

# Language attitudes of Turkish students towards the English language and its use in Turkish context

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## **Abstract**

Learners, teachers, administrators, and parents complain about why most of Turkish people cannot attain the desired level of proficiency in English. Within the frame of this study, it is assumed that the provocative relation between language attitudes and language learning is a missing point of discussions on the problems of teaching English in Turkey. This study examines the relationship between language attitudes towards the English language and its use in Turkey. The sample included 190 eighth grade students of a private primary school in Adana, Turkey, where English is intensively taught. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: The first part required personal information such as gender, the age when they started to learn English, the place where they started to learn English. The second part asked them about their attitudes towards the English language and their attitudes towards the use of English in Turkish context. Mann Whitney U test and Spearman's rho correlation coefficient tests were applied. It is found out that although these students are exposed to English in a school environment more frequently than other students at public schools, they have only mildly positive attitudes; especially female students have higher rates. They recognize the importance of the English language but interestingly do not reveal high level orientation towards learning the language. On the other hand, they have mildly positive attitudes towards the English based culture but they are not tolerant to Turkish people speaking English among themselves.

**Key words:** *Language attitudes, learner's factors in language learning, Turkish learners*

## **Özet**

Öğrenciler, öğretmenler, yöneticiler ve anne babalar, Türk insanının neden istenen düzeyde İngilizce öğrenemedikleri konusunda şikayet edegelmektedirler. Bu çalışma bağlamında, dilsel tutumlar ile dil öğrenme arasındaki birbirini tetikleyici ilişkisinin, Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretimiyle ilgili sorunlar üzerine yapılan tartışmaların kaçırdığı bir nokta olarak düşünülmüştür. Bu çalışmanın amacı Türkiye'de, İngiliz diline ve İngilizcenin kullanımına ilişkin tutumlar arasındaki ilişkiyi

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incelemektir. Örneklem, Adana ilinde İngilizcenin yoğun olarak öğretildiği özel bir okulun 190 sekizinci sınıf öğrencilerini kapsamaktadır. Uygulanan sormacanın iki bölümü bulunmaktadır: Birinci bölüm, cinsiyet, İngilizceye öğrenmeye başlama yaşı ve yeri ile ilgili kişisel bilgilere yönelik sorular sorulardan, ikinci bölüm ise Türkiye bağlamında İngilizcenin kullanımı ve İngiliz diline ilişkin tutumlarını öğrenmeye yönelik olarak sorular sorulardan oluşmaktadır. Mann Whitney U test and Spearman's rho correlation coefficient testleri uygulanmıştır. Bu çalışmada, devlet okullarında okuyan öğrencilere göre daha yoğun İngilizce eğitimi almalarına karşın bu öğrencilerin genel anlamda, orta düzeyde olumlu tutumlarının olduğu; kız öğrencilerin ise daha yüksek oranlara sahip olduğu bulunmuştur. Örnek grubundaki öğrenciler İngilizcenin önemini anlamakta, ancak İngilizceyi öğrenmek konusunda yüksek düzeyde istek göstermemektedirler. Bir başka bulgu ise, İngilizce konuşulan kültüre ilişkin orta düzeyde olumlu tutumları bulunurken, Türklerin kendi aralarında İngilizce konuşmalarına ise hoşgörü gösterememektedirler.

*Anahtar sözcükler: Dile karşı tutumlar, dil öğreniminde öğrenciyle ilgili etmenler, Türk öğrenciler*

## **Introduction**

English is the leading foreign language enjoying a prestigious position in many countries, including Turkey, since the end of World War II. It is neither a national nor an official language in Turkey but it is the most widely taught foreign language at all stages of education system. Many Turkish learners start learning English during high school; some others as early as primary school or even pre-school, yet the problem is that most are far from attaining the desired level of proficiency either in comprehensive or productive skills or in both. Despite being exposed to English instruction for a long time at different levels, the reasons for the poor foreign language skills of students have long been a matter of discussion among educators. Although a huge amount of time and effort are spent, learners either cannot go beyond the basics or they experience difficulty in developing their level of proficiency unless they are individually motivated (for a detailed sociolinguistic analysis of English in Turkey, see Büyükkantarcioglu, 2004).

While many discussions about learning a second/foreign language focus on the efficacy of teaching methodologies, little emphasis is given to the contextual factors –individual, social and societal- that affect Turkish students' learning. These contextual factors can be considered from the perspectives of the language, the learner and the learning process.

