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## Academic Studies on the Turkish Education of Turks in Bulgaria

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### Abstract

Language is an integral component of identity, and for minorities the ability to use and receive education in the mother tongue is an important right that allows the transmission of culture, creates kinship, and strengthens identity. This article examines Turkish education access for Turks in Bulgaria by reviewing Turkish academic studies about this topic, in order to identify gaps. This research uses the literature review method to investigate published articles, Master's and Doctoral theses, books, and reports. Within the scope of this literature review the issue is discussed within the framework of the concepts of bilingualism, mother tongue, education policies, and language policies. This article presents and discusses specific research topics that are not present in the current literature available in Turkish and identifies areas of study to close gaps in the literature.

### Keywords

Turks in Bulgaria,  
Mother Tongue,  
Bilingualism, Turkish  
Education, Language  
Policies

### Introduction

Bulgarians were one of the non-Muslim subjects of the multinational Ottoman State and revolted towards the end of the 19th century, due to the effects of the nationalism movement. They gained their autonomy from the Ottoman State after the 1877-1878 war against Russia and founded their own independent state at the beginning of the 20th century. However, in their state, which they planned to be a national state, a population with different ethnic identities remained, and a majority of them were Muslim and Turkish (Çelik M. E., 2020). Thus, Turks who lived in the region for five centuries became a minority in the newly established Bulgaria and lost their status in the Ottoman State (Erkan, 2006) and had to live in the newly formed state as Bulgarian citizens (Şimşir, 1986). The Turkish diaspora and the Turkish society that emerged in Bulgaria clearly illustrates the concepts of *accidental diaspora* or *autochthonous diaspora*.

According to Rogers Brubaker's (2002) conceptualization, accidental diaspora is formed by the movement of borders across people, they crystallize abruptly after a dramatic

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and often traumatic reconfigurations of political space, arise without participation of the peoples involved, and tend to be more concentrated and territorially rooted. Members of accidental diasporas were territorially dispersed, and were citizens of the countries where they lived (Brubaker, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, Turkish society remained beyond the borders when the Ottoman State was divided into nation-states. They then lived as Bulgarian citizens for generations as an accidental diaspora. Mehmet Köse (2021), on the other hand, addresses the Turks who found themselves beyond the border due to the narrowing borders of the Ottoman State in Bulgaria as autochthonous diaspora, as they are considered the natives of Bulgaria where they resided. Both accidental diaspora and autochthonous diaspora are appropriate for the Turkish community in Bulgaria. The Ottoman successor, Republic of Turkey, has not been indifferent to its diaspora. When the State of Turkey was established, but the Republic had not yet been proclaimed, Turkey defined the Turkish community in Bulgaria through their ethnic and religious identity and identified them as the residual Ottoman Turkish-Islamic community. It must be noted that during this period, Turkey accepted Muslims from ethnically and linguistically Albanian, Bosnian, Pomak, and other non-Turkish ethnic origins as Turkish, since they had Islamic faith and were previously members of the Islamic Ottoman nation. In addition, Turkey endeavored to protect the rights of the residual Ottoman Turkish-Islamic community in non-Muslim communities through bilateral and multilateral agreements. With the proclamation of the Republic and the subsequent transition to the secular state order, although Turkey embraced its Ottoman heritage, it started the construction of a modern society consisted of equal citizens regardless of ethnic, religious, sectarian, and other identities. In other words, Turkey avoided ethnic and religious emphasis while making the official definition of the Turkish nation (Aktürk, 2009). Turkey still adheres to this approach and defines the Turkish nation without any ethnic or religious emphasis. Therefore, Turkey has accepted the Turkish community in Bulgaria as a kin community and identified them as residual Ottoman Turks in Bulgaria.

Today, the Turkish population residing in Bulgaria is the densest among the Balkan countries (Köksal, 2020). According to the official census conducted in 2011, they constitute almost 600,000 of Bulgaria's around population of seven million. They are defined in the Bulgarian constitution not as an ethnic minority but as "Bulgarian citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian" (Yıldırım, 2020). Although they do not have the status of ethnic minority in terms of the constitution, they are sociological minorities who carry Turkish identity, keep it alive, and pass it on to future generations. Moreover, the second most spoken language in Bulgaria after Bulgarian, is Turkish (Bekir and Sadık, 2017). Nevertheless, due to different policies followed by Bulgarian governments in the historical process, they have had difficulties with the Turkish language. Language provides the most excellent convenience to the Turks in Bulgaria for preserving their cultural values and transferring them to future generations (Özkan, 2009). For instance, Bulgaria adop-

