

Turkey - May 2015

In May of this year my colleagues and I had the privilege of travelling to a small farming town named Gulsehir, which is in the picturesque region of Cappadocia, Turkey. The aim of this visit was to be able to gain an insight into how the Turkish Education System works in comparison to our establishments in the UK. As a tutor, teaching English Literacy to adults using IT, I was very interested in discovering how other educational organisations work without the use of IT as the UK is now using computers as a day to day tool in its classrooms unreservedly.

The Education System in Cappadocia consists of four main stages; Pre-school education, Primary Education, Secondary Education and Higher Education.

Pre-school Education is not compulsory whereas Primary Education is compulsory and starts at the age of 6 – 14 yrs. Secondary Education is from the age of 14-17 years and comes in two forms, either 'Vocational High Schools' or 'General High Schools'. This is for 2 years but an extra year is allowed if pupils wish to study a second language such as English. This education is provided free of charge by the Government. Higher Education is at University level and also includes institutes like Police or Military Academies. In order to enrol onto Higher Education, pupils have to gain relevant qualifications before they are considered for these courses.

We were particularly interested in the Vocational High School institutions which are schools that help students gain practical skills as well as academic qualifications in order to secure future employment. We visited two schools, one of which was Gulsehir Vocational and Technical High School.

As part of our visit, we chose to take some teaching resources and organised lessons whilst visiting the schools. We were kindly shown around the schools but it was apparent how the schools lacked teaching resources in comparison to our schools in the UK. We witnessed pupils with text books, exercise books and a basic writing whiteboard at the front of the classroom. There were no interactive whiteboards, IT facilities were just one IT suite and when questioned about teaching

methods and practical exercises used to teach subject like Science, very little was available.

My colleagues and I had prepared practical activities such as card games, board games and visual aids to help us deliver lessons teaching English as a second language. We taught the English alphabet using phonics, tried to engage students in conversation by asking what their 'likes' and 'dislikes' were using pictures. We taught colours and used topics such as what profession they would like to go into to encourage conversation in English. In one particular class our students were English literate but were hesitant to speak. We used our resources and found that the pupils engaged extremely well with this method of teaching. Feedback given showed that they had enjoyed the lessons immensely.

We recommended this method of teaching to the teachers present who also agreed that it was highly productive. Another issue we found that needed addressing by the Education authorities was the lack of replacement teachers available if the teacher in class was otherwise engaged or too ill to attend her class to teach. In the UK we have 'supply' teachers which can cover a class on short notice if necessary but on questioning, we found this sort of system was not available in schools in Turkey. However, we met some lovely teachers and inspirational students which I admired for their determination to learn.

The thing that impressed me the most about the Turkish Education System was the Vocational aspect of it all as from personal and professional experience I have seen that not all individuals are academic and many skills can be gained through practical learning. The Turkish education system allows students to gain specialist skills such as Culinary Arts (Cookery), Tourism and Hotel Management, Tour Guidance and IT skills which are perfect when living in a vibrant tourist region like Cappadocia. This can give students an excellent foundation when looking for employment locally, particularly if they are poor or their families are heavily reliant upon the individuals gaining employment to raise their standards of living etc. Cappadocia is famous for its air ballooning industry and programmes such as Civil Aviation and Transportation are also now offered and are useful skills to have when looking for jobs. I think this system would be very useful in the UK and as part of my feedback, I would certainly

recommend introducing a similar programme for our students especially at the age of 14-17 years when it is so difficult for them to choose which career path they would like to persevere.

Turkey, for me came across as a country that has embraced its beautiful culture and history and used it to promote travel and tourism hence creating jobs. This I am sure, contributes towards its strengths in making the country's economy stronger and stronger. The hustle and bustle of Istanbul to me showed people are travelling from all over the world to do business in Turkey. Its transportation structure shows a lot of investment has gone into the country which is escalating its profile.

Finally, I would like to convey my utmost gratitude GOAL and the excellent initiative organised through the European Project, for allowing me to have experienced everyday life in small remote towns and cities in Turkey where I would never had had an opportunity to visit. It was an emotional as well as an educational trip for me. Feeling very grateful for the opportunities our country has to offer me and my children in comparison to other countries like Turkey.

Visiting the Blue Mosque with its opulent blue domes and slender balconied minarets towering gracefully in the blue skies above the city of Istanbul, the numerous photogenic, architectural buildings scattered around the city with its historical ambience wishing you could return over and over again. The world's first rock carved Underground Ceramic Museum in Cappadocia with its historical artefacts from the first age, attractive modern age ceramics designed by famous artists and showing off its paintings through organised exhibitions for the whole world to see. Also, catching a glimpse of the breathtaking views at Sunset Point overlooking Goreme in Cappadocia will always remain memorable for me.

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