From the perspective of language, these can be language distance between Turkish (a SOV language) and English (a SVO language), native language proficiency, knowledge of the second/foreign language, language status, and language attitudes. From the perspective of the learner, the factors affecting language learning can be mentioned as diverse needs and goals, peer groups, role

models, starting age for language learning and pre-school support. From the perspective of the learning process, the factors influencing language learning can be outlined as learning styles and strategies, motivation, and classroom interaction (Walqui 2000).

### **Language attitudes**

Learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the languages (Starks & Paltridge 1996: 218). In the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1992:199) 'language attitudes' are defined as follows:

The attitude which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each others' languages or to their own language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language.

Gardner (1985: 10) sees attitudes as components of motivation in language learning. According to him, 'motivation ... refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language'. He believes the motivation to learn a foreign language is determined by basic predispositions and personality characteristics such as the learner's attitudes towards foreign people in general, and the target group and language in particular, motives for learning, and generalized attitudes (Gardner 1985). Wenden (1991) sees attitudes as including three components: First, attitudes tend to have a cognitive component. This could involve beliefs or perceptions about the objects or situations related to the attitude. Second, attitudes have an evaluative component. This means that the objects or situations related to the attitude may generate like or dislike. Third, attitudes have a behavioral component, i.e. certain attitudes tend to prompt learners to adopt particular learning behaviours. Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) discuss the current issues, pedagogical implications and new directions in beliefs about language learning including social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors among which attitudes have an important place. Similarly, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) conclude attitude as an important factor in language learning in their study on the internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effort, which was put forward previously as the Process Model of L2 Motivation (Dörnyei and Ottó 1999). Moreover, Dörnyei (2000) proposes a process-oriented approach to the understanding of student motivation which broke down the motivational process

into several discrete temporal segments organized along the progression that describes how initial wishes and desires are first transformed into goals and then into operationalized intentions, and how these intentions are enacted, leading (hopefully) to the accomplishment of the goal and concluded by the final evaluation of the process.

There is a great amount of research on attitudes towards different languages (Marley 2004, Balcazar 2003, Villa 2002, Malallah 2000), towards different varieties of English and other languages (Karstadt 2002, Zhou 2002, Assaf 2001, Birnie 1998, Al-Kahtany 1995, Dalton-Puffer and Kaltenböck 1995, Gibb 1999, Starkes & Paltridge 1994, Matsuura et al. 1994, Benson 1991, Shaw 1981, Wyler et al. 1982, Cooper and Fishman 1977, El-Dash and Tucker 1975), on learners' beliefs about language learning (Sakui and Gaies 1999).

Different aspects of language attitudes have also been studied such as the relation between attitudes and motivation (Donitsa-Schmidt et al. 2004, Bernaus et al. 2004, Williams et al. 2002), the relationship between attitudes and learning strategies (Gan 2004), the relationship between attitudes and level of achievement (Graham 2004), beliefs and attitudes about target language use, first language use and anxiety (Levine 2003), attitudes to language and language learning at secondary and tertiary levels (Yang and Lau 2003), attitudes towards English-language usage among peers (White 2002), the relationship between negative attitudes towards non-native speakers and poor comprehension of those speakers (Lindemann 2002), attitudes towards debatable usages between teachers and their students (Lee 2001a), attitudes of native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers towards disputable usages (Lee 2001b), the relationship between attitudes towards ideology, culture, people, language and factors affecting attitude (Flaitz 1988).

### **Purpose of the present study**

Our aim in this study was:

- To investigate the interlaced relationship among language attitudes, the starting age of language learning, and the place where the individual started to learn language within the context of EFL students in Turkey.

### **Method**

#### *The Instrument, design and analysis*

Data was collected through a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire required personal information: gender, the age when they started to learn English, the place where they started to learn English.

The second part of the questionnaire asked the students about:

(a) their attitudes towards *the English language* on the basis of five-point Likert scale (using the Semantic Differential Technique) (see Yağmur 1997, Kraemer and Olshtain 1989, Baker 1992). Six items were listed to find out whether the English language is ‘beautiful’, ‘musical’, ‘important’, ‘rich’, interesting’ and can be used for ‘cultural activities like in literature, art, theatre, etc’. Each item was ranked as (0-1) strongly negative, (1-2) mildly negative, (2-3) neutral, (3-4) mildly positive, and (4-5) strongly positive.