ted a pluralist language policy in the 1950s and encouraged the use of Turkish. However, it abandoned this practice between 1970 and 1980 and the population was compelled to learn and speak Bulgarian when a single language approach was adopted. In the 1990s, Bulgarian was declared the official language, and citizens whose mother tongue was not Bulgarian had the right to learn and use their mother tongue (Bekir, 2015). This unstable situation has paved the way for difficulties in accessing Turkish education that transmits the Turkish spirit and culture (Yenisoy, 2007). For instance, Turkish schools, which contributed significantly to the spread of Turkish unity and spirit, began to be closed in the 1940s (Kaştan, 2008). Turkish high schools and teacher schools terminated Turkish education by deciding to teach all courses except Turkish language and literature in Bulgarian. Taking Turkish courses was completely prohibited with the assimilation policy implemented by the Bulgarian administration in the 1980s. Although Turkish began to be taught as an elective course in the second half of 1992, the inadequacy of teaching Turkish as an elective course in schools in the implementation phase reduced the learning and use of Turkish (Yenisoy, 2011). Consequently, the Turkish spoken in Bulgaria today has come to a low point in expressing feelings and thoughts, since developments in the Turkish language could not be followed. It has been limited to only a daily spoken language in the family. This situation in language poses a threat to both culture and identity (Özkan, 2009). Therefore, examining the access that Turks in Bulgaria have to education in Turkish is essential.

In this context, this study focuses on Turkish education for Turks in Bulgaria. It reviews studies published in Turkish literature on this subject and reveals possible research topics that have not been covered. For this purpose, the literature review method is used in this study, and the related reports, papers, books, articles, and Master's and Doctoral theses have been researched. Articles, papers, book chapters, and reports were accessed from Academia, DergiPark, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. Master's and Doctoral theses were obtained from Turkey's Higher Education Institution Thesis Center. A total of 39 academic publications were identified, including 24 articles, four books, four book chapters, two master's theses, two doctoral theses, two papers, and one report, which relate to the scope and purpose of this study. From these studies, Turkish education for Turks in Bulgaria deals with the context of bilingualism in three studies, mother tongue in six studies, education policies in 16 studies, and language policies in 14 studies (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Studies Examined the Turkish Education in Bulgaria

	Bilingualism	Mother Tongue	Education Policies	Language Policies	Total
Article	3	3	9	9	25
Book	-	-	4	-	4
Book Chapter	-	2	1	1	3
Doctoral Thesis	-	-	-	2	2
Master's Thesis	-	-	1	1	2
Paper	-	1	1	-	2
Report	-	-	-	1	1
Total	3	6	16	14	39

These studies are reviewed and categorized within the framework of the concepts of bilingualism, mother tongue, education policies, and language policies. While reviewing the studies, repetition was avoided. The findings from this article are in the discussion and conclusion section at the end.

## Bilingualism

Studies with the concept of bilingualism in the literature are evaluated corresponding to bilingual Turks who are from Bulgaria, whose mother tongue is Turkish and second language is Bulgarian. These studies reveal the influence of both Bulgarian on the Turkish language and Turkish on the Bulgarian language.

Çelik (2016) examines the views of Turkish language teachers on Turkish education for bilingual Turkish children, the problems teachers face, and their expectations from Turkey through interviews and a survey. According to the study, Turkish language teachers consider the allotted weekly Turkish lesson hours insufficient, and their schools' textbooks outdated. They also believe that the Turkish writing skills of the students are not at the desired level, and the students are influenced by Bulgarian while speaking. They point out that since Turkish is an elective course, students approach Turkish courses with a lack of importance. Additionally, parents do not desire their children to choose Turkish lessons as they believe that their children already know Turkish. The problems faced by Turkish language teachers are that the Bulgarian government does not welcome them and they constantly face unemployment. Their expectation is for Turkey to send Turkish literature and materials containing current issues, help with book publishing, and provide in-service training courses.

In a second study, Çelik (2020) examines the features of Turkish children's bilingualism in Bulgaria and the reflection of bilingualism on Turkish children's education as well. He gathers data by conducting interviews, surveys, and observations. He finds that Turkish children in Bulgaria cannot acquire Bulgarian and Turkish at a sufficient level, and

this situation negatively impacts their school success. He also reveals that as an elective course, Turkish is more often chosen by parents of the children living in villages, not from the cities. To change this situation, Çelik suggests that *i)* Turkish and Bulgarian teachers should be people who are fluent in both languages, *ii)* institutions, such as the Yunus Emre Institute, should be established in Bulgaria, *iii)* Turkish should be removed from the elective course category and included as a compulsory course, *iv)* parents in Bulgaria should be informed about Turkish, and *v)* campaigns carried out to raise awareness should be increased.

Although they do not directly concentrate on Bulgaria, Akkaya and İşçi's study (2016) is worth mentioning, as Bulgaria is included. In their study designed by qualitative research methodology, Akkaya and İşçi evaluate instructors' views on the concept of bilingualism and the participation of bilingual individuals in educational activities. Accordingly, one of the bilingual participants, who spoke Bulgarian with his friends and Turkish with his family, experienced that otherwise communication was perceived as a source of shame in the social environment. However, the participant perceives bilingualism as an advantage in academic and social life, and believes that the Bulgarian administration and legal system inhibit language learning and teaching. The authors suggest in order to solve the problems related to bilingualism, research needs to be conducted that focuses on the views of instructors and students at all levels of education.

## Mother Tongue

Generally mother tongue is understood as “the language learned from the mother and the close family circle, and then from the related circles, and goes down to the person's subconscious and forms the strongest bonds of the individuals with the society.” In this sense, Susan Chakar (2001) analyzes teaching Turkish as a mother tongue or a foreign language in Bulgaria at the high school level and explains it within the legal framework. Chakar states that Bulgarian law mandates that Bulgarian is the language of instruction, but allows students whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian to study in their mother tongue in municipal schools under state supervision. Turkish is taught as a second foreign language in a few high schools.

