

Do Admission Requirements Matter? A Comparison of the Requirements for Admission to the ELT programs in the Netherlands and Turkey

Kabul Koşulları Önemli midir? Hollanda ve Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğretmenliği Programı Kabul Koşulları Kıyaslaması

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Özet

Öğretmenlerin, öğrencilerin yabancı dil gelişimi ve yeterliliği üzerindeki etkisi, öğretmen niteliklerinin öğrencilerin dil gelişimi ve dil seviyelerini etkilemesinden ötürü yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Türk öğrencilerin uluslararası İngilizce yeterlilik endekslerindeki düşük performansı, dil öğretmenlerinin niteliklerini eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla anlama ihtiyacını da beraberinde getirmektedir. Şüphesiz ki, dil öğretmenlerinin sahip olması gereken önemli niteliklerden biri, öğrettikleri dilde yüksek yeterliliktir. Ancak, liselerdeki farklı programlardan mezun, sınırlı İngilizce yeterliliğine sahip öğrenciler İngilizce öğretmenliği programlarına yerleşebilmektedirler. Hollanda’nın uluslararası İngilizce yeterlilik endekslerinde ilk sıradaki ülke olarak gösterdiği başarı göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu çalışma, Hollanda’daki İngilizce öğretmenliği programlarının kabul koşullarını araştırmayı, Türkiye’deki İngilizce öğretmenliği programlarının kabul koşulları ile karşılaştırmayı ve Türkiye’deki İngilizce öğretmenliği programları için kapsamlı kabul koşullarını önermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda her iki ülkedeki İngilizce öğretmenliği programlarının kabul koşulları ile ilgili bilgileri ve ulusal ve uluslararası istatistikleri birleştiren bir doküman analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak Türkiye’deki İngilizce öğretmenliği programlarının kabul koşulları ile ilgili değişiklikleri içeren önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Hollanda’da İngilizce öğretmenliği, İngilizce dil yeterliliği, İngilizce öğretmenliği kabul koşulları, öğretmen yeterlilikleri, Türkiye’de İngilizce öğretmenliği.

Abstract

Qualifications of language teachers affect their students’ language development and proficiency. Turkish learners’ low performance in international English proficiency indices requires an investigation of the qualifications of language teachers from a critical point of view. Without doubt, one of the crucial qualifications that language teachers need to possess is a high proficiency and competency in the target language. However, graduating from different programs in high schools, students are placed in English language teaching (ELT) programs with limited English proficiency. Considering the success of the Netherlands as the top country in international English proficiency indices, this study aims to find the admission requirements of the ELT programs in the Netherlands, to compare them with the ones in Turkey, and to suggest comprehensive admission requirements for ELT programs in Turkey. In this regard, a document analysis merging a detailed analysis of information regarding the admission requirements of the ELT programs in both countries and national and international statistics was conducted. Consequently, some recommendations regarding the likely changes to be made in the admission requirements to the ELT programs in Turkey are made.

Keywords: Admission requirements for ELT, ELT in the Netherlands, ELT in Turkey, English language proficiency, teacher qualifications.

In modern-day societies, higher education institutions, as one of the key organizations of human and workforce development and societal advancement, are being challenged to provide high-quality education and training to their students. Considering the significant role of teachers in the development of societies, quality in the education of teachers

within higher education institutions has also been a popular topic (see Mahalingappa & Polat, 2013; Staub & Kırkgöz, 2019). Therefore, increasing the quality of teaching and teacher education has been among the major policies of governments (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014), and thus teacher education

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policies of high-performing countries around the world have always been under close examination (see Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jensen, Klette, & Hammerness, 2018). In this regard, teachers, as the key figures of education systems, and their selection and training have become a major concern worldwide (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Klassen & Kim, 2019; Leshem, 2012; Révai, 2018).

It is without doubt that the primary purpose of teacher education programs around the world is to train teachers who will be successful at teaching different groups of learners in various types of schools. In this regard, whether explicitly stated or not, teacher education programs anywhere around the world aim to select and admit the candidates to be successful. Thus, one perspective supports the idea that those who have the potential to be effective teachers should be selected through setting the right admission requirements (Casey & Childs, 2007). Therefore, issues regarding *what skills, knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes, and traits the students of teacher education programs should have, and how their selection and admission should be* need to be addressed.

