Language Teachers' Suggestions over Coping with Difficulties in Turkish Language Teaching to Foreigners

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ABSTRACT

As the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language becomes widespread, teaching materials and teaching environments are diversifying and developing. While these developments continue in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, various problems are encountered in adapting and using contemporary teaching methods. From a student perspective, learning a foreign language is not an easy process. Foreign language learners are most likely to face with a new form of sound, different structure, syntax, and a different meaning from their mother tongue. The aim of this study is to determine the problems of the foreign students with learning Turkish language and evaluate the views and suggestions of the teachers of Turkish Language serving in course centres in some cities in Turkey upon over helping students get over the problems encountered by the foreign students in Turkish Language Teaching in classroom environment. We asked two open ended questions to the participant teachers to obtain the data: "What are the problems of foreign students in learning Turkish Language?", and "What do you recommend language students to come over their problems in learning Turkish Language?" We used a qualitative research method to evaluate and compare the suggestions of the teachers of Turkish Language in terms of the feasibilities and implementation process in classroom environment. The research was carried out with the participation of six teachers of Turkish Language working in various course centres in some cities in Turkey. According to the suggestions of language teachers, it is argued that educational technologies and materials should be used, motivation strategies should be applied, some cultural events should be organised in school environments, and teachers should plan course materials together with students.

Key Words: Problems with language learning, Turkish Language Teaching, Educational technologies, Classroom management, Turkish as a foreign language.

1. Introduction

The languages used widely in science, technology, art, tourism and international communication and international affairs are advanced languages and adopted as a foreign language in the world today. The teaching of a language as a foreign language means that the language is not only within its borders, but it also interacts with other nations and cultures, it is studied more so as to be recognized and taught in an effective way. As the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language becomes widespread, teaching materials and teaching environments are diversifying and developing. Various problems and challenges emerge while the development and application efforts are under way to keep pace with the modern educational methods of teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

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Challenges in Teaching Foreign Language

Challenges in teaching foreign language may result from institution, curriculum, teacher, course materials, personal traits of the student, cultural difference, learning skill and style of the student, alphabet difference of the target language. Foreign learners may have difficulties in establishing certain grammatical units and structures for some reasons arising from the fact that target language belongs to a different language family structure from their mother tongue (Mavaşoğlu and Tüm, 2010).

Language teachers emphasize that foreign language classes provide a wide range of applications in the classroom environment and positive benefits for the students with the help of many different resources in the way of making different senses and competences effective (Kayalar and Kayalar, 2017). Appropriate learning environments are important elements in language teaching through motivating students in individual-centred method using language (Özer and Korkmaz, 2016). If the students can be equipped with a positive environment for their language learning, this will help the students achieve language learning skill by the teachers.

At the centre of teaching and learning process are social relationships and political realities. In this assumption, learning is argued to emerge from socio-cultural and political spaces through the relationships and interactions between teachers and learners. Sociocultural and socio-political perspectives are first and foremost based on the assumption that are at the heart of teaching and learning foreign language. That is, the achievements in learning foreign language emerge from the social, cultural, and political spaces in which it takes place, and through the interactions and relationships that occur between learners and teachers (Nieto, 2010).

Studies (Berne, 2004; Graham, 2006) have shown that foreign language learners cannot fully achieve effective listening skills although they are aware of the importance of listening skills, It is argued that effective listening skill is the most difficult skill to develop and acquire, and thus they cannot fully understand what they are listening to. On the other hand, foreign language learners might have limited vocabulary in the languages they learn (Staehr, 2009), encounter many different accents (Scales et al. 2006), and might not be able to perceive phonological changes. The sentence structure of the target language might differ from that of mother tongue (Açık, 2008, İşcan, & Aydın, 2014), and they might have difficulty understanding proverbs and idioms in target language.