Arzu Şaşmaz and Mustafa Arslan's (2016) study designed by applying qualitative research methodologies, demonstrates the mother tongue usage levels of Turkish children from the viewpoint of teachers. The authors identify the absence of books and curriculum for teaching Turkish as a mother tongue, short Turkish lesson hours, and the lack of mother tongue awareness among students and parents in their study. They also assert that students make grammatical mistakes by confusing Turkish and Bulgarian alphabets. As a solution to these problems, the authors suggest raising families and children's awareness about the mother tongue, giving enough space for Turkish speaking, reading, and wri-

ting, and developing a curriculum and schedules.

Ülkü Şen (2013) discusses the contributions of Turks in Bulgaria to Turkish. She emphasizes that Turks in Bulgaria made an effort to speak their mother tongue and not to lose their Turkish names when the Bulgarian administration prohibited them from speaking Turkish, and their names were forced to be changed to Bulgarian names. She underlines that they continued to keep the Turkish language and culture alive.

Hayriye Süleymanoğlu (2003) argues for the role of children's literature in developing the mother tongue. She maintains that Turkish children's literature, which contributes to children's mental and spiritual development, is shaped by Bulgaria's social and political environment. She highlights that Turkish children's literature first developed, and then stagnated in the interwar period. After the Second World War, children's literature developed in direct proportion to the increased education among Turkish children, but in the following years, it entered a recession with the closure of Turkish schools. She claims that it started to develop again in 1990. Süleymanoğlu's primary concern is the possibility that Turkish children's literature will become unreadable. She recommends that Turkish be taught as a compulsory lesson to prevent this.

Rahime İrem Yavuz (2020) investigates Balkan Turks' awareness about Turkish through a survey. According to the survey results, most Turks in Bulgaria that participated in the study believe that Turkish is essential in international relations, and learning Turkish will benefit them. They believe that Turkish sounds sincerer, politer, and more privileged. They admit that Turkish is vital for making friends, finding a job, getting higher education, and traveling. Almost all participants would like the person they marry to know Turkish, and if they have children, they want them to learn Turkish effectively.

Harun Bekir and Fatma Sadık (2017) review the education system in Bulgaria and identify teaching Turkish as a mother tongue as a topic of concern. They explain the approaches to teaching Turkish as a mother tongue and problems stemming from teaching it as a mother tongue. Accordingly, today, Bulgaria implicitly adopts a mono-lingual language approach. However, the Turkish-speaking population needs bilingualism because, although the official language is Bulgarian, Turkish is also widely used throughout the country. However, the ratio of Turkish spoken in rural and urban areas in Bulgaria is different. While the Turks living in the countryside use Turkish more fluently and widely than Bulgarian, those living in the city use Bulgarian more dominantly and fluently. This situation creates problems for obtaining an education. In addition, the lack of Turkish teachers is another problem, because most of them migrated to Turkey in 1989 due to the Bulgarian assimilation policy.

## Education Policies

The studies in the literature concentrate on demonstrating the education policies applied by Bulgaria to Turkish education from a historical perspective. Starting with Bilal N. Şimşir (1986), who divides the Turkish minority's education in Bulgaria in three parts. He identifies the Principality period, the Kingdom period, and the People's Republic period of Bulgaria period and states that Turkish education in Bulgaria dates back to the Ottoman State in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Principality of Bulgaria and the Kingdom periods, the Turkish minority schools faced several challenges, but despite that, these schools were able to protect their status until 1940. In the 1940s, they lost their status and rights, and subsequently, Turkish education was banned entirely in 1966. Şimşir remarks that he cannot predict how long the Turks in Bulgaria can withstand the assimilation policy implemented by Bulgaria. He supposes "Turkey's support of the Turks in Bulgaria is a historical, national, humanitarian and contractual right and duty."

Hüseyin Memişoğlu provides another reference source on the subject. Memişoğlu (2002) classifies the education of Turks in Bulgaria chronologically in his study. He claims that there are periodic differences in Turkish education in Bulgaria and states that Turks in Bulgaria started to use the Latin alphabet after Turkey switched its alphabet to the Latin alphabet. Similar to Şimşir, he also mentions the situation of Turkish schools. He affirms that the status of Turkish minority schools that were created under the complete control of the state, instead of special-status, and that a Turkish education with socialist content was developed. Memişoğlu finds that this hostile atmosphere began to change with the end of the communist regime, and Turks were allowed to speak, read and write in their mother tongue. Turkish is included in the mother tongue compulsory elective category from the 1st to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Turkish Language and Literature Departments were opened to train teachers in Turkish language and literature. The author anticipates that these positive steps will develop further in the democratic regime, and Turkish education will be revived.