There are several strategies that can be employed by teacher education programs to establish the best admission requirements. These strategies include a wide variety of criteria ranging from students' high school GPA to reference letters, from teaching motivation to relevant experiences, from interview performance to standardized test results, or from having a certain degree (education) to work experience or combination of various methods (Casey & Childs, 2007; Hobson, Ashby, McIntyre, & Malderez, 2010; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2014). If standardized test results are taken as the only criteria, as the case in Turkey, the applicants can be placed in a program depending on the quota of the program regardless of the admission strategies mentioned above. However, selection of teacher candidates is not an easy task to perform for any of the stakeholders in teacher education. That could be the reason for European Commission General Directorate of Education and Culture to regard selection of teacher candidates as one of the complexities of pre-service teacher education (Caena, 2014). Despite varying from one country to other, admission requirements have been devoted considerable thought, and many of the European countries have determined the criteria (i.e. skills, competencies, attitudes, aptitudes, and knowledge) that they base their selection and admission of teacher education on so that the best candidates can be selected. For instance, the UK requires the candidates to achieve a standard equivalent to grade 4 in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations in Mathematics and English (see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria>), plus information and communication technologies skills (OECD, 2014). Some of the UK universities (name kept confidential) are reported to make use of subjective judgmental tests including understanding of education and motivation for teaching, leadership skills, and competencies like resilience, problem-solving, and interaction as they admit teacher candidates (see Klassen, Kim, Rushby, & Bardach, 2020). Besides, Denmark also changed admission requirements into teacher education programs to a stricter two-tier process whereby the candidates are selected based on a more competitive performance of upper secondary education and an interview (Nusche, Radinger, Falch, & Shaw, 2016). Additionally, member countries of the European Union have also been reported to use different parameters like sample lesson and observation of teaching (Austria, the UK, Lithuania, Romania, Estonia, Finland), competence level check (Austria, Denmark, the UK, Lithuania), key skills testing (Austria, the UK, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Estonia, Finland), psychometric testing (the UK, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Finland), and written exams (Austria, Denmark, Cyprus, the UK, Latvia, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Estonia, Finland) (see Iucu, Mironov, Borzea, & Marin, 2014). France has also been reported to start adopting a competency-based approach to admission into teacher education programs (Cornu, 2015).

Due to the variety of factors used as reference points for admission into teacher education programs, it is important to specify and distinguish what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are teachable. Those that are not teachable during the program such as teaching motivation, commitment, interests, values, and personality should be expected from the applicants prior to the program and should be set as the admission criteria for these programs (Casey & Childs, 2007). Some countries are seen to use psychometric tests to assess unteachable traits (see Iucu et al., 2014). Although it is possible to claim that some aspects such as language skills, teaching skills and knowledge can be categorized as teachable, they may require a long period of time extending beyond pre-service teacher education, thus continuing over their in-service teaching. Furthermore, together with some key skills such as being willing to educate, being tolerant towards students' mistakes, and trying hard to contribute to the students' learning (Cheung, 2006), language teachers should possess well acquired and developed language skills.

Considering the widespread use of English in scientific publications and the current position of it as the global language (Melitz, 2018), its teaching has a significant role in governments' education policies, and Turkey is not an exception. English language and its teaching have always been a promi-



ment issue in the Turkish education system due to Turkey's strategically important position between Asia and Europe, globalization in the world, Turkey's attempt to be a full member of the European Union, and several other reasons, such as the need to use English as the global language of trade and mobility (Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban, 2012). In this regard, there have been constant changes in Turkey's policies on the teaching of English and English language teacher education. Hence, scholars and teacher educators pay particular attention to understand them (see Arık & Arık, 2014; Erarslan, 2018; Gürsoy & Eken, 2018; Kırkgöz, 2007; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Yavuz & Zehir Topkaya, 2013).

However, despite the importance attached to the teaching of English, Turkey continuously ranks among the least successful countries in terms of English proficiency (Education First [EF], 2019). Although there may be several reasons behind the failure in English proficiency of Turkish learners, inadequacy in the language proficiency of pre-service teachers of English (see Çetinavcı & Yavuz, 2010; Köksal & Ulum, 2019) and weaknesses in such important aspects of ELT programs as not equipping the learners with the 21st century skills, being theory-driven rather than providing first-hand authentic classroom experience, lack of guidance for students, and not using the modern teaching techniques (Öztürk & Aydın, 2019) have always faced criticism. Decrease in the quality of pre-service English teachers as one of the reflections of the changes in admission requirements has also been reported among the reasons for their unpreparedness to teach (Çelik, 2017). Öztürk and Aydın (2019) also criticize the admission procedures which decrease the quality of the future language teachers.

Although Turkey's overall performance in English has been observed as quite low according to the statistics of EF (see Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Savaşkan, 2016), there are some countries which have almost always ranked on the top of the English proficiency list. The Netherlands took the lead in Europe and in the world in 2019 English Proficiency Index (EF, 2019). An investigation and description of the admission requirements to the ELT programs in the Netherlands may suggest implications to overcome the deficiencies in admissions to ELT programs in Turkey. Therefore, this study examines the admission requirements of ELT programs in Turkey and the Netherlands and makes some suggestions for the admission criteria for ELT programs in Turkey.

