

# National Technology Projects for EFL Teaching in Turkey

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## Abstract

Technology integration into education has become a national priority for many centuries after the 1980s. However, making sound policies and creating a functional decision-making mechanism depend on various factors and differing alternative pathways. Following the developed country models during the 2000s, Turkey introduced a national ICT integrated instructional model in EFL teaching by implementing DynED (Dynamic Education), an internet-based language-learning module. Furthermore, the country has recently prioritized technology-integrated education as its foremost national policy via Fatih Project whereby the learning materials are digitalized and learners are to follow their classes on their tablet PCs throughout all levels of compulsory education. Considering the immense amount of investment in allocated resources, the project is understandably a long-term one with many stages of implementation by adopting a multi-dimensional approach. The current paper analyses the governmental policies by indicating the political attitude towards ICT integration into EFL teaching/learning at compulsory education with two main projects, namely DynED and Fatih. It achieves the aim via examining each step of policy-making via addressing mandates, actors, roles and responsibilities, and further binding decisions. Results indicate that Turkish government regardless of political ideology has always possessed positive dispositions towards technology integration into EFL teaching at public schools though the policies were introduced with urgency hesitating to fall behind the age.

**Keywords:** ICT and Education, EFL Teaching, Political Attitude, Turkey, Policy Analysis.

## 1. Introduction

“There is a global trend in both educational policy and research to recognize the need to reform education from traditional paradigms of teaching and learning into more innovative forms of pedagogical practice” (Ottestad, 2010, p.478). These innovative forms comprise the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) instruments in learning and teaching processes. It seems that technology integration into education has become a national priority for many countries after the 1980s. Turkey has also long known to closely follow and model developed countries in policy- and decision making processes. Europeanization, lately, has been one of the main forcing drives; integration has been a source of motivation lying under many education reforms. Policies have continuously been realigned in line with the global trends. ICT in education has been one of them as well, and recently Turkey has become a pioneer reformist in involving ICT into its national educational plans.

However, making sound policies and creating a functional decision-making mechanism depend on various factors and differing alternative pathways. Following the developed technology integrated education systems and country models during 2000s, Turkey introduced a national ICT integrated instructional model in EFL teaching at public schools by implementing DynED (Dynamic Education), an internet-based language learning module. Furthermore, the country has recently prioritized technology-integrated education as its foremost national policy via Fatih (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology) Project whereby the learning materials are being digitalized and learners are to follow their classes on their tablet PCs throughout all levels of compulsory education. Considering the immense amount of investment in allocated resources, the project is understandably a long-term one with many stages of implementation by adopting a multi-dimensional approach.

Given the circumstances, the current paper analyses the governmental policies by indicating the political attitude towards ICT integration into EFL teaching/learning with two main projects, namely DynED and Fatih. It achieves the aim by examining each step of policy-making via addressing mandates, actors, roles and responsibilities, and further binding decisions around the two foremost nation-wide projects.

## 2. Technology-integrated Education and ELT Policies in Turkey

Policies are needed in maximizing the power of welfare states to protect the rights of each citizen with justice. Well-stated by the Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva “in an economy dictated by capital, the big eating the small is inevitable. That is why we need a policy to prevent the big from eating the small. That is the role of

policy and law. But, when we remove the policy and law through deregulation, the big will eat the small” (Manikutty, 2006, p 94). Policy making, thus, is a concern of all different social institutions as well as the ruling managerial side. The process has always been a significant interest of the elites and interest groups; therefore policy making is a multi-group involving extensive task. Considine (2005) regards the institutions are the places for the start of the policy-making processes as the action and inaction are all institutionally framed. “Actors and the system are often in tension but they also depend upon each other” (p. 2). Likewise, attitudes are an important part of policy-making process; however, it is inevitable to consider other driving forces such as globalization and thus current key developments across the world, which ultimately has a great role on determining the policies and how they are shaped. Governments and decision-making mechanism often have to take the general attitude into account while making and implementing policies.