Regarding Turkish education in Bulgaria, three studies by Hayriye Süleymanoğlu Yenisoğ provide insight in the literature. In the first study, Süleymanoğlu (2007) clarifies the policies applied toward Turkish education and teaching in the historical process. She reveals that the status and hours of Turkish courses have changed negatively, and the parents became dissatisfied with this situation. She points out that Turkish teachers were dismissed in 1980, and until 1989, Bulgarian teachers investigated whether Turkish students spoke Turkish at home. She examines ancestry return in this process when many Turkish students and families migrated from Bulgaria. She underlines that even with the change of administration in 1989, and policies that applied to Turkish education began to transform, other problems such as teaching Turkish as a foreign language continued even in 2007.



In the second study, Süleymanoğlu-Yenisoy (2011) evaluates Turkish education in Bulgaria before forced migration (1944-1989), and after forced migration (1990-2010). Accordingly, before forced migration, a new model was developed in which Turks would receive socialist education in form and content. Subsequently, Turkish teachers unsuitable for the communist regime were sent to Turkey while Turkish teachers prone to Marxist-Leninist ideology were employed. Bulgarian teachers were appointed to teach the Turkish language instead of Turkish teachers, and it was decided not to train teachers that were Turks. In the post-compulsory migration period, Turkish began to be taught as a free elective course in municipal schools, Turkish textbooks were prepared, and Turkish departments were opened. However, Turkish expert inspectors were later dismissed, the preparation and printing of Turkish textbooks continued to be a problem, and the number of Turkish students attending Turkish lessons decreased.

In the third study, Süleymanoğlu-Yenisoy (2017) criticizes the situation, focusing on the years between 1990 and 2010. She argues that although Bulgarian authorities were aware of the deficiencies experienced in Turkish students' education, they neglected it. Turkish students were not allowed to speak Turkish among themselves in some schools. There were no Turkish textbooks and novels in school libraries.

Mahmut Bolat (2020) examines the Bulgarian Turkish Teachers' Union. He states that this association aimed to solve educational problems by protecting the rights of the Turks in Bulgaria, creating a national consciousness among the Turks, and reinforcing the sense of loyalty to Turkey. It directly worked to provide free education for Turks with modern techniques, print and publish Turkish textbooks, insisted that the Bulgarian government cover the expenses of Turkish schools, and struggled to grant rights, such as retirement, to Turkish teachers. However, this association was closed by the Bulgarian government in 1933.

Mustafa Özşarı (2015) elaborates on the associations and non-governmental organizations established by Turks in Bulgaria between 1930 and 1940, schools, and periodical publications. He maintains that Turks attempted to counteract the assimilation policy implemented by the Bulgarian government by maintaining their relationship with the non-governmental organizations they had established and protecting their language and culture through the newspapers and magazines they published in their mother tongue. However, the author highlights that Turks faced several difficulties in this period, as the regime closed Turkish schools and associations and suspended their periodicals.

In a study based on his observations and investigations, Baskın Oran (1993) indicates that until 1944, an additional examination at a Bulgarian school was necessary for a diploma obtained from a Turkish school to be valid. Oran emphasizes that Turkish courses, forbidden during the communist era, were added to the curriculum as an elective course for 2 hours a week and then 4 hours a week with the transition to the democratic period.

Indicating that 80% of Turkish children petitioned to take elective Turkish lessons, Oran believes that the rest did not petition “out of negligence.”

Ali Eminov (2002) reviews the changes in the education of Turks in Bulgaria between 1945 and 1983. Accordingly, before the Second World War, Turkish students were educated in Turkish schools, which had a special status and were controlled by Turks. However, when these schools’ control passed to the Bulgarian administration, they were exposed to the ideological and atheist-oriented education implemented throughout the country. In addition, the Bulgarian administration tried to reduce the interaction between Pomaks, Tatars, Romanian Muslims, and Turks, who defined themselves as Turk.

Bilgehan A. Gökdağ (2012) highlights that the Jivkov regime implemented a policy of assimilation, claiming that Turks were Bulgarians who were forcibly converted to Islam during the Ottoman period. He states that the situation of the Turks in Bulgaria has improved relatively with the establishment of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) and their political participation. For instance, Turks were gained the right to use their Turkish names, publish a Turkish newspaper every 15 days, and receive education in their mother tongue despite restrictions. However, the number of students taking Turkish lessons decreased due to the restrictions. The author highlights that Muslim Pomaks were also exposed to the assimilation policy, but their conditions gradually and relatively improved. He underlines that most of them supported MRF.

Süleyman Köksal (2020) examines the problems Turks in Bulgaria experienced with education during the Communist era. At the beginning of the communist regime, Bulgaria implemented policies by giving moderate and positive messages. It supported the increase in the literacy rate among Turks, activated Turkish Pedagogy schools, and allocated inspectors for Turkish schools. As a result, a Turkish intellectual community appeared. However, as this situation worried the Bulgarian administration, it changed the policies implemented on Turkish education. In 1959, the Bulgarian administration either closed the Turkish schools or merged them with Bulgarian schools. It reduced the number of Turkish lessons at first and subsequently, banned them. In addition, it struggled to eliminate Turks in Bulgaria’s ties with Turkey. It established closer ties and cooperated with Azerbaijan in language and education. For instance, Azerbaijani poets and writers who make Soviet propaganda were praised and encouraged to be read in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the author stresses that people who did not speak Bulgarian were impeded from finding jobs or obtaining higher education and Turks in Bulgarian were forced to migrate.

