was used to carry out the study. Studies carried out in survey design aims at reflecting the existing situation as it really is without any manipulation.

### 2.2. Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of 54 English Teaching Assistants from the United States of America visiting Turkey through Fulbright Scholarship between September 2010 and June 2011. The teaching assistants were distributed to 37 different universities. All of the 54 ETAs were taken as the sampling. Only 25 ETAs answered the questionnaire and they made up the sampling of the study. The two of the ETAs were assigned to Bartın University, where the researcher worked.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect data, a questionnaire was developed on internet through surveymonkey.com based on the researcher's observations and interviews with the two ETAs and the link of the questionnaire was sent to 54 ETAs working at 37 universities in Turkey with the help of two ETAs who were then working at Bartın University. The two ETAs, who knew all the other ETAs by person, added their message requesting that the questionnaire be replied as soon as possible under researcher's own explanation. Also, the two ETAs assisted the researcher while preparing the likert type and open ended items and they proofread the questionnaire when it was completed by the researcher. The necessary corrections were made on the questionnaire in accordance with the recommendations of the two ETAs. They checked whether the items were comprehensible and serve for the purpose they have been developed.

At the top of the questionnaire, demographic information about the ETAs such as teaching experience, age and gender were collected. The departments at which ETAs studied during their undergraduate, graduate and/or post-graduate education were intended to be determined in this part; however, this part was misunderstood by the participants and they gave inconsistent responds. Therefore, ETAs' responses to this part weren't included in this study. After this initial part, there were a sum of 19 five point likert-type items ranging from "strongly agree" pointed with 5 to "strongly disagree" pointed with 1. Five of these likert-type

items were negatively keyed and the rest were positively keyed. The first 6 items are concerned with Turkish instructors of English at universities. The 5 items between 7 and 11 are related with university students having English classes at the time of the implementation. The next 5 items, from 12 up to 16, are concerned with English classes, weekly hours, course books and administrations at universities. The last three items are about ETAs themselves. At the end of the questionnaire, there are 5 open-ended items. Score intervals for each of the five statements, which will serve as a measure for the interpretation of likert items, are given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Score Intervals for the Statements in the Five-point Likert Scale**

Statement	Corresponding Score in the Scale	Score Interval
Strongly agree	5	4.20 - 5.00
Agree	4	3.40 - 4.19
Neither agree nor disagree	3	2.60 - 3.39
Disagree	2	1.80 - 2.59
Strongly Disagree	1	1.00 - 1.79

The data obtained via the questionnaire were saved in surveymonkey.com and the frequencies, percentages and mean values belonging to each of the items were given in this website automatically. The data provided by participants for each of the items were analysed and interpreted.

Data collection process lasted for four months starting in February, 2011 and ending in June, 2011. ETAs started to work at universities in September, 2010 and they filled in the survey after they had worked at universities for at least five months. It is considered that a period of five months would be adequate for ETAs to make reasonable judgments about English language education offered at universities they worked for.

### 3. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The findings obtained through the questionnaire consisting of 19 five point likert-type items and five open-ended items and related interpretations are given below.

#### 3.1. Findings and Interpretation on the Demographic Information about ETAs

At the beginning of the questionnaire, demographic information such as teaching experience, age and gender were collected. Firstly, teaching experience of the participants ranged from 0 to 5 years. The mean teaching experience was 1.71 years. In addition, ETAs' ages ranged from 21 to 28 years with a mean of 23.8 years. Finally, 15 of the ETAs were girls

and 10 of them were boys. The table below demonstrates ETAs' teaching experience and ages with their frequencies.

**Table 2: Frequencies of ETAs' Teaching Experience and Ages**

Teaching Experience (Years)	Frequency	Age	Frequency
No teaching experience	2	21	1
1	12	22	5
2	7	23	10
3	2	24	2
4	-	25	1
5	2	26	2
		27	3
		28	1
$\bar{X} : 1.71$	<b>N= 25</b>	$\bar{X} : 23.8$	<b>N= 25</b>

Taking the data given in Table 2 into consideration, it can be said that ETAs consisted mostly of young people who had just graduated from university and also most of them weren't experienced in teaching in general and specifically in teaching English. 60% of them were female teaching assistants and only 40% were male.