Problems in Teaching Turkish to Foreigners

The number of foreign students who want to study in universities in Turkey increases day by day, because Turkey, which is located at the crossway of Asia, Europe and Africa, is host to different cultures and civilizations due to its geographical position, Turkish businessmen improve foreign relations within the scope of economic activities, the introduction of Turkey into international arena by the international organizations and institutions and the media has increased the interest in Turkish as a foreign language. Thus, Turkish language has started to be taught in Turkey and in other countries as a foreign language by various institutions and organizations (Kaldırım and Degeç, 2017).

One of the most important problems in teaching Turkish to foreigners is that the studies describing the grammar of Turkish language functionally and in all aspects are not sufficient (Karababa, 2009). In the studies carried out on the problems encountered in teaching Turkish to foreigners, the researchers (Er et al, 2012; Alyılmaz, 2010; Arslan and Adem, 2010; Demir and Açık, 2011; Derman, 2010; Doğan, 1989) have determined some problems such as inadequacy in terms of teaching materials, lack of course materials in the course centre, lack of a serious website for teaching Turkish to foreigners, deficiencies in the measurement-evaluation parts of textbooks, failure of textbooks to meet learners' expectations, shortage of printed materials with visual aids, and use of foreign language sets prepared for English in teaching Turkish to foreigners.

In the studies carried out in Turkey to find out the sources of the problems in teaching Turkish to foreign learners, some interesting points have been revealed for this subject such as problems arising from curriculum or educational programs (Biçer, 2017), the proficiency level of the lecturers (Çoban-Sural and Güler-Arı, 2017), course materials used in teaching Turkish language (Dağ-Pestil, 2016), language skills of the learners (Kayalar and Kayalar (2017), social levels and personal traits of the learners, educational environment (Kayalar and Kayalar, 2016), and the duration of the courses.

2. Method

2.1 Problem Statement and Purpose

In the study on Language Teachers' Suggestions over Coping with Difficulties in Turkish Language Teaching to Foreigners, we aimed to find out important suggestions of the teachers working in the language centres for immigrants to Turkey regarding what should be done to cope with the difficulties encountered in teaching Turkish to them. We determined two problem statements: (1) What are the sources of challenges and difficulties in teaching Turkish to the immigrants to Turkey? And (2) What are the remedies of the problems with the students learning Turkish as a foreign language?. In relevant to the purpose of the study we asked the participant teachers "What are the problems of foreign students in learning Turkish Language?", and "What do you recommend language students to come over their problems in learning Turkish Language?"

2.2. Methods and Research Design

In the study, a qualitative research method was used to determine and evaluate lecturers' views on Language Teachers' Suggestions over Coping with Difficulties in Turkish Language Teaching to Foreigners. The reason why we have chosen qualitative research method is that this kind of methodological approach enables researchers to evaluate, interpret and make judgement about immeasurable data. Qualitative analysis is a technique that allows us to understand how and when social events and cases occur. In qualitative research, rather than measuring the purpose, it is the in-depth study and the study of variables. However, although qualitative methods can not be counted, there is always the possibility of being converted into numerical data .

We carried out this research with the views of instructors teaching Turkish language in various Turkish Language teaching centres in some cities in Turkey through face to face interview. By examining the data obtained by the researcher in the course of coding the data, the researcher tries to separate the data into meaningful parts and to find out what each part conceptually means (Creswell, 2003). Sometimes this can be a sentence, sometimes a paragraph, and sometimes a whole page, while these parts sometimes refer to only one word. These sections, which have a meaningful consistency within themselves, are named by the researcher; In short, it is coded. The investigator codes all the data in this way and thus creates a code list (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

2.3. Participants

The participants in our study were six instructors who teach Turkish languages in different language centres in Turkey. As shown in Table 1 and 2, half of the participants are female; the range of age is 25-45 years, with 6-18 years of teaching experience. We obtained the data from 6 instructors who admitted to be involved in the interview for the research in face to face interview. The participants were asked whether they were contented to answer to the questions, and then we applied the tool. The names of the lecturers are coded with letters and the duration of their experience, their gender and the location of their workplace are mentioned.