Method

For the fulfillment of the purposes of the study, document analysis was adopted as the stand-alone methodology since it would be the best fit as the data source. In document analysis,

both electronic and printed documents are systematically read in detail, reviewed, interpreted, and evaluated to provide information, evidence, and insight (Bowen, 2009). Within the frame of this study, the document analysis method was used to examine and describe the current situation (Schensul, 2008) in the Netherlands and Turkey regarding the admission requirements in ELT programs. Although some form of content analysis is feasible, "the standard approach to the analysis of documents focuses on what is contained within them" (Prior, 2008, p. 230), and the researchers of the current study adopted this approach to examine and describe the current admission requirements in both countries. For the Netherlands, documents of University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, as the universities offering degree in ELT program, were examined. Besides, documents published by The Dutch Organization for Internalization in Education (Nuffic) were also examined. As for Turkey, the documents published by *Council of Higher Education* (hereafter CoHE) and *Measurement, Selection, and Placement Center* (ÖSYM), were reviewed and examined. Besides, documents including statistical data were also examined. In this regard, the statistics of the Educational Testing Service regarding the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) performance of Turkish test-takers and the statistics provided by English Proficiency Index by Education First (EF) over the years were also reviewed and examined.

Results and Discussion

The Procedures for Admission to the ELT Programs in Turkey

Higher education is a significant gate for many students around the world for better life conditions. Due to the significance of this gate in letting only the qualified ones go through, countries decide their own ways of admitting students to higher education institutions depending on their student population, number of higher education institutions, and some extra institutional criteria.

Students' placement in higher education institutions in Turkey is administered by CoHE through the *Student Selection and Placement Examination* regulated by the *Measurement, Selection, and Placement Center*. A high school diploma and a sufficient score on HEIE (Higher Education Institutions Examination) administered simultaneously in three sessions in June across the country are required for admissions to all undergraduate programs in Turkey (Ölçme Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi [ÖSYM], 2019a). The first session of the exam which is called as Basic Proficiency Test (hereafter BPT) includes multiple-choice questions in Turkish language, social sciences,



math, and science. Students are given 135 minutes for this test. The second session, Field Qualification Test (hereafter FQT), is administered in 180 minutes involving multiple-choice questions in Turkish language and literature, social sciences, math, and science. Students who would like to be placed in foreign language programs (Literature, Teaching, and Translation and interpretation) are required to take the Foreign Language Test (hereafter FLT) in the last session. FLT includes 80 multiple-choice questions which have to be answered in 120 minutes, and it is offered in five languages: English, Arabic, German, Russian, and French (ÖSYM, 2019a).

The total foreign language score, which is the score required to apply for ELT programs, is obtained by taking 40% of the BPT and 60% of the FLT. 33% of the Turkish language questions, 33% of the mathematics questions, 17% of the social science questions (history, geography, philosophy, and culture of religion and knowledge of ethics), and 17% of the science questions (physics, chemistry, and biology) are taken to calculate the BPT score. Students' high school GPA is added in this total score depending on their program choice. In general, students' high school GPA is multiplied by 0.12 (ÖSYM, 2019a). Only the graduates of Anatolian teacher high schools before 2012 get extra score with the multiplication of their high school GPA by 0.18 when they select teaching programs (ÖSYM, 2019a). However, Anatolian teacher high schools, which were mainly educating and preparing students for the teaching programs of universities, were closed in 2014 as a result of restructuring reforms within the Ministry of National Education (hereafter MoNE) and transformed into Science High Schools and Social Sciences High Schools (MoNE Directory General of Secondary Education e-bulletin, 2015, p. 11).

High number of students in student selection system in higher education stems from Turkey's population of almost 82 million, with a total of 5,649,594 students at secondary education waiting to be placed in higher education institutions according to the statistics provided by Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2019). This number is increasing each year due to the number of students in primary schools (5,267,378), secondary schools (5,649,594), and high schools (5,627,075) (TÜİK, 2019). On account of the growing number of students in pre-higher education institutions, the number of universities has dramatically increased to 207 in 2019 including 129 state, 73 foundation universities, and 5 foundation vocational training schools employing 143,084 lecturers all around Turkey (YÖK, 2019).

In order to educate almost 16.5 million students studying in primary and secondary schools, MoNE currently employs 1,026,164 teachers teaching in 659,048 classrooms (MoNE,

2019). In this well-structured but complex system, one of the most problematic issues is ELT because Turkey consistently ranks very low on several different measures of English skills, by occupying the 79th place among 100 countries according to English Proficiency Index (EF, 2019) or having an average score of 75 over 120 in TOEFL categorized as 'very low proficiency' falling behind all countries in Europe (British Council & TEPAV, 2013). Moreover, the statistics provided by Education First (EF, 2019) have shown a dramatic fall as English proficiency of Turkish test-takers has consistently fallen in recent years by taking the 32nd position among 54 countries in 2012 (*low* as the proficiency band), the 47th position among 63 countries in 2014 (*very low* as the proficiency band), the 51st position among 72 countries in 2016 (*very low* as the proficiency band), and the 79th position among 100 countries in 2019 (*very low* as the proficiency band). The latest data provided by TOEFL in 2017 and 2018 also showed that Turkish participants' total mean score was 78 which ranked Turkey as the last country in the category of Europe among 45 countries (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2018). The low performance of Turkish participants could also be seen in foreign language test (YDS) which is very similar to FLT explained above, but is designed for adult learners who want to pursue a graduate and postgraduate degree in any field and want to become academics, or advance in their careers. The average correct answer is 37.74 out of 80 questions according to the results of 2018 YDS (Spring term) (ÖSYM, 2018). The performance of adult test-takers on this test also highlights the need to understand the state of ELT and education of English teachers.