### 3.2. Findings and Interpretation on Turkish Instructors of English

ETAs and Turkish instructors of English at universities worked together. Turkish instructors and ETAs taught in English classes together and ETAs assisted the instructors during the English teaching process. Thus, ETAs observed the instructors closely while they were teaching English in and out of class. The percentages, frequencies and mean scores of ETAs' evaluations about Turkish instructors of English are given in Table 3 below. Frequencies are given in parentheses next to the percentages for each item.

Table 3: ETAs' Views on Turkish Instructors of English

Likert Items	Percentages and Frequencies					$\bar{X}$
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	
1. Turkish Instructors of English use contemporary teaching methods.	12% (3)	36% (9)	28% (7)	24% (6)	0%	2.64
2. Turkish Instructors of English are dedicated to their job.	20% (5)	32% (8)	16% (4)	28% (7)	4% (1)	2.64
3. Turkish Instructors of English are good at their job.	8% (2)	32% (8)	36% (9)	24% (6)	0%	2.76
4. Turkish Instructors of English have a good command of English.	4% (1)	36% (9)	16% (4)	32% (8)	12% (3)	3.12
5. Turkish Instructors of English know how to motivate their students.	32% (8)	52% (13)	16% (4)	0%	0%	1.84
*6. Turkish Instructors of English lack the required materials and/or equipment to teach English.	4% (1)	24% (6)	28% (7)	28% (7)	16% (4)	3.28 **2.72

\* Negatively keyed item.

\*\*The mean score when the score above is inverted.

When the data in Table 3 are examined, it is observed that ETAs gave the highest score to the 6<sup>th</sup> item, a negatively keyed one, with a mean score of 3.28, slightly above average. This means that a considerable number (44%), but not the majority of the ETAs believe that Turkish instructors of English lack the required materials and/or equipment to teach English. They don't totally agree on this item as the mean score ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.28) suggests although they are inclined to agree on it though. This item has nothing to do with the instructors themselves but it is concerned with the facilities the institution provides. The 4<sup>th</sup> item is another one that is rated above average ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.12) by the participants. This means that the participants can't decide whether the instructors can use English effectively or not even though they tend towards agreeing on it as the mean score suggests. Except for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> items, ETAs scored the instructors below average in the remaining four items. It means that the overall mean score ( $\bar{X}$  = 2.62 when the inverted negatively keyed items are considered) of these six items is below average, which can be considered as an unfavourable outcome on the side of the instructors. The scores of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> items are slightly below average, whereas that of the 5<sup>th</sup> item is fairly low with a mean score of 1.84, the lowest of all. Thus, it can be claimed that ETAs neither agree nor disagree with the ideas that the instructors use

contemporary teaching methods ( $\bar{x}$  =2.64), are dedicated to their job ( $\bar{x}$  =2.64), and are good at doing their job ( $\bar{x}$  =2.76). In addition, ETAs disagree with the idea that the instructors know how to motivate their students ( $\bar{x}$  =1.84). What is surprising here is that none of the ETAs agree or strongly agree with this idea. It seems that the most troublesome point for the instructors among the six items listed in the table above is motivating their students.

### 3.3. Findings and Interpretation on Turkish University Students

ETAs taught English to the students at universities where they were assigned. Thus, they had the opportunity to observe their behaviour patterns. ETAs' observations and evaluations regarding the students are given in Table 4 below. Frequencies are given in parentheses next to the percentages for each item.

**Table 4: ETAs' Views on Turkish University Students**

Likert Items	Percentages and Frequencies					$\bar{X}$
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	
7. Turkish university students are motivated to learn English.	20% (5)	44% (11)	28% (7)	8% (2)	0%	2.24
8. Turkish university students have an aptitude for learning English.	12% (3)	12% (3)	28% (7)	32% (8)	16% (4)	3.28
*9. Turkish university students lack the technological facilities necessary to learn English.	20% (5)	44% (11)	20% (5)	12% (3)	4% (1)	2.36 **3.64
10. Turkish university students enjoy English.	24% (6)	28% (7)	20% (5)	28% (7)	0%	2.52
*11. The students usually lack the environment (friends, media, physical facilities) that can support their language learning.	4% (1)	28% (7)	4% (1)	32% (8)	32% (8)	3.60 **2.40

\* Negatively keyed item.

\*\*The mean score when the score above is inverted.

