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Views of undergraduate students on “The history of Atatürk’s principles and revolutions” course and its instructors

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Abstract

The general aim of this study is to determine the beliefs and opinions of undergraduate students (n=61; ranging in age 21-23) about (a) the course of “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolutions”, (b) its instructors, and (c) their learning habits.” To do so, a survey has been administered to those who have taken this specific course in the department of ELT at tertiary level. The survey has been developed by the researcher and received experts’ opinion in the related field of study. The results have been analyzed through SPSS statistical package on the computer. The findings obtained in the study have shown that teachers prefer lecturing technique and lack the use of technology in their classrooms. The attendance seems to be another important issue, though the students report favorable results for this course. Lastly, certain projects should be given to students in order to make them aware of the past events and make associations with the present happenings.

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Keywords: History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolutions; undergraduate students; opinions.

1. Introduction

History is a branch of science that sheds light on our past, present, and gives valuable insights about our future. According to Mimoğlu (1955) it is a branch of science that examines the objective causes and laws of the historical events that human beings experienced throughout their lives, focusing on the time and the setting in which these events took place.

As we all know, “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolution” course has been incorporated into the curricula of both public high schools and universities. What is expected to reach from this highly vital course is to keep the youth alert against both national (domestic) and outside (international) threats, make them aware of the hard conditions out of which a new national state was established, and lastly, but not the least, grow a nation that loves his country and his people, which will get them united under Atatürk’s principles and thoughts (Turan, Safran, Hayta, Şahin, Çakmak, & Dönmez, 2009). Similarly, Acun et.al. (2009) report that the main aim to train teachers is “to inform them about the challenges the Turkish nation encountered throughout the history in establishing Turkish

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State and realizing the Turkish Revolutions, make them aware of both cultural and social top-down and bottom-up events and of their consequences, discuss both the individual and the social events and guide them how they should handle with these under the highlights of Kemalist thoughts.” In teaching these facts to our youth to whom our leader and the founder of our country, Atatürk, entrusted our country and our independence, teachers have important responsibilities. Thus, they need to make their lessons attractive, interesting, lively, convincing, and increase their students’ motivations and attitudes. To do so, they need to use highly attractive lecturing techniques.

2. Method

The main of this study is to scrutinize the opinions of ELT 4th year undergraduate students (n=61; of whom 12 are males, 49 are female) about “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolution” course and clarify the problems that are faced by the students in the lesson and make some recommendations. They range in age from 21 to 23. Quantitative methodology was chosen to garner the opinions of students about (a) the course, (b) the teacher, and (c) the students’ learning habits. For this purpose, the 29-item survey was constructed by the researcher. Three experts are asked to judge the validity of the items in this survey. Any result 3.1 and over indicates that the students favor the characteristics about the course, the teacher and their learning habits in this study. The result 2 and below is considered unfavorable. To analyze the data SPSS 17.0 was run.

2.1. Research questions

In this study answers have been sought to the following questions;

- What are the undergraduate students’ opinions about the course of “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolution (APR)”?
- What are the undergraduate students’ opinions about the instructors of this course?
- What are the undergraduate students’ opinions about themselves?
- What are the undergraduate students’ opinions about the topics incorporated in the curriculum?

3. Findings

At the end of the study, the following findings were obtained.

3.1. Students’ opinions about the course of “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolution”

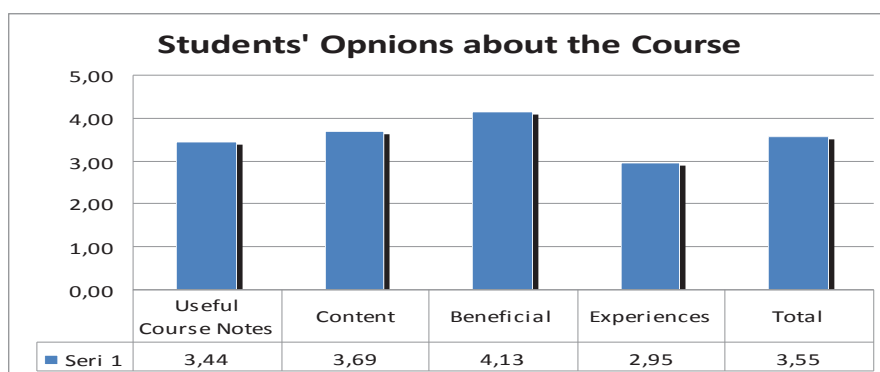


Figure 1. Students’ opinions about the course of “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolution”