Although around 65,000 English teachers are employed at state schools in different levels and the number of student per an English teacher is low (11 students in secondary schools, 18 students in primary schools, and 15 students in junior high schools per teacher) (TÜİK, 2019), there seem to be serious problems concerning ELT in Turkey. The problems may stem from several factors, such as teachers' English proficiency, qualifications, training, classroom conditions, curriculum, materials, inadequate use of technology, etc. (British Council & TEPAV, 2015). Specifically, the findings indicating deterioration or no positive change regarding English grammar or lexical knowledge throughout the process of teacher education in ELT program may make everyone suspicious of the language proficiency of pre-service English teachers (Çetinavcı, & Yavuz, 2010). Furthermore, when the impact of teachers on students' success is considered, the need to examine English language teachers and their education at ELT programs becomes stronger.

In this regard, a closer look at the current state of education faculties across Turkey shows that there are 315,876 students



and 10,179 lecturers, including the research assistants. 364 of them are lecturers teaching in ELT programs and 118 are research assistants (YÖK, 2019). Especially the number of students in higher education has dramatically increased in the last decade to make higher education more accessible in Turkey (Gök, 2016). With this aim, new universities have been established in all cities, and 7,740,502 students in higher education have been placed in different programs of 207 universities (YÖK, 2019). Although opening new universities in every city was to make higher education more accessible to all students, especially some programs like ELT were negatively affected due to increased student quotas. This made it possible for less successful students to be placed in ELT programs. In this regard, CoHE launched an initiative named YÖK Atlas (for details <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr>) to share the statistics of placement scores to university programs every year to help students have a thorough understanding of the majors and universities. These statistics show that the number of the questions correctly answered in FLT out of 80 by the last student who was placed in an ELT program is 35.8 for state universities, 12.5 for foundation universities, and 9 for the universities out of the country (YÖK Atlas, 2019). However, FLT is clearly known to include such question types as *multiple-choice questions of vocabulary, cloze-tests, multiple choice grammar questions, translation, reading comprehension questions for paragraphs, conversation, restatement, sentence completion, finding suitable expression, and finding the irrelevant sentence in a paragraph*. In this regard, as the statistics show, students even with very limited English proficiency are placed in ELT programs due to the large number of quotas both in state and foundation universities.

CoHE made some regulations for some programs such as law, architecture, engineering, medicine, and education by setting a minimum ranking in order not to allow less successful students to be placed in these programs. Hence, CoHE announced that the student who ranks at least 300,000th in the relevant score type can be placed in the faculties of education (ÖSYM, 2019a). Implementation of minimum ranking was an important step towards improving the quality and qualifications of students to be placed and training more qualified pre-service teachers. This measure taken by CoHE shows that there have been some problems with the admission requirements of the programs at faculty of education. The situation is even worse for the ELT program due to the mismatch between the objectives of the ELT programs and the English proficiency of the students placed in these programs. Although developing language proficiency of the students is among the aims of ELT programs, the ultimate objective is to educate them to become well-prepared English teachers who can teach both in

and out of Turkey. Therefore, primary purpose of this program is to teach teacher candidates how to teach English, but not to teach them English. In this regard, students with a very low English proficiency, as indicated in the statistics above, may not benefit from training received in these programs, and this deterioration could decrease the quality of future English teachers in Turkey (Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). This situation reveals the problem that initiated this study.

Moreover, until the change in students' university placement system in 2011, secondary school students who studied in the tracks other than foreign language, such as math and science, Turkish and social sciences, or Turkish and mathematics could barely be placed in foreign language programs due to the system employed in the *Student Selection and Placement Examinations*. However, after the change in 2011 (Çavuşoğlu, 2011), all students from various secondary school tracks had the chance to easily reach the minimum score required by the ELT programs. In this case, students from math and science or Turkish and mathematics tracks who studied English only 2–3 hours a week throughout their secondary school education had the chance to be placed in ELT programs despite having limited English proficiency. The increased number of student quotas for the ELT programs played a role in this process as they somehow resulted in the placement of those less successful.

Although one-year English preparatory class is compulsory for all the students placed in ELT programs, the students who get the required score from the proficiency examination conducted at the beginning of the term are exempted from the preparatory class and start the freshmen classes. Students in the preparatory classes take a total of 560–728 hours of language classes, such as basic English, listening & speaking, and reading & writing for two semesters. Students on academic probation after two years in the preparatory class are dismissed from the program.

