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Innovative and organized approaches for foreign language teaching in Turkey

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Abstract

Innovation and organization in language education are more than just a teacher and students in the same classroom, at the same time, using the same materials and current motivation. The importance of innovations is highlighted by the European Label for innovative projects in language teaching and learning. For Turkey and its European Union membership ambitions, education is a prior section, whose standard can be raised by innovations in foreign language education. Heyworth created a formula for innovations [C=(abc)>x], which declares the changes and its costs. In this article, Heyworth's formula is transferred towards the language education system in Turkey. It will theoretically show advantages and changes and a way how Turkish organizations could change to provide a more sustainable language education. Furthermore, the article will explain already existing approaches and show their advantages and critics. As a conclusion, a theoretical approach for innovations will be given and discussed.

Keywords: Foreign language education, Innovation, Turkey, EU, ELL, Heyworth

1.Fundamental Criteria from the European Union (EU)

The European Union established a label (ELL: European Language Label) for innovative projects in language teaching and learning, which encourages European nations for initiatives in the field of teaching and learning languages, rewarding new techniques in language teaching and spreading knowledge of their existence. All kinds of education, training aspects, methods or innovations for foreign language learning are accepted by the label, which tries to raise the standards of language teaching in Europe by funding (such) innovative projects (ELL. 2011).

Following criteria are given by the ELL (2011):

a) The demand of methods and materials for students should be ensured by initiatives with comprehensive approach.
b) There should be an added value for initiatives in the national context.
c) Initiatives must provide motivation for students and teachers to improve their language skills.
d) They must be appropriate, original, and creative to concern the student's motivation.

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e) A European Emphasis should be included, e.g. the variety/diversity of the European languages must be supported.

f) Initiatives should be transferable and be a source of inspiration for language learning in other nations.

Another important issue which the European Union (or: ELL) declares is that innovations should be creative and inventive. Creativity and originality are bounded to the context of a project. Heyworth illustrates innovations in foreign language teaching as a process, which differs to a general lesson developments and spontaneous ideas. He defines it more as a planned or managed change. The ELL (2011) wants all European member countries, including candidates, to work on innovation for better foreign language education. As a result, better communication of Europeans and sustainability (of peace) can be established.

2.Perspectives of innovation

As mentioned above, innovation(s) is (are) more a planned or managed change of old habits. That meant evaluation is the key element, which precedes innovation. The following diagram exemplifies the fundamental process (Rea-Dickins and Germaine, 1998).
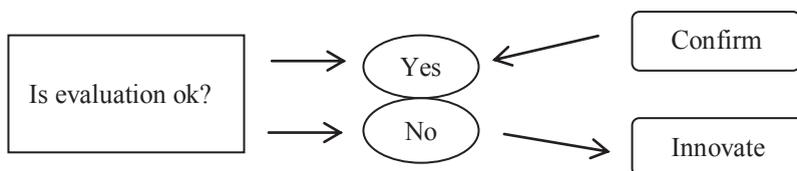

Figure 1: Fundamental evaluation process by Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1998).

Indeed, to precede an innovation is more complex. Efforts, resources and cost share parts in a formula (Heyworth, 2003) of [any innovative] change:

$$C = (abd) > x$$

C expresses change, *a,* the level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, *b* highlights the desired outcome while *d* identifies practical (first) steps to achieve the desired outcome. *X* underlines the cost or afford of a change. In language education any innovation is generally understood as a good approach to renew old structures and refresh the learning process. For taking a real change, the product composed of dissatisfaction, desired outcome and theoretical, innovative approaches of the innovation in total must overcome the costs. The question about how to reach a successful change [or: innovation] arises. Kolb and Frohman (1970) describe a requirement in the following steps to gather a process of innovation:
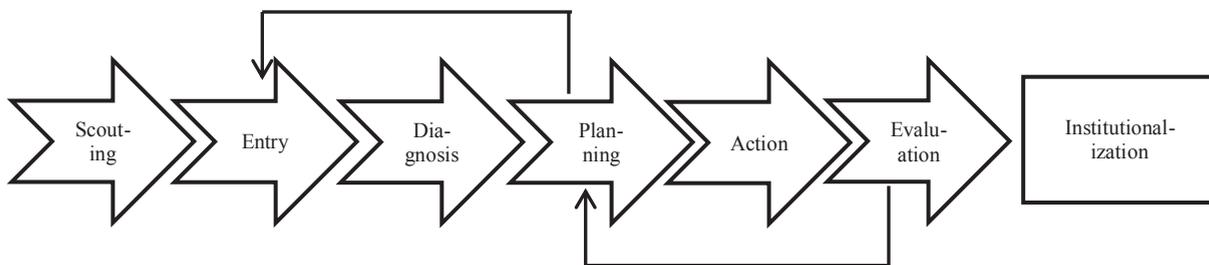

Figure 2: Innovation process by Kolb and Frohman (1970).