It is clear in the table above that ETAs disagree with the ideas that Turkish university students are motivated to learn English ( $\bar{x}$  =2.24) and they enjoy English ( $\bar{x}$  =2.52). However, they don't have a consensus on the idea that students have an aptitude for learning English even though a considerable number of them ( $\bar{x}$  =3.28) believe so. Also, ETAs disagree with the statement that students lack the technological facilities ( $\bar{x}$  =2.36). In the 11<sup>th</sup> item, 64% of the ETAs agree with the idea that students lack the environment that can support their language learning ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.60), a problem frequently mentioned in Turkey. Of all the five items listed in the table, ETAs regard only 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> items as a problem. They don't think that there is something wrong with students' aptitudes and technological facilities stated in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>



items. This means that they point to different sources as the main cause of the problems, not the students. The data belonging to the 5<sup>th</sup> item listed in Table 3 explains why the students lack motivation in English classes and point to the instructors.

### 3.4. Findings and Interpretation on the Facilities and Administrators

In the four items from 12 to 15, the facilities essential to teach English fruitfully and administrators at universities are questioned. ETAs' views on these variables are given in table 5 below. Frequencies are given in parentheses next to the percentages for each item.

Table 5: ETAs' Views on the Facilities and Administrators

Likert Items	Percentages and Frequencies						$\bar{X}$
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	N/A	
*12. The classrooms in which English is taught are not adequately equipped.	4% (1)	24% (6)	24% (6)	40% (10)	4% (1)	4% (1)	3.17 **2.83
13. Weekly hours (excluding prep. classes) allotted to English are enough.	24% (6)	20% (5)	16% (4)	20% (5)	8% (2)	12% (3)	2.64
*14. The books used in English instruction lack the required qualities.	4% (1)	12% (3)	32% (8)	20% (5)	20% (5)	12% (3)	3.45 **2.54
15. Administrators at universities assign importance to English instruction.	16% (4)	28% (7)	16% (4)	16% (4)	16% (4)	8% (2)	2.87

\* Negatively keyed item.

\*\*The mean score when the score above is inverted.

As seen in the table, when the negatively keyed items are inverted the mean scores of these four items are all close to each other. It is surprising that not all the 25 participants rated the items listed in the table as is seen in the N/A column. ETAs neither agree nor disagree on the statement that classrooms are not adequately equipped ( $\bar{X}$  =3.17) although a considerable number of them (44%) think so. Again, they don't reach a consensus ( $\bar{X}$  =2.64) on whether the weekly hours allotted to English are enough or not as stated in the 13<sup>th</sup> item. However, they agree ( $\bar{X}$  =3.45) on the idea that the books used in English instruction lack the required qualities. As for the administrators, the participants can't reach a compromise ( $\bar{X}$  =2.87) on university administrators' attitudes towards English instruction. In order to have an idea on administrators' support to English instruction, the data belonging to the 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> items may help. When the data belonging to these three items are taken into consideration, it can be

concluded that ETAs have a negative view about administrators support to English instruction at universities in general.

### 3.5. Findings and Interpretation on ETAs' Evaluations on Their Own Performance

ETAs' evaluations on their own performance throughout their one-year stay in Turkey were one of the subjects to be found out through the questionnaire. For that purpose, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> items were written and rated by ETAs. Their evaluations are given in table 6 below. Frequencies are given in parentheses next to the percentages for each item.

Table 6: ETAs' Evaluations on Their Own Performance

Likert Items	Percentages and Frequencies						$\bar{X}$
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	N/A	
16. We have exchanged information and experience with Turkish instructors of English.	8% (2)	16% (4)	0%	52% (13)	16% (4)	8%(2)	3.57
17. As foreign instructors, we have contributed significantly to English classes at Turkish universities.	4% (1)	24% (6)	24% (6)	20% (5)	28% (7)	0%	3.44

When the two items in the table above are examined, it is observed that ETAs certainly agree with the idea that they have exchanged information and experience with Turkish instructors of English ( $\bar{X}$  =3.57) and they have contributed significantly to English classes ( $\bar{X}$  =3.44). Both of the mean scores are the highest scores that ETAs have rated for a positively keyed item in the questionnaire so far. Based on the researcher's experiences, who has worked with two of the ETAs for one year, it is a fact that ETAs have a different viewpoint in teaching English and the instructors have made use of it. As for their contribution to English classes, it can be claimed that they contributed to English classes positively as they were foreigners and native speakers of English, which aroused students' interest.