Currently, the students' placement in ELT programs across Turkey is only defined by their score from the HEIE. Unlike the Netherlands (■ Table 1), no other criterion is required. However, the demand for high quality language teachers is urging ELT programs to select and educate high-quality teacher candidates. Despite the significance of the issue, to the researchers' best knowledge, studies investigating admission requirements are very few (see Öztürk & Aydın, 2019), and no study examining the admission requirements of countries performing successfully in international tests and indices and comparing them with the admission requirements in Turkey has been reported so far. This has also been the departure point for the current study.

The Procedures for Admission to the ELT Programs in the Netherlands

The Netherlands, one of the founders of the European Union with its population of over 17 million, is a western European nation. Regarding English proficiency, the Netherlands has almost always taken the lead in recent years (EF, 2019). The statistics show that the Netherlands has ranked among the top three countries in the world in English proficiency ranking since 2011 and was ranked as the top country three times in 2016, 2017, and 2019 (EF, 2019). Recent TOEFL scores have also proved the success of the Netherlands by ranking it as the first and the second country in Europe with the scores of 100 and 99 in 2017 and 2018. This steady success in keeping English proficiency of the learners very high requires a considerable amount of effort and particular emphasis seems to be paid to the system behind it.

Although the exact number of ELT students and staff working in this department is not shared publicly, there are currently a total of 456,633 bachelor's students studying in different programs in 36 institutions at universities of applied sciences according to the statistics of The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences. The number of staff working either part-time or full-time at these universities is 48,392 (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2018).

The decisions related to the education system are taken by The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* – OCW). Although institutions at all levels are given freedom to implement the policies of the government when it fits, it is The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science that is in charge of setting general education policy, providing funding, and determining the framework including admission requirements as well as the structures and objectives of the educational system (Nuffic, 2019).

In order to understand the admission requirements for ELT programs, a brief overview of the organizational structure in the educational system of the Netherlands should be clarified. The educational system in the Netherlands makes it compulsory for the students to receive primary education for 8 years and secondary education for 4 years. It is compulsory from the age of 5. During the secondary school education, students have some options to follow as illustrated in ■ Figure 1 below, such as general secondary education (VMBO-T, and HAVO or VWO), or pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO-bb/kb/gl). The students in general secondary education are given the options to choose either senior general secondary education (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, HAVO) or pre-university education (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, VWO). Receiving bilingual education is

among the options as well. In these schools, at least half of the classes are taught in a second language which is mostly English, but they are also offered in German and French (Nuffic, 2019).

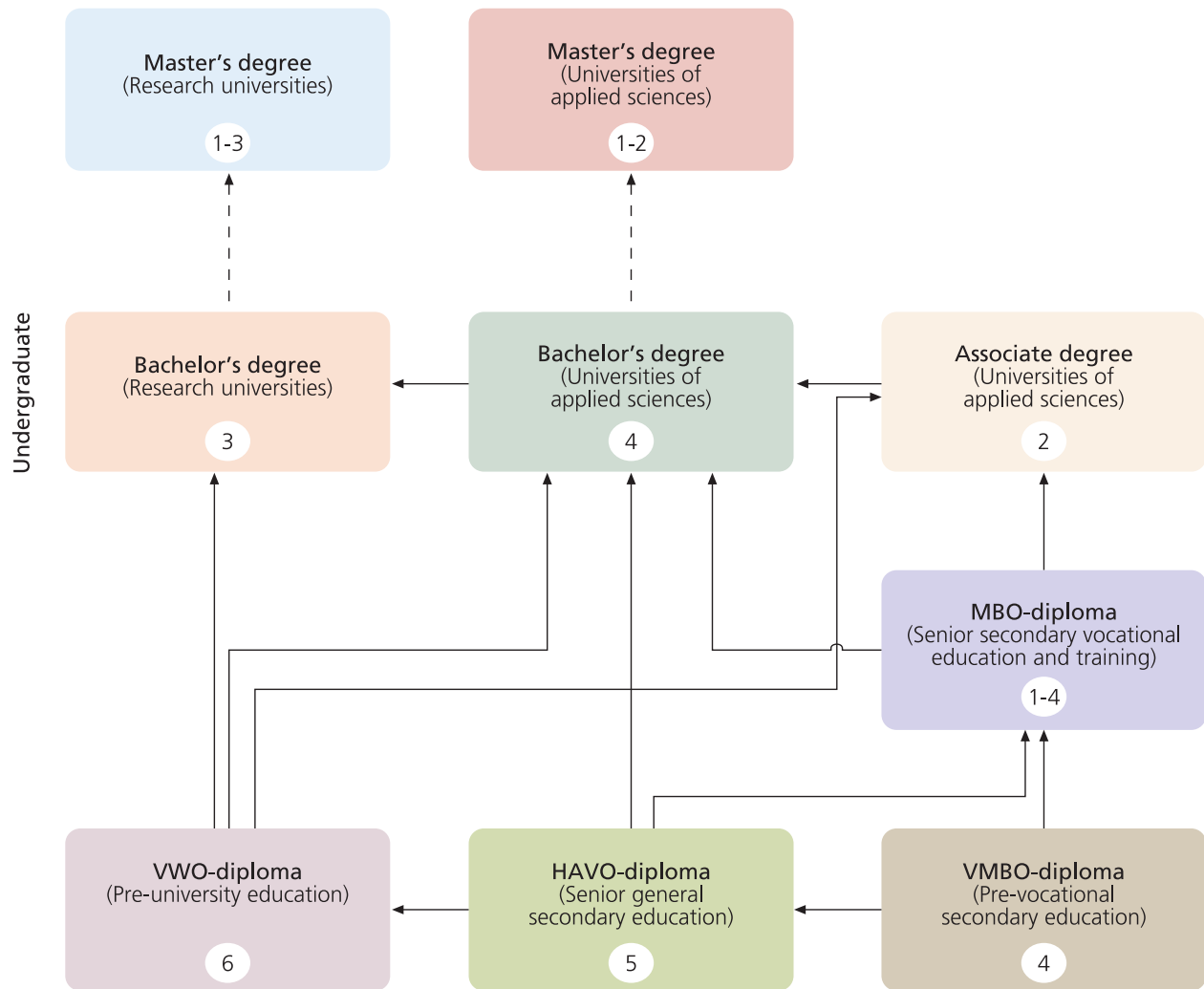
In both HAVO and VWO, students are required to study three initial years which are followed by two and three upper years respectively. Students choose one of the four tracks called *culture and society*, *economics and society*, *nature and health*, and *nature and technology* just prior to the upper years for more in-depth specialization. The students need to pass a national exam in at least seven and eight subjects to obtain a diploma from HAVO and VWO respectively (Nuffic, 2019).