Educational policy is complex and multi-dimensional in nature, and thus the context and dynamics of educational policy-making are required to be examined. The complexity of the policy making process and the multilateral involving levels such as national and international and different actors either being governmental or non-governmental (Anderson, 2006; Fowler, 2009) and/or institutional or non-institutional (Cahn, 1995; Simon, 2007) are all indispensable parts of policy analysis. In the scope of the current chapter, the actors of the governmental policy makers include the people who hold the positions in the governmental offices where they determine the priorities and assignments for the relevant bodies. In top-down approaches, governmental actors are the ones who commence the process of policy making via the pre-determined idealized solutions to the diagnosed problems as the content of the policy. Countries like Turkey who often opts out inviting the stakeholders, teachers, administrators, and NGOs needed to advise within a larger context of educational policies to align their agenda with the contemporary ones. Thus, the two major driving forces that are globalization and Europeanization have been inextricably connected in determining the policy content in the country for more than three decades (Nohl, 2008; Özalay-Sanlı, 2011; Grossman & Sands, 2008; Atay-Turhan, Koc, Isiksal & Isiksal 2009).

Owing to these two outsourced motivation sources in many fields of education, ELT policies and reforms in Turkey were also shaped after the versions of western country models. Where prior the 1980s television was the only basic technological tool to conduct distance education, for instance, after then the field of education witnessed an immense variety of ICT tools to be used in the classrooms. When the discourse around technology use has been based very much on computer-assisted education post 1980s, Turkey, too, started to recognize the necessity of information technology integration into education. In line with the common use of ICT products, internet-based or assisted models also became popular around the late 1990s. The policies prioritizing the use of ICT trends in other countries also were reflected into the school practice. Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) first encouraged the technology use at schools then opened finally a new office, namely Directorate of Educational Technology, to design, define and shape the policies on technology use in education later in 1998. E-state and thus e-school and e-education systems were adopted in 2003 and the government has invested largely into e-transformation infrastructure (Bayrakci, 2005) since then. Today, parent and school connection on student development is done via an internet-based national portal at compulsory level (MNE, 2009). Universities run their classes and the management of academic data via the internet-based modules, too.

In the case of education in general and ELT in particular, the Turkish government regardless of political ideology has always possessed positive dispositions towards technology integration into teaching/learning when the policies are analyzed. The result is visible in two consecutive nation-wide compulsory education project investments as it is reflected into (a) DynED and (b) Fatih Project both of which depended on teaching/learning via and based on ICT technologies. It is because of the advantages of the use of internet in language learning is proved in terms of practicality, speed and efficiency. The quality and duration of exposure to the authentic input is a particularly highlighted benefit thanks to the Web (Dodigovic, 2005). In fact, the use of computers in language teaching dates back to the 1960’s. Depending on the level of technology and pedagogical theories of the time, the use of computer assisted language learning (CALL) can be divided into three stages as behaviorist, communicative, and integrative CALL (Lee, 2000). With an appropriately set infrastructure CALL is known to contribute to students’ progress in different aspects like experiential learning, motivation, interaction, individualization, global understanding, etc. Economic and political changes over the last 30 years have brought about a number of reforms regarding language teaching in Turkey. Throughout these reforms, Turkey has been heading towards the normalization of the CALL concept that was defined as “...the stage when a technology is invisible, hardly even recognized as a technology, taken for granted in everyday life” (Bax, 2003, p. 23). With the Fatih project EFL teaching is intended to come to a climax. ICT is believed to be able to implement and facilitate the realization of the pedagogy that fits an information society (Dede, 2000). Through DynED and a Fatih, EFL teachers will be able to use ICT to the utmost and thus raise responsible citizens who will be equipped to confidently fit into a contemporary world where the English language is compulsory as one’s own mother tongue to survive in many ways.

### 3. Premier ICT Project on EFL: DynED

Turkey connected to Internet first on April 12, 1993 using TCP/IP protocols to get an access to NSFNet (National Science Foundation Network) in USA. Yet, after two decades, as announced by the Minister for Transportation, Maritime Affairs, and Communication, Istanbul besides Los Angeles and Singapore has been chosen by ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) as one of the main hubs of internet access. In line with the globalization processes at large and technological advancements, as well as local advancement in infrastructure and investments in ICT, MNE aimed for the students to enjoy the best of both worlds. Thus, a protocol was signed between FuturePrints, the country representative of DynEd International Inc., Sanko Holding Inc. and MNE on April 26, 2006. Sanko Holding Inc. granted the software to MNE to support EFL instruction at primary school level in Turkey. On February 1, 2013, the contract has been renewed to include secondary education as well.

