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## Academic mobility development in Turkey via English for specific purposes

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### Abstract

Special skills, abilities and knowledge, necessary for professional growth and/or education in a foreign academic environment can be developed by means of foreign language learning. English language training in the context of academic mobility development should be based on high educational quality; advanced level of English demonstrated by students and academics; their informational, social and cultural preadaptation. The aim of the research is to apply this concept in practice and make Turkey more attractive for academics and students from other countries. The main result of the research will be the creation of the coursebook 'Study, Teach and Research in Turkey. English for Academic Mobility' for Intermediate/Upper-Intermediate learners, including Students' Book, Teachers' Book, DVD with audio and video material. The course development involves several stages. The course can be useful for university students and academics and language courses in Turkey and abroad.

**Keywords:** Academic mobility; cultural preadaptation; higher education; teaching English.

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## 1. Introduction

Globalisation has influenced almost all the spheres of human activity. Education is not the exception. Tomilinson (1999) mentions that globalisation has 'put communication, mobility and connectivity at the centre of our lives.' The majority of higher education institutions worldwide are going through the period of changes connected with the integration into the European Higher Education Area. Over the past two decades, the international activities of most universities have expanded in volume, scope and complexity. Turkey has been a full member of the Bologna Process/European Higher Education Area since 2001. The significant feature of the Turkish higher education is that Turkey has been the most rapidly growing and intensively developing higher education system in the EHEA. During this period, a lot of changes in the current higher education system have been made and many others are expected. Quantitative changes require further structural and contextual reforms at national and institutional levels. Bologna Process called for the improvement in the quality of education, development of academic mobility, the possibilities of life-long learning, collaboration of academics from different countries, opportunities for international careers for the graduates and opportunities for students from other countries to study and work in Turkey.

To set the training of internationally, active specialists becomes one of the priorities of higher education institutions. Taking this tendency into account, it is clear that using English only as the means of international education is not enough. English language should be used as a tool to understand global culture in general and the culture of the country where the students are planning to work or study in particular. Language proficiency and previous international play a key role in cross cultural adjustment.

## 2. Relevance of the research and the previous successful experience

According to *The Black Book of the Bologna Process*, created in 2005 by The National Unions of Student in Europe, student mobility is negatively influenced by high cost of mobility programs, lack of information on them, poor command of a foreign language, stereotypes between 'the East' and 'the West', and other factors. These aspects are also true when we consider the mobility barriers for the academic staff. On the other hand, a lot of students and academics who have studied or taught in a foreign country can agree that this experience benefited them in many ways. Creating global awareness, promoting international peace between countries, enhancing academic learning, learning a non-native language and experiencing personal and professional development are just a few of these benefits. The above-mentioned barriers should be eliminated and the advantages should be made stronger worldwide, Turkey included.

The researchers from different countries have been trying to find the ways of academic mobility improvement and development. One of the projects which showed good results was developed within the framework of the Tempus project CD JEP\_ 27119-2006 'Innovative Language Curricula in Technical Universities (ILAN)' (2007–2009). Six institutions of higher education from Austria, Sweden and Russia, took part in this project. ILAN is intended for three groups of learners: students, teachers of technical disciplines and administrative staff of engineering universities. It's main goal is to train learners to use international English to promote academic mobility in higher technical education in Europe. Both the learners and the teachers working with the course gave very positive remarks.

ILAN was so much demanded that it was decided to enrich and enlarge the course with more topics and materials for learning. The same team of authors created a new coursebook 'English for Academic Mobility. Coursebook for Students, Lecturers and Administrators of Technical Universities.' The coursebook took part in VII All-Russia Contest of Publications for Institutions of Higher Education and won in nomination 'New Types of Educational Publications' in 2015.

### **3. The novelty and the concept of the research**

The desire to comply with the international educational standards and opportunity to enhance academic mobility call for the development of innovative training courses, programs and teaching materials that foster the improvement of higher education. According to Mischenko and Shelenkova (2011; 2012), for achievement and sustaining of competitiveness in the internal and external markets for educational services, it is necessary for higher education institutions to pursue the policy of educational quality, to develop new concepts in education process and to follow them. Achieving conformity with these criteria and improving the quality of teaching which is also focused on acquiring cultural issues mean introducing a new concept in English language teaching and learning.

The concept is based on the combination of three principles: improvement and sustaining of the educational quality; improvement of the English language command by the students and academics and informational, social and cultural preadaptation of students and teaching staff taking part in academic mobility.

#### **3.1. Educational quality**

The first principle is focused on the educational quality. Darling–Hammond (1997) added that ‘for the most part, education systems are deemed to be of higher quality when students demonstrate higher levels of achievement. Improving quality, in the view of many, involves taking actions that increase the amount of students learn. However, most observers recognise that education systems have multiple goals, many of which go beyond the transmission of cognitive knowledge, such as the development of relevant employment skills and attitudes that facilitate civic engagement’. The last mentioned point of view on the quality of education proves that both the learning material and the teaching approaches used should improve not only cognitive skills but also social skills and competences in the native and non-native international environment.