Scouting means determining readiness for change and identifying obstacles. For the process of language learning scouting is more equal to a focus of class observation. Entry determines the process of "finding a responsible institution, organization or "staff" that shows responsibility and gives access towards the innovation process. Problems, changes, aims and results, which shall be solved within the scope of the innovation, must be diagnosed. At the same time, diagnosis should declare a definition of the meaning of [the] innovative (foreign) language teaching, too. After defining aims, targets and scopes, the innovation (process) should be planned. Heyworth declares in relation to Kolb and Frohman (1970),six subsystems for an innovative intervention: Person-subsystem, authority-subsystem, information-subsystem, task-subsystem, setting-subsystem, didactic and methodology. The implementation is highlighted as action, in which the educators apply the (innovated) methodology. For the action strategy, processes should take part, but there should be an addition, that no matter what the changes are, there is likely to be some resistance to change. This resistance can be even productive and may remind us to think about lacks of a method in the (innovation) system. The whole innovation process (and procedure) must be evaluated to understand its errors. Evaluation (in a scientific manner) is a basic academic process which can strengthen or weaken the innovation. In case of all sections being positively fulfilled an institutionalization may follow. That means an agreement for a takeover into education curriculum.

Additionally, Heyworth (2003) mentions about a (clear) logical management, in which educators and students can come together at the same time, in the same environment with the proper materials.[†] "It involves a proper learning environment for an effective learning community" (Heyworth, 2003).

The whole perspective of innovation towards foreign language teaching can be highlighted as a method. In general, most European countries share similarities for methodologies and didactics in foreign language learning. Ortner declares methodology as "theory of connection according the whole language education based approaches." (Cillia, 1998:20). Here the main question for the research arises. If Heyworth's (2003) and Ortner's (1998) approaches are fundamental for innovations (as methods) for foreign language education, a parallel view to the Turkish foreign language education system would be basic, too.

3.Approach transfer to the Turkish language education

The Turkish education system itself faces several discussions and changes, mostly about the dilemma between Islamic and secular syntheses. On the one hand the number of educational institutions in all sections increased, so did the number of students (pupils)[‡]. Based on a central education system, even the numbers of students increase, innovations barely take over. New media (e.g. books, online-systems/-lessons) hardly find their way into the education system. Why? Where do innovative approaches come in touch with difficulties? Heyworth's formula may provide an answer (Heyworth, 2003):

Scouting: The process of scouting is not that difficult. If foreign language education in Turkey will be analyzed, various problems can be detected. It is obvious that complications vary in terms of educational institution and city in which they are located. The origin of such deficiency(in foreign language education) is mostly based on a central executive including its bureaucracy. Also the mentality of teachers, students, officials and instructors is not often well trained and educated for any innovative preparation.

Entry: For every innovation, permission is needed. Executive powers are the responsible boards for any innovation entry. The Turkish education system is quite hierarchical on all levels. Permissions must be provided by chairperson or responsible operators. In many cases an entry for innovation is just reachable if the ministry of (higher) education [MEB, YÖK] is accepting or providing the [spread of] innovation. Such (autocratic) topologies have their roots back

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[†] Innovation variables: Time, place, channel of transfer, content, individuals, resources and control (Cillia, 1998).
[‡] Number of schools in Turkey (rounded): 1923:4900; 1960:25.000; 1990:50500; 2010:53000. Number of students (in thousand) in primary education: 1923:330; 1960:3000; 1990:7000 2008:14000

in history (e.g. Ottoman Empire), furthermore, many educational institutions face internal troubles like overcrowded classes, deficient media and less financial support (for teachers). Such standards are the root for demotivation, a further internal factor for blocking innovative ideas. The process of entry should become easier, barriers should drop and people in charge should support them in an objective way. Additionally, (Turkish) political parties must deepen their powers with higher "international" institutions like the European Union or UNESCO. For now, such connections do exist on a low level bureaucracy.

