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**CHALLENGES IN EFL EDUCATION IN**

**TURKEY AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FROM**

**THE TERTIARY-LEVEL INSTRUCTORS'**

**PERSPECTIVES**

**Türkiye'de Yabancı Dil Eğitiminde Karşılaşılan Güçlükler ve**

**Yüksek Öğretimde Çalışan Eğitimcilerin Bakış Açısından**

**Muhtemel Çözümler**

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**Abstract**

In this study, the challenges encountered in foreign language education in Turkish context and instructors' suggestions for overcoming the challenges were investigated. The participants of the study included 15 instructors working at the same university during the academic year of 2016-2017. The study followed a qualitative research design. The data were collected through a written interview form including open-ended questions. The qualitative analysis of the collected data suggested that the challenges encountered by the EFL instructors fall in three main categories: external factors (inappropriate physical conditions of schools, inappropriate curriculum, lack of appropriate teaching materials, strict curriculum, inappropriate evaluation system, lack of technological facilities, heavy reliance on exams, and time limitations), student-related factors (learners' demotivation, biases against language learning, low proficiency, and lower life standards), and teacher-related factors (lack of certain qualities, habits of traditional teaching, demotivation, decrease in teacher prestige). Likewise, their suggestions for a more effective foreign language education pointed to the improvement of the challenges in these categories.

**Keywords:** Challenges, EFL education, Solutions, Quality of education, EFL instructors

**Özet**

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'de yabancı dil öğretiminde karşılaşılan güçlükler ve eğitimcilerin bu güçlüklerin üstesinden gelme konusundaki önerileri araştırılmıştır. Araştırmaya katılanlar 2016-2017 akademik yılında aynı üniversitede çalışan 15 eğitimciyi kapsamaktadır. Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma deseni izlenmiştir. Veriler açık uçlu sorular içeren yazılı görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır. Toplanan verilerin nitel analizi; karşılaşılan zorlukların üç ana kategoriye ayrıldığını göstermiştir: dış faktörler (okulların uygunsuz fiziki koşulları, uygunsuz müfredat, uygun öğretim materyallerindeki eksiklik, sınavlara aşırı önem verilmesi ve zaman kısıtlamaları), öğrencilerle alakalı faktörler (öğrenci demotivasyonu, dil öğrenmeye karşı edinilen ön yargılar, düşük dil yeterliği ve düşük yaşam standartları) ve öğretmenle alakalı faktörler (bazı nitelikleri taşınamaları, geleneksel dil öğretim alışkanlıkları, demotivasyon, öğretmen prestijindeki azalma). Aynı şekilde, daha etkili yabancı dil öğretimi konusundaki önerileri bu kategorilerdeki güçlüklerin iyileştirilmesi gerektiğine dikkat çekmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Güçlükler, İngilizce öğretimi, Çözümler, Eğitimin kalitesi, İngiliz dili eğitimcileri

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### **Introduction**

Foreign language education has been a popular area for decades. However, despite the emphasis on the teaching of English as a foreign language, the proficiency level students achieve seems to be far from the actual goals of foreign language education (Akbari, 2015). After years of English courses, most students still lack the ability to use English for communicative purposes in most countries. Turkey, in this sense, is no exception and encounters a number of challenges in the process of foreign language teaching (Acat & Demiral, 2002). Turkey has undergone a number of radical changes in the field with no productive results so far (Çelebi, 2006). Apparently, the challenges can be best detected by the educators themselves. When the reasons for failure are well-defined, the solutions can be more realistic.

Previous studies (Acat & Demiral, 2002; Işık, 2008; Haznedar, 2010; Khan, 2011) suggested a number of challenges that could be attributed to the failure in foreign language education. These challenges include lack of motivation, traditional habits of teaching, lack of effective teaching materials, problems with language policy and assessment, inefficient teacher education programs or in-service training.

The study by Fareh (2010) looked into the reasons why the outcomes in EFL education are far from what is expected in the Arab world. The findings suggested that the failure can be attributed to a number of factors including lack of proper teacher training, demotivation among students, improper evaluation methods and traditional teaching approaches.

