



EFL Program Management in Turkish Cypriot Educational Context: Qualitative Case Study

Chinaza Solomon Ironsi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8644-710X>

Department of English Language Teaching, Near East University
Near East Boulevard, PK: 99138, Mersin 10 Turkey North Cyprus

*e-mail: solomon.chinaza@neu.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

This study is carried out to examine EFL program managers' working conditions, eliciting information on their views on EFL program management within the Turkish Cypriot context. This study also upholds that an understanding of their perceptions as EFL program managers will help create a better working condition and improve EFL programs and instruction, characterized by excessive proliferation of language centers that put profit-making as their utmost priority. Two research questions were utilized to investigate EFL program managers' challenges and barriers while managing foreign language institutes and centers. The study adopted a qualitative research design approach; 45 EFL program managers and coordinators with international qualifications with over ten years of experience were purposefully sampled and recruited as participants for this study. A semi-structured interview was the instrument for data collection, which experts validated to ensure it measures what it purports to measure. Data collected were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover themes used to define and interpret findings. This study's findings indicate that the absence of professional expertise, training/retraining programs, resource availability, and competition from other universities were the significant challenges EFL program managers face while carrying out their duties. It was also unveiled that over monetization of EFL programs within institutions brings about challenges in program management. Recommendations were given to bridge these gaps.

INTRODUCTION

It is a herculean task for program managers to effectively manage foreign language-related programs to meet up with high standards required in most language programs—little has been written about this in the Turkish Cypriot context. Managing a language program differs from managing other subject programs as language programs are skilled-centered and require proper design and implementation (Butler et al., 2018; Christison et al., 2009). As the growing need for foreign language acquisition increases, establishing conducive learning environments devoid of anxiety and stress (Ironsi, 2017) is essential. Literature suggests that most schools have commercialized foreign language

acquisition as a money-making venture, making program managers do more towards ensuring that the best quality of EFL programs are design and implemented ([Jenks et al., 2012](#); [Eaton, 2013](#)). It seems to be a common problem in language education pedagogy as this leads to myriad problems in trying to achieve or design a quality EFL program. One primary problem with these issues is that many educators experience challenges in designing and implementing a quality EFL program. This study intends to examine the perceptions of program managers concerning this issue.

However, it is assumed that a program manager who applies for such a job ought to know the hassles that come with it and be ready for challenges. In this light, there is a need for program managers to be trained and retrained to handle challenges of program management effectively as they emanate, as this could assist improve the quality of EFL programs used by most foreign language institutions ([MacDonald, 2016](#); [Greenier et al., 2016](#)). Previous and recent studies affirm that the monetization of most EFL programs makes it more tasking for the program managers, who are assigned with the duties of generating revenues and incomes for the departments or language institutions while trying to design and implement quality language programs, some consider this obligation task-filled ([Norris, 2016](#); [Curtis, 2013](#)). This study intends to investigate EFL program manager experiences in the Turkish Cypriot context regarding this issue as there is no previous research discussing this issue. As far as we know, no previous research has investigated this issue, especially in the Turkish Cypriot context, and there has been less previous evidence to suggest that the problem with program management, especially EFL programs, has been sorted out.

Theoretical framework

The success of the EFL program is vital to every language institution, and while many are succeeding in this quest, a lot are having challenges that range from related administrative issues to management issues. This study anticipates that tackling these challenges will bring about success in EFL program management, allowing administrative leaders to manage their programs effectively. In this light, this study hinges on the theory of adaptive leadership proposed by [Heifetz \(2010\)](#), who suggested that leadership through its adaptive means brings about changes that help create individuals' capacity in an organization to thrive in their endeavors. This theory obliged that practical leadership is essential in tackling challenges, especially during challenging moments, requiring the need to build adaptive capacities in our organizations. Heifetz further suggested that when the values that make us successful becomes redundant, then there is a need for an x-ray to find a way of surviving possible challenges.