(b) their attitudes towards *the use of English in Turkish context* based on twenty-one statements having three-point Likert scale (based on Buschenhofen 1998) and their attitudes were ranked as (1) agree, (0) undecided, and (-1) disagree. These statements are included regarding the following points:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Educational and social status of English                              | It is a good thing to have English as the frequently used foreign language in Turkey (1 <sup>a</sup> ).<br>My social science and mathematics textbooks should be written in Turkish (14).<br>English should be a medium of instruction in the schools in Turkey (20).   |
| Social and instrumental value of English                              | English is the mark of an educated person (2)<br>If I use English, I will be praised and approved of by my family, relatives and friends (4).<br>If I use English, my status is raised (12).<br>The spread of the use of English is one of the most crucial factors in Turkey’s development today (17).   |
| The use of English would detract from cultural identity               | When using English, I do not feel that I am Turkish any more (3).<br>At times I fear that by using English I will become like an expatriate (5).<br>If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic (11).  |
| Orientation towards English   | I am forced to learn English by the people around me (6).<br>I like reading English magazines, books, etc (7).<br>I do not feel awkward when using English (8).<br>I love talking with expatriates in English (9).<br>I wish that I could speak fluent and accurate English (15).<br>I feel uneasy and lack confidence when speaking English (16).<br>I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject at school (18). |
| The intrinsic value of the English language and English based culture | I like to see English speaking films (10).<br>The command of English is very helpful in understanding expatriates and their cultures (21).  |
| Discomfort about Turkish people speaking English                      | I feel uncomfortable when hearing one Turkish speaking to another in English (13).<br>I feel uneasy when hearing a Turkish speaking English (19).   |

a. Question numbers refer to the order in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was presented to students in Turkish since the language of presentation may affect their responses. In this case, the effect would probably be to elicit slightly less favorable attitudes to English because the possibility of misunderstanding the questionnaire in English is thought to be reduced by allowing

students to respond in their mother tongue. The quantitative analysis is carried out using SPSS in order to find out answers for the research questions.

### *Participants*

The sample includes 190 eighth grade students of a private primary school in Adana where English is intensively taught (up to 10 hours a week). 94 of them are female students constituting the 49.5% of the student group, whereas 96 are male which constitutes the 50.5% of the group. When the age they started to learn English is considered, 42.1% started to learn English when they were at the ages between 0 and 6; 57.9% at the ages between 7 and above. Regarding the place where they started to learn English, their distribution is the following: 158 students constituting 83.15% reported that they started to learn English at school, 32 students comprising 16.84% at pre-school. Even though this study is limited to a small number of the subject group when the whole population of students enrolled in education (10.565.389 according to the statistics of the National Ministry of Education in 2004-2005 academic year [www.iogm.meb.gov.tr](http://www.iogm.meb.gov.tr) ) is considered, it is statistically enough to have a general idea about the students having the same characteristics such as being enrolled in a private school and being exposed to intensive English language teaching.

### **Findings**

| Attitudes towards English<br>in general | Gender |       | The age of starting to learn English |       | The place of starting to learn English |           |               |
|---|--------|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|--|-----------|---------------|
|   | Means  | F     | M                                    | 0-6   | 7+                                     | At school | At pre-school |
| Beautiful                               | 3.83   | 4.11* | 3.56                                 | 4.09* | 3.65                                   | 3.78      | 4.06          |
| Musical                                 | 3.91   | 4.26* | 3.56                                 | 4.06  | 3.79                                   | 3.87      | 4.06          |
| Important                               | 4.26   | 4.43  | 4.10                                 | 4.38  | 4.18                                   | 4.23      | 4.41          |
| Rich                                    | 3.90   | 3.98  | 3.82                                 | 3.98  | 3.85                                   | 3.92      | 3.78          |
| Interesting                             | 3.17   | 3.35  | 3.00                                 | 3.28  | 3.1                                    | 3.25*     | 2.78          |
| As a language of culture                | 3.41   | 3.81* | 3.02                                 | 3.6   | 3.27                                   | 3.37      | 3.59          |
| Overall                                 | 3.70   | 4.0   | 3.51                                 | 3.90  | 3.64                                   | 3.73      | 3.78          |

\*p<0.01 statistically significant difference for gender and the age of starting to learn English

\*p<0.05 statistically significant difference for the place of starting to learn English

Mann-Whitney U test

**Table 1.** Attitudes towards English in general and its relationship with gender, the age and the place of starting to learn English

The degree of attitudes of the Turkish students towards English is generally mildly positive (3.7). They find English musical, rich and beautiful successively but they stated that they do not find English as a language of culture and it is not so interesting to them. On the other hand, the students could be said to have strongly

positive attitude towards the importance of English (Table 1).

