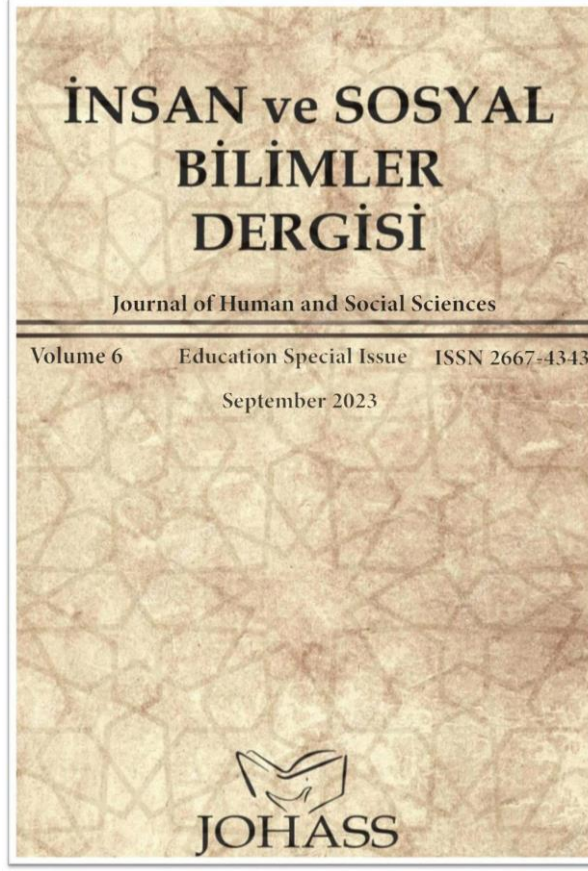


## JOURNAL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (JOHASS)



<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/johass>

### Opinions of Foreign Convicts Learning Turkish in Penal Institutions on Learning Turkish

**Bahadır Ahmet ATILA<sup>1</sup>**

Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses

*Turkish-Language Teacher*

[bahadirahmet25@hotmail.com](mailto:bahadirahmet25@hotmail.com)

Orcid ID: 0000-0001-8974-1929

**Mustafa**

**HARMANKAYA<sup>2</sup>**

Yıldız Technical University, Turkish and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Center

*Dr.*

[ozgunharmankaya@gmail.com](mailto:ozgunharmankaya@gmail.com)

Orcid ID: 0000-0001-9420-858X

**Özgün**

**Osman Kürşat YORGANCI<sup>3</sup>**

Yıldız Technical University, Education Faculty, Department of Turkish Education

*Assist. Prof. Dr.*

[kursatyorganci@gmail.com](mailto:kursatyorganci@gmail.com)

Orcid ID: 0000-0001-8230-219X

**Article Type:** Research Article

Received: 23.08.2023

Revision received: 21.09.2023

Accepted: 25.09.2023

Published online: 29.09.2023

**Citation:** Atila, B. A., Harmankaya, M.Ö., & Yorgancı, O. K. (2023). Opinions of foreign convicts learning turkish in penal institutions on learning Turkish. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, 6(Education Special Issue), 1-27.

## **Opinions of Foreign Convicts Learning Turkish in Penal Institutions on Learning Turkish**

**Bahadır Ahmet ATİLA<sup>1</sup>**

*Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses*

**Mustafa Özgün HARMANKAYA<sup>2</sup>**

*Yıldız Technical University, Turkish and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Center*

**Osman Kürşat YORGANCI<sup>3</sup>**

*Yıldız Technical University, Education Faculty, Department of Turkish Education*

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to explore the perspectives of convicts who are studying Turkish as a foreign language in penal facilities about learning Turkish. Of qualitative research designs a basic qualitative research design was employed in the study, and the data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The study was carried out with a cohort of 10 foreign convicts in a penal facility located in Ankara. The obtained data underwent content analysis and were subsequently presented in the form of tables. The findings of the research revealed that foreign convicts and detainees aim to learn Turkish for reasons of force majeure, integration, social factors, and future-oriented expectations. Force majeure factors encompassed essential humanitarian needs (such as official and private communication, daily necessities, emotional sharing, healing, health, social and spiritual support, and economic needs) as well as legal needs. Integration-related reasons included considerations of the attitudes of Turkish citizens, the need for belonging, and the need to adapt to prison life. Reasons stemming from social and personal factors included the need to know new people, acculturation, and education. Future-oriented expectations comprised the desire to reside in Türkiye, the desire for an early release, and familial responsibilities. Additionally, the study revealed that convicts learning Turkish as a foreign language encountered challenges linked to the linguistic characteristics of Turkish, personal problems, and constraints during the language learning process.

**Keywords:** Teaching Turkish as a foreign language, penal institution, foreign national, convict, detainee

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*Received: 23.08.2023*

*Revision*

*received:21.09.2023*

*Accepted:*

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author:

*Turkish-Language Teacher*

[bahadirahmet25@hotmail.com](mailto:bahadirahmet25@hotmail.com)

*Orcid ID: 0000-0001-8974-1929*

<sup>2</sup> *Dr.*

[ozgun.harmanakaya@gmail.com](mailto:ozgun.harmanakaya@gmail.com)

*Orcid ID: 0000-0001-9420-858X*

<sup>3</sup> *Asst. Prof. Dr.*

[kursatyorganci@gmail.com](mailto:kursatyorganci@gmail.com)

*Orcid ID: 0000-0001-8230-219X*

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary era, the progress in transportation and communication technologies driven by globalization has made various parts of the world more reachable for individuals who have access to these technologies. People's short-term accommodation requirements, such as trips and vacations, can be a result of this accessibility, but it can also result in extended visits or even permanent settlements. When this ease of accessibility is combined with the political, economic, and social conditions in an individual's home country, it can lead to a necessity for some people to relocate or establish residence in a different country for the long term. When examining the situation in Türkiye, it becomes evident that foreign nationals choose to be in Türkiye for a variety of reasons. These motivations encompass diverse reasons like tourism, education, seeking asylum, migration, and healthcare.