This theory upholds that adaptive leadership is required to take care of occurring realities, especially in a permanent business context crisis. It is evident that this theory applies to the business context; this study upholds that this theory is relevant and applicable to EFL program managers who try to solve problems in situations of crisis—just like other business enterprises. The adoption of adaptive leadership becomes helpful in such situations. This study anticipates that building adaptive leadership among the workforce or personnel gives rise to practical and efficient EFL programs' management.

Literature review

Several authors have recognized that the multiple challenges of managing an ESL program are near related to the sophisticated nature of managing a complex organization. It requires that managers possess specific problem-solving skills to handle this array of challenges. Authors acknowledge that an EFL program manager is an expert equipped with language education, program design, implementation, and evaluation ([Butler et al., 2018](#); [Fareh, 2010](#)). It is evident in literature that EFL program managers possess internationally recognized certificates, which certifies that they are skillful in carrying out their jobs ([Panferov, 2012](#); [Greenier et al., 2016](#)).

Few literature reviews show that the program manager possesses excellent managerial skills and plays the role of designing the foreign language program from implementation, design to appropriate material selection and content ([Ferrer et al., 2016](#); [Pennington et al., 2014](#); [Liyanage et al., 2015](#)). Previous research showed that implementation is another role of the program manager who ensures that what they have designed is usefully implemented and functional, achieving the program's set goals and objectives ([Smithwick, 2014](#); [McGee et al., 2015](#); [Ferrer et al., 2016](#)).

Seminal contributions have been made by authors who posit that the EFL program managers also play a vital role to ascertain the extent to which the program is achieving its objectives through a SWOT analysis of the entire program, while they seek ways of improving the program for customer satisfaction ([Eskey, 1997](#); [Pennington et al., 2014](#)). A series of recent and previous studies have indicated that the monetization of most foreign language institutes has placed an enormous task on the shoulders of EFL program managers who, in some cases, are not prepared to carry such colossal responsibility ([Rowe-Henry, 1997](#); [Norris, 2016](#); [Prayitno et al., 2019](#)).

Some require extra managerial retraining to be able to carry out the immense task placed on them. Previous studies have shown that this condition keeps getting worse as most foreign language institutions continue to monetize foreign language acquisition, which places more task for the program managers ([Marty, 2014](#); [Rowe-Henry, 1997](#); [Bista, 2011](#)). Studies suggest that some graduates of education administration of program educators possess little or no skill in their discipline and require extra training and workshops to cope with the managerial challenges while managing an EFL program ([Shaw, 2014](#); [Jiang et al., 2018](#)).

It is believed that only through practice and consistent experience can these young program managers carry out their jobs effectively, as most of them resort to common sense or trial/ error while solving problems ([Warner & Zhu, 2018](#); [Bushardt et al., 2018](#); [Prayitno et al., 2019](#); [Nawawi, 2020](#)). As pointed out by studies, student-related problems and program design-related issues could pose a threat to EFL program managers; hence the idea of carrying out leadership in such a crisis-ridden situation as suggested by Heifetz becomes ideal ([Rowe-Henry, 1997](#); [Siswanto et al., 2018](#)). The literature review has painted a clear picture of the EFL program manager, who is assumed to possess the tremendous managerial skill, right certification, and experience yet lacking in skills to manage effectively and efficiently EFL programs.

While it is evident in literature that managers may lack excellent managerial skills to effectively run EFL programs, it can be deduced that this could lead to myriads of problems. These could amount to poor program implementation and inadequate personnel expertise for these language institutes' daily running. More problems may be accounted to this, which may be related to resource availability, possible competition from other universities, and financial issues. It would not be enough to make these assumptions without researching what the future holds for program management. Several questions regarding other possible EFL program managers' challenges remain to be addressed as most studies have relied on more general approaches while discussing this issue.

As far as we know, no previous research has investigated these issues, especially in the Turkish-Cypriot context, and this study will assist in elucidating on these issues by suggesting possible ways for better practical and efficient management of EFL programs in the future.

One possible way of solving these arrays of issues is to elicit information from stakeholders involved in EFL program management on their possible views and challenges regarding EFL program management. It would assist in solving these issues and suggesting a few recommendations to tackle this menace. It is in this light that this study intends to investigate EFL program management in the Turkish-Cypriot context.