Diagnosis: If an entry is done, diagnosis helps to identify problems and the power of change. Mostly, on this level, material and manned resources come into play. For diagnosis the European Commission offers resources and ideas, which may offer a frame for the diagnosis of such innovative approaches. As mentioned before, it seems that Turkish education policy is not so much interested in European education frame works, which is the basic barrier. On the other hand, the influence of the EU on the MEB in Turkey is not that powerful as well. It is understandable that the (autocratic) Turkish [education] system cannot be changed easily.

Planning: In the case that entry and diagnosis are accepted, innovation planning can be done. According Heyworth (Cillia, 1998), 6 different strategies for innovation [planning] can be chosen: 1-teachers, 2-authorities, 3-information (media channels), 4-curriculum, 5-didactics and methodology and 6-environment. As mentioned before, innovations for foreign language teaching in Turkey should (actually) take place in all (6) strategy levels. It seems clear that if an entry cannot be afforded, planning of innovation is impossible.

Action: Conversion of the strategy means introduction of the strategy which was declared in the section of planning. As Heyworth states correctly, "no matter what the changes are, there is likely some resistance to change." Anyhow, resistance can be a productive factor as well because rethinking the innovation may help to exclude negative consequences. Especially in Turkey teachers from older generations are comfortable with their style of language teaching; furthermore, they may dislike any innovation procedure. If an innovation takes action, resistance will be faced (even) on the instruction level.

Evaluation: Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of data needed to make decisions, a process in which most well-run programs engage from the outset. It seems logical and clear that after any new interaction or methodology in foreign language learning, an evaluation has to be done. It shows the benefit which may bring the innovation into a certain role (permanent usage).

Institutionalization: Institutionalization is a process in which aninstitution'scode of innovation, change,mission,policies, vision andstrategic plans are assumed into (permanent) actionguidelines,applicable to thedailyactivitiesof its workers (officers)and otheremployees. Itaimsat integratingfundamentalvalues andobjectivesinto the institution'scultureandstructure. After positive and valuable evaluation of any innovation, institutionalization proves assumption. In Turkey even an institutionalization seems somehow tricky, then even after a clear process of the innovation and its evaluation officers or institutions will not let change an existing rule easily.

In the conclusion below an analysis of the existing problems will be shown. Any innovation is generally provided by an individual who created the innovation with respect to his/her own circumstances in foreign language education. Nevertheless, a framework shall be given, which shows or proves that Heyworth's steps seem useful for the Turkish foreign education system to bring new ideas and impetus into educational institutions. Furthermore, the EU supports any innovation foreign language education.

4.Conclusion

As said before Heyworth's steps offer a way to bring innovations into activation. Unfortunately some barriers (in Turkey) have to be solved. The Turkish education system (in general) is centrally organized. Every innovation for foreign language education, if it will take activation all over the nation, must be approved and accepted by official

ministries in Ankara. Right now, educational structures on each educational level are quite traditional and hard to change. Even so, Turkey should support, accept and run for innovative ideas for not losing grip and positions on the international education "market". PISA proves and underlines the need of such innovations, because Turkey's positionin PISA study (OECD, 2011)is in the last quarter. Such a position demands change through innovations.

Heyworth's structure uncovers barriers in the Turkish education system. The first blockade which Turkey should lower is the strategic position of "entry". Traditional structures must be eased and the mind of education should show clearly profits of innovations, which can be additionally be funded by the EU. The key to losing barriers is political. Political parties don not pay enough attention about education processes on their party platforms. Especially demands of the EU are not assumed. The reason may be the economical rise of the country and possibly intern controversies about the nation's future (including the education system). Educational institutions bring up innovations for them, but face internal barriers as well.

As a result, a process of innovation in foreign language education in Turkey can be supported with the help of Heyworth's formula. The main barrier is located in educational policy structures. If parties will pay more attention towards the idea of educational change or innovation, educational institutions may overcome internal barriers easier and upgrade the education of the Turkish nation successfully. Heyworth's formula $[C = (abd) > x]$ must be arranged especially within the section of "entry". X expresses costs or afford, which must be lower than the demand of change. An innovation must be beneficial for the (Turkish) policy as well which means the ruling party needs to understand the profit, otherwise it will not take action. If a political (and financial) benefit is given, innovation barriers may drop.

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