In recent years, most of the foreigners coming to Türkiye are immigrants from countries in Türkiye's neighborhood. Economic difficulties and political instability in these countries have become an important challenge for Türkiye's migration policy (T.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of migrants entering Türkiye, especially due to the ongoing political instability and conflict in Syria. The total number of regular migrants in Türkiye is 4 million 797 thousand 593, including 3 million 293 thousand 934 Syrians under temporary protection, 1 million 213 thousand 143 under residence permit, and 290 thousand 516 under international protection (T.C. Directorate of Migration Management, 2023). Therefore, it can be stated that the number of foreign nationals living in Türkiye under different statuses such as temporary protection, residence permit, and international protection status has increased considerably in recent years.

Türkiye's position as a gateway to Europe, its economic and social development, and its stable and secure structure make it a preferred country for irregular migrants as well as other groups. According to the data of the Migration Management Administration (n.d.), while the number of irregular migrants apprehended was 44,415 in 2011, this number increased steadily to 454,662 in 2019 and then decreased to 285,027 in 2022. The majority of irregular migrants apprehended are citizens of countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Turkmenistan, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Morocco, Yemen, and Iraq.

Some foreign nationals who are in Türkiye for a variety of reasons are sometimes prosecuted under the laws of the Republic of Türkiye for committing unlawful acts, and some of these individuals are sentenced in Türkiye. As prisoners or detainees, these individuals are confined for a period of time in penal execution institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Türkiye. Convicts and detainees are individuals who have stepped outside the target circle drawn by the state and society, have committed a crime, or are imprisoned for a variety of reasons (Atila, 2018). The increasing population of migrants in Türkiye is similarly reflected in the proportion of foreign national convicts in penal institutions. According to the data of the Türkiye Statistical Institute (2021), in 2020, 851 foreign nationals were imprisoned for drugs: 673 for theft, 263 for looting and extortion, 148 for deprivation of personal liberty, 118 for murder, 136 for smuggling, forgery, and fraud, 61 for violation of family protection measures, and 472 for other offenses. In 2011, the number of foreign convicts and detainees who committed crimes and entered penal institutions was 274 under the aforementioned headings, and it is understood that this number increased by 1012% in 9 years.

The process of reintegrating convicts and prisoners back into society holds significance in terms of both preventing crime and including individuals in public order along with specific attributes. Bauman (2020) highlights the objectives of rehabilitation, reform, and re-education for convicts, noting that the penal execution system allows for observation and supervision. From this perspective, it is clear that since foreign detainees and convicts are required to live in a different country, in a new socio-cultural context, in an unfamiliar social environment, with a limited number of people, and under certain restrictions, their reintegration into the existing public order through means such as education, is crucial.

Individuals who are aimed to reintegrate into the public and social order must have their social requirements met. Communication is one of the most essential social needs of the individual, both within and outside of penal institutions. Sever (1998) states, “Effective participation in social life in a democratic society requires the development of adequate communication skills.” Considering the situation of foreign convicts and detainees in their own context, not speaking the local language is one of the biggest obstacles to their effective participation in social and social life. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2009, foreign national convicts and detainees encountered challenges stemming from language barriers. These obstacles lead to a lack of comprehension of the justice system, avoiding necessary contact and support crucial for social integration,

difficulties in communicating with fellow convicts and prison staff, devolving of participation in prison activities, and violation of confidentiality in physical and psychological health services. To effectively address these barriers and facilitate the successful reintegration of foreign national prisoners into society, language education is an issue that needs to be carefully emphasized.

To meet the individual, social, and societal needs of foreign convicts and detainees and to facilitate their reintegration into society, teaching the Turkish language will be an effective first step. In fact, this situation has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Justice, and Turkish courses for foreign nationals have been started in penal institutions. On the basis of the Turkish courses for foreign convicts and detainees will contribute to the linguistic and communicative skills, it can be predicted that these courses will facilitate the integration of foreign convicts and detainees into the life of penal institutions and the society in which they reside. As language and communication barriers are eliminated or minimized, achieving the objectives outlined in the Law on the Execution of Criminal and Security Measures (Resmî Gazete, 2004) “encouraging re-socialization, facilitating adaptation to a productive and responsible lifestyle that respects laws, regulations, and social rules” will be easier.

Due to the increasing number of foreign national convicts and detainees in penal institutions, integration issues have the potential to worsen, necessitating that the relevant institutions meet the Turkish language learning needs of these convicts and detainees. It is anticipated that the Turkish language education required by foreign nationals will not be similar to that required by other foreign nationals in the country and will not produce results that are generally consistent with the literature on certain topics. In light of these factors, it is believed that revealing the objectives of foreign convicts to learn Turkish will contribute to the determination of needs and expectations in teaching Turkish to foreigners. It will also help to review teaching methods, techniques, and materials, as well as the education process in general.

In Türkiye, teaching Turkish to foreigners through public institutions and organizations, universities, foundations, and private businesses has attained a certain level of organizational memory. The acquired knowledge and experiences are also reflected in the studies in the relevant literature. In recent years, researchers have conducted a large number of studies examining the objectives of non-Turkish speakers to acquire Turkish and their difficulties in learning Turkish in a variety of contexts. Opinions towards learning Turkish have been examined under many dimensions such as; Learners’ nationality (Aljaradat

&Yeşilyurt, 2021; Kara, 2022; Karatay, 2018; Şengül, 2017; Tok&Yığın, 2013; Tunagür&Kardaş, 2021; Tunçel, 2016; Yaşar&Batur, 2021;Yıldız&Varlı, 2021;), educational level (Boylu et al., 2018; Büyükikiz&Hasırcı, 2013; Demir&Genç, 2018; Derman, 2010; Gürbüz&Güleç, 2016; Kaplan, 2018), and social status and roles (Akkaya, 2013; Biçer&Özaltun, 2020; Bölükbaş, 2016; Moralı, 2018; Şahin et al., 2021; Yıldız&Sertoğlu, 2019). In fact, the Turkish learning objectives, needs, problems, and perspectives of foreign secondary school students and university students, students and employees, children and adults, Arabic speakers and Russian speakers, refugees, and resident foreigners differ from each other to a certain extent. In the process of learning Turkish, it is necessary to address each situation in its own context due to this difference. Nevertheless, the review of existing literature reveals that the aspect concerning teaching Turkish to foreign nationals within penal facilities has not been sufficiently addressed, despite its sensitive and distinctive nature.

