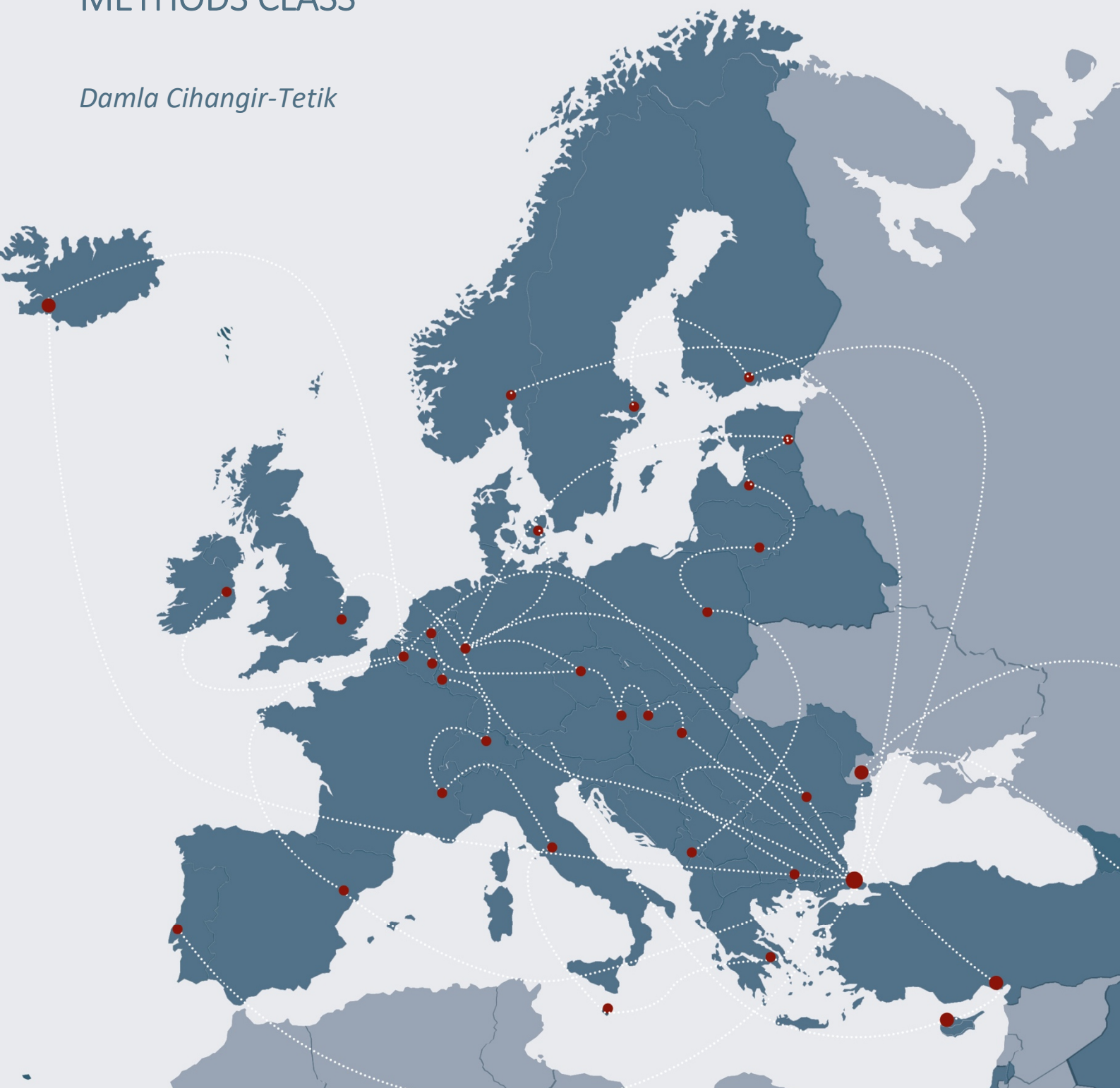


# VIADUCT Teaching Paper

TEACHING TURKEY-EUROPEAN UNION RELATIONS  
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A RESEARCH  
METHODS CLASS