Tosun, in his article published in 2006, discussed the topic from a wide perspective. According to the researcher, the English preparatory class that students attend at tertiary level is doomed to fail because of educators that cannot live up to the needs of learners. That is, most educators lack the necessary qualities to teach English to learners who have already received an education of years with no fruitful learning outcomes. Students are demotivated, they accept the failure from the beginning, and educators' effort falls short under such conditions. He continues that the situation is even worse in universities in the rural part of Turkey, where students' university entrance scores are lower than big universities.

Literature is full of research trying to grasp the real reasons why Turkish students cannot learn English despite the effort and financial investment. A recent study by Demirpolat (2015) summarises the problems as follows: low-quality teacher education programs, hiring teachers of other branches to teach English courses, inappropriate physical conditions of schools, ineffective teaching materials, inappropriate methodologies and lack of appropriate guidance for EFL teachers. Her suggestion for these challenges suggests the improvement of the above-stated issues. In other words, teachers should be provided with a more effective teacher training program which prepares them for the realities in Turkey. Teachers, on the other hand, need to improve learners' communicative skills despite the grammatical expectations of exams. Class sizes should be smaller and - when not possible- teachers need to know how to engage the students in big classes.

This study investigated the problems that educators encounter at tertiary level and potential solutions to them. The aim was to look into the challenges at the very place they are the most common: the eastern part of Turkey. The perspectives of the participants who have a history of working in the rural parts of Turkey can take the results of the previous studies one step further. A number of radical changes can change the fate of Turkish EFL learners. When the problems are carefully addressed, there can be higher hopes for a high-quality foreign language education in the future.

## Method

### Participants

This qualitative study aimed at examining challenges encountered in foreign language education in tertiary level and potential solutions for the problems from instructors' point of view. The researcher conducted the study in the second term of 2016-2017 academic year with the participation of 15 lecturers working at the same institute at that time. Of the 15 participants, 8 were male and 7 were female. Their ages ranged from 29 to 54. Their weekly workload was similar with each other, the average being 15 hours a week. The randomly selected participants gave their consent to take part in the study. In addition, for convenience during the analysis process, the participants were numbered from 1 to 15. In the article, they are used in short forms such as P1 for Participant 1 or P2 for Participant 2.

### Instrument

For collecting data, the researcher developed a written interview form which was evaluated by an expert in the field. The written interview form included two open ended questions about the challenges instructors observe and their potential solutions to such challenges. These questions aimed at investigating the on-going foreign language education from instructors' perspective. The participants returned their written answers in paper in a two-week period.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The interview questions were handed to the participants in written form. They were kindly asked to return their answers in two weeks so that they had enough time to provide well-thought answers. The researchers used content analysis following the steps suggested by Creswell (2014) to analyse the qualitative data. The written answers were carefully analysed to find themes, categories and codes. An expert in the field checked the defined categories, codes, and themes so that they were in harmony with each other. For the purpose of ensuring inter-rater reliability, the researcher and the expert, who is an ELT instructor currently working at tertiary level, held two meetings during the analysis process to compare and contrast their themes and categories. After each meeting, a few minor changes were made in the analysed data so that the themes and categories were a perfect match. Besides code-checking as suggested by Creswell (2014), both raters also reflected on their own final theme and category charts to check for the harmony.

The steps followed by the researcher during the content analysis process are as seen in the following figure.

