



THE ORGANIZATION OF “COMMUNITY SERVICE” COURSE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: A MODEL APPLICATION

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Summary

In Turkey, the curriculum teacher training programs follow are defined by the Council of Higher Education. In 2006, Council of Higher Education revised the curriculum of teacher training programs in accordance with the Bologna Process. This curriculum revision introduced a new course called ‘Community Service’ which aims to raise students’ awareness of their responsibilities as individuals to the community in which they live. Through this course, students are expected to realize individuals can make a difference by volunteering to share their knowledge and skills with the community. The curriculum change implemented in the Distance Education English Language Teaching (DELT) program made the inclusion of 4th year Community Service course necessary in the current academic year. As the number of 4th year distance education students is enormous and live in different cities around Turkey, an organization which ensures students to do community service in cities where they reside was a challenge. Therefore, a protocol with the Ministry of Education was signed whereby DELT students would help 6-8th grade students who need additional help with their English courses in lower income neighborhoods. This presentation discusses the details of the organization for the 1495 students who conduct tutorials in primary schools in 71 cities.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Preparing students as active citizens who are engaged with the communities in which they live has been one of the objectives of higher education both in Europe and the United States of America since 1980’s. In Europe, Magna Charta Universitatum (1988) signed by 388 rectors which is considered to be one of the foundations of the Bologna Declaration clearly states that one purpose of higher education is to serve the community. In recent years, one focus of the European Higher Education Area within the Bologna Declaration is the social dimension of higher education. This focus has given rise to declarations such as *Talloires Declaration on the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education*(2005), *Strasbourg Declaration on the Responsibility of Higher Education for a Democratic Culture Citizenship, Human Rights and*

Sustainability (2006) in Europe, *Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education* (1999) in the United States, which emphasize the importance of higher education institutions' role in improving the quality of community life. To achieve this goal, higher education institutions need to engage with their communities through administrators, faculty, staff and students.

Turkey, as one of the participating countries working to create the European Higher Education Area, has also placed an emphasis on the role and responsibilities of higher education institutions to their community. Accordingly, the Turkish Council of Higher Education has revised the strategy of the Turkish higher education with the understanding that higher education institutions have a crucial role in fostering active democratic citizenship. To enable students to become aware of their responsibilities as educated citizens, the Council introduced a course to be included in the curricula called "Community Service". Through this course, the aim is to foster student involvement in the community, societal and environmental issues. This study presents one application of Community Service course. This application is of interest because the number of the students taking the course is large and students reside in different cities around Turkey.

2.0. HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Higher education in Turkey is planned, coordinated and supervised by the Council of Higher Education. All the higher education institutions offer programs that are conducted face-to-face. One university however, namely Anadolu University, in addition to face-to-face programs also offers undergraduate programs through distance education. Open Education Faculty within Anadolu University was established in 1981 to provide education to those who otherwise could not attain higher education. Today, Open Education Faculty provides Associate and Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degrees a number of different areas to over one million students. One of the programs offering a BA degree through distance education is English Language Teaching program.

The curricula for programs are prepared by universities independently but subject to the approval of the Council of Higher Education. Although programs can define their own curriculum, they, of course, reflect the policies of individual universities as well as the national higher education policies. For teacher training programs, on the other hand, the curriculum is defined by the Council of Higher Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. In 2006, following the Bologna Process, YÖK revised the curriculum of teacher training programs. This curriculum revision introduced a new course called 'Community Service' which aims to raise students' awareness of their responsibilities as individuals to the community in which they live. Through this course, students are expected to realize individuals can make a difference by volunteering to share their knowledge and skills with the community.

3.0. DISTANCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM (DELT)

The DELT program, which began to admit students in 2000 in accordance with the protocol signed between the Ministry of Education and Anadolu University, is unique in that it is a blended program whereby the first two years are face-to-face and the last two years are through distance education. The distance education is supported by asynchronous on-line courses. The first two years is designed to help students improve their language skills. Thus in the first two years, students take courses such as speaking, writing, reading, listening and pronunciation. The purpose of the last two years is to help students acquire English language teaching skills. Therefore, the last two years consist of theoretical and methodology courses.