### 3.6. Findings and Interpretation on ETAs' Recommendations on English Instruction

Before passing on to open ended items where ETAs are free to say anything they like without being restricted, two recommendations were structured and included within likert type items for ETAs' evaluations. One of them was forming homogeneous classes and the

other was employing foreign instructors. The data belonging to these two variables are given in table 7 below. Frequencies are given in parentheses next to the percentages for each item.

**Table 7: ETAs' Recommendations on English Instruction**

Likert Items	Percentages and Frequencies						$\bar{X}$
	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	N/A	
18. Homogeneous classes should be formed for better English instruction.	0%	4% (1)	36% (9)	36% (9)	8% (2)	16% (4)	3.57
19. Foreign instructors should frequently be employed in Turkey in teaching English.	0%	4% (1)	20% (5)	44% (11)	32% (8)	0%	4.04

As can be seen in the table, ETAs agree on the statement that homogeneous classes should be formed with a considerably high mean score ( $\bar{X}$  =3.57) and thus they believe that it will increase the efficiency of English classes. In addition, they think that foreign instructors should be employed in English classes in Turkey with the highest mean score ( $\bar{X}$  =4.04) in the questionnaire. This idea can be verified examining the 17<sup>th</sup> item, in which they believe that they have contributed significantly ( $\bar{X}$  =3.44) to English classes.

### 3.7. Findings and Interpretation on the Open Ended Items

ETAs were asked to write their own thoughts and/or opinions in the five, semi-structured open ended items given at the end of the questionnaire. The open ended items are important in that they enable the participants to write their opinions independent of those of the researcher's. In this way, it is intended to obtain more objective data.

The first open ended item was worded as follows: *We could contribute to English instruction more if ...* so as to find out ETAs' views on what was missing or should be taken into consideration in English instruction process. All of the 25 participants wrote their opinions for this item, some did it in form of a huge paragraph. It is hard to categorise the answers; however, the dominant seven categories and their frequencies could be listed as; inadequate weekly hours (5), lack of a curriculum (5), lack of student motivation (4), physical facilities (4), formation of classes (4), using Turkish (3) and low level of students (2). Often, the participants mentioned more than one factor that's why the sum of frequencies may exceed the total number (25) of participants. Among the most prominent answers were:

*"We were given more class time and a curriculum to work with."* (inadequate weekly hours & lack of a curriculum)

*"It would be nice to have a model curriculum."* (lack of a curriculum)

*"Smaller class sizes would aid significantly in helping with classroom management."* (physical facilities)

*"The university's incentives structure caused students to be motivated to learn in class."* (lack of student motivation)

*"We had more resources available to us... like copy centers, books and projectors."* (physical facilities)

*"We had the opportunity to assign our students certain levels and form more homogeneous classes."* (formation of classes)

*"All teachers were dedicated to teaching in English instead of Turkish."* (using Turkish)

*"There were a base of English in the students already. Their skills are shockingly low despite prior years of instruction."* (low level of students)

As is seen in above sentences, ETAs complain about problems that can be categorised under seven titles as stated in the previous paragraph. Some of the categories listed above were also included in the likert-type questionnaire such as inadequate weekly hours (13<sup>th</sup> item), lack of student motivation (7<sup>th</sup> item), and physical facilities (partly 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> items and 12<sup>th</sup> item). ETAs' ratings for the items mentioned in the preceding sentence are usually consistent with the frequencies of categories listed in the preceding paragraph.

The second open ended item was worded as follows: *The biggest problem regarding English instruction at universities in Turkey is...* to find out ETAs' views on the existing problems of English instruction at universities based on their observations and experiences. All of the 25 participants wrote their opinions for this item. As for the dominant categories of factors, the outstanding ones and their frequencies are as follows; Turkish instructors (7), low student motivation (6), developing listening/speaking skills (5), using Turkish (4), large class size (3), inadequate weekly hours (3), lack of seriousness (3) and lack of a curriculum (2). Some of the prominent ideas were:

*"is the apathy and disrespect that Turkish teachers have toward their students... the extremely heavy teaching schedules that most teachers must take on also contribute to apathy."* (Turkish instructors)