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## ABSTRACT

The paper introduces a unique model of teaching Turkey-EU relations within the framework of a learner-centered research methods class by drawing on the example of “SIB 2005 Research Methods class” that is currently taught as a required course to first-year students at the newly established Istanbul Ayyansaray University, Political Science and International Relations Department. The design of the course content and implementation methodology has two main aims: applying a learner-centered approach instead of a traditional teacher-based model in higher education and contributing briefly and implicitly to teaching Turkey-EU relations through four learning tools and teaching strategies. These tools and strategies are using news pieces related with Turkey-EU affairs, analysing an empirical article on Turkey-EU relations as the major assignment of the course, giving proper examples of both quantitative and qualitative research methods by using academic works on Turkey-EU relations and inviting a guest lecturer, who has conducted a research on Turkey-EU relations. In this way, while the course enables the students to be the active learner of the class and partners of the instructor, at the same time, it improves the ability and academic skills of students to understand and critically evaluate the design, main components, and findings of any research in social sciences, particularly, the ones on Turkey-EU relations.

## CONTENT

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Motivation of Teaching Turkey-EU Relations within a Research Methods Class.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. The Learning Tools and Teaching Strategies .....</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 Using News Pieces .....	4
3.2 Analysing an Empirical Article.....	5
3.3 Examples of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods .....	6
3.4 Inviting a Guest Lecturer .....	7
<b>4. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>8</b>

## 1. Introduction

Teaching research methods to undergraduate students has never been an easy task. Teaching research methods to a group of first year students who are just adjusting to the general university requirements is even more challenging given the expected capacity for abstraction that such courses require. This paper deals with the challenges of teaching research methods in the context of Turkey-European Union (EU) relations at an introductory level. While the paper provides an example of an introductory level research methods class designed to contribute implicitly to teaching Turkey-EU relations, it also explains how the content and teaching methodology design of “SIB<sup>1</sup> 2005 Research Methods” are prepared by using specific learning tools and teaching strategies for that particular course. Siyaset Bilimi (SIB) 2005 is a compulsory course for first-year Political Science and IR students at Istanbul Ayvansaray University, offered for the first time in the Spring 2019 semester. Therefore, it is expected that students would not have prior background in research methods or Turkey-EU relations. The course does not directly deal with Turkey-EU relations, however, it aims to contribute to teaching the subject within the framework of a research methods class. The main aim of this course is to introduce necessary knowledge, basic skills and tools to understand, evaluate, and conduct scientific research in social sciences, particularly in the disciplines of political science and IR to a group of first year undergraduate students. It also aims to introduce the components of scientific research to the students and familiarize them with critical and constructive thinking. Since all departments of the university have a fair amount of freshman students, the course is open for the students enrolled to other departments of the Faculty of Economics, Administrative, and Social Sciences. In this way, students, who would participate voluntarily to the class, from History, Psychology, Public Relations and Advertisement and English Language and Literature Departments, will also be informed about current issues and research on Turkey-EU relations.

In order to achieve these aims, a more learner-centered approach (LCA) in higher education instead of a traditional teacher-based model is applied in the design of the course. Even though in practice the teacher-centered traditional style of learning still dominates teaching methodologies at higher education institutions (Liu, Qiao, and Liu 2006), there is an increasing trend in using the constructivist models of learning in higher education (Arendale 1994; Parkin 2017; Sambell, Brown, and Graham 2017). LCA in higher education aims to provide positive learning experiences by engaging students as partners in learning and teaching (Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2014; Blumberg, Phyllis, and Weimer 2012; Weimer 2002; Johansson and Felten 2015). Thus, in LCA the instructor’s intention is to alter and to develop the students understanding by fostering active learning beginning from the very first year of undergraduate studies, while also relying on the perception of the students as peers and partners (Arendale 2014; Astin 1999; Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten 2014). It is much easier in a research methods class to apply LCA in teaching than other compulsory courses of political science and IR disciplines, since the instructor can use a multitude of examples of scientific and unscientific work, encourage students to think critically, and share their ideas with their peers. In addition, students are expected to engage in active class discussions and work together for their assignments to figure out the best examples of a