A careful analysis of Figure 1 implies that students have favorable attitudes towards this course ($m=3.55$). They report that the course materials, the teacher-made course notes and the course book is useful ($m=3.44$). When compared to the other courses offered in their program, the content is balanced ($m=3.69$) and highly beneficial (4.13). However, students believe that the teachers provide their students with not many significant projects on important happenings in the history of Turkish Republic ($m=2.95$).

3.2. Students' opinions about the instructors of this course

As to the opinions of students about their teachers' teaching behaviors in the classroom, it is clearly seen that the students have favorable attitudes towards their APR teachers ($m=4.20$). They believe that their teachers provide them with the background information about the topics they are going to study ($m=4.16$). Their teachers almost always regularly ($m=4.70$) come to classes well-prepared ($m=4.69$), give examples in their lectures ($m=4.90$). They often exert efforts for us to comprehend the events ($m=4.15$) and give homework ($m=3.54$). They try to manage ($m=4.18$) the class successfully with good communication skills (4.33). When something is unclear, they almost always try to give feedback ($m=4.30$). They are fluent (4.48), active ($m=4.10$), helpful ($m=3.38$), and competent ($m=4.57$). They justly evaluate the students' exam papers ($m=4.34$) and often are reflective (3.90). Relying on these findings we can assert that the APR teachers have the necessary qualifications and credentials both in terms of the knowledge of the field and teaching abilities. However, there is only one point that they should take into consideration. That is they prefer only lecturing that seems boring to the participants of this study because they lack the use of technological equipments such as power point presentations, using OHP, VCD, DVD, computers, etc. ($m=2.74$) as is suggested by Ulusoy (2009:427).

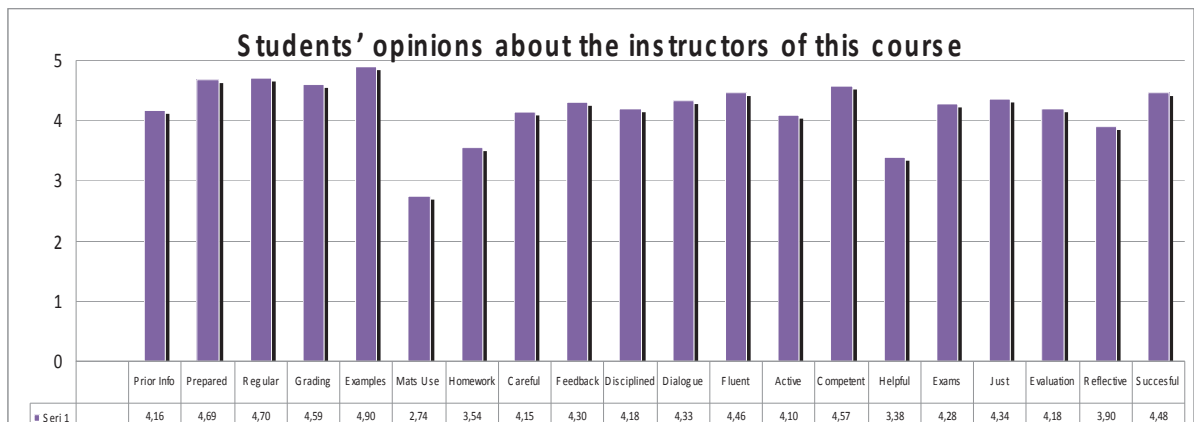


Figure 2. Students' opinions about the instructors of this course

3.3. Students' opinions about themselves

As to the features pertaining students' opinions about themselves, the results given in Table 3 seem to be satisfying in that they regularly attend this specific course and voluntarily followed the lectures ($m=4.00$). They report that they almost often try to ask questions to be clarified about the subjects they do not comprehend ($m=3.34$), do and hand-in their homework on time ($m=4.30$) and study for the exams as well ($m=4.20$). On the other hand, they seem not to make necessary daily preparations for the lessons ($m=2.49$). This may be the result of their loaded program in their ELT programs. However, relying on these findings we may say that they seem to be willing to attend this course and take active part in the discussions.

