

## Difficulty of Learning English Language by Turkish Nationalities and Learning Turkish Language by Foreign Students in Turkey: A Case Study for Elazig Metropolis

Jamila MUHAMMAD<sup>1\*</sup>, Asaf VAROL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Software Engineering, College of Technology, Firat University, Elazig, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Department of Software Engineering, College of Technology, Firat University, Elazig, Turkey

\*<sup>1</sup> jamilamuhammad80@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup> avarol@firat.edu.tr

(Geliş/Received: 26/07/2019;

Kabul/Accepted: 07/09/2019)

**Abstract:** Learning any language as a second language is generally considered difficult due to some contributing factors. English language being the top global language, has made it a necessity for Turkish natives to learn the language at all levels of Education. Foreign students in Turkey on the other hand, has to learn the Turkish language and present a proficiency certificate before they are being absorbed into their respective course of study departments. This study hypothesized that, the factors determining difficulty in learning English by Turkish natives are the same factors causing difficulty in learning Turkish language by foreign students in Turkey. Paired sample t-test was used as a statistical measure to investigate the statistical significance between variables of interest that aid the difficulty in learning these two languages.

**Key words:** Second language, English language, Turkish language.

### Türk Uyrukluların İngilizceyi Öğrenme Zorluğu ve Türkiye'deki Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrencilerin Türkçeyi Öğrenme Zorluğu: Elazığ Şehri Örneği

**Öz:** Herhangi bir dili ikinci bir dil olarak öğrenmek, bazı katkıda bulunan faktörler nedeniyle genellikle zor olarak kabul edilir. En iyi küresel dil olan İngilizce, Türk yerlilerinin dili tüm eğitim seviyelerinde öğrenmelerini zorunlu kılmıştır. Öte yandan, Türkiye'deki yabancı öğrenciler, Türkçe dilini öğrenmek ve kendi çalışma bölümlerine girmeden önce bir yeterlilik belgesi sunmak zorundadır. Bu çalışma, Türk yerlileri tarafından İngilizce öğrenmede zorluk çeken faktörlerin, Türkiye'deki yabancı öğrenciler tarafından Türkçe öğrenmede zorluk çeken faktörlerle aynı olduğu varsayılmıştır. Eşleştirilmiş örneklem t-testi, bu iki dili öğrenmede zorluk çeken ilgi değişkenleri arasındaki istatistiksel önemi araştırmak için istatistiksel bir ölçüt olarak kullanılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İkinci dil, İngilizce dili, Türkçe dili.

#### 1. Introduction

Learning any language other than mother's tongue or native language by any individual is generally considered a challenging task by most of the researchers in the field [1]. Although children have the advantage of acquiring (learning to read, write, and speak), second language termed L2 in the literature by far faster with little or no noticeable hitch, the case is always different with adults [2]. Eventually, globalization has made it a lifestyle for individuals especially in adulthood to travel around the world for either knowledge acquisition, business collaboration or even attaining medical health fitness [3]. It is apparently not a debating issue that, learning a second language, for communication purpose amongst other subjects is a necessity. However, factors such as first language influence [1 - 4], age, gender [5], individual difference in auditory processing [3], language grammatical judgement, time constraints and learning anxiety [5 - 7], and many other factors are a major constraint in learning a second language. This study intend to evaluate the difficulty similarities, even factors, and major challenges in learning English Language by Turkish nationalities as compared to learning Turkish language by foreign students in Turkey.

#### 2. Learning English as a Foreign Language by Turkish Nationalities

English language being the number one lingua franca largely spoken by almost all countries in the world and most especially in westernized schools, it is one becoming almost impossible for students to take lesson in other language besides English. Turkey is one of the countries that conducts its instructional lessons in their native language. As English turned into the built up language of science, innovation and exchange its utilization as the

\* Corresponding author: [avarol@firat.edu.tr](mailto:avarol@firat.edu.tr). ORCID Number of authors: <sup>1</sup> 0000-0002-3356-8263, <sup>2</sup> 0000-0003-1606-4079

vehicle of guidance at tertiary training has expanded in Turkey [8]. The new world has made it a necessity for Turkish to learn English at almost every level of Education system. One of the functions of Turkish academic system is to organize enough and qualified economists. To open ways for these qualified hands, for economic and social improvement, it is an added advantage to understand even over one foreign language, English especially [9]. For these, the Turkish people in learning English as a second language face a number of difficulties and challenges.