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviation of “*Siyaset Bilimi*” (Political Science in Turkish).

good research design in different fields of social sciences. Applying LCA makes teaching Turkey-EU relations in an introductory level research methods class easier. Thus, this approach enables the instructor to embed several academic articles, projects, research studies, books, and book chapters about Turkey-EU relations in the syllabus of the course.

## 2. Motivation of Teaching Turkey-EU Relations within a Research Methods Class

There are five different motivations of teaching Turkey-EU relations within the framework of a research methods class in one of the newly established Turkish universities. Regardless the existing unfavourable political climate between Turkey and the EU, Turkey is still an official candidate for EU accession. engaged in negotiations. Yet, a 2016 poll on the perceptions of Turkish citizens regarding Turkey-EU relations and Turkey's membership to the European Union reveals that a significant majority of Turkish public does not know the history and structure of the EU or Turkey-EU relations (Economic Development Foundation 2016, Türkeş-Kılıç 2018). Similarly, the majority of students enrolled in this class does not have much knowledge on research methods in social sciences nor do they possess academic insights on the EU or Turkey-EU relations. To that end, it would be highly beneficial for future bilateral political, economic, and social relations, if undergraduate students of Political Science and IR departments of Turkish universities attain as much knowledge and information about decision-making processes in the EU, the evolution of Turkey-EU relations and current debates in the literature of European Studies as possible.

Secondly, public opinion of Turkish citizens on the EU, particularly Turkey-EU relations, is limited with the information generated by popular media channels such as newspapers, TV news, social media posts, and mainly public discourse in Turkey. Majority of this information is biased, distorted and spurious. It is becoming much more difficult to find an objective and reliable information on the EU and Turkey-EU relations. This is why, this course aims to teach the basics for developing research design and how to find objective and reliable data. To do so, the course incorporates scholarly works on Turkey-EU relations.

Thirdly, in the literature there is a considerable amount of studies on several EU policy areas and particularly on Turkey-EU relations that use a variety of research methods, data collection methods, and different kinds of data, since it is much easier to reach high amount of data on the EU – thanks to the transparency of EU institutions – compared to other regions and countries of the world. This enables the instructor to use different academic research projects, articles and books on Turkey-EU relations as the proper and relevant examples of the course content and lecture each week. In their assignments students could collect data about the EU easily as well.

A fourth motivation of the instructor is the lack of any methodological class on Turkey-EU relations in Turkish academia. In the last two decades, in parallel to Turkey's EU accession process, the number of 'Turkey-EU Relations' courses has increased tremendously in the curriculums of Turkish universities (Eyryce-Tepeciklioğlu 2013, 309-310). Yet, there is a lack of methodological courses focusing particularly



on the methodological differences of studies conducted on EU politics, governance, and Turkey-EU relations. This research methods class tries to fill this gap for teaching Turkey-EU relations.

Finally, as the demand for courses on Turkey-EU relations or EU Politics and Governance are in decline in the curriculums of Political Science and IR departments of universities in Turkey. While some of them continue to be offered as area elective courses for third or fourth year students, in many universities, they are not offered among the required courses anymore. Offering this research methods class as a required one for first year undergraduate students contributes to teaching Turkey-EU relations in Turkish academia in an indirect fashion.

### 3. The Learning Tools and Teaching Strategies

#### 3.1 Using News Pieces

The course is designed in two parts: The first few weeks aim to introduce the main principles of science, major types of social research, the meanings of theory and methodology, and the content of research design. The second part of the course focuses on the differences, strengths, and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research methods by analysing their characteristics. Thus, the first two weeks of the course cover “science and research” and “dimensions of research” topics. Those lectures aim to clarify particularly the following questions: What is science? Which information resources are alternatives of social research? What are main differences between a scientific research and an unscientific one? What are the main aims of a research? And what are the main differences between quantitative and qualitative analysis?