The curriculum of DELT is comparable to that of face-to-face teacher training programs. With the approval of the Council of Higher Education, the implementation of the revised curriculum in the DELT program began in 2008-2009 academic year. Thus, Community Service, a 4th year course, is offered for the first time this academic year. In the DELT program, students in their 3rd and 4th years generally live in their hometowns, thus in any one of the 81 cities in Turkey as the 3rd and 4th year courses are through distance education.

4.0. COMMUNITY SERVICE

One of the many purposes of Turkish higher education is to encourage civic engagement and foster civic responsibility among university students. To achieve this goal, a course called Community Service was integrated in to the curricula of all the 4-year undergraduate programs. Based on the course description provided by the Council of Higher Education, the goals and the objectives of Community Service course in the DELT program were defined as follows. At the end of this course, students will be able to determine the areas of community service which they can offer, organize activities that would benefit the community, become aware of his/her own skills which can be used to offer service to the community, share the experience gained in community service with others, and as an English teacher, how s/he can share his/her knowledge and experience with the community.

In the DELT program, administering the Community Service course is a challenge due to the number and dispersion of its students. To accommodate 1495 students (henceforth teacher candidates) residing in 71 cities around Turkey, we prepared a proposal for a project according to which the Ministry of Education would be a partner in the realization of this course. This project had number of motivations.

The proposal was to have our teacher candidates to do English tutorials in primary schools in low-income neighborhoods. The reason for this proposal was that in Turkey 6th, 7th and 8th grade students are required to take a centralized exam at the end of each year which includes English as one of the subject areas to be tested. Graduates of primary schools are placed in secondary schools based on the cumulative scores received on the three exams. Therefore, most students take private lessons and/or tutorials to improve their knowledge and skills to receive higher scores on these exams. Because they are expensive, children from low income families cannot afford to take private lessons or tutorials. Moreover, because the parents of these children are not well educated, they cannot help their children with school work. Thus, those students are at a disadvantage in such a competitive system. Providing English tutorials to those students who cannot otherwise receive additional guidance, would foster equal education opportunity for low income students. The best way to reach those students is through the schools which they attend. As primary as well as secondary education is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education's approval of this project was necessary. In addition, because the teacher candidates reside in different cities, the Ministry's coordination with the Provincial Education Directorates was essential. The Ministry of Education accepted the proposal with the view that primary school students would benefit from such a project and a protocol was signed between the Ministry of Education and Anadolu University on July 11, 2008.

4.1 Course requirements

The protocol states that the Ministry of Education would allocate primary schools in low income neighborhoods for English tutorials to be conducted by teacher candidates and the Provincial Education Directorates would act as a bridge between Anadolu University and local schools in terms of providing information and organization. The principals of the local schools selected by

the Provincial Education Directorates organize the tutorials. In each tutorial, the number of students should not exceed 15 and for each tutorial, a teacher candidate is assigned. Each teacher candidate is required to conduct a minimum of 2 hours of tutorial per week. An English teacher is assigned to supervise a maximum of 3 teacher candidates. English teachers need not to be present in the classrooms during tutorials but should guide the teacher candidates in planning the tutorial and the activities that would be the most beneficial to the students. It is the English teachers' and the principals' responsibility to oversee that the teacher candidate abides by the rules and the regulations of the school, Ministry of Education and Open Education Faculty. The principals and English teachers are paid by Anadolu University for the extra hours they work for this course. Teacher candidates are required to complete 25 weeks of two-hour tutorials. As this a credited course, students receive Pass/Fail grade.

4.2. Implementation

In 2008-2009 academic year, 1495 4th year students (teacher candidates) took this course. As seen in Figure 1, 70.4% of the teacher candidates are female and the remaining 29.6% are males. The ages of the teacher candidates differ between 21 and 30. However, the majority (70%) of the teacher candidates are between the ages of 21 and 25.