### **2.1. Factors affecting Learning English Language by Turkish Nationalities**

Amongst the major factors that make learning English a challenge includes age, individual socio-economic class, approach, teaching methods and techniques, teaching-learning environment and cultural differences, and attitude [10]. Other factors may include individual interest, anxiety [6], zeal and determination to learn. Social interaction of a person that is ability to communicate freely with other English learning students or English native speakers constitutes a great role towards learning English. Other factors may include gender.

### **2.2. Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language by Foreigners in Turkey**

It will be imprudent of any foreigner to migrate to any country of choice for whatsoever reason and not learn the language of those people. Foreign students in most of the Turkish institutions have it mandatory to learn Turkish because quite a number of Turkey institutions still offer their lessons using native tongue. However, threat of learning a second language is inevitable in the course of learning Turkish by any foreign student. Although, it would have been made easier to learn if Turkish was an option and not compulsory upon foreign students who attend lessons in English language. This comes to picture due to the fact that, self-regulated learning seems by far fun learning, persistent and more enduring. It allows students to build-up knowledge by pinpointing their learning targets, self-steering their learning progression and self-assessing their achievement counter to targeted goals [11].

### **2.3. Factors affecting Learning Turkish Language by Foreign Students**

Unless for Arabic natives, especially those around the Syrian side that have many phonological similarities with Turkish, other foreign students will find it difficult learning Turkish language within a short period.

As stated in their work, [4] explained that Theoretical models altercate that listeners' perception of second language sounds is massively determined by their native language phonology. In addition to that, foreign students learning Turkish will face another obstacle taking the fact that, they are learning in a group of people from different demographic region, different native accent and different ways of acquiring knowledge in school. With this hindrance, the advantage of cooperative learning as introduced by [12] that cooperative learning in the foreign language classroom is conceived to maximize target language use, revamp intercommunication proficiency, construct confidence and enhance learner self-determination. This is because, majority of the students do not understand their individual native tongues alas the new language they are acquiring. Therefore, tendency of facing a great challenge during the period of learning Turkish is inescapable.

## **3. Methodology**

Data sampling was conducted in two phases using an online questionnaire including open-ended and close-ended questions. The variables used in conducting the research include, interest of learning the second language, degree of difficulty, proficiency level, first learning environment, relevance of the second language to actual course of study, duration of learning as well as age group.

Phase I questionnaire was circulated across Turkish natives in Elazig metropolis learning English Language within the age group of 15-26. Thirty (30) randomly selected responses across both gender was collected. This sample was used to evaluate the difficulties students face while learning English language. The second phase questionnaire was distributed among international/foreign students living within Elazig metropolis. Thirty responses were randomly selected and used for evaluating the difficulty faced by the students in learning Turkish language.

### **3.1. Participants Measurements**

**Phase I:** Thirty participants of both gender collectively responded to the questionnaire, 33.3% were male students where as 66.7% were female. 52.4% belong to 18-20 years, 19% 15-17 years, 19% 21-23 years and 9.5%

belong to 24-26 age group respectively. The first environment of learning English was in the proportion of 47.6%, 23.8% for the first two, and 9.5% for three other environments. All participants stated high interest of learning English language. Duration of learning of the participants was recorded in the proportion of 10% for one year of learning, 6.6% for two years, 6.6% for three years, and 70% for duration longer than three years.

**Phase II:** Thirty responses was recorded in proportion of 64% male and 36% female foreign students. The age grouping as in phase I was in the proportion of 4%, 32%, 24%, 12% and 28% respectively. Duration of learning was apportioned in the ratio of 60%, 16%, 4%, 4%, and 16% respectively for just starting, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years and others category. All participants showed positive interest of learning Turkish language.

### 3.2. Findings

Headings, Paired sample T-Test was conducted on the sample dataset to correlate whether there is significant difference in the difficulty level experienced by Turkish natives while learning English in comparison to the difficulty faced by foreign students learning Turkish language. The findings were based on null and alternative hypothesis developed for the study.

Null Hypothesis H0: Factors determining difficulty in learning English language are the same with factors determining difficulty in learning Turkish language.

$$H0: FDDE = FDDT$$

Alternative Hypothesis H1: Factors determining difficulty in learning English language are not the same with factors determining difficulty in learning Turkish language.

$$H1: FDDE \neq FDDT$$

If significance is  $> 0.05$  we fail to reject our null hypothesis otherwise we reject.