Regarding gender differences, female students are found to have more positive attitudes than male students do. Statistically significant differences are found between female and male groups in terms of the foreign language's being beautiful, musical and as a language of culture but there is not any statistically significant difference between their attitudes in terms of its being important, rich and interesting.

The students who started to learn English between the ages 0 and 6 find English more beautiful than the others who started to learn English when they were 7 and above. Regarding their overall attitudes, the former who started to learn English earlier have more positive attitudes than the latter who started to learn English later.

The students who started to learn English at school consider English more interesting and rich than the students starting to learn English at pre-school. On the other hand, the students started to learn English at pre-school think English more beautiful, musical, important and as a language of culture. Moreover, overall evaluation of attitudes shows us that the students who started to learn English at pre-school have slightly more positive attitudes towards English than the ones starting to learn English at school.

| Attitudes towards the use of English                    |  | Means <sup>a</sup>         | Gender                       |                            | The age of starting to learn English |                            | The place of starting to learn English |                            |
|---|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|
|   |  |                            | F                            | M                          | 0-6                                  | 7 and above                | At pre-school                          | At school                  |
| Educational and social status of English                | It is a good thing to have English as the frequently used foreign language in Turkey (1).  | <b>0.41</b>                | <b>0.53*</b>                 | 0.28                       | <b>0.41</b>                          | <b>0.40</b>                | <b>0.44</b>                            | <b>0.40</b>                |
|   | My social science and mathematics textbooks should be written in Turkish (14).   | <b>0.60</b>                | <b>0.59</b>                  | <b>0.61</b>                | <b>0.56</b>                          | <b>0.63</b>                | <b>0.69</b>                            | <b>0.58</b>                |
|   | English should be a medium of instruction in the schools in Turkey (20).   | -0.09                      | -0.02                        | -0.17                      | -0.05                                | -0.13                      | 0.03                                   | -0.12                      |
| Social and instrumental value of English                | English is the mark of an educated person (2)  | <b>0.47</b>                | <b>0.55</b>                  | <b>0.39</b>                | <b>0.43</b>                          | <b>0.50</b>                | <b>0.34</b>                            | <b>0.49</b>                |
|   | If I use English, I will be praised and approved of by my family, relatives and friends (4).   | <b>0.53</b>                | <b>0.62</b>                  | <b>0.44</b>                | <b>0.51</b>                          | <b>0.54</b>                | <b>0.44</b>                            | <b>0.54</b>                |
|   | If I use English, my status is raised (12).<br>The spread of the use of English is one of the most crucial factors in Turkey's development today (17). | <b>0.51</b><br><b>0.53</b> | <b>0.65**</b><br><b>0.63</b> | <b>0.36</b><br><b>0.43</b> | <b>0.61</b><br><b>0.59</b>           | <b>0.43</b><br><b>0.48</b> | <b>0.44</b><br><b>0.56</b>             | <b>0.52</b><br><b>0.52</b> |
| The use of English would detract from cultural identity | When using English, I do not feel that I am Turkish any more (3).  | -0.19                      | -0.21                        | -0.17                      | -0.18                                | -0.20                      | -0.13                                  | -0.20                      |
|   | When I use English, I feel as if I were in a foreign country (5).  | -0.22                      | -0.17                        | -0.27                      | -0.23                                | -0.22                      | -0.06                                  | -0.25                      |
|   | If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic (11).   | <b>-0.69</b>               | <b>-0.79*</b>                | <b>-0.60</b>               | <b>-0.70</b>                         | <b>-0.69</b>               | <b>-0.69</b>                           | <b>-0.70</b>               |
| Orientation towards English                             | I am forced to learn English by the people around me (6).  | -0.29                      | -0.40                        | -0.19                      | <b>-0.44</b>                         | -0.19                      | <b>-0.53</b>                           | -0.25                      |
|   | I like reading English magazines, books, etc (7).  | -0.03                      | 0.15*                        | -0.20                      | 0.09                                 | -0.11                      | -0.03                                  | -0.03                      |
|   | I do not feel awkward when using English (8).  | 0.10                       | 0.24*                        | -0.04                      | 0.21                                 | 0.02                       | 0.09                                   | 0.10                       |
|   | I love talking with expatriates in English (9).  | <b>0.52</b>                | <b>0.72**</b>                | <b>0.32</b>                | <b>0.56</b>                          | <b>0.49</b>                | <b>0.59</b>                            | <b>0.51</b>                |
|   | I wish that I could speak fluent and accurate  | <b>0.61</b>                | <b>0.73*</b>                 | <b>0.49</b>                | <b>0.50</b>                          | <b>0.69</b>                | <b>0.72</b>                            | <b>0.59</b>                |