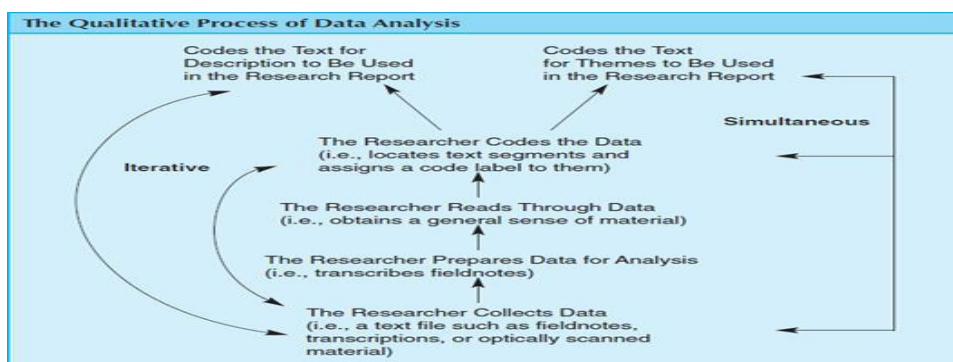


Figure 1. The steps of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2012, p.237)

## Results

The research identified two themes based on the qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the participants.

Table 1. *Theme#1 Challenges in EFL Education in Turkey*

	<b>N</b>	
Category # 1 External Factors	Inappropriate physical conditions	15
	Inappropriate curriculum	14
	Lack of appropriate teaching materials	5
	Strict curriculum	5
	Inappropriate examinations	3
	Lack of technological facilities	3
	Heavy reliance on exams	2
Category # 2 Student-related Factors	Time limitations	2
	Demotivation	9
	Biases against language learning	2
	Low proficiency	2
Category # 3 Teacher-related Factors	Lower life standards	1
	Lack of certain qualities	6
	Habits of traditional teaching	5
	Demotivation	3
	Decrease in teacher prestige	2

The first theme includes the challenges in EFL education in Turkey from the participants' point of view. According to the data, educators may encounter problems that are mainly external factors. This kind of challenges reversely affects the quality of EFL education, yet, need to be addressed by people in charge rather than teachers themselves. In this category, the most commonly mentioned problem is inappropriate physical conditions of schools and classrooms. All of the participants expressed negative teaching experiences resulting from physical challenges. Almost all of their comments included problems regarding the size of classrooms. For them, teachers fail to reach their full potential in skillful teaching because of large classrooms. P1 summarises the issue as follows:

*"I can't apply my knowledge to my real courses because there 80 students in each. I try my best to encourage students to participate in my course. For this, I try to appeal to their sense of humour so that I could attract their attention. My teaching does not reflect my potential, but I'm doing my best under the current conditions."*

Another participant (P12) addresses the issue from a different point of view. His short comment calls for attention from people in charge.

*"The public schools in certain regions still lack the basic requirements like appropriate heating. Which material can be super effective when students are freezing?"*

Another widely stated problem in EFL teaching is the inappropriate curriculum that teachers are forced to follow. According to the participants of the current study, the current curricula at all levels of education are boring, full of unnecessary detail regarding grammar, heavy-loaded, and ineffective. Not only students but also teachers are reversely affected by such improper curricula. P7 stated that

*"The heavy curriculum puts a burden on teachers' shoulders. They try hard to cover all the content in their courses. They have time-related issues. Therefore, they need to skip to new units before the previous ones have completely been digested by the learners."*

Another challenge stated by the participants is strict curriculum that teachers are meant to follow. Five of the participants believed that a strict curriculum restricts the teachers in the classroom and prevents them from reaching their full potential in teaching. The comment by P4 summarises the issue as follows:

*"Curriculum that leaves no room for teachers' own options about what to teach, when to teach, and how to teach is one of the biggest problems existing in ELT in Turkey."*

The way teachers teach the content is of great importance in education. However, the assessment type also has a big role to play in the quality of outcome. Three of the participants clearly stated that the current assessment types commonly used in EFL courses or national exams in Turkey do not evaluate learners' basic language skills. Without a focus on listening and speaking skills, exams only assess how well students can memorise the given information about the language itself: Grammar. According to the participants, students do not enjoy English courses because they are not expected to communicate in the target language.

According to two of the participants, the heavy reliance on exams in EFL courses challenges both teachers and students. As P8 comments, the frequent and heavy exams lead to 'students who consider English as not a language but the topic of a course'. When learners try to learn English only to pass an exam, it is harder for them to use it as a means of communication.