The following tables show the results of the findings computed by the statistical tests.

### 3.3. Results

Table 1 below illustrates the paired sample statistics for the paired groups based on variables of interest. The statistics determines the t- value used for the actual paired samples tests. Only at P (3) where interest level of the participants to learn the respective languages is zero. This is because, all participants show the same interest towards learning a second language, hence, no significant difference in the interest and therefore no t-value is computed for the paired variables because standard error of the difference between the paired variables is 0.

**Table 1.** Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Gender_T	1.57	30	.504	.092
	Gender_E	1.23	30	.430	.079
Pair 2	Age group_T	3.20	30	1.243	.227
	Age group_E	1.97	30	.890	.162
Pair 3	Learning Interest_T	1.00a	30	.000	.000
	Learning Interest_E	1.00a	30	.000	.000
Pair 4	Learning Duration_T	1.96	28	1.453	.274
	Learning Duration_E	4.46	28	1.036	.196
Pair 5	Proficiency Level_T	1.63	30	1.033	.189
	Proficiency Level_E	3.97	30	.556	.102
Pair 6	Difficulty Level	3.90	30	.885	.162
	Difficulty Level_E	2.50	30	.861	.157
Pair 7	Difficulty Factor	1.83	30	.986	.180
	Difficulty Factor_E	2.30	30	1.208	.221
Pair 8	Mandate Turkish	1.67	30	.479	.088
	Mandate English	1.10	30	.305	.056
Pair 9	Turkish Relevancy	3.17	30	1.763	.322
	English Relevancy	1.13	30	.346	.063

a. The correlation and t cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

Table 2 on the other hand illustrates the paired sample correlations. Negative correlations as in the case of P(4), P(5), P(6), and P(9) indicate that as one of the pair increase, the other variable decreases therefore they are negatively correlated. However, All significant differences are greater than 0.05 therefore we fail to reject our null

hypothesis and accept that factors determining the difficulty in learning English language are the same with factors determining difficulty in learning Turkish language.

**Table 2.** Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
<b>Pair 1</b>	Gender_T & Gender_E	30	.164	.385
<b>Pair 2</b>	Age group_T & Age group_E	30	-.087	.646
<b>Pair 4</b>	Learning Duration_T & Learning Duration_T	28	-.186	.345
<b>Pair 5</b>	Proficiency Level_T & Proficiency Level_E	30	-.022	.908
<b>Pair 6</b>	Difficulty Level & Difficulty Level_E	30	-.204	.280
<b>Pair 7</b>	Difficulty Factor & Difficulty Factor_E	30	.188	.319
<b>Pair 8</b>	Mandate Turkish & Mandate English	30	.000	1.000
<b>Pair 9</b>	Turkish Relevancy & English Relevancy	30	-.207	.271

Table 3 is the depiction of the actual paired sample test taking a confidence level of 95%. With alpha value of 0.5%, none of the resultant significant differences lie within the critical region all values are in the range of  $\pm 1.96$  Z score. We therefore have statistical evidence of not rejecting the null hypothesis. At P(5), the t-value is negative in relation to the hypothesized mean, which is also -2.333. In spite of that, we fail to reject our null hypothesis since t-value is lower than the mean hypothesis.

**Table 3.** Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
<b>Pair 1</b>	Gender_T - Gender_E	.333	.606	.111	.107	.560	3.010	29	.005
<b>Pair 2</b>	Age group_T - Age group_E	1.233	1.591	.290	.639	1.827	4.247	29	.000
<b>Pair 4</b>	Learning Duration_T - Learning Duration_T	-2.500	1.934	.366	-3.250	-1.750	-6.840	27	.000
<b>Pair 5</b>	Proficiency Level_T - Proficiency Level_E	-2.333	1.184	.216	-2.776	-1.891	-10.792	29	.000
<b>Pair 6</b>	Difficulty Level - Difficulty Level_E	1.400	1.354	.247	.894	1.906	5.662	29	.000
<b>Pair 7</b>	Difficulty Factor - Difficulty Factor_E	-.467	1.408	.257	-.992	.059	-1.816	29	.080
<b>Pair 8</b>	Mandate Turkish - Mandate English	.567	.568	.104	.354	.779	5.461	29	.000
<b>Pair 9</b>	Turkish Relevancy - English Relevancy	2.033	1.866	.341	1.337	2.730	5.969	29	.000

#### 4. Conclusion

From indication of the results, learning any language as a second language especially for adults is very challenging. The paired sample t-test used, is statistically evident that we fail to reject our null hypothesis. Although two different languages were, measured standing on the same difficulty variables, the factors hindering the efficient learning of any non-native language can be mostly controlled if not for the effect of first language influence. Looking at the responses from the participants learning English language it can be said that learning English language in Turkey is still premature although the efforts applied in improving this barrier cannot be over looked, learning English language by Turkish natives is developing day by day.