Determined by the social democratic government of the time then, DynED project was, as one can easily predict, a top-down decision and the implementation process did not take for long. Yet the main idea behind was raising the quality of equity and access for all studying English at primary schools. Therefore, MNE educated the pre-selected teachers who already had or had to improve the necessary ICT skills and thus would guarantee the diffusion of the project to the student level. The project was based on both visual and aural English language input where the teachers and parents could monitor the learner development. It interactively involves the problem solving, analyzing and synthesizing cognitive skills of learners with a particular emphasis on listening and pronunciation skills. With the content of DynED, MNE explicitly displayed the policy turn in ELT via adopting a more communicative language philosophy with enriched authentic input in the project. From traditional teacher role of being the input provider to a more submissive one, students were assigned to take own responsibility for their learning. The activities presented in DynED also reflected the change of learning theory at schools from a behaviorist one to a more cognitive and constructivist one via exploitation of multiple intelligences. The students were not expected to be only audio-visual learners but could sing, draw and use their higher order thinking skills via providing solutions to some daily encountered problems in their own way. Thus, prescriptive approaches in language teaching left its place behind to more descriptive ones.

MNE also considered the benefits for the Turkish society at large by educating the next generation for more effective use of ICT technology. Broader perspective for an ICT policy was also considered for a sustainable society in the sense that EU's life-long learning goals also somehow mandated a quality adult education. Thus, DynED was also seen as a sign of a quick integration to the EU through teaching English language as a school subject via internet-based authentic input for a more qualified future adulthood life. However, free from the positive policy intentions at the implementation stage there had been many problems all of which decreased the potential benefit of the project. Kizildag (2009) listed them as

- Schools do not have a computer laboratory
- Schools do not have internet access
- Schools have computer laboratory; yet, not used for language classes. (p. 193)

As supported by MacNeil & Delafield (in Akbaba-Altun, 2006) "the main inhibitors to implementing technology in the classroom are lack of financial resources for hardware, software, and infrastructure, and lack of time for professional development and planning" (p. 177). Shortage of ICT subject teachers across country by then put most of the responsibility on English language teachers in Turkey, too, as the time between the policy-making and implementing was rather limited. Prior to Kizildag's study Pelgrum (2001) also collected the main problems in ICT applications in EU countries: "insufficient number of computers, teachers lack of knowledge/skills, difficult to integrate in instruction, scheduling computer time, insufficient peripherals, not enough copies of software, insufficient teacher time, not enough simultaneous access, not enough supervision staff, and lack of technical assistance" (Akbaba-Akbulut, 2006, p. 177).

Yet, despite the lack of technologic infrastructure, DynED has reached out 11 250 primary schools at the year of its inauguration, in 2008 to 1 million pupils. In 2009, 34 500 primary schools were involved into the program, and 6.8 million students had a key code to study English with DynED in 2010. The positive outcomes in schools with the necessary infrastructure and trained personnel as well as developments and cost benefit calculations of ICT- supported education led to the initiation of Fatih project.

### 4. Ongoing ICT Project of Turkey: FATIH

Currently, MNE is extremely engaged with the most updated ICT project Fatih (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology), the most significant educational investment of Turkey (MNE, 2011). Not particularly an EFL teaching project, Fatih, indeed, forms the second stage in the reformation of English language learning and teaching after the partial failure in DynED project. Negative perceptions in the implementation of the project, led to a larger but somewhat a more updated version of ICT-based module namely Fatih, at compulsory school level by involving the use of smart boards in the classroom and a tablet pc for each student.

FATIH is described as the movement aiming to enhance opportunities and improve technology by supplying 620 000 classrooms of 40 000 schools with IT equipment. The Fatih Project is being realized under the joint direction of two ministries, namely the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications. The project, started in 2010, is due to run 6 years until 2016. The project, in brief, is to make information and communication technologies the main means of the education process and enable teachers and students to use them effectively for teaching/learning purposes. The 5 different components of the FATIH Project can be listed as, (i) equipment and software substructure, (ii) educational e-content and management of e-content, (iii) effective usage of the ICT in teaching programs, (iv) in-service training of the teachers, and (v) conscious, reliable, manageable and measurable ICT usage.

Supporters of the project (cf Ciftci, Taskaya & Alemdar, 2013) justify this movement by stressing that one of the aims of education is to raise citizens in line with the needs of the society. Therefore, education systems should develop citizens capable of dealing with the bulk data that is currently produced in the information age and carry the characteristics of information society. All these require educational institutions to inform individuals and teach them how to use new technologies as well as using these ICTs themselves.

