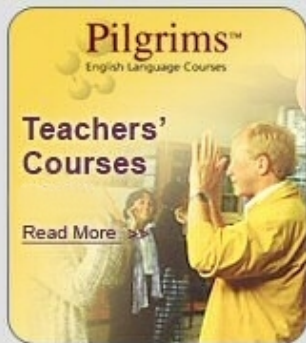




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## MAJOR ARTICLES

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### Instructors' Attitudes towards English-Medium Instruction in Turkey

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#### Abstract

This paper reports on the results of a small-scale survey of the attitudes of instructors of non-language subjects towards the use of English as a medium of instruction in Turkish universities, where Turkish is the native language of the great majority of the students. The sample of this study consisted of 100 instructors at the universities in Ankara in Turkey. The results of the questionnaire, in general, show that Turkish instructors are more favorable to the idea of adopting Turkish as an instructional medium rather than English. They agree that instruction in Turkish can promote student learning better. However, the instructors have a wide range of concerns related to the Turkish-medium instruction as well as the English-medium instruction in higher education such as the resources provided in Turkish and English, the proficiency level of students and student participation in class.

#### 0. Introduction

English language has always been a concern of the educational field in Turkey and there is an on-going discussion from the past to today regarding the English-medium instruction in the institutions of higher education. Although in Turkey English is not an official language or second language, it is widely used and recognized in education and in the private sector. Different views come into play regarding the role and function of English in institutions of higher education, where it is the medium of instruction. This paper reports on the results of a small-scale survey of 100 instructors regarding attitudes towards English-medium instruction.

#### 1. The role of English in education in Turkey

English started to spread in Turkey in the 1950s due to the increasing effect of American economic and military power (Demircan 1988). English started to compete with French and the need to improve trade relations and keep up with the technological developments made English a compulsory foreign language. Later in the 1980s, Turkey felt a more urgent plan as regards foreign language teaching and this required an efficient foreign language policy to be implemented due to economic factors. This led to an increase in the number of public and private schools where a foreign language, especially English, is taught as a foreign language.

Turkey, in the 21st century, is English as a foreign language (EFL) context in the expanding circle, where English has mostly instrumental functions in education and the private sector (Dogançay-Aktuna 1998). Turkish students learn English mainly for instrumental reasons of education (graduate studies, to be research assistants, etc.) and better career opportunities (Sebüktekin 1981). Today, English is not just a compulsory school subject, but "also a must for most of the jobs in urban Turkey", as in most of the other countries in the world (Dogançay-Aktuna, 33).

## 2. The debate over English-medium instruction in Turkey

In Turkey, as in most other countries, teaching and learning has a very important role in the educational context. English is, in a way, in competition with Turkish as the medium of instruction, especially in the institutions of higher education. It is not just a 'must' course, but in 26 universities (including the departments where the medium of instruction is English) such as Bogaziçi University, Middle East Technical University and Bilkent University, English is the medium of instruction. This is where a 'hot' discussion commences among Turkish educators as well as students and parents as regards the pros and cons of English-medium instruction. In this paper, these pros and cons will not be explored in detail, but to give a general understanding, they will be outlined.

Some educators oppose English-medium instruction by arguing that it leads to reduced ability to understand concepts, low-level of knowledge about the subject studied, and excessive consumption of time, feelings of alienation and separation, and the least amount of participation in the classes due to low level proficiency in English (Arslantunali 1998; Boztas 1998; Demir 1995; Demircan 1995; Zonnevel (as cited in Vinke, Snippe, and Jochems 1998); Kocaman 1998; Köksal 1995, 2002; Sankur and Usluata 1998; Leung n.d.; \_\_\_\_\_ 1995). Furthermore, it is claimed that the education sector where English is the medium of instruction is "a vehicle for creating an elite class" that will rule the masses, since it limits the involvement of the majority of the students, who do not have access to English education, in economic and social development (Mutamba 1999; Sarihan 2005). The benefit of using L1 in language classes adds another perspective to this discussion. The study done by Tang (2002) shows that limited use of the mother tongue in the English language does not reduce students' exposure to English, but it can help in the teaching and learning process.