Kader Özlem (2010) expounds on Turkish education in Bulgaria in two parts: The Cold War Period and the EU membership process in the Post-Cold War Period. Özlem, who provides similar information to the other authors aforementioned, states that the motivation of Turks to receive education in their mother tongue has decreased. He assu-

mes that without precautions regarding education in their mother tongue, Turks in Bulgaria probably will not be able to speak Turkish with Turks living in Turkey.

Nuray Kayadibi (2013) examines the level and status of Turkish education applied in Bulgaria for Turkish minorities after the 1990s and the problems encountered in Turkish education. She finds that *i*) Turkish language education programs became a free elective course in 1992 and a compulsory elective course in high schools in 1999, *ii*) Turkish books were prepared for primary, secondary, and high school levels between 1991-93, *iii*) Turkish textbooks were published in 2012, *iv*) The number of Turkish language teachers was not sufficient, and that *v*) The Turkish Studies Program, Turkic Philology Department, Turkology Department and Chair, Department of Turkish Language and Literature were opened in higher education.

Muammer Nurlu and Mehmet Emre Çelik (2015) focus on teaching Turkish in Bulgaria during the post-1989 period and discuss the problems that stem from teacher training, textbooks, parental approaches, and Bulgarian state authorities. The authors advise that by improving the relations between Bulgaria and Turkey, Turks in Bulgaria would be ensured to be able to preserve their culture, language, and traditions. They also state that Turkish libraries should be established in villages, and Turkish books should be updated, Turkey should cover their expenses, and the number of Turkish teachers should be increased.

Levent Doğan and Gül Gülvodina (2015) address the education policies applied to Turkish teaching in Bulgaria and examine the problems encountered in this sense. They compare the primary and secondary levels of Turkish textbooks published in Bulgaria between 1992 and 2019. Within the scope of the study, they find that the textbooks from 1992 are neither up-to-date nor suitable for modern language teaching. The textbooks from 2019 do not go beyond the traditional understanding of education and are educationally unqualified.

Kadir Yalınkılıç (2014) carried out a field study in Kırcaali analyzing the Turkish education of Turks in Bulgaria in the context of identity and language. He finds that more than 80% of the participants in the research define themselves as Turks and their mother tongue as Turkish. He interpreted this situation as ethno linguistic vitality of Turkish being high for Turks. He states that the main reason behind this is the shared suffering of Turks, who were subjected to assimilation by the Bulgarian administration. Close ties with Turkey increase this linguistic vitality.

## Language Policies

The studies in the literature demonstrate that Bulgarian authorities have produced various language plans and policies in a country where more than one language is spoken. They also show that Turkey has made several attempts toward these unstable policies that

Bulgarian Turks face. Therefore, language policies are presented in two sub-categories: language policies applied by Bulgaria toward Turks in Bulgaria and language policies applied by Turkey toward Turks in Bulgaria.

### *Language Policies Applied by Bulgaria toward Turks in Bulgaria*

Harun Bekir (2015) discusses the language policies applied toward Turkish in line with legislation and international agreements in Bulgaria. He emphasizes that in Bulgaria, three main approaches are used including, language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource. He points out that Bulgaria has three policies: the policy of homogenizing the language, the policy that gives the right to receive education and use the mother tongue language, and the policy that supports the mother tongues under legal framework. He maintains that these policies have changed in the historical process. Accordingly, Bulgaria adopted a *pluralist language policy* in the 1950s and encouraged the use of Turkish. However, it abandoned this practice between 1970 and 1980 and adopted a *single language approach*. He highlights that currently in Bulgaria, Bulgarian is the dominant language and perceived with a high language status, and Turkish is seen as a low-status language. Regarding legislation and international conventions, the author states that the 1991 Constitution of Bulgaria recognizes Bulgarian as the official language but guarantees citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian the right to learn and use their mother tongue. He indicates that although Bulgaria is a member of the European Union (EU), the language planning and policies implemented for Turks in Bulgaria does not comply either practically or theoretically with the minority policies of the EU, where many linguistic and cultural rights are protected.

In the SETA Report (Alptekin, Lika, Dağdelen, and Erdogu, 2020), the authors affirm that courses are taught in three categories: compulsory, compulsory-elective, and free-elective, according to the latest regulation made in the Bulgarian Education Law in 2001. They claim that this situation and other related problems negatively affect the number of students who can benefit from Turkish education. The problems specified in the report as follows: *i)* inadequacy in teacher employment due to financial problems, *ii)* not being able to open elective Turkish courses because petitions could not reach a sufficient number, and *iii)* not having enough interest in Turkish education and training. The authors emphasize that despite the fact that some rights were granted, such as teaching Turkish as an elective course in schools, the policies pursued by Bulgaria remained inadequate in the implementation phase. Therefore, some of the Turks consider the situation in Bulgaria to be a secret assimilationist policy. In addition, they maintain that there is a concern among Turks in Bulgaria that their Turkish identity will be lost in the long run.