The fact that the number of foreign detainees in penal institutions is increasing day by day and that this increase has the potential to reveal communication-related problems in the future makes it necessary to examine the issue of language learning in penal institutions in all aspects. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to determine the attitudes of convicts who study Turkish as a foreign language in penal facilities. With this objective, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the learning objectives of convicts studying Turkish as a foreign language?
2. What problems do convicts encounter while learning Turkish as a foreign language?

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

This study, aimed at assessing the perspectives of convicts who were learning Turkish as a foreign language, utilized the basic qualitative research design—a type of qualitative research design. Qualitative research is an approach that explores research issues concerning the significance attributed by individuals and groups to a social event or a humanitarian process. This is realized through the application of interpretive/theoretical frameworks, and the analysis of data collection is conducted within a natural setting. This process involves the establishment of both inductive and deductive patterns and themes (Creswell, 2021, p. 45). In

this particular study, the information gathered from the participants through interviews was analyzed using the framework of inductive and deductive patterns and themes, leading to the creation of corresponding codes.

## **Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 10 foreign national convicts and detainees studying Turkish in a penal institution in Ankara. The socio-demographic characteristics of the convicts and detainees in the study group are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Foreign Convicted and Detained Students*

<b>Socio-demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Number (n)</b>
Age Group	22-30	2
	30-40	7
	40-50	1
	50 and up	0
Education	Unschooling	1
	Elementary sch.	5
	Middle school	2
	High school	2
Period in Prison	Less than 1 year	1
	1-3 years	5
	3-5 years	2
	Over 5 years	2
Mother Language	Arabic	6
	Uyghur	1
	Uzbek Turkish	1
	Turkmen	2
Nationality	Suriya	4
	Iraq	4
	Uzbekhistan	1
	East Turkestan	1
Turkish Level	A1	1
	A2	5
	B1+	4

In accordance with Table 1, 20% of the participants are aged 22 to 30, 70% are aged 30 to 40, and 10% are aged 40 to 50. 10% have not attended school, 50% have completed elementary school, 20% have completed middle school, and 20% have completed high

school. 10% have been detained for less than one year, 50% for one to three years, 20% for three to five years, and 20% for more than five years. 60% of the convicts speak Arabic, 10% Uyghur, 10% Uzbek Turkish, and 20% Turkmen. 40% are from Syria, 40% are from Iraq, 10% are from Uzbekistan, and 10% are from East Turkestan; 10% speak Turkish at the A1 level, 50% at the A2 level, and 40% at the B1 level or higher.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The data was collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers in accordance with the literature review and expert opinions. During the preparation of the semi-structured interview form, the opinions of three field experts with PhDs, academic studies in Turkish education, and at least five years of experience teaching Turkish to foreigners were sought. The number of questions was reduced from seven to five after field experts provided their feedback. The following questions were asked to foreign convicts and detainees:

1. Do you believe that learning Turkish will contribute to your prison life? Please provide an explanation with reasons.
2. Do you believe that learning Turkish will help you in legal situations and the trial process? Please provide an explanation with reasons.
3. Do you believe that learning Turkish will help you after your release from prison? Please provide an explanation with reasons.
4. Do you believe that learning Turkish will enhance your social and personal interactions? Please provide an explanation with reasons.
5. What problems did you encounter while learning Turkish in prison? Please describe them.

Within the scope of the research, since six participants' responses were collected in written form, the pertinent questions were translated into Arabic, the native language of the participants. With the participation of the researchers and two translators, an online meeting was held to translate the interview questions into Arabic. During the online meeting, the researchers provided the translators with a comprehensive explanation of the intended meaning of the questions. Together, the translators finalized the translation based on this explanation. A different translator was asked to translate the final version of the translation into Turkish. The structure and meaning of this translation were found to be identical to the



original questions. Finally, it was determined that the translations were suitable for data collection for the research.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The interviews were conducted with foreign nationals who had completed or were enrolled in Turkish language classes at the penitentiary on a voluntary basis. One of the researchers conducted a preliminary interview with the convicts and detainees prior to the actual implementation and evaluated their Turkish oral communication levels in order to obtain reliable data on the topics subject to the interviews. The preliminary interviews determined that six participants had a language proficiency level of B1 or lower. Upon evaluation, it was determined that the current Turkish language proficiency levels of these learners were insufficient for providing deeper emotional and cognitive transfer for this study. For this reason, six participants were interviewed in their mother tongue, Arabic, and four participants were interviewed in Turkish.

The face-to-face interviews were carried out in Turkish by one of the researchers and written by the same person due to the unavailability of audio/video recordings. The relevant questions were then shared in Arabic with six participants to gather written data. Two distinct translators translated the participants' responses into Turkish, and a third translator, who is an expert in the subject, compared the two translations. Since there were no significant differences in terms of meaning, but there were lexical differences, one of the expert translator's translations was accepted as correct, and raw data were collected. The researchers analyzed the final data using the content analysis method. "Content analysis necessitates a more in-depth analysis of the gathered data in order to reach concepts, categories, and themes that explain the data. In content analysis, the emphasis is on the collected data; codes are obtained from events and phenomena that are frequently repeated in the data set or that the participant emphasized strongly (Baltacı, 2019, p. 377). In this study, each researcher read and coded the responses independently. After completing the relevant classification procedure, categories and themes were determined through repetitive discussions of the codes in two separate sessions.