The following research questions were investigated, which include;

1. What are the challenges of EFL program managers while managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot context?
2. What are the barriers faced by EFL program managers while managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot context?

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, and this is a research method used to understand the reasons, motivations, or opinions of a small group of people regarding a situation through interviews ([Yildirim et al., 2011](#)).

This research method is suitable for this study, which intends to elicit information from EFL program managers on their experiences and challenges while managing the EFL program.

Participants

A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit 45 EFL program coordinators and managers. The participants were all male program managers who have been working in this capacity for more than ten years. They also possess the appropriate professional and international experience with certifications. The purpose of the study was explained to these participants before commencing the study. The researcher obtained informed oral consent from the participants before commencing the study. They were coded as P1 to P45, respectively.

Data Collection

For data collection, a semi-structured interview was used to elicit information from the participants. The data collection instrument consists of open-ended questions validated by two experts from a private university in North Cyprus, who confirm that the items conform with the study's purpose, thereby measuring what it intends to measure. Afterward, interview sessions were scheduled with participants at a time convenient time and date. As a result of the pandemic, a zoom application, a video conferencing tool, was used to conduct the interviews. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants again before commencing the interview session. The interview session was recorded with two recording devices; the zoom application and an external recorder.

The researcher ensured that the participants choose a cozy room, conducive, without noise and distractions. They were asked six questions formulated from the research questions.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to interpret and analyze the data, this type of analysis uses themes in interpreting the data, and it was used for this study. Data collected from the interviews were transcribed, the researcher familiarised himself with the data to get a thorough overview of all data collected, which was achieved by reading through the text and taking notes where and when necessary. After that, sections of the text were coded by highlighting sentences and phrases, then apportioning labels to describe the content. Afterward, themes were generated to identify patterns that existed among them. The themes generated were fair and accurate representations of the data, the researcher reviewed the themes again, and after that, the themes were defined and named. The themes obtained were finally presented in tables for an adequate description of the findings of this study.

RESULTS

RQ 1: What are EFL program managers' challenges while managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot context?

Table 1. Opinions of EFL program managers on the challenges of managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot context

Themes	f
Absence of professional expertise	8
Absence of training and retraining programs	4
Absence of resource availability	4
Financial challenges	7
Competitions from other universities	6

Table 1 presents the opinions of program managers on the challenges they face in managing EFL programs. The results presented in the table above suggest that five different themes were derived, which were; lack of professional expertise, lack of training and retraining programs, low resource availability, financial challenges, and competition from other universities. These were the most regularly reoccurring opinions of the participants.

The participants indicated that a lack of professional expertise is a significant challenge which they encounter while carrying out their duties; some of their responses are stated below:

We all assume that we are professionals before accepting this job, but realistically, there is still a need for staff professional development in these regards (P24).

Aligning with this statement, another participant added:

Most of us here claim we are experts, but the truth is that we lack the required expertise to carry out this work effectively (P11).

Also, this theme is directly connected with the second theme that hinges on the lack of training and retraining programs; a participant stated:

The university must organize more development programs to ensure that we are improving day by day on our duties (P35)

In the statements of another participant, she puts it this way:

We require ongoing and continuous retraining programs to acquaint us with recent managerial techniques in line with world standards, carrying out duties more effectively (P3).

Confirming the need for training and retraining, another participant added:

The university must see it as a need to organize local training programs for us, where they can invite an international guest who is experienced in EFL or other language program management. I think they can help us get better (P17).

More so, a lack of resource availability was another reoccurring theme. It was an indication that EFL program managers do not have adequate resources at their disposal, thereby making their job more challenging. It is expressed in the statement of one of the participants:

We must be encouraged by making resources available for us, the school delays in making resources available to us, which could be a problem (P16).

The results presented above indicated that financial challenges are part of the challenges EFL program managers experience. One of the participants also states:

The availability of funds for carrying out some educational projects is also a challenge for us. Times what we receive for running the center is not enough for us (P16).