The students who opt for studying pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO-bb/kb/gl) receive a two-year vocation-oriented education which is followed by selection of a pathway. Students complete their education in four years. To receive a diploma, students need to pass a national exam including at least six subjects. This type of education is provided to let the learners be ready for the professional practice or further studies. There are different qualifications, and the duration of the study depends on the preferred qualification. However, only qualification level 4 allows learners to access to higher professional education (HBO) (Nuffic, 2019).

There is a binary system in higher education in the Netherlands. It involves two types of education: *research-oriented higher education (WO)* and *higher professional education (HBO)*. Higher professional education is mainly provided by universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*). Although some HBO programs may require some extra profile requirements, basically a HAVO or VWO diploma is required for admission to a higher education. HBO diploma (qualification level four) also provides students with the opportunity to be admitted to HBO programs. Special requirements, such as enrolment quota and specific skills are applied in the admission of some programs.

ELT program is listed under the title of *education* among the seven sectors that are taught at universities of applied sciences; thus, it is included within higher professional education system. Attracting lots of foreign university students, ELT program is offered at different universities in the Netherlands with relatively similar admission requirements. To present a clear picture of the admission requirements there, this study relies on the examination of admission requirements at two universities; University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences. Apart from the basic diploma requirements, their language requirements are presented in ■ Table 1.

Depending on the diploma they have received, some students are exempted from these language requirements, such as



■ **Figure 1.** Flow chart: the Dutch education system. Reprinted from *The education system of the Netherlands*, by Nuffic, July 2019, retrieved from <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2020-08/education-system-the-netherlands%20%281%29.pdf>. Copyright by Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC 3.0) Licence.

■ **Table 1.** Language requirements of Utrecht and NHL Stenden Universities of Applied Sciences for ELT program.

Language test	Type	Minimum score	
		Utrecht	NHL Stenden
Certificate of TOEFL	Internet based	80	80
	Paper based	550	550
	Computer based	NA	213
Certificate of IELTS	Academic	6.0	6.0 (5.0 for each skill)
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication	670 (listening and reading) and 290 (speaking and writing).	NA
Cambridge English	FCE-C	169–172	169 or higher



the ones who obtained diploma in the UK, US, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, or Australia where English is the official occupational and educational language.

During the admission process, to help the students, University of Applied Sciences Utrecht requires them to take the program selection check. The process depends on where the students are from. It is mandatory to fill out a questionnaire in a form of digital intake including the students' competencies, interests, motivation, and orientation activities they have already taken. Although it is not obligatory, an online interview opportunity with the program coordinator is provided as well. During the online interview, students receive information about what is necessary to successfully complete the program, in depth information about competencies, interests, and motivations of a good candidate for this program (*see* <https://www.internationalhu.com/bachelor-programmes/teacher-education-in-english/admission>).