### **Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, Creswell's (2021) strategies for ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research were used. To assure diversity,

participants were chosen based on factors including period in prison, age, level of education, and nationality. However, the number of convicts participating in Turkish courses prevented maximum diversity. Each interview continued until completed, and adequate time was allotted to each participant. During the analysis process, the coding was conducted independently, and after the analyses were complete, the coding was discussed in two separate sessions.

### **Ethics Approval**

The ethics committee permission for the article was given by the Yıldız Technical University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee at its meeting numbered 2023/08 on August 18, 2023.

### **Findings**

In this section, the findings and interpretations obtained by analysing the data obtained from semi-structured interview forms are presented. Qualitative findings are tabulated and interpreted.

### **Findings and Interpretations on the Purposes of Turkish Language Learning of Convicts Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language**

The first question of the research is “What are the learning objectives of convicts studying Turkish as a second language?” The opinions of the convicts who learn Turkish as a foreign language about the purposes of learning Turkish are shown in Table 2 as themes and categories.

**Table 2**

*Turkish Learning Objectives of Convicts Learning Turkish as A Foreign Language*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Force Majeure	Humanitarian Needs	(P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10)
	Legal Needs	(P1, P2, P3, P8, P9)
Integration Related Reasons	Attitudes of Turkish Citizens	(P1, P5, P8)
	Need for Belonging	(P1, P2, P5, P9, P10)
	Need for Adaptation to Prison Life	(P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10)
Social-Personal Reasons	Meeting New People	(P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9)
	Acculturation	(P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10)

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Participants</b>
	Education	(P1, P3, P6, P10)
Future-oriented Expectations	Desire to live in Türkiye	(P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10)
	Desire for Early Release	(P2, P4, P5, P8, P9)
	Familial Responsibility	(P1, P5, P6, P10)

Analyzing Table 2 reveals that the Turkish learning purposes of the convicts who learn Turkish as a foreign language are comprised of four themes: force majeure, integration, social, and future-oriented expectations. Humanitarian needs are the most frequently mentioned category in the theme of force majeure in Turkish learning objectives (f=10). Due to humanitarian needs, all of the convicts who participated in the interview emphasized the importance of learning Turkish. Despite the fact that legal needs were mentioned less frequently (f=5), the participants who emphasized legal needs constitute half of the total cohort. It is notable that half of the participants highlighted legal needs as one of the reasons for learning Turkish. The following are examples of participant statements regarding the theme of force majeure as it relates to the Turkish learning purposes of foreign convicts and detainees:

*“Before I was sent to prison, I lived in Mamak. Most of the shops in our neighborhood were owned by Arabs. Iraqis and Syrians always speak Arabic in the neighborhood. But it is necessary to know Turkish outside.” (P1)*

*“Some people do not speak Turkish. It is very difficult for them being in prison. Others help them but not always.” (P1)*

*“... Knowing Turkish is a necessity. In the bazaar, market, hospital, prison... Turkish is spoken everywhere... If you don’t speak Turkish, you always ask for help from others.” (P2)*

*“...For example, although I needed a psychologist and a religious official, I could not see them privately because of my language problem.” (P9)*

*“...I need to write to the canteen for the supply of my basic needs, but I could not fill the canteen forms.” (P8)*

*“This is a foreign place for us. Shopping, traveling, being examined, going to school, getting along with people, and even living in prison depend on speaking Turkish.” (P5)*

*“Even if I speak with the help of an interpreter in court now, I can understand what he/she asks and translates. I can give answers in Turkish myself, which attracts the attention of the court committee, and they like it.” (P8)*

*“I write my petitions to the court and prosecutor’s office in Turkish. I can read and understand the documents brought by my lawyer.” (P3)*

In accordance with the interview data, when the objectives of foreign convicts and detainee students to learn Turkish are examined in terms of force majeure, the topics of

meeting daily needs, official-private communication needs, health-social-spiritual support needs, and legal needs come to the forefront.

Taking into account the execution status of foreign convicts and detainees reveals the legal reasons for their need to learn Turkish. The desire to be familiar with the Turkish legal system and to be able to follow the trial proceedings without feeling anxious is another crucial reason for foreign prisoners and detainees to learn Turkish. The statements of one participant are as follows:

*“... I could not fully understand what was told. I could not convey what I thought in this process. I could only get simple answers about the information written in my legal status papers... If you want to learn about legal issues, it is useful to know Turkish.” (P9)*

In conclusion, the need for foreign convicts and detainees to learn Turkish increases for the following: the communication skills necessary for maintaining routine practices, shopping, conveying internal and external demands within and outside the institution, and comprehending instructions; sharing and healing needs arising from being human; medical-spiritual-social support needs and economic motives. This situation is obvious in the participant interviews, as shown in Table 2.

The necessity of adapting to the life of the penal facility is the most frequently described category in the theme of reasons deriving from integration. The entire group (f=10) acknowledged the need for adaptation to the penal facility. This category is followed by the need for belonging (f=5) and Turkish citizens' attitudes (f=3). Some participant statements on the topic of the integration-related reasons for learning Turkish are as follows:

*“Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis do physical work...It is useful for us to know Turkish in official and private work.” (P1)*

*“I am in a foreign country, and I am in prison. I don't know this place at all...I was very anxious, stressed...Then, I established communication (with other convicts and detainees) at work. Now, I don't feel like a foreigner. I know the rules.” (P10)*

*“I learned about cities; I want to live in Mersin. I like listening to the radio, Turkish music is very good.” (P9)*

*“...There is a TV in the ward, but it does not show Arabic channels. I could not watch Turkish channels. If you live in Türkiye, I think it is essential to know Turkish. This need is felt more in prison. It is not possible to get support from other friends all the time. Even if it is, it is not enough. Institution officials do not speak Arabic.” (P8)*