Another participant stated:

There is a need for appropriate budgeting to be made so that funds needed will be allocated to the right channels. We are still waiting for the management to release funds for the second phase of the library project that we are embarking on; this makes it more challenging for us to do our jobs effectively (P9).

It was evident that foreigners are learning foreign languages at all costs, which leads to profit maximization by these foreign language centers, and puts lots of pressure on them. It brings about competition among foreign language centers, putting a lot of tension and pressure on the center/program manager. Affirming this, a participant stated:

We are under lots of pressure at work due to the high demand for foreign languages (P14).

Another puts it this way:

There are many expectations from us, especially from foreign language faculty heads, which makes us fidget in carrying out our jobs. I think this is as a result of competitions among schools (P45).

In the words of another participant, she added:

I think the competition has increased among schools to have the best foreign language center, and this requires us, the program managers, to work more to meet up to their expectations (P41).

Though the study indicated that foreign language acquisition had been heavily monetized, studies did not indicate that this would result in competition among schools or foreign language centers, making it an essential finding of this research. From the results obtained, it could be deduced that competition arises among foreign language institutes and centers, which poses a challenge to EFL program managers, especially in the Turkish Cypriot setting.

RQ 2: What are the barriers faced by EFL program managers while managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot context?

Table 2. Opinions on the barriers faced by EFL program managers while managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot context

Themes	f
The monetization of EFL programs	9
Institutional barriers	4

According to table 2, 2 different themes were extracted from the interview data. They included; monetization of EFL programs and institutional barriers. The participants indicated that EFL programs' monetization was one of the barriers they face as program managers. The participants suggested that this situation puts more pressure on how they work as expected from them as program coordinators and managers. One of the participants stated:

Of course, to be an owner of a foreign language center has become a profitable business and revenue generation for many business-minded men. It puts much pressure on us as the EFL program coordinators and a barrier to foreign language centers (P17).

Another participant stated:

Most foreign language centers worldwide have been monetized just like other educational sectors; this monetization policy suggests that a lot is expected from program coordinators like us. It is a significant barrier (P37).

There is also a need for the EFL program team to understand the foreign language centers' needs and channel their energies towards achieving that. Though in a situation where most of the team members are only employed as assistants (who have little or no knowledge of the needs of the foreign language center), forging ahead towards success becomes difficult. A participant narrated her experience while working as a manager:

I have worked there for more than 15 years, and I have seen a lot. Often, we have workers who have no idea of what a foreign language center is and how they function. It is challenging to work with such people, especially when a lot is expected from your department. We are not consulted before making recruitment, and so our team knows little or nothing about the essential needs of this department, how we work, what we need to do to be on top, program design, program evaluation, and others. I am working with ten workers; only 2 have a bit of experience in their job; how can we

achieve our expectations with a team like this? It is not easy, but we keep doing our best to give our foreign language students the best quality instruction services (P33).

Another institutional issue is bureaucracy; in most cases, the EFL program manager requires to receive permission from their superiors to carry out a particular task in the interest and growth of the foreign language center. Approvals for such a task take time and, as such, delay the centers' smooth running. A participant puts it this way:

It took me two months to receive approval for funding a marketing flyer designed to promote our language center. My boss traveled out of the country, and I had to wait for his return for two months before carrying out my task. It is disheartening (P30)

Though surprisingly, none of the studies indicated these as a challenge among EFL program managers, the results presented in table 2 indicate so; this may be synonymous in the Turkish Cypriot setting and a novel finding of this research.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that five different themes were derived: lack of professional expertise, lack of training/retraining programs, low resource availability, financial challenges, and competition from other universities. This result aligns with assertions of a similar study who posit that most EFL program managers require regular training and retraining to improve upon their expertise in this field of program management as this will assist them in carrying out their duties more effectively and efficiently ([Panferov, 2012](#); [Warner et al., 2018](#)). Another study upheld that certification was not enough to justify that these EFL program managers can effectively carry out their duties. Instead, there is a need for professional development and training to be carried out regularly, so their jobs are made easier for them ([Norris, 2016](#)). Also, this theme is directly connected with the second theme that hinges on the lack of training and retraining programs as many studies suggest the need for training and retraining programs for program managers ([MacDonald, 2016](#); [Curtis, 2013](#); [Bista, 2011](#)) they believed that this would assist in the professional development. More so, the absence of resources was another reoccurring theme. It indicates that EFL program managers do not have enough resources at their disposal, making their job more challenging. It affirms the position of a study that asserts that program managers can be encouraged by making resources available to them. However, other studies align with this position as they indicate that most foreign language learning institutions should ensure that adequate workers/personnel are always available to make work easier and organizational goals more achievable ([Jenks & Kennell, 2012](#); [Bista, 2011](#)).