In the first lecture, after the short introduction of the syllabus, course content, requirements, and evaluation methods, the class is divided into two groups, since it is not a large class, and two different news articles and empirical articles are given to each group. One of these news articles is about a recent development on Turkey-EU relations and one of the empirical articles is on Turkey-EU relations. Attached to these articles, some discussion questions are given to the students as well. These questions direct students to figure out unscientific elements in these news pieces and guess their main differences with a proper social or political research on the same topic. A week later, the lecture starts with a discussion session led by the instructor. The students and the instructor sit in a circle and the instructor starts the discussion with a specific question related to the content of the previous week. Then, she continues with an introductory question in order to link the previous lecture to the current one. Later on, she divides the class into two and presents another two news and empirical articles and discussion questions to each group. The instructor uses different news and empirical articles on Turkey-EU relations in this exercise. By repeating the same exercise, the instructor aims to familiarize students with these kind of learner-centered exercises included into the course and lecture content throughout the semester. Secondly, repeating this exercise makes freshman students feel much more confident while discussing with their peers and speaking publicly. Lastly, by incorporating the news articles into the lectures, the instructor aims to develop critical reading and interpretation skills of students. It would be useful for students of a research methods class to understand and compare the methodological differences between a news piece and academic research. News pieces are not only embedded into the course content as the examples of unscientific works. In the following weeks of the class

they are also used as data sources for both quantitative and qualitative research designs. To that end, in-class examples, discussions and assignments cover some news pieces and different academic articles on Turkey-EU relations. These activities enable students to learn how to collect and use materials, news pieces, articles, etc. from traditional media sources as data in their researches. Secondly, in this way students understand how, with which research methods, these media materials could be a part of a research on Turkey-EU relations.

### 3.2 Analysing an Empirical Article

As a part of LCA in teaching, students are required to write four short linked papers throughout the semester. The main aim of this exercise is to familiarize students with an empirical article that is assigned to them in the content of the course. The instructor chooses an empirical article on Turkey-EU relations that has a clear argument, propositions, and a good research design that would serve to the main aim of the exercise and overall objectives of the course. Thus, students would deal with the elements of basic research design of an empirical article on Turkey-EU relations throughout the semester. This would familiarize them with the EU politics and governance, European integration, enlargement policy and Turkey-EU relations, while understanding how to approach puzzling social and political phenomena and developing their main research skills at the same time.

In the first assignment students write a short paper on the research problem and basic design of the study. To that end, they try to find the answers to the following questions: What is (are) the main research question(s) of the study? What are the main arguments/propositions of the study? Where does this research question(s) come from? What is the basic research design of the study?

In the second short paper students deal with the sample and the variables of the assigned empirical article on Turkey-EU relations. For this purpose, they look at the unit of analysis or the case in the article and the variables of the study. In doing so, they figure out the way how these cases are selected and what are the dependent, independent and control variables. Third short paper describes the data collection procedure and data analysis of the assigned article. Thus, students first try to explain the mode(s) of collecting the data and then describe the mode(s) of analysing the data in the assigned article and discuss whether there are alternative modes of data analysis. In the final short paper, students are required to review the whole article. To that end, they describe the main findings of the research report and explain their own overall evaluations of the article by considering the possible impact of the article for policy makers, the reliability of its conclusions and the way of its presentation. They evaluate whether its presentation is clear, fair, and appropriately qualified or not and justify their analysis. During the first class hour after the submission of each assignment, students discuss their answers, findings and arguments with their peers and the instructor.