*“Those who learned Turkish are comfortable in prison; they are getting used to it more easily.” (P2)*

*“I can speak Turkish a little, so I am comfortable in prison. I entered the prison, they asked me questions, and I answered them. ...We can communicate with our*

*teachers and administrators in prison. We can read magazines and books. We can watch television. We benefited from our Turkish a lot” (P6)*

*“Learning Turkish is essential, especially for those who are thinking of living in Türkiye... They do not like Syrians who do not speak Turkish here.” (P5)*

*“I find it difficult to spend time in the ward. I met new friends through Turkish lessons.” (P7)*

*“From what I have seen and heard from other foreign prisoners, life becomes difficult for those who do not speak the language. I have never seen a convict who can live his life comfortably and solve every problem by speaking Arabic, like in his country.” (P4)*

*“I have fewer mistakes now. I speak better; they do not treat me like a foreigner...I have never been in prison before; this place is very different from Iraq. It is necessary to adapt and to know Turkish for this reason.” (P2)*

*“Learning Turkish is a necessity in Türkiye. I want to travel and to see different places.” (P2)*

*“I was illiterate. My friends wrote my needs, my petitions for me... It is not always possible to ask someone for something. After a certain time, the relationship between people deteriorates. You become a burden for them. After Turkish lessons, I am not a burden on others. I am not in need of anyone, thanks to God.” (P4)*

When foreign convicts and detainees’ reasons for learning Turkish are analyzed in terms of integration, the need to adapt to the conditions of the penal institution (f=10) comes to the fore as the most prominent one. It is believed that the foreign participants- who are also convicts in Türkiye- attach importance to learning Turkish for the purposes of meeting new people, wandering, reading books, listening to music, chatting, struggling with discrimination, adapting to the conditions of the penal institution, and feeling to belong. Below are participant comments regarding the penal institution life of foreign convicts and detainees:

*“Foreign convicts had many problems. It is very difficult not to speak Turkish in prison. Conditions are more difficult for them.” (P1)*

*“Foreign convicts chat among themselves and tell about their court experiences.” (P2)*

*“My father is Turkmen. I knew Turkish a little bit, so I didn’t have much communication problem. If I were like other foreigners, I would have a hard time living here.” (P3)*

*“I could not fully explain my illnesses. Then, they put me in a ward with other foreigners. With the support of the people there, I tried to get used to the prison, and I tried to learn the rules. If you do not follow the rules, it is very difficult to live here.” (P5)*

The titles that arose under the social-personal reasons theme are the desire to meet new people (f=7), acculturation (f=6), and training needs (f=4). The following are examples of participant comments regarding the social-personal reasons theme of the objectives for learning Turkish:

*“I can also communicate with my Turkish friends. I get to know new people. Would this be possible if I did not speak Turkish?” (P1)*

*“Time does not pass easily here. We do the same things every day... We have met new friends in the lessons, we talk to them. We chat with my Turkish friends in Turkish, it is very good for us.” (P2)*

*“Harmonization is good. Foreign convicts should attend the classes. They will make new friends and learn new information.” (P10)*

*“I have a notebook where I write song lyrics. I solve puzzles, play word games with my friends. I read books. I chat with my Turkish-speaking friends.” (P3)*

*““When you learn Turkish, you gain the ability to get into people and express yourself. It is up to you to utilize this opportunity.” (P4)*

*“I am interested in drawing, I have been drawing since I was little. After I learned Turkish, I started to buy drawing and painting books. I read them, and I learn new things. I started to borrow religious books from the library. I both improve myself and spend my time by reading.” (P5)*

*“I ask for books from my teacher. I learned a lot from books. I listen to Turkish music. Hande Unsal’s songs are very nice. After I learned Turkish well, I felt comfortable... To read, learn, listen to music, watch films and series, and talk to other people (in Turkish) is very good.” (P6)*

*“I can watch Turkish TV series, I started to watch the Great Seljuk Alparslan series.” (P8)*

*“Enes, my son, started primary school this year. My wife and I want to contribute to his education.” (P10)*

*“I want to continue my education, then I want to work and live in Türkiye...” (P2)*

*“I attend Turkish preaches, I understand most of them. ...I watch films. Knowing Turkish is a great comfort.” (P10)*

The titles that emerged in the theme of reasons deriving from future-oriented expectations are the desire to reside in Türkiye (f=8), the desire for early release (f=5), and the familial responsibility (f=4). The following are examples of participant statements on the topic of reasons for learning Turkish based on future-oriented expectations:

*“ ...People who commit crimes in other countries are tried again when they return to (Country name deleted), they go to prison. That’s why I do not want to go back to ..... ” (P6)*

*“I am a welder; I used to work in construction. I want to start my own business; I am making plans... If I know Turkish, people will treat me well.” (P1)*

*...In (Country name deleted), life is very difficult. There is no peace there; Türkiye is safe. I know Turkish so that I can find a job more easily.” (P2)*

*“... If I am released and live in Türkiye, what else would I want...Turkish is necessary for that...” (P3)*

*“I lived in Urfa for a short time. I have relatives and friends there. I want to get married. If there is no problem, I will live in Türkiye if God wills.” (P4)*

*“.... Therefore, the language I learned will be useful for me to study and earn money, and it will also help my family to get used to this place. I like Turkish very much.” (P6)*

*“... (Country name removed) is still unsafe, and probably I will not return there. My family lives in Gaziantep. I want to live there.” (P9)*

*“I have a citizenship of... .. Some of my friends and relatives are in prison there. Türkiye and ... are very different; I do not like there, but I live and worship here comfortably. Türkiye is very beautiful; it is like my homeland. Our people are the same. Our culture is the same. I will live in Istanbul if God wills (P10)*

*“Attending classes, obeying the rules, and good conduct offers an opportunity for early release for convicts.” (P5)*