These claims are also shared by the students in the study conducted by Kirkgöz (2005) regarding the attitudes towards English-medium instruction. Students expect lecturers' coverage of subject matter to be more superficial according to Zonnevel (as cited in Vinke, Snippe, and Jochems). This view is also stressed by Klaassen and Graaff (2001, 282):

The focus on language production influences the lecturer's didactical skills in the sense that they are less flexible in conveying the contents of the lecture material, resulting in long monologues, and a lack of rapport with students, humor and interaction.

Marsh (n.d.) proposes that without adoption of appropriate curricula, teaching in English leads to confusion and despair among students and lecturers. However, some educators state that learning foreign languages (English, in our context) does not lead to forgetting Turkish, and the second language in fact increases competence in mother-tongue (Alptekin 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). Bear (1998a, 1998b) and Çolakoglu (1995) consider English-medium instruction as an artificial environment where students are required to communicate in English because of the few opportunities outside of school to practice the language in everyday communication and adds that it is an appropriate model as regards the current situation in Turkey where there are no other proposed alternatives.

Parents, in this discussion, behave and think 'innocently' since they want their children to become broadly educated and get a (well-paid) job. They are indifferent to these discussions since they are mainly interested in the economic benefits that English will bring to their children.

## 3. Significance of the study and the research questions

In Turkey, English-medium instruction is expanding especially in the institutions of higher education and generally considered as a tool which differentiates one university from the others. Many students opt for undergraduate degrees in English for instrumental reasons as well as integrative reasons. However, instructors' views on this issue are generally ignored or it is taken for granted that the instructors in these institutions support the view that English-medium instruction is an indispensable component of university education. This leads the researcher to the present study that sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the instructors' views as regards the English-medium instruction in Turkey?
2. What are the instructors' suggestions/alternatives as regards the English-medium instruction in Turkey?

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants

The sample of this study consisted of the instructors at the universities in Ankara in Turkey. 100 instructors out of 400 (see Table 1) returned the questionnaires soliciting their views on the use of English and Turkish as medium of instruction in universities.

Table 1

The number of the participants in universities in Ankara

<i>University</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
Gazi University	12
Hacettepe University	13
Middle East Technical University	15
Ankara University	10
Baskent University	14
Atilim University	13
Çankaya University	11
Bilkent University	11

### 4.2. Data collection instruments

The questionnaire used by Tung, Lam, and Tsang (1997) was used in this study with minor modifications to make the statements fit the current situation in Turkey. The questionnaires, consisting of 24 items (see Appendix), were designed in Turkish and sent to the email addresses of instructors in universities in Ankara. All the items (except the last item) required participants to rate a given statement according to a specified Likert-type scale:

1- never 2- sometimes 3- half the time 4- frequently 5- always

### 4.3. Data analysis

The participants' views on the statements in the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS with summary measures such as means and standard deviations.

### 4.4. Threats to validity of the study

The attitudes and characteristics of participants can influence the results of this study. The study finished towards the end of the semester when participants had end-of-term responsibilities. This could have affected the participants' responses.

### 4.5. Limitations of the study

One limitation is that the study was carried out just using one data collection instrument within time constraints and affected by the availability of the participants. Interviews could have also been used to benefit from triangulation.

As this study was carried out with 100 participants and only in universities in Ankara, it is suggested that similar studies with a larger number of participants all over Turkey are replicated.

## 5. Results of the study

The results of the study are presented in Table 2, which contains the mean and standard deviations as regards 23 items in the questionnaire.

Regarding items 1-5 in the questionnaire, instructors value Turkish-medium instruction over English medium one. Instructors are confident that Turkish as an instructional medium enhances student learning (Item1, mean= 4, 39, where 5= always), in that they can cover the materials of the course faster (mean=3, 91) and in greater depth (mean=3, 61).

Instructors also state that they support mother-tongue education at the university where they teach (mean=3, 49). However, they consider Turkish-medium instruction as having some problems as regards the translation of special terms (item 8), resources for teaching (item 10), parents (item 15). Responses to items 11-12 makes it clear that instructors require the government to provide universities with more resources for mother-tongue education.