*"lack of student motivation to speak. Perhaps with a clearer understanding of the goals of English teaching, and a greater emphasis on confidence in speaking, students would be more willing to learn."* (low student motivation)

*“the lack of emphasis on oral English. The students only want to learn English in order to pass a test.”* (developing listening/speaking skills)

*“many of the classes are still taught in Turkish and teachers are not as inclined to create a no-Turkish-policy.”* (using Turkish)

*“the biggest problem is class size which leads to issues with one teacher trying to instruct more than thirty students.”* (large class size)

*“students have so few hours of English instruction per week and there is no motivation to learn.”* (inadequate weekly hours and low student motivation)

*“that it isn’t taken seriously by anyone. There’s no punishment if students don’t come to classes unprepared, if they don’t do their homework, or even if they don’t come to class at all.”* (lack of seriousness)

*“that there is no curriculum at all.”* (lack of a curriculum)

As it can be seen in the sentences above, there are four shared categories with the preceding open ended item, which are inadequate weekly hours, lack of a curriculum, lack of student motivation and using Turkish. Some of the categories given above were included in likert-type items such as Turkish instructors (the first 6 items), student motivation (7<sup>th</sup> item), and weekly hours (13<sup>th</sup> item). For the first six likert-type items of the questionnaire, the mean score was 2.62 and it was below average, which is certainly not a desirable outcome on the side of Turkish instructors. Also, ETAs’ ratings for student motivation in the 7<sup>th</sup> item ( $\bar{x}=2.24$ ) and weekly hours in the 13<sup>th</sup> item ( $\bar{x}=2.64$ ) were below average, which means that they are inclined to regard these factors as problems when it comes to English instruction.

The third open ended item was worded as follows: *English instruction at universities in Turkey should / shouldn’t ...* to find out ETAs’ recommendations on English instruction at universities. The replies for this item can be grouped under the following categories: developing speaking/listening skills (10), elective course (6), instructors (4), and class size (2). To cite some of the responses:

*“have more emphasis on developing communicative skills. I find that many of my students can read and write decently but have terrible listening/speaking skills. There is also such a huge emphasis on learning grammar.”* (developing speaking/listening skills)

*“make English education elective so that students who are motivated to learn can have a chance to learn and those that don’t will not take up space in the classroom.”* (elective course)

*“be improved. The teachers speak in Turkish the entire class period and/or write on the board/read from a text. There is almost no student-teacher interaction from what I have observed.”* (instructors)

*“class sizes must be appropriate for language learning, under 30. Classrooms should be echo-free so that students have the physical ability to hear their instructors.”* (class size)

As is seen above, the recommendations listed by ETAs are usually consistent with those in other open ended items. Focusing on listening/speaking skills more instead of reading and writing is one of the factors that are repeated in four out of five open ended items usually as the first or second factor. It means that ETAs regard lack of communicative language in the class as one of the major problems in English instruction at universities. They also demand that English be elective and thus the students who are willing to learn English will not be prevented by the ones who are not.

The third open ended item was worded as follows: *The best way for Turks to learn English is ...* so as to find out the best way according to ETAs to learn English in Turkey. The replies can be grouped under the following categories: developing speaking/listening skills (9), travelling abroad (4), studying abroad (2), starting early (2) and using different methods (2). Some outstanding responses were;

*“through exposure to spoken English with a native English speaker.”* (developing listening/speaking skills)

*“by travelling abroad. Unfortunately, I do not believe that language teaching in Turkey is currently effective.”* (travelling abroad)

*“study abroad. Learning English in the current system is like saying you can learn how to be a doctor by watching a TV show about doctors. It is not happening.”* (studying abroad)

*“as a child. Having quality university programs is important but having quality opportunities in elementary schools is more important.”* (starting early)

*“to incorporate more contemporary methods, such as games and social networking. Being more creative with students is essential; they need to be motivated and inspired.”* (using different methods)

When the responses and categories above are considered, it is seen that they are consistent with the responses in the preceding items. Using a communicative language in the class and exposure to the target language are frequently emphasized by the ETAs in other open ended items. Developing listening/speaking skills is recommended by nine ETAs, the

frequency of which is almost equal to those of the other categories listed above. It can be claimed that it is the best way for Turks to learn English in ETAs' opinions.