With regards to monetization of EFL programs, it would be appropriate to posit that over monetization or profit maximization of university centers/ language institutes are part of the challenges of program management, and similar literature earlier discussed that monetization of most foreign language institutes in most cases leads to lots of pressure mounted on the program managers ([Eaton, 2013](#); [Jessop, 2018](#)). These studies presume that owners of such foreign language training centers, in some cases, experience financial challenges even while ensuring that monetization is their utmost priority in setting up such centers ([Jessop, 2018](#); [Fusco et al., 2019](#)). The results indicated that financial challenges are part of the challenges EFL program managers experience, yet this study did not anticipate that funds' availability would pose a challenge to EFL program managers as studies suggest that the foreign language industry is already heavily financed ([Sarchenko et al., 2019](#); [Eaton, 2013](#); [Jenks & Kennell, 2012](#)). It is a novel finding in this study. Contrary to other studies' views, this result did not affirm the opinions of other studies that suggest that most program managers are given much financial support to make their institutes the best within the locality ([Norris, 2016](#); [Marginson, 2018](#); [Jessop, 2018](#)).

Other studies point out that lots of money being pumped into the educational centers puts more pressure on the program managers to deliver in their duties, making it more challenging to achieve their goals ([MacDonald, 2016](#); [Eaton, 2013](#); [Jenks & Kennell, 2012](#); [Marginson, 2018](#)). The result obtained did not support this presumption. Lastly, competitions from other universities were presented as a

challenge. It is pertinent to note that acquiring a foreign language is a 21st-century skill and in high demand. Foreigners are learning foreign languages at all costs, which leads to profit maximization by these foreign language centers. It brings about competition among foreign language centers, putting a lot of tension and pressure on the center/program managers. Though the study indicated that foreign language acquisition had been heavily monetized, studies did not indicate that this would result in competition among schools or foreign language centers, making it an essential finding of this research. From the results obtained, it could be deduced that competition arises among foreign language institutes and centers, which poses a challenge to EFL program managers, especially in the Turkish Cypriot setting.

Furthermore, in-line with the result obtained, different themes, including monetization of EFL programs, Institutional barriers, and competitions among other Program managers, were extracted from the interview data. The participants indicated that EFL programs' monetization was one of the barriers they face as program managers. The participants suggested that this situation puts more pressure on how they work. This finding is in tandem with other studies that suggest that foreign language centers' monetization is a clue that a lot is expected from these centers ([Eaton, 2013](#); [Shaw, 2014](#); [Jessop, 2018](#)). A similar study anticipates that these foreign language center owners often stay at their home's comfort while their program coordinators and managers carry these burdens of expectations ([Eaton, 2013](#)). This study upholds that while there is a need for revenue generation, over-dependence on revenue generation makes the expectations high and can lead to other issues that will suppress the future of foreign language teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the result indicated that institutional barriers exist, which pose a threat to EFL program managers. The study indicated that to be successful as managers, there is a need to work with a team that understands foreign language competition and needs. These teams are usually recruited by the institution or language centers without consulting most EFL program managers, who require an efficient team to produce results; this is a big challenge to them. There is also a need for the EFL program team to understand the needs of the foreign language centers and thus channel their energies towards achieving that, though in a situation where most of the team members are only employed as assistants, forging ahead towards success becomes difficult. It was evident that such institutional barriers were a challenge to these EFL managers, as opined by [Rowe et al., \(1997\)](#), who assumed that for the manager to achieve much success, there is a need to organize quality team members who understand the business sector and its growing demands. Though he did not suggest this as a challenge, he indicated that every successful manager must have a great team to work with another. Another institutional issue is bureaucracy; in most cases, the EFL program manager requires to receive permission from their superiors to carry out a particular task in the interest and growth of the foreign language center. Approvals for such a task take time and, as such, delay the centers' smooth running. Though surprisingly, none of the studies indicated these as a challenge among EFL program managers, the results presented in table 2 indicate so; this may be synonymous in the Turkish Cypriot setting and another critical finding of this research as well.