Responses to items 16-23 shows that Turkish-medium instruction is also feasible, considering students' level of proficiency in English, non-language subjects, and the benefit

of L1 even in language classrooms. Instructors seem to agree that mixing Turkish and English is also beneficial while lecturing although most of the current practices are to do one's best to avoid the use of Turkish, accepting the risk of the very low participation in class and long monologues.

Items 24 (see Table 3) required instructors to comment on English-medium instruction in Turkey. It is stated (freq. = 30) that selective courses should be given in Turkish while it is suggested (freq.= 80) that universities adopt mother-tongue education in general and provide more courses in English, such as Current issues in History, International Relations etc. Also, it is put forward (freq. = 60) that assignments should be given in both Turkish and English if we are to insist on the English-medium instruction. In regard to the success of the English-medium instruction, it is claimed (freq. = 70) that current English-medium instruction is successful if we are to consider the level of English of graduates. But I have doubts about the students' ability to express this knowledge in Turkish or apply it into Turkish contexts (examinations that are conducted in Turkish may be an obstacle for the students).

Table 2  
An analysis of the lecturer's attitudes towards the English-medium instruction:

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>
1. Lecturing in Turkish can bolster students' interest in learning more than lecturing in English.	4,3900	,51040
2. Lecturing in Turkish allows the lesson to progress faster than lecturing in English.	3,9100	,69769
3. Lecturing in Turkish produces a better classroom atmosphere than lecturing in English.	3,3100	,48607
4. Lecturing in Turkish allows a teacher to go deeper into the content of the lesson than lecturing in English.	3,6100	,61783
5. I support adopting mother-tongue education at the university where I teach.	3,4900	,84680
6. I feel it is easier to set examination questions using English rather than using Turkish.	3,7800	,52378
7. I feel I can write better in English than in Turkish.	2,9800	,60269
8. The greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction is the need to translate many special terms.	4,5200	,50212
9. It is easier to teach non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics) in English than in Turkish.	3,4900	1,21018
10. Resources for teaching, e.g., textbooks and reference books, are more plentiful in English than in Turkish.	4,6500	,47937
11. The Education Department should provide universities that adopt mother-tongue education with more resources for teaching.	4,8300	,37753
12. The Turkish government should raise the status of the Turkish language in society.	3,6000	,58603
13. Learning Turkish well will benefit the learning of English.	2,4700	,80973
14. English as the medium of instruction will certainly lead to poorer student intake.	3,2200	,77303
15. Parents are the major obstacle in the promotion of mother-tongue education.	3,4000	,63564
16. Students tend to neglect those subjects taught in Turkish.	1,9700	,70288
17. Teaching a class in Turkish encourages students to speak uninhibitedly, thereby disrupting the order of the class.	1,2300	,42295
18. Even studying every subject in Turkish will not help students with poor academic performance.	3,6400	,74563
19. Using Turkish to study non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics, and History) will affect students' English proficiency.	2,5300	,65836
20. Students with good academic performance should study all subjects in English.	1,5700	,67052
21. The English proficiency of the students I teach is not adequate for them to study non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics, and History) in English.	2,5100	,52214
22. I have a good understanding of the language policy of the university where I teach.	1,5400	,50091

23. It is inappropriate for instructors to teach the same lesson mixing English and Turkish.	1,6500	64157
--	--------	-------

\* Likert-type scale

1- never 2- sometimes 3- half the time 4- frequently 5- always

Table 3

An analysis of the item 24 in the questionnaire

<i>Comments/suggestions</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Selective courses should be given in Turkish	30
Universities should adopt mother-tongue education in general and provide more courses in English such as Current issues in History, International Relations etc. (resources should be both in Turkish and English)	80
Assignments should be given in both Turkish and English	60
Current English-medium instruction is successful if we are to consider the level of English of graduates. But I have doubts about the students' ability to express this knowledge in Turkish or apply it into Turkish contexts (examinations that are conducted in Turkish may be an obstacle for the students)	70

## 6. Discussion

The results of the questionnaire, in general, show that Turkish instructors are more favorable to the idea of adopting Turkish as an instructional medium rather than English. They agree that instruction in Turkish can promote student learning better. However, the instructors have a wide range of concerns related to Turkish-medium instruction as well as English-medium instruction in higher education such as the resources provided in Turkish and English, the proficiency level of the students, student participation and the parents as well as the students (pragmatic reasons).