All of the participants have high interest of learning the language yet, even those that have spent years learning find it difficult acquiring expertise in the language. As a suggestion, instructional materials should be made simple for students to understand, especially in the language structure contents as most of participants claimed grammar and vocabulary as the most tedious aspect of it. Although teachers' attitude towards teaching was not evaluated in this study, it is recommended that teachers improve especially in those areas students find difficulty in learning the language.

Improving the English-medium especially for students from high school and above will help Turkish nationalities attain the ultimate goal of academics. Foreign students on the other hand, having shown a positive interest of learning Turkish as a second language, majority do not support making the language compulsory for them. This is because, pressure and demand of high expectation in the language proficiency outcome becomes a burden for students.

Undoubtedly, majority of the lessons learnt are being taught in English language, hence most foreign students will find it difficult to learn the Turkish almost perfectly if it were a compulsion. Learning language is faster

through communication and especially through cooperative learning therefore making learning Turkish language should be an option for the foreign students. Otherwise, the learning methods should be integrated with lots of fun learning by introducing frequent presentations and extracurricular activities such as drama.

To sum it up, difficulty in learning a second language should not be a barrier to learning the language. Having additional language to speak and communicate with besides native language or first language is amazing. Second language use will fast break the bridge of inter cultural/racial variance and differences and would help boost economy, as globalization is vast.

### References

- [1] Verhoeven L, Perfetti C, Pugh K. Cross-linguistic perspectives on second language reading. *J. Neurolinguistics* 2019; 50(1): 1–6.
- [2] Hartshorne J. K, Tenenbaum J. B, Pinker S. A critical period for second language acquisition: Evidence from 2/3 million English speakers. *Cognition* 2018; 177(4): 263–277.
- [3] Kachlicka M, Saito K, Tierney A. Successful second language learning is tied to robust domain-general auditory processing and stable neural representation of sound. *Brain Lang.* 2019; 192(2): 15–24.
- [4] Gong J, Cooke M, García Lecumberri M. L. A quantitative model of first language influence in second language consonant learning. *Speech Commun.* 2015; 69(1): 17–30.
- [5] Rafek M. B, Ramli N. H. L. B, Iksan H. B, Harith N. M, Abas A. I. B. C. Gender and Language: Communication Apprehension in Second Language Learning. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2014; 123(1): 90–96.
- [6] Hismanoglu M. Foreign Language Anxiety of English Language Teacher Candidates: A Sample from Turkey. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2013; 93(1): 930–937.
- [7] Özütürk G, Hürsen Ç. Determination of English Language Learning Anxiety in EFL Classrooms. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2013; 84(1): 1899–1907.
- [8] Demirbulak D. A look at the Turkish and English Language in Turkey from the perspectives of tertiary undergraduate students. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2011; 15(1): 4083–4088.
- [9] Oktay A. Foreign Language Teaching: A Problem in Turkish Education. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2015; 174(1): 584–593.
- [10] Gömleksiz M. N. An evaluation of student's attitudes toward English language learning in terms of several variables. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2010; 9(1): 913–918.
- [11] Xiao Y, Yang M. Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: How formative assessment supports students' self-regulation in English language learning. *System* 2019; 81(1): 39–49.
- [12] Çelik S, Aytın K, Bayram E. Implementing Cooperative Learning in the Language Classroom: Opinions of Turkish Teachers of English. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2013; 70(1): 1852–1859.
- [13] Şahan Ö, Şahan K. E, and Razi S. Turkish Language Proficiency and Cultural Adaptation of American EFL Teachers in Turkey. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2014; 158(1): 304–311.
- [14] Yaylı D. Comments of Prospective Turkish Teachers on Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language. *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.* 2015; 191(1): 459–463.