CONCLUSION

After administering the semi-structured interviews, data were collected and analyzed to determine EFL program managers' opinions on managing EFL programs in the Turkish Cypriot setting, especially regarding challenges and barriers. After analyzing the results from the short review above, key findings emerge; The study argued that the absence of professional expertise, training and retraining programs, resource availability, financial challenges, and competition from other universities were the significant challenges EFL program managers face while carrying out their duties. Our results demonstrated that though other studies did not suggest that the availability of resources poses a challenge to EFL program managers, this study uncovered that lack of resources was a challenge they faced. Another remarkable finding was the level of competition among universities, which allows for the conclusion that the presence of competition among language institutes and universities places a high demand on these managers who, in most cases, may not meet up with the educational demand. Another promising finding was that as the demand for foreign language acquisition increases, more foreign language centers and institutes are being established, making the competition high and putting more pressure on the program managers. This study's findings can be understood in this sense that the rise in competition among universities and foreign language centers resulted from the sector's monetization.

The study argues that the EFL program's monetization serves as a barrier to the sector of foreign language teaching and learning, as confirmed in the study. Though this study acknowledges the need for profit-making in a business venture, exploiting this at the detriment of its success is not a step in the right direction. In conclusion, it would appear that most centers use such a language learning platform as revenue generators and a times do not do a lot to ensure that the quality of the EFL programs is of international standard. Conclusively, the study confirmed that institutional barriers like bureaucracy, recruitment of unqualified foreign language staff, and more are severe barriers to foreign language teaching and learning pedagogy, especially for program managers within this field. It allows the conclusion that lots of projects are left abandoned due to the bureaucratic approvals they require, which is time-consuming. The study also concluded that recruiting highly qualified individuals is not given adequate attention, thereby affecting the few program managers who need to work with unqualified, inexperienced staff.

Pedagogical implications and Recommendations

After carefully carrying out this study, it can be deduced that EFL program management experiences numerous challenges that range from lack of professional expertise, issues of funding, rapid multiplication of language institutes/ universities, high rise in competition among universities, and many more. The study demonstrated that a lot needs to be done towards ensuring efficient management of EFL programs.

In light of these conclusions and implications, the following are recommended, there is a need for training and retraining programs to be organized for EFL Program managers to carry out their duties effectively. Such training will equip them with the adequate managerial skills needed to manage such centers. This training also should be taken seriously by our departments who graduate these young EFL managers and coordinators; it is assumed that they are already equipped with the necessary skills needed to succeed in their respective job descriptions, which is not so. Therefore, more practical training must be given to these prospective EFL managers at the early stage to master their jobs and deliver when and where necessary during the actual job assignments. Much more, there is a great need to organize sensitization programs for owners of foreign language institutes and centers to reach a dialogue on maintaining the value and quality of EFL programs, so they are not seen and used as mere centers for revenue generation only.

It will help create a formidable structure and quality foreign language education system that will serve as a benchmark for any foreign language institute or center desiring to operate. The creation of standards is essential for academic integrity and will help checkmate the over-proliferation of foreign language centers solely for money-making reasons.

However, for further research, there is a need to research and examine why resources are not provided for program managers even while the foreign language centers are making much money from their international students. Again, questions have not been answered why permissions are granted to quack foreign language centers and institutes to operate when they do not meet international regulations and standards; these are more areas to carry research.

There is a great need to investigate and evaluate the quality of curriculum used in training prospective EFL program managers, educational administrators, and others at the university level. It will help to determine the reasons for their underperformance as managers after graduation. A dig into these areas above will help answer unanswered questions about foreign language education, management, and center administrators.

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