#### **3.2. English language**

The second principle is aimed at the improvement of the English language command by the students and academics. It is a well-known fact that the active involvement in academic mobility can lead its participants to develop positive attitude towards the second language. This motivational advantage of studying and teaching abroad can be favourably applied to the English language learning. According to Toderescu, Greculescu and G. Mugurel (2012, p. 37) ‘academic mobility has the potential from an international perspective to boost the language skills because of a more authentic purpose and the meaningfulness of the learning context’. These learning settings determine the methods, technics and the content of the English language teaching courses and course books.

#### **3.3. Preadaptation**

The last principle of the concept includes informational, social and cultural preadaptation of students and teaching staff taking part in academic mobility. Studying abroad and living in a culture that is different from your own can be exciting, but challenging. Some students experience culture shock when they move abroad. One of the biggest fears of students studying abroad is the worry about culture shock or language differences. The process of adjusting to a new cultural environment is stressful. Lazarus (1999) mentioned that students have to face various stressors, and often the expectations students have from home cultures do not really match that of the host culture. To reduce and even eliminate the above-mentioned issues, students and academics need to experience a developed cultural preadaptation.

This concept can be put into practice with the development of the training course aimed at students and teachers wishing to take part in academic mobility projects. The training course can be

used by foreign students and academics to learn more about Turkish educational and cultural environment, and by Turkish students and academics to tell about their educational background, share with foreign colleagues the information about Turkish educational system, and develop scientific collaboration between the universities in English.

The task of the research is to use the positive results of the previous projects which proved their success and to make the course helpful for people, who are going to study, teach and research in Turkey. The characteristics that will be new in the course and the coursebook aimed at the promotion of academic mobility in Turkey are the following:

- ◆ to use the content of all the topics and the material for study based on the Turkish academic reality;
- ◆ to develop the course for a wider audience of learners, i.e., not to concentrate only on one particular type of universities (e.g., technical universities) as it was in the previous projects;
- ◆ to include information and the tasks to develop cross-cultural skills and provide cultural preadaptation for those who are coming to Turkey and, at the same time, for those who are representing academic life in Turkey abroad;
- ◆ to develop the tasks to improve learners' 21-st century skills with the special attention to the development of communication and critical thinking skills;
- ◆ to include more academic English tasks of Intermediate/Upper-Intermediate level to improve the learners' command of English for academic mobility.

#### **4. Project description**

The primary goal of the research is to implement the principles mentioned above and thus to promote academic mobility in Turkey. The main outcome of the project is the development of the training course and the coursebook 'Study, Teach and Research in Turkey. English for Academic Mobility.'

##### **4.1. Objectives**

Following the goals of the project, the objectives can be formulated as follows:

- ◆ to develop a new English language training course and the coursebook;
- ◆ to make the course multi-target, i.e., it will help to improve the command of the English language, promote academic mobility and help with cultural preadaptation;
- ◆ to aim the course at the learners who come to Turkey for academic purposes and at Turkish students and academics who represent their country abroad;
- ◆ to develop the course for suitable for undergraduate students, postgraduate students and academics;
- ◆ to train the target groups using the course materials;
- ◆ to measure and analyse the educational quality improvement and readiness of the learners for academic mobility, comparing education results of the pilot training and non-pilot target groups.

##### **4.2. Course characteristics**

The course is characterised by certain features. English language level of learners should be Intermediate at the beginning of the course leading to Upper-Intermediate level by the end of the course. Course components include Students' Book, Teachers' Book, DVD with audio and video material. Topics covered by the coursebook are:

1. Turkey in the international educational environment.
2. System of higher education in Turkey.
3. Academic mobility programmes in Turkey.
4. Turkish university life.
5. Turkish academic culture.
6. Being a foreigner in Turkey: dos and don'ts.
7. The latest achievements in science and technology in Turkey.

The training course and the coursebook can be used by higher educational institutions, language schools and independent learners. The following Figure 1 summarises the main course characteristics.

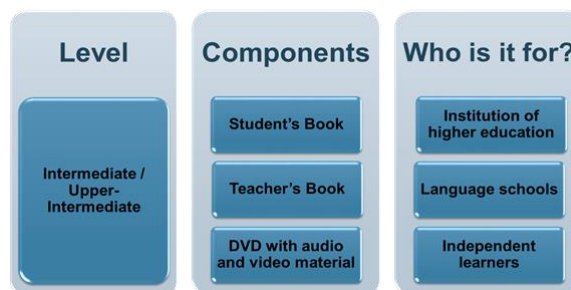


Figure 1. Main course characteristics

Learners' skills that can be developed by the course involve reading, listening, writing, and speaking English as a foreign language due to the corresponding sections in each unit of the coursebook. 21st century skills, such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and digital literacy owing to the relevant tasks given in the coursebook. The special attention is given to the improvement of cross-cultural skills as a result of the topics cover by the coursebook.