The strict curriculum and heavy content load was stated as a challenge above. However, its negative impact is even worse than being boring for both teachers and students. P4 criticises the heavy curriculum for causing time-related issues that put burden on both parties' shoulders:

*"Language learning takes time. However, neither students nor teachers are given time to concentrate on their jobs. People in charge believe that languages can be learnt by just reading the textbooks without any practice."*

In addition to the above-stated external factors that might pose a challenge in EFL education, there might be student-related factors as well. The most commonly mentioned factor in this category is student demotivation. All of the participants expressed that they try hard to engage their learners in their courses: all in vain. P13 explains his idea as follows:

*"I want my teaching to be student-centered. However, I end up talking myself. The reasons for that are reluctant, demotivated learners and overcrowded classrooms."*

According to two of the participants, students are biased against language learning: they believe they cannot succeed in it no matter what. However, it is not only students' fault to develop such a way of thinking. P10 summarises the issue from instructors' point of view:

*"Students are generally biased against English courses. They are convinced that they cannot learn English. The reason for that is, of course, the years of traditional teaching methods they have been exposed to. You cannot learn language by memorisation only."*

As could be understood from the comment, learners' biases against foreign language learning and demotivation can be deeply rooted in wrong teaching practices they have been exposed to for years. It is, again, teachers' responsibility to teach their learner through methods that suit their learners' the most. Only then can students develop healthy beliefs about foreign language learning and what they can do to foster it.

Two of the participants criticised their students for knowing nothing despite long years of foreign language education. According to them, teachers cannot help students when they start every new academic year remembering nothing related to English course.

One of the participants mentioned learners' socio-economic status as one of the factors that impact the quality of learning outcome. According to the participant, when learners lead a life in poverty, *'their priority cannot be learning an additional language'*. In other words, for such learners, learning English cannot go beyond being a subject at school. Therefore, they are less likely to put effort in learning it.

Teachers, as an indispensable part of education, play a role in the quality of education for obvious reasons. Teacher-related factors might be directly related to the learning outcomes. For the participants of the present study, teachers need to have certain qualities to ensure the quality of education. They need to improve themselves in their field. P11 comments as follows:

*"Teachers who do not do anything to improve themselves are also a problem in our current education system. When they cannot keep up with the changing necessities and requirement, they cannot choose appropriate teaching materials and methods, and do not know how to apply them."*

Another teacher-related factor includes teacher motivation. They expressed several different reasons for teacher demotivation, yet the result is the same: failing to reach their true potentials. When teachers are reluctant to teach in courses, they stop putting effort in the process. The main cause for demotivation was expressed to be students' demotivating attitudes.

Being a teacher was once very prestigious in Turkey. However, in time, due to several factors, the situation severely changed to the opposite. According to the participants, the decrease in teachers' prestige negatively impacts the quality of education. P12 utters that:

*"Disrespect for teachers is quite common nowadays. They are currently accused of failing at teaching English. For parents and students, there is nothing that they can change in themselves. Teachers are ignored in public, this negatively affects their teaching practices."*

Table 2. Theme #2 *Ways to Improve the Quality of Foreign Language Education in Turkey*

	<b>N</b>	
Category # 1 External Factors	A carefully-revised curriculum	11
	Improving schools' physical conditions	11
	Providing chance for contact with native speakers	2
Category # 2 Student-related Enhancements	Increasing student awareness	7
	Motivating learners to learn English	4
Category # 3 Teacher-related Enhancements	Additional teacher training courses	7
	Inclusion of appropriate teaching materials	7
	Improved teaching practices	6
	Improving teachers' life standards	2
	Study/Work abroad experiences	2

The second theme in this section provides participant perceptions regarding how to improve the quality of foreign language learning in Turkish context. The first category in the theme includes external enhancements that could contribute to foreign language education. Most of the participants of the present study believe that the current curriculum needs serious revisions to suit the changing needs of learners. They criticised the curriculum for being boring, strict, heavy-loaded and encouraging learning by memorisation. The comment by P12 was as follows:

*“The curriculum should be revised because currently it only forces learning by memorisation. Students are not empty cups to fill with memorised knowledge. They have to know how to efficiently use what they know in real life.”*

Schools' physical conditions have a role to play in the quality of foreign language education, too. The participants agreed that classroom size should be small and classrooms should be well-equipped with proper materials and technological facilities.