|   |   |                       |                                 |                       |                              |                       |                              |                       |
|---|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   | English (15).<br>I feel uneasy and lack confidence when speaking English (16).<br>I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject at school (18). | -0.18<br><b>0.39</b>  | -0.27<br><b>0.62**</b>          | -0.09<br>0.18         | <b>-0.35*</b><br><b>0.51</b> | -0.05<br><b>0.31</b>  | -0.22<br><b>0.28</b>         | -0.17<br><b>0.42</b>  |
| The intrinsic value of the English language and English based culture | I like to see English speaking films (10).<br>The command of English is very helpful in understanding expatriates and their cultures (21).                      | 0.23<br><b>0.77</b>   | <b>0.34</b><br><b>0.83</b>      | 0.13<br><b>0.71</b>   | <b>0.36</b><br><b>0.73</b>   | 0.14<br><b>0.80</b>   | <b>0.50*</b><br><b>0.75</b>  | 0.18<br><b>0.77</b>   |
| Discomfort about Turkish people speaking English                      | I feel uncomfortable when hearing one Turkish speaking to another in English (13).<br>I feel uneasy when hearing a Turkish speaking English (19).               | -0.23<br><b>-0.56</b> | <b>-0.38*</b><br><b>-0.72**</b> | -0.08<br><b>-0.41</b> | <b>-0.31</b><br><b>-0.64</b> | -0.17<br><b>-0.51</b> | <b>-0.38</b><br><b>-0.50</b> | -0.20<br><b>-0.68</b> |

a.Scores range from (1) showing agreement, (0) showing being undecided and to (-1) showing disagreement.

0.7 and 1: statistically positive attitude at high level

0.3 and 0.7: statistically positive attitude at mid- level

0.3 and -0.3: statistically 'no relation'

-0.3 and -0.7: statistically negative attitude at mid- level.

-0.7 and -1: statistically negative attitude at high level

\*p<0.05 – According to gender, there is statistically significant difference for the statements 1, 7, 8, 11, 13, and 15.

\*\*p<0.01 – According to gender, there is statistically significant difference for the statements 9, 12, 18, and 19.

**Table 2.** Attitudes towards the use of English in Turkey and distribution of rates according to gender, the age and place of starting to learn English

Regarding the attitudes towards the use of English in Turkish (Table 2), the results show that the students strongly agreed with the following statement: ‘The command of English is very helpful in understanding expatriates and their cultures’ (item 21). This strong agreement is supported at mid-level by all of the items indicating social and instrumental value of English together with affective orientation towards English in terms of speaking English with expatriates and the desire to speak more fluently and accurately (item 9 and 15). Although they agree on the social status of English as a foreign language in Turkey (item 1), they do not support English as a language of instruction in schools (item 14) but they wish to take English as an elective course (item 18). Strong disagreement was expressed with the following statement: ‘If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic’ (item 11) i.e. they do not feel that using English has a detrimental effect on their identity as Turkish people. Moreover, they feel comfortable about Turkish people speaking English (item 19).

Female students generally have higher rates than male students indicating more positive attitudes towards the use of English in Turkey in all aspects. Specifically, female students have very strong disagreement with the following statement: ‘If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic’. It reveals that they do not see the use of English as detracting from cultural identity. This positive attitude is also supported by strong orientation towards English in terms of speaking it (item 15 and

16) for the female group. Another positive response at mid-level but higher rates of female group again was elicited by all items indicating social and instrumental value of English. The rate for the social status of English (item 1) is at mid-level according to the female group. On the other hand, both groups do not want to have course books in English (item 14), showing the low level of attitude towards the educational value of English. This result is supported by the intrinsic value of the English language which is also at low level. In contrast, the intrinsic value of English based culture is very high (item 21). This could be evaluated as the fact that students have strong desire to learn the culture but not the language. However, the female group feels significantly more comfortable about Turkish people speaking English than the male group.