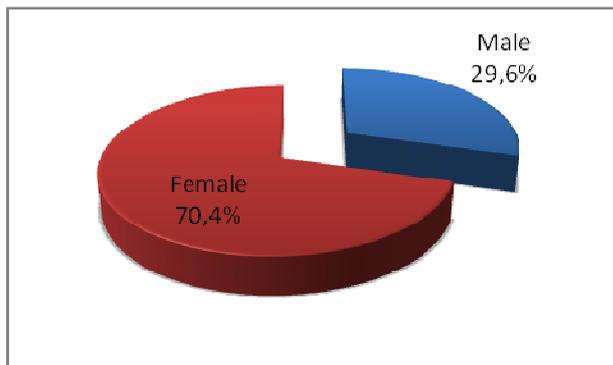


Figure 1. The distribution of teacher candidates according to gender

Figure 2 presents the number of teacher candidates in each city for the 2008-2009 academic year. The organization for the community service course was done for 71 cities. There were no teacher candidate residing in 10 cities.

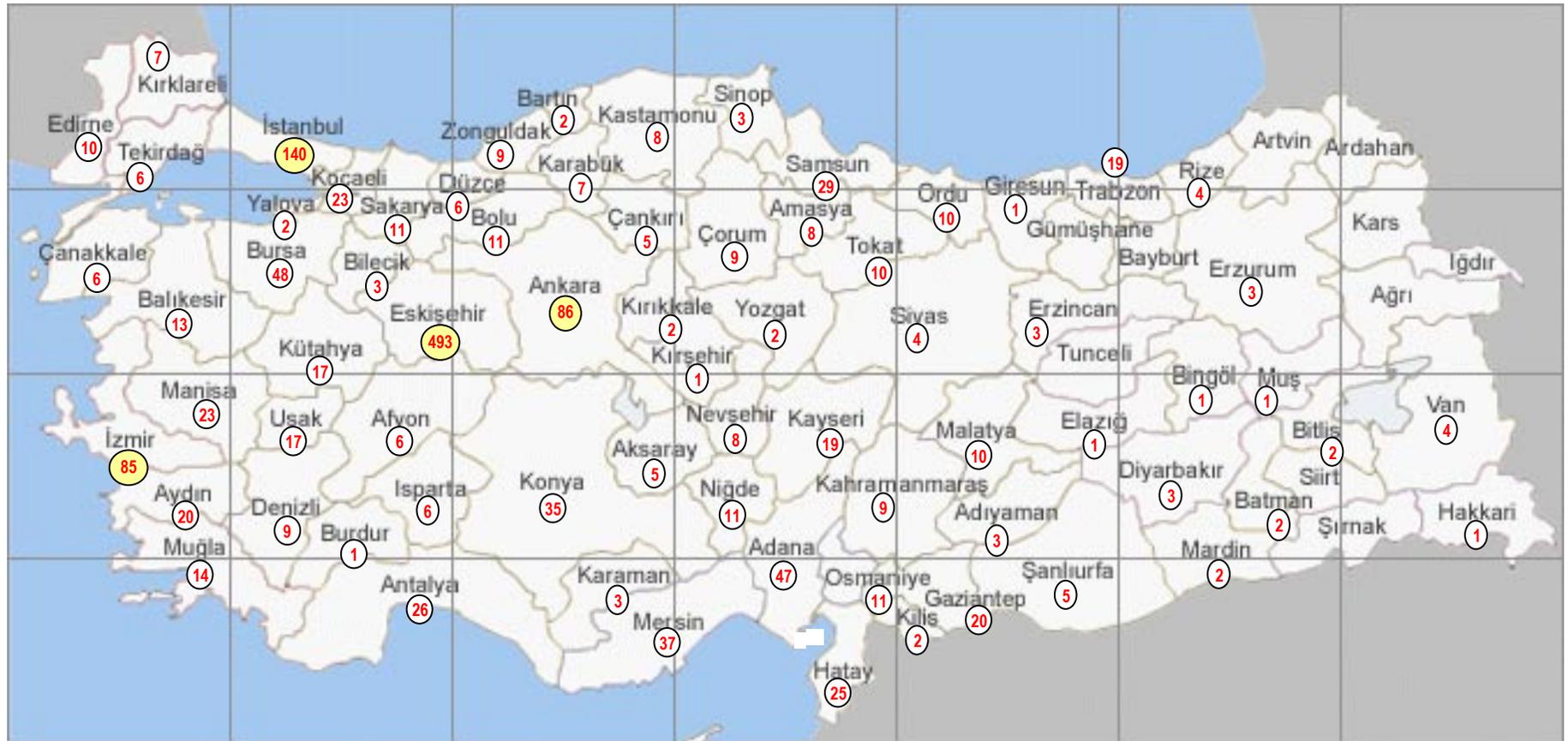


Figure 2. Number of teacher candidates in each city

In the 71 cities, 230 principals and 436 English teachers participated as shown in Figure 3.

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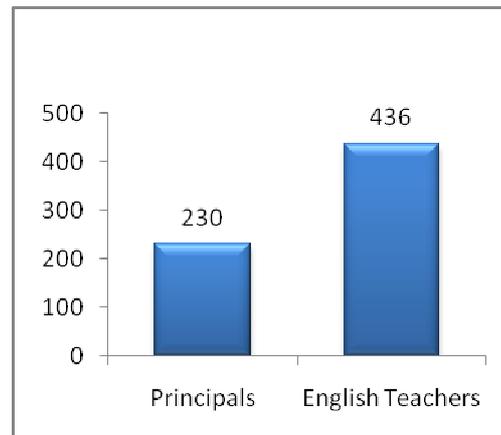


Figure 3. Number of principals and English teachers in 71 cities

Before the implementation of the course, the following steps were taken. As the academic year begins in the second week of November, the organization for this course starts at the beginning of November. DELT students can renew their address information until the end of October. Based on the teacher candidates' address information, the number of teacher candidates in each city is determined. The Provincial Education Directorates in each city are provided with the number of teacher candidates so that the number of schools and English teachers to oversee teacher candidates can be determined. The Provincial Education Directorates, after determining the schools and teachers, supply this information to Open Education Faculty and Open Education Faculty announces the names of the schools and the number of tutorials planned for each grade on DELT's website (<http://www.iolp.anadolu.edu.tr>). Teacher candidates choose the school they would like to do the tutorial among the announced schools. Each teacher candidate contacts the principal of the school to determine the tutorial schedule (i.e., the day and grade of tutorials). If the openings for all the tutorials are filled in that school, then the teacher candidate needs to find a different school. As the organization is done based on teacher candidate numbers in each city, all are accommodated although the schools in which they do their tutorial may not be their first choice. The principal assigns an English teacher for each candidate. Both the English teacher and the principal approve the schedule. The approved schedule is sent to Open Education Faculty. Teacher candidate and the assigned English teacher plan the tutorials.

During the tutorials, the teacher candidates are expected to help students improve their English and appreciate learning a foreign language. To achieve these goals, teacher candidates can work with students to stage a play at the end of the tutorial, read English stories, watch English films and cartoons, and play language games (e.g., hangman, scrabble).

At the end of the tutorial, teacher candidates are required to submit a portfolio consisting of tutorial plans, tutorial report for each week and a report evaluating the tutorials and reflecting on whether they themselves have benefited from the tutorials as citizens.

5.0. CONCLUSION

As the year has not ended and this is the first year this implementation is realized, we do not have conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of the application presented here. However, although limited and informal, the feedback we have received from teacher candidates and English teachers is positive. At the end of the tutorials, primary school students will be given a questionnaire to determine whether they have benefited from the tutorials. Teacher candidates will also be given a questionnaire investigating if they have benefited from this course – what they have learned benefits of community service, what they could do as educated citizens, and as English teachers.

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