## 5. Methodological framework

### 5.1. Teaching methods

Teaching methods that can be applied in the training include interactive approach plus Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Both of them can be used by the teachers involved in the training. Interactive learning is a hands-on, real-world approach to education. According to Stanford University School of Medicine, 'interactive learning actively engages the students in wrestling with the material. It reinvigorates the classroom for both students and faculty. Lectures are changed into discussions, and students and teachers become partners in the journey of knowledge acquisition.' Interactive method really helps to achieve the good results of modern education. They foster learning process to be carried out in such a way that the students are involved in the cognitive process, every learner contributes to the teaching, students interact to exchange information and ideas.

The concept of CLIL was determined by Marsh (2005). According to him, 'CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or part of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language.' The implementation of this method in the course will develop not only the learners' language competency, but also it will shape their outlook and the awareness of foreign cultural, social and academic issues. The main principals of the course and the recommended teaching methods will be highlighted in the Teachers' Book along with the keys to the tasks, listening and video scripts and other important notes and recommendations.

## 5.2. Research methods, techniques and stages

The research and the implementation of the project will be conducted with the help of multiple methods and techniques: questionnaires, tests, meetings, consultations and discussions, comparative analysis, information collecting, material development and pilot training. All of them will be used throughout the research.

Research consists of seven stages:

Stage 1—making SWOT analysis of the project; conducting meetings and discussions with the representatives of the relevant University divisions to find the ways to eliminate threats and weaknesses, use the opportunities and make the most of the strengths; collecting material and information for the coursebook using printed and Internet resources.

Stage 2—‘Study, Teach and Research in Turkey. English for academic mobility’ course components’ development, consultations and cooperation with the University divisions.

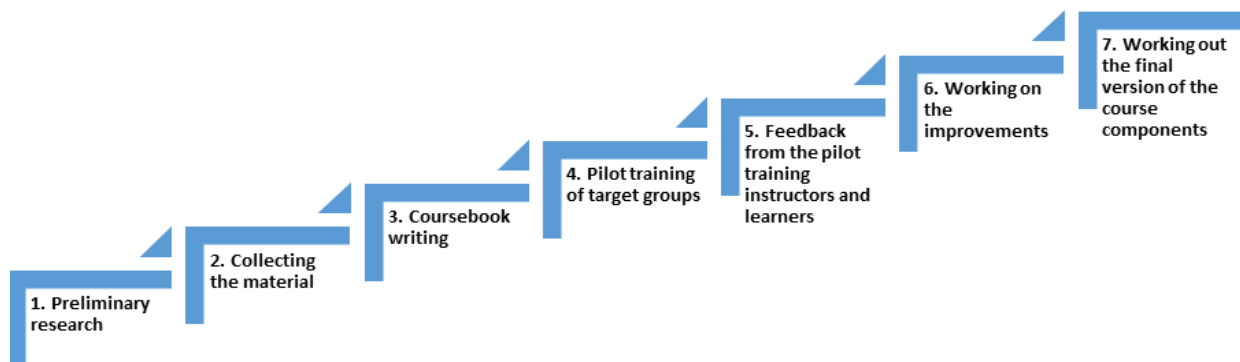
Stage 3—selecting students from 3 target groups (undergraduates, postgraduates and academics) and instructors for the course pilot teaching; forming the groups and organising the study schedule.

Stage 4—developing the questionnaire to check how much factual information representatives of target groups and students and academics who do not take part in course pilot training know about academic mobility in Turkey; developing the test checking the level of English for academic mobility of the pilot and non-pilot training learners; comparing the results of the questionnaire and the test in the pilot teaching and non-pilot groups.

Stage 5—selecting the parts of the coursebook for pilot training and consultations with the pilot training instructors; pilot training of target group members on improvement of the skills mentioned above.

Stage 6—developing the questionnaire to check how much factual information representatives of target groups know about academic mobility in Turkey after the pilot training; developing the test checking the level of English for academic mobility of the learners after the pilot training; comparing and analysing the results of the questionnaire and the test in the pilot training groups. Identifying the progress of the pilot teaching groups.

Stage 7—collecting and analysing the feedback from the pilot training instructors and learners; working on the improvements of the course; working out the final version of the course components.



**Figure 2. Research steps**

Figure 2 represents the summary of the research stages in the form of its main steps.

## 6. Conclusion and dissemination of the results

Bogoslovskiy, Pisareva and Tryapitsina (2007) determine academic mobility as an opportunity for the students (primarily), teachers and administrative university staff to move from one institution to another in order to share experience, get the opportunities that are not available for some reason in their university, overcome national isolation and acquire pan-European prospects.

Study abroad programs are about choosing the hard road to understanding a foreign culture, recognising a global challenge while involvement in an unfamiliar world. During this journey, students go through an acculturation process, which in an idealistic world should transpire in a richer intercultural competence state.

In case of success of the course development and pilot training, its results can be shared at the scientific conferences in Turkey and abroad, published in scientific journals and presented at the universities interested in the development of academic mobility all over Turkey.

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