Ersin Erkan (2006) studies the relations between Bulgaria and the Turks in Bulgaria. He explains language rights in Bulgaria and the language policy in education. He underlines that the Bulgarian education system's provisions for learning minority languages

are not based on a systematic approach and that a transition from a prohibitive language policy to a restrictive language policy has been gradually transferred.

Esin Aydınoğlu (2011) evaluates Turkish language teaching in Bulgaria in the historical process and current theories, approaches, methods, and policies in foreign language teaching. She also analyzes Turkish textbooks in primary education. She specifies that the process of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union affects the language policies implemented by the Bulgarian authorities. Accordingly, the democratic Bulgarian regime abandoned the exclusionary principles of the former communist regime and initiated modern methods accepted by the world. On the other hand, the author claims that "in the books, the Turkish national anthem, the flag, and the picture of Atatürk, which emphasize the Turkish identity, were avoided." Thus, she emphasizes the need for the reorganization of the books.

Fahri Türk and Kader Özlem (2016) analyze the Turk's current situation and examine the Bulgarian administration's approach to the Turkish language. The authors state that the assimilation policy practiced by the former communist regime is prohibited in the new Bulgarian constitution, which entered into force on July 13, 1991. Also, Turks were restored to their former rights with the law that was enacted the same year. According to the authors, the reasons behind these developments stem from the Movement for Rights and Freedom role, Bulgaria's EU membership process, and Turkey's role. However, the authors believe that the Bulgarian administration followed a secret assimilation policy toward the Turks despite these developments. To clarify their claim, the authors state that Turks are forced to learn foreign languages instead of their mother tongue, the names of the places where they lived intensely were changed to Bulgarian names, and no national channels are broadcast in Turkish.

I. Murat Çakmakçı (2011) finds that with the legislation in Bulgaria shaped within the scope of its relations with the EU, Turkish written and visual publications have the opportunity to be advanced. In addition, there are developments in Turkish education and religion. He underlines İsmail Gaspıralı's principle of "unity in language, thought, and work" and advised the Turks in Bulgaria to make the best use of the rights they have.

### *Language Policies by Turkey toward Turks in Bulgaria*

Meşkure Yılmaz-Börklü (1999) evaluates Turkey's policies toward Turks in Bulgaria from the establishment of Bulgaria until 1999. Accordingly, during the Principality of Bulgaria, the Ottoman State endeavored to protect the Turkish people living in the region's educational status, religious activities, and fundamental rights and freedoms. At the beginning of the Kingdom period, the Ottoman State signed the Istanbul Protocol with Bulgaria, which guaranteed these rights. After the First World War, Bulgaria guaranteed rights and freedoms to Turks with the Neuilly Peace Treaty. During the Farmer's Party,

the legal basis of immigration between Turkey and Bulgaria was established. During the totalitarian regime (1946-70), oppression and violence against Turks increased; however, to protect the rights of the Turks, Turkey allowed Turks to migrate to Turkey. When the Turks in Bulgaria's desire to migrate to Turkey continued, Turkey signed the 1968 Migration Agreement with Bulgaria. In the socialist period (1970-1989), as Turks in Bulgaria were exposed to assimilation policies, Turkey tried to protect their rights by making various initiatives with the Bulgarian government and international institutions. When Turkey's attempts did not yield positive results, Turks in Bulgaria immigrated to Turkey in 1989, and Turkey supported its kin community in line with its power. In the democratic period, the rights of the Turks in Bulgaria were restored. The author believes that the good relations between Turkey and Bulgaria contributed to the protection of the rights of the Turks in Bulgaria.

Yüksel Kaştan (2008) examines the developments in Bulgaria between 1919 and 1938. He discusses the effects of these developments on Turkey and the problems experienced by Turks in Bulgaria. With the establishment of Bulgaria, the Turkish and Muslim minorities united around the Mufti Offices and the Union with Turkish Teachers (TÖB). The author states that after the transition to the Latin alphabet in Turkey, thanks to the diligent work of the TÖB, the Bulgarian administration allowed the transition to the Latin alphabet in Turkish schools. On the other hand, Kaştan points out that the Bulgarian administration granted broad rights to the Turks when it needed Turkey's support in foreign policy. He also emphasizes that Bulgaria could not achieve complete assimilation of the Turks because of Atatürk's foreign policy.

Bülent Yıldırım (2015) finds that after switching to the Latin alphabet, Turkey engaged in diplomatic connections with Bulgaria to continue language and writing ties with Turks in Bulgaria. Accordingly, Turkey provided financial aid to Turkish schools and petitioned for the use of the new alphabet in Turkish minority schools.

Bahar Toparlak (2016) argues that Turkish foreign policy in the 1930s aimed to establish relations with Bulgaria based on peace and friendship. Therefore, reciprocal travel was allowed in the fields of education and culture. Accordingly, delegations from Turkey and Bulgaria visited the other country to conduct professional studies and visit medical faculties. To the author, these travels developed bilateral relations between Turkey and Bulgaria.

Ersoy Zengin (2019) finds that Turkish President Fahri Korutürk contacted Bulgarian State Council President Todor Jivkov in 1978 and stated that the assimilation policy used toward Turks is against the United Nations Human Rights articles. However, Jivkov stated that these practices are internal, therefore, Turkey cannot be involved in the issue.