Two of the participants also argued that contact with native speakers can foster learners' English proficiency and improve their motivation to put more effort in their learning process. Keeping contact with a native speaker of English might not be always possible for students in Turkey. P10 offers the following suggestion:

*“Native speakers could be invited to classroom from time to time. If this is not possible, encouraging learners to keep in contact with native speakers through the internet might also keep them engaged. Students can be encouraged to make friends on the internet to whom they can write English letters.”*

The second category in the second theme includes student-related suggestions for a better quality foreign language education. Almost half of the participants agreed that learning outcomes could be better if learners were convinced about the actual reasons for learning English. Students should be aware of potential benefits of knowing an additional language could provide them with. P12 explains the issue as below:

*“Students should be told about the good reasons for learning English. Students can be offered opportunities to travel abroad and interact through English. Knowing English can open the doors of a new world for them.”*

Another suggestion to improve learning outcomes is increasing learner motivation, which is relatively close to the above stated suggestion. Learners can work harder if they are truly willing to improve their language proficiency. The participants commented that learners' motivation could be improved through rewards for achievements, integration of technological devices, and inclusion of interesting topics.

There could be a number of teacher-related enhancements with the purpose of a better foreign language education, also. Teachers are in the heart of education, therefore, simple improvement related to them can positively affect the overall schooling outcomes. The first suggestion made by the participants includes additional teacher training courses for instructors. For them, with all the various kinds of materials available and newly emerging teaching methods, teachers might need help to keep up with the pace of advances in their field. As P6 comments:

*“Education should be far from memorisation. The whole process should be interactive and should involve a lot of interactions. Most importantly, teachers should be qualified enough to encourage such a learning environment. Teacher education and in-service training programmes should*

*include more opportunities for appropriate teaching practices that suit the needs of our age.”*

The participants of the present study also expressed that inclusion of proper teaching materials can increase the quality of education. For maximum benefit, the teaching materials used should fit Turkish culture and appeal to various learning styles. They also need to be authentic, up-to-date, and interesting.

The participants also believe that teachers' teaching practices and overall behaviours make a difference in learners' achievement. To contribute to students' learning, according to the participants, instructors need to pay attention to different talents and learner styles, teach for communicative purposes, encourage students to learn from their mistakes, encourage out of classroom learning, and make use of modern teaching methods.

According to the participants, as noted earlier, decline in teacher prestige is one of the many reasons for low-quality foreign language education in Turkey. Their suggestion to fix the problem is to improve teachers' life standards. By doing so, as P12 notes, *‘they [teachers] can focus on their jobs instead of worrying about their prestige and low salary.*

The final suggestion made by the participants points to the importance of studying or working abroad experience. For them spending several months in English speaking countries can boost their proficiency and help them get accustomed to the culture of the language they are supposed to teach in Turkish context.

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to define the current challenges in foreign language education in Turkey and potential solutions to overcome them from tertiary level instructors' point of view. The results pointed to three main categories of challenges and provided solutions to stated problems.

The findings of this study suggest that the challenges instructors encounter stem from three main categories including external factors, student-related factors and teacher-related factors. The external factors that lower the quality of foreign language education include inappropriate physical conditions of schools, inappropriate curriculum, lack of appropriate teaching materials, strict curriculum, inappropriate evaluation system, lack of technological facilities, heavy reliance on exams, and time limitations. The second set of challenges attribute the failure in the foreign language education to learners' demotivation, biases against language learning, low proficiency, and lower life standards. Ineffective teacher performance, on the other hand, was argued to result from lack of certain qualities such as teachers, habits of traditional teaching, demotivation, and a steep decline in teacher prestige.