*“A law was enacted last year. Learning Turkish is a great opportunity. I can be released from prison earlier.” (P2)*

*“...I will communicate better with Turkish people... My children and my younger brother go to school in Mamak. I will help them at school.” (P1)*

*“I lived in Urfa for a short time. I have relatives and friends there. I want to get married. If nothing goes wrong, If God wills, I will live in Türkiye. I used to work as a telephone salesman in Raqqa. I can open a shop or work in a telephone shop in Sanliurfa. I believe that I will benefit from learning Turkish for this.” (P5)*

*“My father is dead, I have only my mother and my brother. ... If God wills, I will continue to live in Türkiye after I am released... I don’t know, maybe I can work in the apparel industry or do some other trading jobs.” (P6)*

### **Findings and Interpretations on the Problems Faced by Convicts Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language while Learning Turkish**

The second research question posed the following: “What problems do convicts encounter while learning Turkish as a foreign language?” The problems encountered by convicts learning Turkish as a foreign language were categorized into three subthemes: language-related issues, limitation-related issues, and personal issues. When analyzing the language-related problems encountered by the participants while learning Turkish, the linguistic characteristics of Turkish (alphabet, pronunciation, and vocabulary limit) come to the forefront. Constraints result in practicing problems, lack of technology, and lack of guidance. Four categories of personal problems were identified: shyness, inability to concentrate, lack of readiness, and negative transfer.

Table 3 presents, as themes and categories, the opinions of convicted individuals who learn Turkish as a foreign language regarding the difficulties they face during the learning process.

**Table 3**

*The Views of Convicts Who are Learning Turkish as A Foreign Language Concerning The Difficulties They Encounter in the Course of Turkish Learning*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Language Related Problems	Linguistic Characteristics of Turkish	(P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10)
Problem Due to Constraints	Problem of Practice	(P1, P2, P5, P7, P8, P10)
	Lack of Technology	(P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10)
	Lack of Guidance	(P2, P3, P7, P8, P10)
Personal Problems	Shyness	(P1)
	Inability to Concentrate	(P4, P7)

Themes	Categories	Participants
	Lack of Readiness	(P7) (P5)
	Negative Transfer	(P1, P3, P4, P8, P9)

In accordance with the analysis of the obtained data, the opinions of the convicts who learn Turkish as a foreign language regarding the difficulties they encounter in the process of learning Turkish are comprised of three subthemes: language-related problems, problems resulting from limitations, and personal problems. It is believed that eight of the participants (f=8) had linguistic difficulties due to pronunciation, word insufficiency, and alphabet. The following are examples of participant statements on the topic of language-related issues in the Turkish learning process:

*"... We learned the Arabic alphabet in Iraq. I went to primary school there. The alphabet is different in Turkish..." (P1)*

*"... I say some words inaccurately and write them wrongly." (P2)*

*"... I make word mistakes when I speak. When I stop speaking, my mistakes increase." (P3)*

*"I was speaking slowly and writing slowly. I'm not very fast now, but it's getting better. When I saw that I could succeed, my desire increased." (P4)*

*"I had difficulty learning the alphabet...Some words are similar to each other. Some words are difficult to pronounce." (P5)*

*"I was unfamiliar with the letters. Turkish words are difficult." (P7)*

*"I had some difficulty at the beginning of the lessons. After I got used to the alphabet, I progressed easily. Some words are very difficult to pronounce." (P10)*

It is observed that the lack of technology is the most emphasized theme in the opinions of convicts who learn Turkish as a foreign language regarding the challenges they face (f=7). In addition, it is acknowledged that the problem of practice (f=6) and lack of guidance (f=5) are significant constraints during language learning process. The following are examples of participant comments on the topic of problems arising from constraints in Turkish language learning processes:

*"There are rules in prison. Our teacher gives books, but there is nothing else... It is still good under prison conditions." (P2)*

*"I can talk about technology. We learned things we didn't know in our class... Our teacher used to show photos and videos on the internet. We only have books in our rooms. It is necessary to do a lot of research when learning a language. There is no one to ask questions outside the classroom." (P3)*

*"Materials are limited in the ward. Only what is allowed is allowed in. It would have been better if I had been outside when I was learning Turkish and had more Turkish friends."(P5)*

*"...Being in prison is very difficult for preparing for lessons and doing research. It is bad not to be able to use a computer." (P6).*

*"I don't have a friend in my ward that I can get support from. I fell behind my friends, I told our teacher that I was thinking of withdrawing from classes." (P7)*



*“There is no use of computers and phones in prison contrary to outside. No one in our ward spoke Turkish.. These are difficult.” (P8)*

*“We don’t have any opportunities in prison except what is allowed, only books and notebooks. There is no telephone, internet, CDs.” (P9)*

*“There is no one to help me with Turkish. I cannot ask about words, grammar,..., there is no one to ask questions... There is no technology.” (P10)*

In the context of convicts learning Turkish as a foreign language, focusing on their personal problems, the most prominent issue is negative transfer, which is highlighted significantly (f=5). This is subsequently followed by the categories of lack of readiness (f=2), inability to concentrate (f=2), and shyness (f=1). Negative transfer refers to the negative influence of the convicts’ previous linguistic experiences on their acquisition of the Turkish language. Readiness encompasses both psychomotor aspects (like inability to hold a pencil) and cognitive aspects (such as unfamiliarity with the classroom setting and learning procedures). The inability to concentrate signifies the challenge of not being able to sufficiently concentrate on lessons due to longing for family or psychological concerns. Conversely, shyness refers to a limitation stemming from the introverted tendencies of the convicts, who tend to assume a passive role during lessons. Here are examples of statements made by participants regarding personal obstacles encountered during the process of learning Turkish as foreign national convicts:

*“Although I speak Arabic, I don’t know how to write. I didn’t like school. I had to work because my father died. I have worked as a porter since I was a child...” (P7)*