The distribution of rates for the attitudes towards the use of English according to the age of starting to learn English shows not much difference except for the item 16, i.e. the ones started to learn English before the age of 6 do not feel uneasy and lack confidence while speaking English. Both groups have positive attitudes at mid-level for the social status of English but they agree with the statement at mid-level indicating that textbooks should be in Turkish (item 14). Both groups have positive attitudes towards the social and instrumental value of English in all aspects. Furthermore, both groups nearly strongly disagree with the use of English as detracting from cultural identity in terms of item 11. For the items included in the orientation towards English, the students started to learn English before 6 have higher rates showing positive attitudes than the ones started to learn English after 7 except for the item 15 showing the desire to speak fluent and accurate English. This is supported by the disagreement of the ones started to learn English earlier indicating feeling uneasy and lack confidence while speaking English. In other words, the ones started to learn English before starting the school may be said to speak English without having negative attitudes. On the other hand, both groups strongly agreed with the intrinsic value of the English language and English based culture (item 21) and do not feel discomfort about Turkish people speaking English.

Based on the place of starting to learn English, both groups have higher rates showing positive attitude towards the social status of English but negative attitude towards having course books written in English. Although both groups have statistically positive attitude at mid-level for the social and instrumental value of English, the students started to learn English at school (S group) have slightly higher rates except for the item 17, i.e. seeing the spread of the use of English as one of the most crucial factors in Turkey's development. Both groups believe that English does not detract from their cultural identity. Regarding orientation towards English, (the group started to learn English at pre-school) has higher rates showing their positive

attitudes but for item 18, in other words, P group does not wish to take English as a course at school. On the other hand, although P group has a statistically significant strong intrinsic value of the English language (item 13), S group's rate is higher for item (21) showing the intrinsic value of the English based culture. Both groups feel comfortable about Turkish people speaking English at mid level.

| Attitudes towards the use of English in Turkey                        |  | Overall attitude towards the English language  |
|---|--|--|
| Educational and social status of English                              | It is a good thing to have English as the frequently used foreign language in Turkey (1).<br>My social science and mathematics textbooks should be written in Turkish (14).<br>English should be a medium of instruction in the schools in Turkey (20).  | <b>0,465</b><br>-0,188<br>0,245  |
| Social and instrumental value of English                              | English is the mark of an educated person (2).<br>If I use English, I will be praised and approved of by my family, relatives and friends (4).<br>If I use English, my status is raised (12).<br>The spread of the use of English is one of the most crucial factors in Turkey's development today (17).   | 0,262<br>0,191<br><b>0,356</b><br><b>0,337</b>   |
| The use of English would detract from cultural identity               | When using English, I do not feel that I am Turkish any more (3).<br>When I use English, I feel as if I were in a foreign country (5).<br>If I use English, it means that I am not patriotic (11).   | 0,172<br>0,277<br>-0,072   |
| Orientation towards English   | I am forced to learn English by the people around me (6).<br>I like reading English magazines, books, etc. (7).<br>I do not feel awkward when using English (8).<br>I love talking with expatriates in English (9).<br>I wish that I could speak fluent and accurate English (15).<br>I feel uneasy and lack confidence when speaking English (16).<br>I would take English even if it were not a compulsory subject at school (18). | -0,147<br><b>0,420</b><br><b>0,515</b><br><b>0,444</b><br>-0,059<br>-0,277<br><b>0,538</b> |
| The intrinsic value of the English language and English based culture | I like to see English speaking films (10).<br>The command of English is very helpful in understanding expatriates and their cultures (21).   | 0,282<br>0,155   |
| Discomfort about Turkish people speaking English                      | I feel uncomfortable when hearing one Turkish speaking to another in English (13).<br>I feel uneasy when hearing a Turkish speaking English (19).  | -0,233<br>-0,260   |

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient.

0.3 and 0.7: statistically positive correlation at mid- level

0.7 and 1: statistically positive correlation at high level

0.3 and -0.3: statistically 'no relation'

-0.3 and -0.7: statistically the negative correlation at mid- level.