The participants offered a number of suggestions to overcome the above,-mentioned challenges. According to the participants, what is needed to employ carefully-revised curriculum, improve physical conditions for education and provide students with the chance for contact with native speakers. To overcome student-related challenges, on the other hand, teachers need to do their best to increase learner awareness and students' motivation level. In addition, to eliminate teacher-related problems, they offered several solutions such as additional teacher training courses, improving teaching practices and employing effective teaching materials, and spending an amount of time abroad for the purpose of working or studying. Improving teachers' life standards, along with their prestige, might also help boost their teaching performance.



The findings showed that external factors have a reverse effect on the quality of foreign language teaching. Crowded classrooms, in this sense, were expressed to be one of the most common challenges that educators encounter. A previous study by Wadesango, Hove, and Kurebwa (2016) also revealed that teachers do not feel comfortable in large classrooms. According to the participants, large classrooms are a big challenge for teachers who want to care for diverse learner needs. It is also more difficult to take the control in crowded classrooms. These challenges mostly negatively impact the overall quality of education (Ijaiya, 1999). Students' learning takes place in classrooms to a great extent. Therefore, everything related to classrooms can be expected to influence learning outcomes. A comfortable environment where students feel relaxed and happy unquestionably provides the best chances for more effective teaching and fruitful learning outcomes (Al-Şensoy & Sağsöz, 2015; Savaş, Taş, & Duru, 2010).

The participants mentioned challenges related to the current curricula in use as well. Previous research (Ari, 2014; Solak & Semerci, 2015; Bulut & Atabey, 2016) confirms that current EFL curricula for various grades do not help learners improve their language proficiency. They are not appropriate for the age group they are designed for: they are heavy-loaded and ineffective.

Teachers' teaching skills may not prove enough in the absence of effective teaching materials. The participants believe that teaching materials are a must in classrooms and that they are even more important while teaching crowded classrooms. Teaching materials in EFL courses are expected to help learners acquire the target language and practice it (Tomlinson, 2011; McGrath, 2013). Al-Seghayer (2014) argues that lack of access to effective materials can add to the existing challenges in teaching English and make the situation even worse for both learners and teachers. While learners miss the chance of being exposed to the target language as they should, teachers need to struggle to provide a facilitating learning environment for their students. One solution to this problem could be including materials development training in teacher education programmes so that teachers know how to adapt the existing materials to address their students' needs or to create new materials with existing facilities (McGrath, 2013).

The participants complained about the strict curriculum as well. The strict curriculum ignores individual differences and diverse needs. In addition, teachers encounter time-related issues. They have a lot to do in a little amount of time. The overload also gets boring for the students. Most importantly, although the purpose is to promote learners' communicative skills, it is almost impossible to do so when students are exposed to knowledge whole day in traditional classrooms and lack the chance to practice the language (Akbari, 2015).

According to the participants, the common assessment type in Turkish education and the examinations pose a threat for the quality in foreign language education, too. Teachers may not be able to solve such a problem on their own, however, they can include self-assessment into their routine, as this type of assessment can be more effective than peer or teacher evaluation (Zarei & Usefli, 2015). Assessment type influences learners' goal orientation, too. Previous studies favour self-assessment over other types of assessment (Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2014; Zarei & Usefli, 2015). In addition, EFL learners can be encouraged to take international exams to assess their EFL proficiency because international exams are known to focus on four basic skills (Taqi & Shuqair, 2014). Besides, boring teaching materials and lack of opportunities to practice the language make the situation even worse (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011). An overall improvement in the teaching and assessment processes is expected to result in better learning outcomes.

With the recent advances in the field of technology, both teachers and students have been more and more attracted by what technological facilities can offer to them. Previous studies revealed positive attitudes towards the integration of technology in EFL courses (Baz, 2016) and better learning outcomes as a result (Kurt & Bensen, 2017). The results of the current study also show that educators want to use technological facilities more often and the lack of such facilities, particularly in certain regions, decreases the quality of foreign language education in Turkey.