The last item in the questionnaire was worded as *"Foreign language instruction at universities in USA is ..... compared to that in Turkey"*. In this item, ETAs were asked to compare and contrast the two foreign language instruction approaches and/or implementations in Turkey and USA. As English is the native language of USA, the term "foreign language" was used in this item. ETAs' responses can be grouped under the following titles with their frequencies beside them: good/better (11), more communicative (5), more intensive (3), more student-orientated (2), more engaging (2). Some of the outstanding responses were;

*"30 years ahead. The USA had similar instruction about 30 years ago with similar results. We currently employ modern practices and are achieving great results with motivated learners and multilingual graduates..."* (good/better)

*"foreign language instruction in US is better and more communicative than in Turkey, however, that is not to say the American model is ideal. If you want a model, look to Sweden, Finland or Denmark, who have multilingual populations even among the working class."* (good/better and more communicative)

*"more intensive; more technology is used; more focus on speaking and not just grammar."* (more intensive and more communicative)

*"in general, much more student-orientated."* (more student-orientated)

*"much more engaging, interactive and student-centered."* (more engaging and more student-orientated)

As can be observed in the above sentences, a considerable number of ETAs regard the English instruction in USA better than that in Turkey in some respects. Almost all of the responses were in favour of English instruction in USA rather than that in Turkey. Only one ETA wrote *"pretty much the same"* but he/she stated that the students in USA were more motivated and teachers were better. In addition, one of the ETAs stated that the implementations in the two countries were not comparable.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Being aware of the ideas of foreigners on English instruction at universities in Turkey is fairly valuable especially if they taught English in Turkey for at least one year. Unfortunately, there aren't many studies in the literature that reveal the views of foreigners, especially foreign teachers, on the English instruction at universities in Turkey. So, it is quite hard to find

similar studies to compare the results obtained in this study, which is a limitation indeed but makes the study worth reading.

ETAs rated the Turkish instructors of English below average in four items out of six. As the mean scores suggest, they couldn't decide whether the instructors use contemporary teaching methods; are dedicated to their job; are good at their job and know how to motivate their students. However, it should be kept in mind that all of the mean scores belonging to these four items were below average. Aslan (2007), Karaata (2007) and Okan and Bařaran (2007) criticise teachers of English for being incompetent in teaching English. They claim that a considerable number of teachers aren't qualified in teaching English as they didn't graduate from programmes where they were taught how to teach English. ETAs rated the instructors above average for the two items stating that they have a good command of English and they lack the required materials and/or equipment to teach English, which was worded negatively. Thus, it is observed that ETAs rated the instructors above average just for one item as one of the items is worded negatively. The only thing they consider positive about the instructors is that they have a good command of English and its mean score is just above average. In Okan and Bařaran's (2007) study on 859 teachers of English, 36.5% of them reported that they have trouble in comprehending what they read; 51.7% have trouble in listening; 40.6% of them have problems in writing and 52.3% have problems in speaking, which is partly consistent with the findings of this study. Thus, it can be concluded that overall opinion of ETAs regarding the instructors is negative. However, the study carried out by Solar-řekerci (2011) revealed that Turkish instructors of English working at universities in Turkey have a high level of self-efficacy, which means that they think they are efficacious in doing their job. Especially the first five items of the questionnaire can be linked to self-efficacy and the overall ratings of ETAs for these items aren't positive.

As for university students, ETAs disagree with the ideas that Turkish university students are motivated to learn English, lack technological facilities and like English. A PhD thesis carried out by Yılmaz (2014) based on the views of 66 university students revealed that the motivation scores of university students were  $\bar{x} = 66.90$  on average out of 100, which can be claimed to be sufficient, if not excellent, to engage in language learning activities. Also, the mean score of one item in the motivation scale was  $\bar{x} = 4.09$  out of 5, which was worded as "I like learning English" and  $\bar{x} = 1.59$  of the one worded as "I hate learning English". These findings don't



reflect the views of ETAs on this matter. As for the technological facilities, Aslan (2007) stresses the lack of contemporary course materials in classes, which is not consistent with the opinions of ETAs but Aslan's comments were not specifically concerned with the classes in higher education. His comments included primary and secondary education as well. ETAs agree that students lack the environment to support their learning English and a considerable number of them (48%) think that students have an aptitude to learn English unlike 24% who don't think so. When the number of people who can speak English well in Turkey is considered, it would not be surprising that students lack a supporting environment in learning English.