These assignments constitute the major exercise that students are obliged to fulfil in SIB 2005 Research Methods class. The benefits of this exercise are two-fold. It serves as a unique exercise to teach Turkey-EU relations under the framework of a research methods class on the one hand, and constitutes a comprehensive activity/assignment example of the LCA in teaching on the other hand.

### 3.3 Examples of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

One of the main objectives of this introductory level research methods class is to teach students the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods in social sciences. Students learn both, strengths and limitations, of quantitative and qualitative research methods in a comparative way. Different weeks of the class cover quasi-experimental and experimental research, sampling and survey design, non-reactive research and secondary analysis as the examples of quantitative research methods. On the other hand, it includes field research, focus group research, participant-observation, in-depth and semi-structured interviews and historical comparative research as the examples of qualitative research methods. Each week, which contains the analysis of one of these types of research methods, starts with a pre-lecture discussion led by the instructor. At the beginning of these discussions, the instructor spreads some questions relevant for the content of the required readings and the lecture of the week. After the short introductory discussion session, the instructor begins the lecture and explains the details of the type of the research methods of the week. She introduces proper research questions, logic of design, methods of data collection and analysis, strengths and limitations for each type of research methods. In each lecture, the instructor prefers to use more than one research study from political science or IR, which apply the introduced research method in their analyses and explanations, as proper examples. These academic papers and book chapters are assigned to the students in the syllabus, so they know beforehand that they are responsible for reading them and being ready for the pre-lecture discussions each week.

The instructor picks some relevant research studies on Turkey-EU relations that apply different types of research methods, to introduce and analyse as proper examples in the lectures. For instance, a study that uses ‘Eurobarometer’ survey data on the perceptions of both, Turkish and EU citizens to Turkey’s EU membership is chosen in order to explain how these statistical data can be used systematically in research design, testing hypotheses, and producing findings as the outcome of the research in social sciences. On the other hand, a study on Turkey-EU relations that analyses relevant primary sources such as the Lisbon Treaty, the Negotiating Framework of Turkey, the Joint Action Plan signed between Turkey and the EU, the minutes of the parliamentary debates both in the European Parliament and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and collected data from them is introduced and analysed in the relevant lecture. Finally, another study on Turkey-EU relations that uses data from semi-structured elite interviews is included in the syllabus and used in one of the lectures as the relevant example of a qualitative research design in social sciences. In addition to various research studies from different topics of political science and IR that are used as relevant examples in the lectures, incorporating several research study examples under the topic of ‘Turkey-EU relations’ into the lectures clearly shows that this specific topic is not studied only by a single research method. It is possible to apply both quantitative and qualitative and also mix-method approaches, while researching on Turkey-EU relations.

### 3.4 Inviting a Guest Lecturer

A Political Science or IR PhD candidate or a young scholar, who has been conducting or conducted her/his doctoral research on Turkey-EU relations, is asked to deliver a guest lecture on the methodology of her/his PhD dissertation in one of the latest weeks of the course. S/he is requested to deliver a mini-lecture on her/his dissertation but to predominantly focus on the research design of his/her doctoral research. Thus, s/he explains what motivated her/him to conduct this research, the main research questions of her/his dissertation, the puzzling story behind her/his research, the research methods and data used in her/his



research, the main challenges while s/he was conducting her/his research and how s/he responded to them; and finally s/he states the main findings of her/his research. Thereby, students would have an opportunity to understand what is going on 'behind the scenes' of a PhD study on Turkey-EU relations. In other words, they would get the chance to listen from the first person and understand how the conceptual, theoretical and methodological design of an academic work is done by a scholar. After her/his presentation, students are divided into two groups and a discussion session led by the instructor and the guest lecturer starts under the guidance of pre-prepared questions. This in-class discussion enables students to search for the possibility of alternative research questions, hypotheses, research methods and further research areas for the same topic presented by the guest lecturer. Thus, students can find an opportunity to reflect and discuss their ideas for various ways of finding a research question, testing a hypothesis and using an appropriate research method that they had learnt during the previous weeks of the course.