The findings also suggest that strict curriculum leads to time-related challenges in foreign language education. Apparently, learners need their own time on task and teachers should be flexible about what to teach, how to teach and when to teach. However, this might not be as easy as it sounds. Having extra time in classroom does not guarantee learners' time on task. The time allocated to learning should be quality cognitive time (Romero & Barberá, 2011). Teachers' flexibility may not result in the best outcomes, either. Students should be aware of why they are learning the language and teachers should be well-trained to create best learning opportunities for their students.

Learner demotivation was also commonly mentioned as a challenge on the way to a high quality education. The participants agreed that they lose their motivation while trying to motivate their learners. They want to teach to students who want to learn, which may not always be the case in the field of education. The factors causing demotivation can vary from inappropriate teaching materials (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) to negative teacher attitudes, excessively high expectation from learners, and a big gap between learners language proficiency in the same class (Kim & Seo, 2012). Teachers, on the other hand, might feel demotivated because of certain factors including their students, curriculum, and school facilities (Aydın, 2012). The first step towards solution can be defining the reason for demotivation in the beginning and addressing the problem afterwards. Learner beliefs impact the whole language learning process. Being self-conscious about what they are able to do may quickly lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, making language learning even more difficult as a result (Babanoğlu & Ağcam, 2016).

Lack of proper English foundation background may pose a threat for the quality of education as well (Souriyavongsa, Rany, Abidin, & Mei, 2013). Students' low proficiency in English was counted as a factor that lowers the quality of foreign language education in this study as well. They forget everything they have learnt once the term is over. Obviously, it is difficult for instructors working at tertiary level to teach English literally starting from the ABCs. It seems to be a vicious circle though: First, improper teaching practices result in bad-quality learning outcomes. Then, the repetitive failure causes demotivation for learners. Finally, when learners meet an instructor who knows what should be done, it is too late. Again, people in charge need to take a broad perspective to find a proper solution to this problem as the issue is deeper than it seems at the first sight because of the many variables playing role in the process.

According to the participants, teachers must have certain qualities to provide their learners with a quality education. Teachers need to be able to adjust their teaching in accordance with their students' needs and pay attention to their students' problem and take various learning styles into account. The participants' perceptions of required teacher qualities are all in harmony with what is suggested by previous studies (Salahsour & Hajizadeh, 2013; Mullock, 2003).

Rapidly changing world requires new teaching styles and methods. Findings of studies have been in favour of modern teaching approaches, too (Mediha & Enisa, 2014; Çağanağa, 2014). With all the hype about the new teaching approaches, traditional teaching methods should have been a history by now. However, adapting to the new system may not be as easy as thought. A number of studies including those of Koosha

and Yakhabi (2013) and Ahmad and Rao (2013) argue that there is still a long way to go for full implementation of modern teaching methods. The participants of the present study suggest a number of reasons for the dependence on traditional methods in Turkey. Most important of all, teachers of English do not know how to implement other methods than the traditional ones. Teacher training programmes fail to prepare teachers for the new conditions. Besides, the in-service training programmes are not any better. According to the participants, curriculum is another obstacle in the way. They believe that teachers cannot engage in modern teaching methods when the curriculum expects learning by memorisation from students.

The decrease in teacher motivation negatively impacts the foreign language education, too. According to the findings of the study, the main reason for the decline in teacher motivation is the demotivating student behaviours, which also complies with the results of a recent study by Sugino, Abe, and Ueda (2017). Another problem is the recent loss of teacher prestige. The decline in teacher prestige can be attributed to a number of reasons. First of all, due to the advances in technology, there is not the primary and only source of knowledge anymore. In addition, the salary they earn in return for their effort is quite low when compared to other professions (Fiszman, 2015). Teachers might need to improve themselves constantly to have more to offer to their students. For the second issue, however, serious revisions and regulations are needed worldwide.