*“I still write some letters incorrectly; sometimes I forget them.” (P1)*

*“I was not used to the Turkish language; I can’t pronounce some words... I had difficulty with the difference of the letters; it took me some time to get used to it... I am 37 years old... I thought I would not learn Turkish. Our teacher was patient with us. We talked and read a lot in the lessons... Some words are similar to Arabic.” (P3)*

*“Frankly, there were times when I had difficulty. Arabic and Turkish are different from each other.” (P5)*

*“The psychology of being in prison was reflected in my lessons. I was constantly thinking about my mom and dad.” (P4)*

*“I attended Turkish lessons in this prison upon the invitation of our teacher. The lessons were different and difficult for me; I did not attend any school in my own country.” (P7)*

*“I learned Turkish with difficulty. ... I have a shy nature. Although our teacher and classmates were very good, I could not be very close to anyone for a long time. I could not ask any questions in the lessons.” (P4)*

The difficulties encountered by detainees acquiring Turkish as a foreign language were categorized into three themes. In the interviews, it becomes clear that the problems that arise in the process of learning Turkish are primarily “problems due to constraints.”

## **Discussion and Results**

The research findings revealed that foreign convicts and detainees learn Turkish for reasons arising from force majeure, integration, social considerations, and future-oriented expectations. Force majeure is understood to manifest as humanitarian needs (official and private communication needs, daily needs, sharing-treatment needs, health-social-spiritual support needs, and economic needs) and legal needs. Reasons arising from integration include the attitudes of Turkish citizens, the need for belonging, and the need to adapt to prison life. The need to meet new people, acculturation, and education are characteristics of social and personal reasons. The reasons arising from future expectations are the desire to reside in Türkiye, the desire for early release, and familial responsibilities.

In the literature, numerous studies have been conducted with foreigners with varying social statuses and roles, including Turkish learners outside of Türkiye, refugees, university students, secondary school students, adults, foreign residents, and foreign football players toward the purpose of learning Turkish. Bölükbaş (2016), in his study with Syrian refugees, determined that the participants learned Turkish in order to study at a university in Türkiye, continue their lives, find a job, do their work more easily in official institutions, communicate better at workplaces, to communicate with their Turkish friends and neighbors, to learn Turkish culture and history, and to communicate with their friends. According to the findings of Tunagür and Kardaş (2021), Syrian students learn Turkish for various reasons, including living in Türkiye, being aware of the significance of learning a new language and the necessity of learning Turkish, receiving an education, loving Türkiye, assisting their families, and adapting to social settings. According to research conducted by Şahin (et al., 2021), refugee children enhanced their social relationships with their Turkish knowledge and were able to perform daily tasks with greater ease. In addition, refugee children's learning Turkish is important for families in matters such as education, employment, profession, and confidence in future. Yıldız and Sertoğlu (2019) conducted interviews with 26 Russian-speaking children and their families residing temporarily and permanently in Türkiye and concluded that parents learn Turkish for reasons including pursuing hobbies, staying updated with current events, interacting with neighbors and friends, familiarizing themselves with Turkish culture, receiving education, and fulfilling daily requirements and finding a job in Türkiye; children learn Turkish for these reasons as well as future-oriented expectations (finding a job, communicating with friends and neighbors in Türkiye). According to the

findings of a study conducted by Gürbüz and Güleç (2016) with students studying in Türkiye, students learn Turkish for personal (to express their problems, to learn about different cultures, to love the Turkish language, to improve themselves), political and economic (to find a job, scholarships, etc.), social (to communicate with and get along with Turks), and educational reasons. Karatay et al. (2018) found that Bosnia and Herzegovina students learn Turkish for self-improvement, studying abroad, traveling abroad, finding a job abroad, and leisure activities. According to the results of Çelik and İpek (2019), Polish students learn Turkish for classroom communication, individual interests and requirements, education and employment opportunities, and commerce. Tok and Yığın (2013) found that foreigners learn Turkish for economic, educational, tourism, political, and marriage-related reasons. In the study conducted by Başar and Akbulut (2016) in Tbilisi, Turkish learners learn the language for individual interests and requirements, education and employment opportunities, commerce, and classroom interaction. According to the study conducted in France by Güner and Kartal (2021), the objectives for learning Turkish are categorized as individual, academic, social, and economic. The results of this study coincide with those of the aforementioned studies in themes such as humanitarian needs, the need for belonging, getting to know new people, the need for education, the desire to live in Türkiye, familial responsibility, and future-oriented expectations. These are the basic humanitarian needs of every person in Türkiye. The findings of this study differ from the other studies in terms of legal needs, the need for adaptation to prison life, and the desire for early release. In reality, each situation and social context emphasizes its own requirements. For refugee children, these needs may include communication and play with their peers, whereas, for convicts and detainees, they may include communication with the penal facility staff (wardens, teachers, health officers, and the director) and meeting their daily basic needs.

Foreign national convicts and detainees in penal institutions have different context-specific reasons for learning Turkish, according to the findings of this study. They are required to learn Turkish due to the communication skills required for maintaining routine practices, shopping, transferring demands within and outside the institution, and comprehending instructions; sharing and healing needs resulting from being human; the needs for medical-spiritual-social support; and economic motives. Legal needs are an additional purpose for learning Turkish that immediately follows humanitarian needs. Foreign convicts and detainees are motivated to learn Turkish in order to become familiar with the Turkish legal system and to be able to follow the trial proceedings without feeling anxious.

Integration is one of the most essential reasons for foreign convicts and detainees to learn Turkish. The opinions of participants underscore the notion that foreign convicts and detainees require incorporation into institutional life. Those who have lived in a penal facility believe that acquiring Turkish is essential. Tucciarone (2018), in his study on teaching Italian as a second language in prison, states that teaching Italian to foreign convicts will contribute to integration and provide interpersonal communication skills such as empathy, sympathetic listening, and sharing.