First of all, this small but practical change in the implementation of one of the lectures of the course can have a big impact on students' approaches to learning (Lang 2016), since this lecture and activity introduce an active learning strategy instead of a traditional 'chalk and talk' approach (Sambell, Brown and Graham 2017). Secondly, while the presentation of the guest lecturer informs students about the content and methodology of an academic research on Turkey-EU relations, in-class discussion activity leads students to think and find out various ways of studying Turkey-EU relations.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper introduced a unique model of teaching Turkey-EU relations within the framework of a learner-centered research methods class by drawing on the example of SIB 2005 Research Methods class. Incorporating teaching Turkey-EU relations into an introductory-level research methods class is not an ordinary and easy task to do. This research methods course aims to contribute briefly to teaching Turkey-EU relations through different tools and teaching strategies, while improving the ability and academic skills of students to understand and critically evaluate the design, main components and findings of any research in social sciences. It enables students to compare the methodological differences between a news piece and an academic research and understand how to work with media materials as data in their research design, by using news pieces related with Turkey-EU affairs. Secondly, analysing an empirical article on Turkey-EU relations as the major assignment of the course serves as a unique exercise to teach Turkey-EU relations under the framework of a research methods class. Additionally, giving proper examples of quantitative and qualitative research methods shows students that both of these methods as well as also mix-method approaches could be used in academic works on Turkey-EU relations. Finally, inviting a guest lecturer, who has conducted research on Turkey-EU relations informs students about its content and scientific methodology and encourages them to think about the various ways of studying the subject.

This course is offered for the first time in the Spring 2019 semester. Thus, at the moment it is impossible to draw conclusions about the impact of the design and implementation of the course on the students and the instructor. However, three major changes are expected from the students at the end of the semester. It is expected that the students will enjoy the content and implementation of the course as a result of applying LCA to teaching in this research methods class. Applying the learning tools of the LCA will give the responsibility of learning to the students themselves and share the responsibility of teaching with the

students, which are considered as the partners of the instructor during the lectures. Thus, students' prior knowledge and experiences about learning in a higher education institution will be challenged with this new approach. It is definitely expected that the students will become much more active during the lectures, because they will be encouraged positively to talk, share their ideas, discuss the results of their assignments, their arguments publicly, and criticize constructively. This would enable them to absorb the subject matter in a better way. Secondly, it is expected that students will be equipped with the basic knowledge and academic skills to understand, evaluate and conduct scientific research. Lastly, incorporating academic works related with Turkey-EU relations hopefully will stimulate students' interest in both EU politics and Turkey-EU relations. They will have a chance to improve their knowledge on Turkey-EU affairs and understand how to approach puzzling phenomena in this subject area, even though they might not take any course on the EU or Turkey-EU relations in the future.

At the end of the semester a survey will be conducted with the students in order to understand the impact of the course on their learning skills, prior beliefs about teaching and a research methods class, prior knowledge and understanding about scientific research as well as particularly research on Turkey-EU relations. Their feedbacks will be used for the re-design of the course for incoming students. As the instructor of the course and as a young scholar working on Turkey-EU relations in Turkish academia, I am also wondering the impact of the course on my lecturing, teaching, supervising and researching skills. This is going to be the first research methods class that I will teach in my academic career. Thus, I hope this unique course experience will give me a chance to learn together with my students, who will hopefully behave as my partners, enrich my academic endeavours, motivate me to continue applying LCA in all of my courses and encourage me to continue studying Turkey-EU relations. Last but not the least, I hope this course will positively contribute to the Turkish youths understanding of the European Union and Turkey-EU relations.

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The **historical complexity and volatility of EU-Turkey relations** are reflected by **research and teaching** in this field. There are international research projects as well as many smaller and nationally funded studies and projects dealing with Turkey, including its relationship with the EU. Linking these different projects, diffusing knowledge on the European Integration process and exploiting synergies between international players constitutes real added-value for European Integration studies.

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