The participants provided a number of suggestions as solutions to the above-mentioned problems. According to them there needs to be revisions in the current curricula which is overloaded and boring. An ideal EFL curriculum needs to offer chances for the development of four basic skills and encourage communication in classroom (Liton, 2012), should be flexible to suit various learner needs and learning styles (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011), and the content should be appealing for learners (Schechter, 2004).

Besides, classrooms should contain less number of students for a better education. Previous studies also suggest that learning outcomes in EFL courses improve in classrooms of optimal size with the use of proper teaching materials (Almekhlafi, 2006; İter, 2009; Wadensango, Todd, 2012; İsisag, 2012; Bahanshal, 2013; Hove & Kurebwa, 2016).

Another suggestion was to provide learners with opportunities to keep in touch with native speakers of English. The recent technological advances can provide various opportunities for learners to keep in contact with native speakers and such interactions can benefit learners in many aspects. It could particularly foster learners' oral proficiency in the target language, which is the main goal of modern foreign language education (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014; Liaw, 2012).

In addition, students should be aware of the reasons why they are expected to learn English. When they learn English for a good reason, they might be more motivated to work on their language skills. For example, using English in an international platform can boost learner motivation by increasing their language learning awareness (Tsai, 2012; Sasaki, 2007). When not possible, learners can be informed about the advantages by the instructors themselves, as suggested by the participants.

For better learning outcomes, teachers should do their best to motivate their learners. As suggested by the participants, motivation levels of students can determine the effort they put in their learning process and the quality of learning gains (Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Alqurashi, 2014). An overall improvement in the syllabi (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011), integration of authentic materials (Kılıç & İter, 2015), benefiting from communicative activities (Ochoa, Cabrera, Quinonez, Castillo, & Gonzalez, 2016) as well

as encouraging cooperative learning (Liao, 2006; Ning & Hornby, 2013) can also improve EFL learners' motivation.

The participants suggested additional teacher training courses as well. Previous studies also confirm the benefits in-service training programmes for instructors' from various aspects including improvement in classroom transactions (Yadav & Bhardwaj, 2013) and instructor beliefs about self (Xiong, 2016). However, as revealed by Gunawardhane (2011), to get most fruitful results from such training programmes, they should be carefully organised and small-scaled.

According to the participants, teaching materials play a significant role in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Teaching materials, particularly authentic materials and technology-assisted ones, unquestionably contribute to foreign language education (Demircan, 2004; Seven & Engin, 2007; Woottipong, 2014). Such materials should be carefully chosen to fit Turkish culture, though.

Another suggestion offered by the participants is to improve teacher attitudes in courses. Teachers are advised to respect various learner needs, teach English for communicative purposes, provide opportunities for out-of-classroom learning. It is important to make positive changes in teacher attitudes because they are believed to play a role in students' learning outcomes (Wenglinsky, 2012; Johnson, 2017).

According to the participants, the loss of teacher prestige is the source of teacher demotivation. They suggest that this problem could be overcome by increasing teacher income. Research so far has revealed that low income can be a demotivating factor for teachers (Doyle & Kim, 1999; Kızıltepe, 2008; Aydın, 2012). Demotivated teachers, as a result, cannot properly function and their teaching quality decreases (Agustiani, 2016). Improving teachers' working conditions can enhance their teaching performance.

Another way of contributing to the quality of foreign language education was stated to be increased study and work abroad experiences for teachers. The comments by participants of a previous study (Shiveley & Misco, 2015) confirm that study abroad experiences benefit the participants not only in the short but also in the long term. Such an experience can help teachers evaluate their own teaching practices better and increase their cultural awareness.

There are challenges to be overcome in every part of Turkey in terms of the quality of EFL education. However, the eastern part of Turkey is one of the most problematic regions where such challenges are so common that they have become the reality of education. It is important to understand the underlying reasons for the failure in EFL education to be able to address them in the most proper way. All in all, in education, every single variable plays a significant role and even the smallest improvement can lead to a better future for both students and teachers.

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