Chapter 13

Motivation of EFL Students in Turkey:
Potential Impact on the Nation’s Economic Sustainability

Bryan Christiansen
PryMarke, LLC, USA

Dilara Demir
Maltepe University, Turkey

Hacer Günsever
Inlingua Language School, Turkey

Melike Esra Kaymak
Inlingua Language School, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The global marketplace is characterized by various changes occurring in economic, social, natural, and technological areas. As such, experts in numerous fields are still working to revise various systems and infrastructures to operate in a robust manner within the new realities of today. This paper focuses on part of the educational aspect of that massive effort by examining the intrinsic motivation of Turkish students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and its potential impact on the country’s long-term economic sustainability since English remains the global business language. The paper commences with an introduction to the realities of contemporary globalism that underscore the very purpose for this work, and the subsequent sections present and then synthesize all material to provide suggestions to create a paradigm shift in thinking required for teaching EFL in Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how motivation potentially influences the performance of students involved in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Turkey, and how this situation could ultimately affect the country’s long-term economic sustainability since English remains the primary language of business and scientific / technological development around the world (Camerota, 2014; Şen, 2012) and the realities of contemporary globalism affect all nations today (Christiansen, 2012; Ohmae, 2005; Nye,
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2003). Additionally, this chapter will examine the importance of business and education to collaborate more closely to narrow the growing global skills gap which exists today to improve business performance and productivity in an era of global hypercompetition (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015).

The global marketplace is characterized by various changes occurring in economic, social, natural, and technological areas (Denktas-Sakar, et. al., 2014). As such, education systems are the cornerstone of training people to meet the demands of that global job marketplace today (Biçerli, 2011), and in an era of the “Knowledge Worker” and the “Global Labor Pool” (Drucker, 2002) these systems must effectively train their constituents so they possess a rather different set of skills and personal qualities than were necessary in past generations, especially with regards to innovation (Carvalho, 2015). The changing nature of many job positions worldwide is requiring qualities beyond traditional skillsets such as computer literacy, business presentations, or quantitative analysis to also include cultural adaptability, initiative and leadership, objectivity and integrity, critical thinking and judgment, teamwork, and information integration (US State Department, 2014).

Therefore, educational systems must reflect these realities with a paradigm shift in thinking to create new programs or upgrade current ones, especially with regards to EFL training, which develop these qualities and skillsets so workers can compete effectively with the global labor force. This evidently holds true for all nations (The World Bank, 2012). It is worthy to note here that the first half of the 21st century will be the first time in 200 years when emerging-market nations such as Turkey will contribute more to global growth than the developed countries (McKinsey Quarterly, 2010).

The authors have a combined total of 30 years’ EFL teaching experience in Turkey and elsewhere, and we state many of the Turkish university first-year English preparatory schools or high school-level EFL programs are not adequate or effective enough to prepare students for future use in university-level courses or at work. Recommended changes are provided below along with a list of “Best Practices” which are included in the Appendix.

Republic of Turkey

With a population of approximately 81 million and a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US$1.5 trillion (at Purchasing Power Parity or PPP) as of 2013-14 (CIA Factbook, 2015), Turkey is one of the next generation of “Tiger economies” known as CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, South Africa) (Allen, 2011). John Bowler, Director of Country Risk Service at the Economist Intelligence Unit in London, England, believes the sizeable populations of some of these countries and the wealth of natural resources in others may make them economic powerhouses in the next decade.

Within this context, Turkey is one of the most geopolitically important of the CIVETS nations – as well as in the world – due mainly to the highly strategic Bosphorous Strait linking the Black Sea (via the Marmara Sea) to the north with the Mediterranean Sea to the south. This connection permits access to many markets beyond Turkey such as Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine in the northern region to Lebanon, all of Northern Africa, and many European nations (e.g., Greece, Italy, Spain) in the southern region. As the gatekeeper of the Bosphorous and the connecting Dardanelles, the Turkish Straits are governed by the 1936 Montreux Convention in which Turkey regulates the transit of naval warships from non-Black Sea nations (e.g., the USA) and guarantees free passage of civilian ships during peacetime. The significance to international trade in the region is self-evident.
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