ETAs rated the idea that classrooms lack the required equipment above average but they were inclined to think that weekly hours allotted to English are not enough. Aslan (2007) also complains, in his study, about the lack of contemporary course materials and inadequate weekly hours allocated to English instruction at universities. In addition, ETAs agreed that the course books used in English instruction lack the required qualities. Büyükduman (2005) also complains about some shortcomings of the course books used in English instruction based on the views of teachers although she lists the positive sides of them as well. They didn't have a common idea on administrators' support to English instruction but they rated it below average. It is known that the administrators at universities don't interfere with the instruction process as much as the ones in primary and secondary education do as the lecturers at universities are free to choose the books and develop the curriculum on their own. So, administrators at universities have a limited effect on instructional process and their support or lack of it does not affect deeply the English education.

They believe that they exchanged information and experience with Turkish instructors and contributed significantly to English classes, which should be verified through a study on the instructors who taught with ETAs. The writer of this study, who worked with two ETAs for one year, believes that they contributed significantly to English language instruction and shared their information and experience with Turkish instructors. They recommend that homogeneous classes should be formed and foreign instructors should be employed in English language instruction. Bülbül (2013) emphasizes the necessity of homogeneous classes, which supports the views of ETAs on this matter. As Coşkun (2009) points out, foreign instructors are assigned in Turkey for foreign language instruction and this should be sustained so as to increase the efficiency of foreign language classes.

As for the open-ended items, ETAs emphasized developing communicative language and listening/speaking skills more frequently than others. The second most dominant category was inadequate weekly hours and it was followed by physical facilities. Turkish instructors were often mentioned in a negative sense. Lack of a model curriculum, lack of student motivation and using Turkish in the class were the outstanding factors in teaching learning process mentioned by ETAs. Cengizhan (2007) carried out a study on preparatory classes of three universities and pointed out that the course materials used were communicative, the instructors were well-informed on new methods and techniques but there weren't any curriculum development offices at none of the universities studied, the only point consistent with the opinions of ETAs. As stated above, Aslan (2007) believes that weekly hours allocated to English instruction are not enough and classrooms lack contemporary course materials, which is consistent with the findings in this study. Sarıçoban (2010) stressed in his study that 81.2% of university students have positive attitudes towards using Turkish in English classes and "teachers almost always need to use native language to express their own emotions just to motivate their students and help them develop positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language" (p.171). This may explain why the instructors tend to use Turkish in English classes.

To conclude, the views of English Teaching Assistants should be taken into consideration as they have a completely different viewpoint. What is more, the data they provide are quite valuable since it is usually hard to find foreigners who teach at least one year in Turkey and get their views. Turkish instructors of English should develop their teaching skills continuously and students should be motivated adequately to learn English. It can be achieved through explaining the importance of mastering English and its possible advantages in life to students. Physical facilities should be improved so as to teach English more fruitfully. Furthermore, homogeneous classes should be formed in order to bring together the students who share similar qualities, which will make it easier for students to keep up with the pace in the classroom. Finally, based on the opinions of the researcher, who worked with ETAs for one year and observed their performance and contributions, opportunities to assign foreign instructors in English classes in Turkey should be utilised to increase the efficiency of the instruction process.

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## GENİŞ ÖZET

Yükseköğretim Kurulu 2010-2011 akademik yılında, Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde verilen İngilizce eğitiminin niteliğini artırmak amacıyla 37 üniversitede 54 Amerikalı İngilizce Öğretim Asistanı (İÖA) görevlendirmiştir. Görevlendirilen asistanlar bir yıl boyunca İngilizce derslerinde o dersleri vermekle yükümlü olan öğretim elemanları ile birlikte öğretim sürecine dahil olmuşlardır.

Bir yıl boyunca Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde İngilizce dersleri veren bu öğretim asistanlarının gözlemlerinden yararlanmak ve bu konuda çok farklı bir bakış açısına tanık olmak amacıyla 19'u beşli likert, 5'i açık uçlu olmak üzere toplam 24 sorudan oluşan bir anket hazırlanmış ve internet üzerinden 54 öğretim asistanına ulaştırılmıştır. Bu konuda Bartın Üniversitesinde görevlendirilmiş olan iki öğretim asistanından da yardım alınmış ve anket maddeleri onlarla birlikte oluşturulmuştur. Araştırma tarama deseninde yapılmış bir çalışmadır. 54 öğretim asistanının hepsi örneklem olarak alınmış ancak ankete yalnızca 25 öğretim asistanı katılmıştır. Veri toplama süreci Şubat 2011'de başlamış, Haziran 2011'de tamamlanmıştır.