Observations reveal that participants who are foreign convicts in Türkiye attach significance to learning Turkish as a means to connect with others, travel, engage in reading, listen to music, social interaction, struggle against discrimination, adjust to the prison environment, and improve a sense of belonging. Furthermore, motivations such as getting to know new people, acculturation, and the need for education are among the objectives of foreign convicts and detainees in learning Turkish.

There is no research found in the literature on the perspectives of foreign convicts and detainees regarding the purposes of learning Turkish and the difficulties they encounter during the process. According to Alyılmaz (2018), learning Turkish as a foreign language may be motivated by personal desire or necessity, and factors such as neighborhood relations, religious-military-commercial relations, migration, tourism, and education are among the primary reasons. The aforementioned determination is consistent with the terms integration necessity, social-personal reasons, and force majeure mentioned in this study in terms of the motivations for foreign national detainees and convicts to learn Turkish. However, when the topic is evaluated from the perspective of penal institution life, it becomes necessary to clarify the Turkish learning purposes of convicts and detainees with more specific reasons to address the issue specifically. This study objectifies the “force majeure” presented by Alyılmaz (2018) with respect to foreign convicts and detainees and deeply examines the reasons deriving from education.

The “future-oriented expectations” such as the desire to live in Türkiye, the desire for early release, and familial responsibilities are additional significant reasons for foreign convicts and detainees to learn Turkish. The issue of early recovery and early release, which was put into practice with the “Regulation on Observation and Classification Centers and Evaluation of Convicts” (Resmî Gazete, 2020), also known as the Good Conduct Regulation, is viewed as a significant source of motivation for foreign convicts to learn Turkish.

Researchers such as Açıık (2008), Biçer (et al., 2014), Derman (2010), Er (et al., 2012), Candaş Karababa (2009), Korkmaz (2018), and Ünal (et al., 2018) have reached a variety of conclusions regarding the difficulties associated with teaching Turkish to non-native speakers. In these studies, issues regarding Turkish linguistic characteristics, language skills, methods-techniques, assessment-evaluation, teachers, and the surrounding environment were examined. The results of the aforementioned studies coincide with the “pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, negative transfer, and alphabet-related linguistic problems” identified as the second sub-problem of this study. In this study, the difficulties encountered by convicts learning Turkish as a foreign language were categorized into three themes. Problems arising from the linguistic characteristics of Turkish and personal issues point to similar categories for those in penal facilities as in other immigrants learning Turkish.

Analyzing the theme of language-related problems, it becomes apparent that foreign convicts and detainees typically experience linguistic difficulties due to their pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, and alphabet. It is believed that this situation is not unique to penal institutions and is similar to the general difficulties encountered in foreign language instruction (Açıık, 2008; Biçer et al., 2014; Derman, 2010; Er et al., 2012; Korkmaz, 2018; Moralı, 2018; Tunagür&Kardaş, 2021; Ünal et al., 2018). Tunagür and Kardaş (2021) revealed in their study that Syrian students have difficulty learning Turkish due to adaptation, alphabet letter differences, linguistic characteristics, personal reasons, and lack of vocabulary. According to the findings of a study conducted by Gürbüz and Güleç (2016) with Turkish students studying in Türkiye, students struggle with grammar, terminology, and pronunciation. Ünal et al. (2018) determined that distinctions in the sentence structures of Turkish and Arabic cause difficulties for Syrian immigrants. According to Korkmaz (2018), Arabic-speaking students may have difficulty pronouncing sounds such as “ü, o, p, j, and c” in Turkish. These results align with the results of this study. In this regard, it can be said that the “language-related problems” identified in this study are consistent with previous research.

Apart from language-related problems, it is believed that “problems arising from limitations” are the most prominent problem identified in the Turkish language teaching activities conducted for foreign national convicts and detainees in this study. It is evident that the limitations-related issues are a lack of technology, practical issues, and guidance. Convicts face practical difficulties due to the fact that their language learning is limited to the classroom. Outside of the classroom, opportunities for systematic language practice are minimal. The problem of lack of a guide is related to the limitation of support that will help

them learn Turkish, answer their questions, and guide the learning process outside the class hours. The lack of technology includes the lack of mobile phones, computers, tablets, internet, and interactive materials in the living environment of the convicts. According to Taşkın (2021), introducing a variety of materials in the instruction of Turkish as a foreign language can enhance the learning experience by appealing students' multiple senses. Nevertheless, due to certain constraints imposed by penal institutions' regulations, the use of technology-based multisensory learning materials is restricted, leading to diverse impacts on the language learning process.

Since convicts and detainees do not have access to a guide outside the classroom, a language-learner peer, or technological resources, learning Turkish as a foreign language is challenging for them. Furthermore, psychological issues, longing for family, and other distractions that may arise as a result of imprisonment are obstacles to the learning process.

As a result, Turkish language teaching in penal institutions is very important in terms of individual needs and social cohesion. However, inmates still experience many problems in the process of learning Turkish. The potential increase in the number of foreign national inmates in penal institutions requires more careful attention to Turkish language teaching in penal institutions.

### **Recommendations**

- Foreign convicts and detainees should be encouraged to learn Turkish so that they can more easily integrate into the country and prison life, socialize, and fulfill their humanitarian and legal needs.
- In order for foreign convicts and detainees to more easily meet their legal needs and adapt to judicial processes and execution procedures, penal institutions should implement Turkish language instruction with a specific purpose.
- The technological transformation of penal execution institutions should be ensured, restrictions should be minimized in the name of educational activities, and if possible, controlled integration of out-of-class environments should be incorporated into education processes.
- The mechanism of good conduct and conditional release should be implemented for detainees who learn Turkish and adapt to the institution,

assuming they fulfill the other essential conditions, and the relevant system should be utilized in a functional way to reinforce learning Turkish.

### **Ethics Approval**

The ethics committee permission for the article was given by the Yıldız Technical University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee at its meeting numbered 2023/08 on August 18, 2023.

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