Kader Özlem (2010) analyzes the discourse and policies developed by Turkey in

response to the policies implemented by Bulgaria towards Turks in Bulgaria. Until 1984, Turkey remained unresponsive to the Bulgarian administration's assimilation policy against the Turks, but since then, Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal started diplomatic initiatives against these assimilation policies. He brought the issue not only to the Bulgarian agenda but also to the international agenda. The author underlines that during this period, the Turkish press and society approached the Turks in Bulgaria with nationalistic and religious feelings. He also emphasizes that similar to Özal, Ahmet Davutoğlu was interested in the issue and attached importance to the delicate handling of bilateral relations.

Sevcan Kurnaz and Rıza Kurt (2019), on the other hand, focuses only on the Turgut Özal period. They state that Özal, who gave importance to regional policies, tried to solve the problems with peaceful tools and allowed Turks in Bulgaria to immigrate voluntarily to Turkey.

Radiye Funda Karadeniz (2011) investigates Turks in Bulgaria's place in Turkish foreign policy during Turkey's early Republic, Cold War, and post-Cold War periods. She states that Turkey was not indifferent to this population inherited from the Ottoman Empire, which remained outside the borders. Turkey tried to solve the problems of Turks in Bulgaria through diplomatic initiatives in the early Republican period and followed a policy to provide financial support for teaching and broadcasting in Turkish. When the Bulgarian government adopted an assimilation policy toward the Turks during the Cold War, Turkey allowed Turks in Bulgaria to migrate to their homeland. In the post-Cold War period, Turkey assisted in the field of education to strengthen the national identity of the Turks in Bulgaria. In this context, Turkey welcomed students by granting them scholarships to higher education institutions, enabling Turkish teachers to freely participate in trainings organized in Turkey, and providing Turkish textbooks to be used in primary schools.

Mustafa Edip Çelik (2020) stresses that although Turks in Bulgaria have a close interest in Turkey, Turkey produces a limited policy toward them, such as limited immigration agreements. He states that Turkey should take measures against assimilation policies based on pressure and violence that prevent Turkish education in the mother tongue and threaten Turkish identity.

## **Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

This article's review of Turkish literature about Turkish education in Bulgaria finds that it plays a significant role in preserving and sustaining the national identity of Turks in Bulgaria and is essential for maintaining kinship ties with Turkey. These academic studies examine the subject through the concepts of bilingualism, mother tongue, education policies, and language policies.

Regarding bilingualism, the literature illustrates that Turks in Bulgaria encountered various difficulties with Turkish language education. These difficulties include, weekly Turkish lesson hours in schools that are insufficient, Turkish textbooks that are outdated and worn out, students that feel Turkish is unimportant because Turkish courses are elective courses, and parents that are not eager for their children to choose Turkish lessons, since they suppose that their children already know Turkish. Students are not able to acquire Bulgarian and Turkish language proficiency at a sufficient level and accordingly they are under the influence of Bulgarian while speaking. Speaking Turkish in the social environment and Bulgarian in the family and immediate environment is perceived as a source of shame and the Bulgarian government does not welcome Turkish teachers.

Regarding the mother tongue, the literature demonstrates that Bulgarian regimes affect the rights of Turks in Bulgaria's access to mother tongue education. During the Kingdom period, the Bulgarian administration closed Turkish schools, dismissed Turkish intellectual teachers from schools, and did not provide textbooks and necessary tools. However, with the transition to the Latin alphabet in Turkey, the Bulgarian government allowed Turks in Bulgaria to use this new alphabet. During the Communist Party period, the Bulgarian administration changed the status of Turkish schools from private to public schools and later merged them with Bulgarian schools, claiming to provide better education. In 1974, it banned Turkish education, took away the Turkish minority's right to use their mother tongue, and ended Turkish education. In the Republican period, although Bulgarian laws made Bulgarian compulsory as the language of instruction, it also allowed students whose mother tongue was not Bulgarian to study in their mother tongue in municipal schools under state control. Even though Turkish minority schools were not reopened during this period, some rights were given to Turks regarding Turkish lessons, textbooks, and teachers. For example, Turkish was made an elective course in 1991 and included as a foreign language in the school curriculum. In 1999, with the Minimum General Education and Education Plan Law, the mother tongue was taught as a compulsory elective preparatory course for high schools. However, although the fundamental rights of the Turkish minority and their mother tongue education are protected by law, problems continue in practice. These problems prevent Turkish lessons from materializing with reason, such as, there is no demand or not enough teachers, the low interest in being a Turkish teacher in Bulgaria because it is a low-paid and insecure profession, lack of books and curriculum, short Turkish lesson hours, the lack of awareness of the mother tongue in students and parents, and students making grammatical mistakes by confusing Turkish and Bulgarian alphabets.