Bulgulara göre, öğretim asistanlarının ortalama öğretim tecrübesi 1.71 yıl, yaş ortalamalarının ise 23.8 yıl olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Katılımcılar Türk öğretim elemanlarını çağdaş öğretim yöntemleri kullanma, işlerine adanmış olma, işlerinde iyi olma ve öğrencilerini motive etme konularında ortalamanın altında değerlendirmişlerdir. Ortalama puanlara göre en büyük sorunun öğrencileri motive etme konusunda yaşandığı söylenebilir. Yabancı öğretim asistanları öğretim elemanlarını İngilizce öğretiminde ihtiyaç duyulan materyal ve ekipmanlardan yoksun olmaları ve İngilizce yeterlikleri konusunda ise ortalamanın biraz üzerinde değerlendirmişlerdir. Ancak, gerekli materyal ve ekipmanlardan yoksun olma maddesi olumsuz ifade edildiğinden bu maddenin ortalama puanının ortalamanın üzerinde olması da olumsuz olarak algılanmalıdır. Öğretim elemanları konusundaki tek olumlu değerlendirme İngilizce seviyelerini sorgulayan maddenin ortalamanın üzerinde bir puana sahip olmasıdır.

Üniversite öğrencilerini değerlendiren maddelerde ise öğretim asistanları öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenmeye güdülenmiş olmaları, teknolojik imkanlardan yoksun olmaları ve İngilizceyi sevmeleri ile ilgili olan maddelere katılmamışlar; öğrencilerin dil öğrenmelerini destekleyecek çevreden yoksun olduklarına katılmışlar ve ortalamanın biraz üzerinde bir puan ortalaması yakalanmışsa da hatırı sayılır bir kısmı ise (48%) öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenme yeteneklerinin olduğu yönünde görüş bildirmiştir.

İngilizce öğretim asistanları fiziki imkanlar, dil öğretimine ayrılan haftalık ders saatleri, ders kitaplarının nitelikleri ve yönetimlerin İngilizce öğretimine verdikleri destek konusunda ortalamanın altında değerlendirmede bulunmuşlardır. Bu durum, söz konusu faktörler hakkında ağırlıklı olarak olumsuz görüşe sahip oldukları şeklinde yorumlanabilir.

Yabancı öğretim asistanları yerli öğretim elemanlarıyla bilgi ve tecrübe paylaşımında bulduklarını ve İngilizce derslerine anlamlı düzeyde katkıda bulduklarını düşünmektedirler. Böylece, bir yıl boyunca İngilizce öğretimi konusunda ortaya koymuş oldukları performansı beğendiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Açık uçlu maddelerden önceki son iki yapılandırılmış maddede benzer niteliklere sahip öğrencilerin bir araya getirilmesi suretiyle homojen sınıfların oluşturulmasını ve Türkiye’de yabancı okutmanların sıklıkla görevlendirilmesini önermişlerdir.

Açık uçlu beş maddede, katılımcılar tekrar edilme sıklıkları göz önüne alındığında sırasıyla öğrencilerin dinleme/konuşma becerilerinin geliştirilmesi ve sınıf içinde iletişimsel bir yaklaşımın benimsenmesini, hazırlık sınıfları hariç olmak üzere İngilizce öğretimi için ayrılan haftalık ders saatlerinin artırılmasını ve fiziki imkanların geliştirilmesini önermişlerdir. Türk öğretim elemanlarının öğretim becerilerini geliştirmelerini, model olarak alınabilecek bir eğitim programının olmayışını, öğrencilerin yeterince güdülenmiş olmamalarını ve sınıfta Türkçe kullanımını da tekrar tekrar vurgulamışlardır.

Sonuç olarak, ülkemizdeki İngilizce eğitimi ve hatta genel olarak yabancı dil eğitimi için oldukça değerli olan bu bulgular ciddiyle değerlendirilmeli ve yabancı dil eğitiminin niteliğinin artırılması için çaba sarf edilmelidir.