Instructors also require the government to take necessary precautions to support mother-tongue education considering the participation and the atmosphere in the classrooms, and students' preparation for studying in Turkish. However, what the instructors point out is rather interesting since the government has left the choice of the medium of instruction to the universities as long as they have enough qualified instructors to lecture in English. The authorities in universities are unwilling to change the medium of instruction as this may affect the quality of their student intake or they may lose their 'tool' which makes their university an 'elite' one.

Regarding the responses that were given to item 23, most of the instructors suggested adopting English-Turkish medium of instruction. In other words, universities will adopt mother-tongue education, but courses and assignments will be given both in Turkish and English. This is already being done in some universities, where approximately 35% of the courses are provided in English. This situation also should be evaluated in detail.

## 7. Conclusion and Suggestions

The instructors in this study favored Turkish-medium instruction considering the difficulties that students may have and resources provided in Turkish and in English. However, the concerns that the instructors do have are, in general, different from the ones students have in the study conducted by Kirkgöz.

Considering benefits and opportunities of knowing English, lack of quality in English language teaching in the secondary school education, and the different needs of students, we have to bring this English-medium instruction into discussion not just taking instructors into consideration, but also the government and other stakeholders.

Although we cannot deny the fact that English is currently very dominant in the education and business environments, we should take other alternatives (elective or compulsory courses in Turkish and English, assignments in Turkish) into consideration. We cannot just say without evidence that "English-medium instruction is the one that works now and we do not have any other proposed alternatives".

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## APPENDIX

Dear instructor,

This is to request your participation in a research study to explore instructors' attitudes towards the adoption of English as the medium of instruction in Turkish universities.

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will see the completed forms. Your name will not be used in any reports of this study. There are no risks, but participating will require some of your time. Please keep a copy of this form as an explanation of the study. If you have any questions, please contact the researcher at the following address:

Ferit KILIÇKAYA  
Middle East Technical University  
Department of Foreign Language Education  
Office B-3 phone 6490  
kilickay@metu.edu.tr

We will be glad to share the results of the study if you write to us at the above address. Thank you again for your assistance in this project.  
Sincerely,

**ase choose an answer according to the following criteria:  
1- never 2- sometimes 3- half the time 4- frequently 5- always**

1. Lecturing in Turkish can bolster students' interest in learning more than lecturing in English.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Lecturing in Turkish allows the lesson to progress faster than lecturing in English.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Lecturing in Turkish produces a better classroom atmosphere than lecturing in English.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Lecturing in Turkish allows a teacher to go deeper into the content of the lesson than lecturing in English.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I support adopting mother-tongue education at the university where I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel it is easier to set examination questions using English than using Turkish.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel I can write better in English than in Turkish.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The greatest problem in using Turkish as the medium of instruction is the need to translate a lot of special terms.	1	2	3	4	5
9. It is easier to teach non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics) in English than in Turkish.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Resources for teaching, e.g., textbooks and reference books, are more plentiful in English than in Turkish.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The Education Department should provide universities that adopt mother-tongue education with more resources for teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The Turkish government should raise the status of the Turkish language in society.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Learning Turkish well will benefit the learning of English.	1	2	3	4	5
14. English as the medium of instruction will certainly lead to poorer student intake.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Parents are the major obstacle in the promotion of mother-tongue education.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Students tend to neglect those subjects taught in Turkish.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Teaching a class in Turkish encourages students to speak uninhibitedly, thereby disrupting the order of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Even studying every subject in Turkish will not help students with poor academic performance.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Using Turkish to study non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics, History) will affect students' English proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Students with good academic performance should study all subjects in English.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The English proficiency of the students I teach is not adequate for them to study non-language subjects (e.g., Geography, Mathematics, History) in English.	1	2	3	4	5

22. I have a good understanding of the language policy of the university where I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
23. It is inappropriate for instructors to teach the same lesson mixing English and Turkish.	1	2	3	4	5
24. What is your opinion regarding the English-medium instruction in Turkey? (Whether it is successful or not, any alternative that you suggest etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

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