When analyzed policy-wise, the implementation of Fatih project, in fact, reflects a more organized and comprehensive way of application despite its top-down approach. First of all, as stated above, the project has been extended to a period of five years' time. Educating the teachers and providing the guidebooks as well as equipping the schools with the required technology and developing the necessary software structure have all been conducted since 2010, which in turn demonstrates that a somewhat deficient application of DynED would be eliminated for the future success of this expensive project. Through the graded implementation of Fatih across the country the provision of equipment and software substructure in all levels of education, from pre-schools through elementary, and to secondary education, via which all schools will be equipped with interactive whiteboards and broadband internet transmission. DynED modules in Fatih project for supporting ELT seems to be improved for the accurate and smooth use in terms of massive investment for the infrastructure. It must be thanks to this development that by 2012, MNE extended the use of DynEd's blended-learning to 34,500 public schools compared to prior 11,220 schools.

If the right steps are taken this component will mostly benefit EFL teachers who can easily make use of the internet throughout their syllabus as the renewed curriculum necessitates them to implement internet-based teaching materials in their classes (MNE, 2013). The second component will give EFL instructors easy access to the latest knowledge and save time since everything is given to them in a software package. Likewise the third component will facilitate EFL teachers' work since guidebooks will be updated frequently.

One of the most important components integrated in the Fatih project is in-service training for the school staff. It is extensively found out that teacher's readiness level for implementing such a large-scale project is unfortunately not available (Bilici, 2011; Dincer, Senkal & Sezgin, 2013) The draft teacher education policy text (MNE, 2012) also underlines the significance of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) as an indispensable part in the formation of teachers' professional education. Also serving for the realization of this aim, it was planned to train 680 000 teachers in terms of equipment infrastructure and effectively use of the teacher's guidebook, synchronized with the developments in ICT within the framework of Fatih Project. The general aim of these trainings is to contribute to the professional development of teachers, and to upgrade the level of education in our country, in order to provide students with a rich education and training environment. To be able to use the ICT equipment effectively in the education process, it is necessary to clearly define how these ICTs should be used in each course. From a top-down perspective, Fatih project realizes the mandates put forward for the content of teacher's professional knowledge that is also cited explicitly by the draft policy text on teacher's professional learning and development (MNE, 2012).

As a final point, learning outcomes of each course regarding the effective use of ICT in the education program should be specified and updated accordingly. According to the 2013 curriculum text, the learning outcomes of EFL teaching are as follows.

...it is expected that learners will become confident and proficient users of English, developing appreciation for their own unique culture while learning to understand and value a broad spectrum of international languages and cultures in accordance with the CEFR's emphasis on plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. (MNE, 2013, p.4)

In short, the policies that regulate Fatih Project's necessity and significance in performing the goals of national education are intertwined with the transformation of ELT policies from traditional to more contemporary, from prescriptive to more descriptive and constructive, and from print-based to digital forms of learning.

## 5. Conclusion

Technology integration and use of ICT in Turkish National Education seem to be having progressive steps. Results coming out of educational decision- and policy-makers in favor of the nation-wide ICT use display that

Turkey regardless of its political ideologies of the ruling parties showed a positive tendency to invest in technology integrated education modules. The on-going large-scale Fatih Project is still under its pilot study phase. There are controversial and inconclusive opinions on whether the project will be a success in near future. For instance, a very recent study (Matthews-Aydinli & Elaziz, 2010) conducted with Turkish EFL teachers indicates that they feel confident over using ICT in their classes and are very positive about technology-integration in teaching processes. Yet many others provided doubts from a mild to strong scales on the success of the project when it is finalized (Bilici, 2011; Dincer, Senkal & Sezgin, 2013; Gulbahar & Guven, 2008; Guven, 2012; Kayaduman, Sirakaya, & Seferoglu, (2011).

No matter what the results indicate it is explicitly observable that Turkey continues to hold positive and strong views on the necessity of technology integration into teaching/learning. Though the literature on ICT integrated education has a few numbers of critical papers questioning whether such technology would contribute greatly on student achievement in meeting the societal needs (Nivala 2009; Selwyn 2011; Player-Koro 2012), one can easily hope Fatih will bring excessively positive results to the country's goals in ELT.

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#### Notes

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