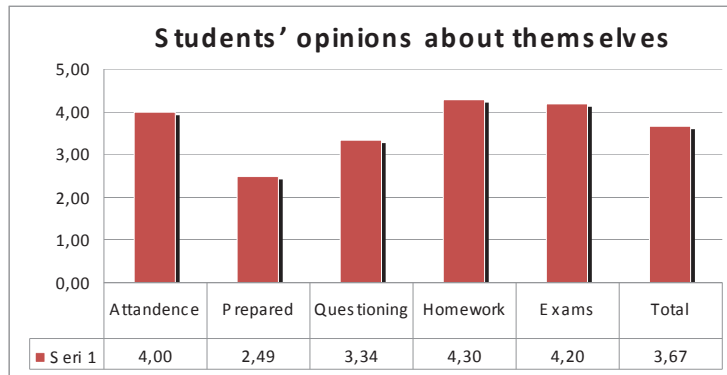


Figure 3. Students' opinions about themselves

3.4. Undergraduate students' opinions about the topics

Table 1. Undergraduate students' opinions about the topics

	Newness	National Struggle	Mudanya Armistice to Lozan	Atatürk's Period	Revolutions	Turkey after Atatürk	Atatürk's Principles
Means	2.77	2.75	2.71	2.93	2.80	2.79	2.91

With regard to this research question the answers were ranged from 3 for “Yes”, 2 for “No”, and 1 for “No Idea.” This question has been formulated in order to get students’ opinions about the Ottoman Newness (An Overview on Ottoman Social Structure, Ottoman Regression and Its Newness, Constitutional Monarchy and the Opposition, and External Events such as Trablugarb War and the Balkan Wars), the National Struggle (the Preparation Period, The Country’s Situations as a Result of the Occupations and the Established Societies, Mustafa Kemalin Samsun (May 19th, 1919) and His Activities, The Opening of Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), the Military and Political Events during 1921-1922, the Foreign Policy of the National Struggle), Mudanya Armistice to Lozan, Atatürk’s Period (the Internal and the External Policy), the Revolutions (Turkish Constitution, the Establishment of Contemporary Law System, the Developments in Education, the Revolutionary Activities in Culture, and the Revolutions in Economy and Society), Turkey after Atatürk (the Internal and the External Policy), and Atatürk’s Principles (Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Secularism, State Socialism. and Revolutionarism). As seen in Table 4, the students seem to have favorable attitudes towards the topics they have studied with their teachers (m=2.77;m=2.75;m=2.71;m=2.93;m=2.80;m=2.79, and m=2.91 respectively). However, it can be stressed that of the above topics the most favorable ones for the students are the topics about

Atatürk’s Period (m=2.93) and Atatürk’s Principles(m=2.91). Therefore, we can wholeheartedly assert that a nation with Kemalist thoughts still exist and will do so.

4. Conclusion and Implications

It is really important to see the undergraduate students’ opinions about “The History of Atatürk’s Principles and Revolution” course and its instructors, and evaluate themselves in order to bring valuable and inevitable insights for the teachers to make this course interesting, enjoyable, and informative about the past of our country, how a new nation grew out of really hard conditions after the sick man of Europe once upon a time.

As a whole, this study has given satisfying results pertaining to good and effective teaching behaviors, the content, students’ learning responsibilities, and the existence of the Turkish youth with Kemalist thoughts. At the end of the study it can be said that the course-book that the teachers use is the sole source. According to the findings obtained in this study once again it can be asserted that lecturing only by means of such sources might not be that

much interesting, enjoyable, and attractive. The course-books should be supported with visual, audio-visual aids such as VCDs, DVDs, OHPs, Power-points, in short with some effective technological aids. Besides, the question-answer technique might keep students alert. Another striking point is that students should be assigned certain projects on important happenings in the history Turkish Republic to expose them to our past and have them make associations with the real present experiences to get some lessons. Therefore, the topics that have strong relations with the present problems should be determined and those topics should be presented in parallel with these problems. Solely, students develop their analytic and critical thinking skills. Lastly, but not the least, depending on the results of this study the students, though they seem to be interested, should always attend these courses offered by their universities to get informed about their past, present and the possible happenings in the future, and voluntarily participate in these studies.

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