For the students living in the Netherlands, in addition to online intake, a matching day is organized by the university on which students consult with the program coordinators. Following this compulsory procedure, students receive non-binding advice about the enrolment in that specific program. The students receive e-mails presenting the advice mostly in three forms: *a definite match*, *a match*, and *no match* between the program and students' choice. As it is non-binding advice, regardless of the advice students receive, they can apply and start their program (*see* <https://www.internationalhu.com/bachelor-programmes/teacher-education-in-english/admission>).

The ELT bachelor's degree program lasts four years. Students have to gain a certain minimum credit in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in the first year of their study at university. If the students fail to succeed in meeting this standard, which is mostly 30–45 ECTS, they are automatically dismissed. In this case, these students are generally not allowed to enroll in the same program for several years. Despite the special attention paid to the matching skills, 12% of the students in the Netherlands drop out after their first year of study at university (OECD, 2019). It is also an interesting fact that only 28% of the bachelor's students completed their programs within its theoretical duration in 2017 (OECD, 2019).

Implications for Admission to ELT Programs in Turkey

The significant impact of teachers' behavior (Lodhi, Zafar, Akhtar, Sikander, & Farrukh, 2019) and their English proficiency (Köksal & Ulum, 2019; Nel & Müller, 2010) on students' English proficiency has already been reported. Review of the studies suggests that rather than age, it is the quality of the instruction and appropriate circumstances that matter in

having a native-like competence in a foreign language (Marinova-Todd, 2003). The quality of instruction is mostly determined by teachers' providing good L2 input which mostly ensures native-like foreign language competence in learners (Marinova-Todd, 2003).

When the impact of English language teachers on learners' proficiency is considered, despite the likelihood for some other reasons, the statistics regarding Turkey's noticeable scores on English proficiency indices presented above in different platforms suggest the crucial role that teachers' English proficiency has on learners' language proficiency. However, English language proficiency is one of the major problems that teachers experience (Çetinavcı & Yavuz, 2010; Köksal & Ulum, 2019) on which they need professional development (Korkmazgil, 2015). More remarkable results have been found regarding English teachers' lack of self-confidence in their English proficiency, such as their worsening proficiency over time, their self-assessed English proficiency as very low and even lower in productive skills, avoidance of declaring their job as an English teacher in order not to be ashamed, and inability to use English with high competency in a foreign country (Korkmazgil, 2015). This reality does not only show low English proficiency of the teachers working in Turkey, but also ELT program students' inability to be placed in or graduate from the program with the optimum English proficiency.

These suggest revisions and changes in language teaching system. Considering the significance of language teachers in this process, admission requirements to ELT programs in Turkey should be revised (also *see* Köksal & Ulum, 2019; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). A comparison of what these requirements are in Turkey and the Netherlands gives us a picture of how some initial steps could be taken.

First of all, the only admission requirement to ELT programs in Turkey is students' score that is received as a combination of FLT (60%) and BPT (40%). Students also receive a score based on their GPA in high school. This score is added to their test score. Considering the language test requirements in the Netherlands, the format of the foreign language test may become more comprehensive to measure listening, speaking, pronunciation, and writing skills as well as done in many international language tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS (Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). It might not be an easy procedure considering the number of participants (113,956) of FLT (ÖSYM, 2019b). However, to achieve reliable results, a more comprehensive and valid measurement should be the first step in changing the admission requirements for ELT programs.

Secondly, as it is implemented in the Netherlands at University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, a mechanism like *online*



program selection check can be conducted to analyze ELT candidate students' competencies, the activities they have participated, as well as their interests and motivation to become an English teacher. This may include open or closed-ended questions. With reference to the students' responses, they may be invited for an online or face to face interview with the academic staff of the program. In the interview, candidates can be informed about the skills and competencies that they need to possess, the demands of the program, and the tasks that they perform in the program. The interview would also give the academics the opportunity to know the candidates better and evaluate their readiness and appropriateness to become a teacher. In the Netherlands, following this process, students receive non-binding advice regarding the match between their interests and the program (*see* <https://www.internationalhu.com/bachelor-programmes/teacher-education-in-english/admission>). At this point, following the obligatory interview with the members of ELT program, candidates may receive feedback and learn whether they are suitable for the program or not. The candidates who receive positive feedback from the interview may be listed and the students who get the highest score within the quota of the program can earn the right to be placed in the program. Apart from all the details, receiving education in the program that is appropriate for the students' interests, skills, and the requirements of which are not beyond the capabilities of them would make the students happier and more self-confident.

Thirdly, the statistics provided regarding the number of questions correctly answered by the least successful student who was placed in ELT programs in FLT in 2019 showed that these students could answer only a part of 80 multiple-choice questions (34% for state universities, 15% for foundation universities, and 13% for the universities located out of Turkey) (YÖK Atlas, 2019). These statistics show that although FLT does not measure four language skills, but solely includes multiple-choice questions, students can be placed in ELT programs by answering less than half the questions. The weights of the tests for the total score may be the reason of this situation. Therefore, these can be modified by increasing the impact of FLT. Yet, the format and content of the test should be revised as mentioned earlier.