0.7 and -1: statistically negative correlation at high level

**Table 3.** The relationship between attitudes towards English in general and its use in Turkey

When the relationship between the students' overall attitudes towards the English language and attitudes towards the use of English in Turkey (Table 3) is examined, the students whose rates are higher in terms of general attitudes towards

the English language have higher rates for item 1, appreciating English as the foreign language in Turkey, in terms of the social status of English, which is supported by items 12 and 17 regarding the social and instrumental value of English. For the orientation towards English, items 7 and 9, i.e. speaking and reading in English (7 and 9) together with item 8 'feeling comfortable when using English' and item 18 'taking English as an elective course even if it were not compulsory' show correlation with the overall attitude.

### **Discussion**

The subject group of this study is one of the most advantaged groups learning English in an environment equipped with psychological, physical and social support. So, it was expected that they would have strongly positive attitudes towards English and the use of English language in Turkey. However, the results show that they have mildly positive attitudes. According to the correlation results between the students' overall attitudes towards the English language and the use of English in Turkey, they welcome English as the frequently used foreign language in Turkey, evaluate the social and instrumental value of English, have orientation towards English *only* on the basis of reading and speaking, and taking English even if it were not compulsory at school. The female students' rates are significantly higher than those of the male students which can be evaluated as the effect of gender factor on attitudes towards language and its use. Moreover, female students have strong orientation towards English especially in terms of speaking English.

Regarding the attitudes towards the use of English in Turkey, the students generally are aware of the importance of the proficiency level in English helpful in understanding other cultures and consequently, they wish to have more fluent and accurate English speaking skills. Although they appreciate English as the frequently used foreign language in Turkey, they do not support English as a language of instruction in schools but they wish to take English as an elective course. Both females and males do not wish to have course books in English. Moreover, they do not reveal high-level positive attitudes towards the English language but the English based culture. In other words, the subject group appreciates the English based culture but not the English language at least at expected level.

On the other hand, the subject group does not see the use of English as a threat for their cultural identity. It is supported by their disagreement with feeling uncomfortable about Turkish people speaking English. Nevertheless, they stay undecided about the statement indicating a Turkish speaking another Turkish in English. So, this finding may be considered as an important paradox to be solved while planning ELT in Turkish context. This paradox can be summarized as the fact that Turkish students recognize the importance of English as an instrument to get a

better job, have a higher status in the society, etc. but are not so willing to take active steps at the expected level in order to learn the English language and are less tolerant to the use of English among Turkish. On the other hand, they are unbigoted against English based culture.

Other correlations are found between the age and place of starting to learn English. Based on the age of starting to learn English, the results display that the students started to learn English before 6 have positive attitudes towards English and thus, can speak confidently and comfortably and show positive orientation towards English. However, the students started to learn English after 7 have high rates in terms of the desire to speak more fluent and accurate English. Both groups have agreement on the intrinsic value of the English based culture but not the English language, but they feel comfort when hearing another Turkish speaking English. Considering the place of starting to learn English, the findings reveal that P group has more positive attitudes than S group but S group's rates are higher in terms of social and instrumental value except for seeing English as one of the most crucial factors in Turkey's development. Although P group has positive orientation towards English, they do not wish to take English as a course at school but have positive attitudes towards English and English based culture. Both groups feel comfortable when hearing Turkish people speaking Turkish. It might be claimed that starting to learn English at an earlier age at pre-school environment has a significant effect on language learning in a foreign context.

### **Conclusion**

The present study, the first one to investigate Turkish primary school students' attitudes towards English and its use in Turkey, supports the general contention *partially* that the positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English. The recognition of the importance of English as a foreign language in Turkish society may not, interestingly, lead students to have active steps in learning process. One of the reasons behind this result may be the fact that they do not have positive attitudes towards the English language – which may be an outcome of the education system of Turkey - but the English based culture – which can be considered to be a result of social tendencies affected by globalization. Another reason may be that they do not feel the need of the English language in their daily life yet, and they delay learning the English language until adulthood when they become to be forced to learn English due to, say, professional needs. Therefore, the level of awareness is not enough on its own, it needs to be turned into action. Therefore, strategy-based learning and teaching might be a solution for this type of learners who have positive attitudes towards the culture and high level of

recognition of the importance of the language but low level of orientation towards learning the English language.

Another important result of this study is that although the students have mildly positive attitudes towards the English language, they do not have positive attitudes towards Turkish speaking English to another Turkish. It may be psychologically and socially an expected finding but when the learning context is considered, it is very strange that students are not tolerant to each other while speaking English. Here the role of the teacher can be said to be an important factor to establish the cool environment to encourage students to practice speaking English with other Turkish students.

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