Regarding education policies, the literature indicates that the ideologies of the regimes have changed the policies followed by Bulgaria regarding the education of Turks in Bulgaria. Accordingly, during the Principality (1878-1908) and Kingdom periods (1908-1919), Turkish education began to decline. With the tolerant policies followed by



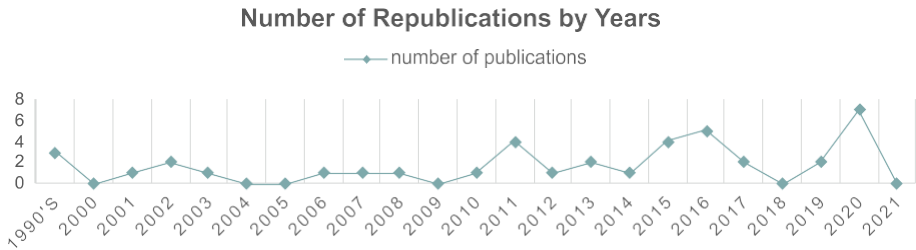
Farmer's Party (1918-1934), Turkish education developed, and the situation of Turkish schools improved. During the fascist period (1934-1946), Turkish education entered into a period of decline again, Turkish private schools were closed, and some parts of the school buildings were taken from the Turkish minority and rebuilt as a national school, that is, Bulgarian schools. Adverse events continued to occur during the socialist period (1946-1989). During this period, instead of special-status Turkish Schools, the status of Turkish minority schools was under the complete control of the state. A new model was developed in which Turks would receive national education in terms of form and socialist education. Turkish minority schools were transformed to Bulgarian, and the language of instruction was declared to be entirely in Bulgarian. Turkish reading houses, local Turkish literature, art societies, Turkish newspapers, and magazines were closed, and Turkish radio broadcasts were terminated. In the democratic period (after 1989), this hostile atmosphere started to change, and Turks in Bulgaria were allowed to speak and write in their mother tongue. However, problems continue to be experienced in practice.

Regarding language policies, the literature can be classified as language policies applied by Bulgaria toward Turks in Bulgaria and language policies by Turkey toward Turks in Bulgaria. Studies reveal that in Bulgaria, language policies considered language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource. In this context, Bulgaria first implemented a policy of homogenizing the Bulgarian language, then followed a policy that gave Bulgarian citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian the right to receive education and use the language of their mother tongue, and finally followed a policy that supports mother tongues by legally guaranteeing them. Accordingly, Bulgaria adopted a pluralist language policy in the 1950s and encouraged the use of Turkish. However, it abandoned this practice between 1970 and 1980, adopted a single language approach, and guaranteed the right to learn and use their mother tongue to citizens whose mother tongue was not Bulgarian with the 1991 Constitution. Despite this, the policies were insufficient in the implementation phase, since Bulgaria has switched from a prohibitive language policy to a restrictive language policy. Therefore, it is thought by many Turks in Bulgaria that the Bulgarian administration followed a secret assimilation policy toward them.

The studies reveal that Turkey attaches importance to the delicate handling of bilateral relations with Bulgaria. It is noted that after Turkey transitioned to the Latin alphabet, Turkey made diplomatic efforts with Bulgaria to ensure that the language and writing ties with its kin community in Bulgaria would continue and provided financial aid to Turkish schools. Turkey brought to both the Bulgarian and the international agenda that the assimilation policies applied to the Turks in Bulgaria are contrary to the United Nations Human Rights Articles. Turkey encouraged the immigration of Turks in Bulgaria to Turkey within the framework of the migration agreements with Bulgaria, and provided opportunities for those who migrated.


This article finds that three studies in the 1990s, seven in the 2000s, 22 in the 2010s, and seven in the 2020s were published (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Number of Publications by Years



As seen in the figure above, literature on Turkish education for Turks living in Bulgaria for more than a century is scarce and draws attention. Additionally, some years no studies on this issue were published. These studies generally discuss the bilingualism characteristics of Turkish children in Bulgaria, the reflection of bilingualism on education, usage levels of mother tongue, the Turkish teachers' perspective on Turkish education, the status of Turkish schools and Turkish lessons according to the changing regimes in Bulgaria, the status of Turkish materials, the staff and salaries of Turkish teachers, the difficulties faced by Turks with language and education, legal and social restrictions, and the demands of the Turks in Bulgaria. In addition, these studies generally contain information about primary and secondary education institutions. There is a lack of information about Turkish education and training at the undergraduate and graduate levels. However, the 2022 news article entitled "The solution of the problem of Turkish mother tongue in Bulgaria is in the hands of parents" reflects the most up-to-date state of mother tongue education, emphasizes the commitment of Turks in Bulgaria to the Turkish language and Turkish identity, and states that they do not want to assimilate in Europe (Radoykov, 2022). An interview with Nesrin Sipahi Osmanova, one of the Turkish intellectuals in Bulgaria, entitled "Our Mother Language is Suffering in Bulgaria," states that the mother tongue among Turks in Bulgaria is on the verge of extinction, and Turkish is hardly taught in schools. Sipahi emphasizes that it is essential to teach Turkish in schools to preserve in the mother tongue. She underlines that staying Turkish against increasing Turkish hostility should be the central issue of struggle for Turkish-born people in Bulgaria (Sipahi, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for more comprehensive and up-to-date studies that reveal the current situation, problems, and expectations of Turks in Bulgaria who struggle for education in their mother tongue.

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