Finally, in 2019, 4748 new students were placed in the ELT programs in Turkey. Most of them are at state universities (3716). 730 of them are at foundation universities in Turkey and 299 of them are at the universities out of Turkey, such as Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Azerbaijan (YÖK Atlas, 2019). The number of quotas at universities allows less successful students to be placed in the program despite the minimum-rank-

ing condition required by CoHE for education faculties which does not allow the enrolment of candidates below the 300,000th in the relevant score type (ÖSYM, 2019a). The high number of students in classes (around 65 students at state universities, 58 students at private universities, and 33 students at universities located out of Turkey) (Asmalı, 2020) in this program causes many problems, such as lack of feedback for teaching practices, research papers, and not being able to make presentations effectively. As a strategy to lower the number of students, the cohort enrolled in the program that year is divided into several groups so that students can be in smaller groups. However, this could create more workload (teaching hours, assessment, and evaluation-related tasks) that academics cannot bear. The high number of students graduating from this program also creates another problem. Thousands of teachers graduating from this program seek teaching positions at state schools. Including the holders of a pedagogical formation certificate (teaching certification for the graduates of faculties other than education), the number was 17,000 in 2017 (*see* <http://www.kamuajans.com/atanamayan-ogretmenler/alan-bazinda-atama-bekleyen-ogretmen-sayisi-h507801.html>) and around 20,000 in 2020 (*see* <https://www.derszamani.net/brans-bazinda-atama-bekleyen-ogretmen-sayisi.html>). As seen, the number of those awaiting to be appointed as teachers in state schools is increasing. Hence, to prevent the increase in the number of unemployed teachers and to train the future English teachers with the best facilities that universities can provide, the number of quotas should be lowered.

Conclusion

Although teacher education programs update themselves in accordance with the current scientific research findings and developments, the admission requirements of these programs in Turkey are not changed at all. Despite ELT teacher educators' efforts, the significance of what these candidates bring from their high school education is undeniable. Considering the current system of admission to higher education institutions in Turkey, where students have the chance to be placed in ELT programs even with limited English proficiency, it is obvious that the training they receive in the teacher education program is not the only factor in determining the quality of teachers.

In this respect, this study investigated the admission requirements of ELT programs in Turkey and the Netherlands and reported the differences between the two. The reason for choosing the Netherlands for this comparison is that it has been among the leading three countries in the past nine years in English proficiency rankings, and it was the top-performing

country in 2019 (EF, 2019). Not only the weaknesses of the current admission requirements of the ELT programs but also some suggestions which are likely to improve the admission system of future foreign language teacher education in Turkey are listed in the current study.

Basically, there are four suggestions to improve the quality of foreign language teacher education in Turkey. The first step to be taken could be to change the current form of FLT, which is in multiple-choice form. This test could be in the form of international tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS, to be more comprehensive and valid not only to measure reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary skills but also listening, speaking, pronunciation, and writing. Besides, an implementation, which is called *program selection check* as in the Netherlands, can be conducted either online or offline (in print) to explore students' interest, motivation, skills, and potential in teaching. Considering this initial investigation, the staff of ELT programs could also conduct an interview with the candidates to help them choose the most appropriate ones that reflect their dispositions best. However, the number of the candidates to apply for the ELT programs, which could be very high, can be a burden for the implementation of interviews. Besides, interviewing requires subjective judgments which could also create pressure on the commission members. Therefore, integration of such a component to the selection and admission process requires further planning and design of measurement and assessment tools with analytic and clearly-defined criteria. Moreover, the current system which calculates students' score by adding up 40% of BPT and 60% of FLT allows the students to be placed in an ELT program with limited English proficiency. A modification in the calculation of these tests by increasing the value of FLT conducted in the correct form would change the professional competence of the future language teachers. As a final remark in terms of suggestions for admission requirements, the excessively high quotas allowing less successful students to be placed in ELT programs, despite the precautions taken by CoHE, should be lowered so that only the best students can be placed in ELT programs.

In conclusion, teaching still enjoys being remunerated and attractive in the Netherlands despite relatively crowded classes and long hours. Despite low salaries and limited salary promotion, teaching profession still attracts young people in Turkey as well. The statistics indicate that 14% and 20% of primary and secondary teachers are under the age of 30 in the Netherlands and Turkey respectively, which shows the success of both countries in attracting new teachers into the profession (OECD, 2019). However, in order to increase the quality of teaching in the ELT programs at universities in Turkey and put the abovementioned suggestions into action which would

have a positive impact on general English proficiency of Turkish students, a collaborative effort of CoHE (YÖK), The Measurement, Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM), MoNE (MEB), and teacher educators from the ELT programs in Turkey is crucial.

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