Table 1: *Statistical data as to Gender, Age, Language and Years of Experience of the Instructors*

Gender		Age		Locations		Experience	
Male	3	25-35 years	4	Ankara	1	1-10 years	4
Female	3	36-45 years	2	Erzincan	1	11-21 years	2
				Gaziantep	1		
				Erzurum	1		
				Trabzon	2		

2.4. Research Instrument

In the study, we used the tool with semi structured interview form to gather data from the instructors. We asked two open ended questions to the participants. The questions were designed in accordance with the source of the difficulties and challenges in teaching Turkish language to the immigrants in language centres. The questions asked to the instructors during the interview were formed by the help and directions of three experts in the fields of Educational Sciences and Language Teaching.

2.5. Data analysis

We did the face-to-face interviewing with the participants to obtain the necessary data for our study; we abstracted the statements obtained from the lecturers and made them into pure data. The data were then transferred and digitalized into computer in order to form digital data. We used content analysis with the percentage and frequency values. According to Özdemir (2010). Content analysis is one of the most frequently used methods of qualitative data analysis. Content analysis is a method used mainly in analyzing written and visual data. A deductive way is followed in this method.

3. Findings

The oral statements we obtained from the instructors working in various centres of language teaching for the questions in the semi-structured interview form were processed after having been typed, arranged, summarized, filtered and extracted. The final statements are given below.

The questions that we asked the instructors are "What are the problems of foreign students in learning Turkish Language?", and "What do you recommend language students to come over their problems in learning Turkish Language?" The sample statements reflecting the views of the instructors for the first question are given as followings. From the replies to the questions we have the conclusion that the main sources of problems shown in table 2 include the problems arising from Curriculum followed in language centres, proficiency levels of the instructors teaching Turkish to immigrants coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and some other countries, course materials used in classrooms, learning skills of the students, educational environment, personal traits of the learners and different grammatical structure of Turkish language.

Table 2: *Content analysis in terms of the source of motivation loss*

The Source of Problem	Language Centre	Number	%	Total Percentage
Curriculum	Erzincan	1	**16.5%**	
	Ankara	1	**16.5%**	**49.5%**
	Trabzon	1	**16.5%**	
Proficiency Level of the Teacher	Erzincan	1	**16.5%**	
	Ankara	1	**16.5%**	
Course Materials	Erzincan	2	**33%**	
	Ankara	1	**16.5%**	
	Trabzon	1	**16.5%**	**100%**
	Gaziantep	1	**16.5%**	
	Erzurum	1	**16.5%**	
Learning Skills of the students	Ankara	1	**16.5%**	
	Gaziantep	1	**16.5%**	**49.5%**
	Trabzon	1	**16.5%**	
Inappropriate Educational Environment	Gaziantep	1	**16.5%**	**33%**
	Trabzon	1	**16.5%**	
Personal Traits of the Students	Erzincan	1	**16.5%**	
	Ankara	1	**16.5%**	
	Trabzon	1	**16.5%**	**82.5%**
	Gaziantep	1	**16.5%**	
	Erzurum	1	**16.5%**	
Different Structure of Target Language	Erzincan	1	**16.5%**	
	Ankara	1	**16.5%**	
	Trabzon	1	**16.5%**	**82.5%**
	Gaziantep	1	**16.5%**	
	Erzurum	1	**16.5%**	

The replies to the questions that we asked the instructors are as below.

(A.S., Female, Instructor in Erzincan, 3 years of experience): *"…. The main problems are that the mother tongues of the students are belonging to a different language family and the language systems are different from the Turkish language. Especially as the Turkish alphabet is different, it is very difficult for the students to read and write Turkish. Another problem is that immigrant students cannot correctly order the suffixes and additions*

to the words in the sentence because it is an articulate language. The incompatibility or unconventionality of the words between the mother tongue and the target language can also create reluctance in learning Turkish language…...”

From the views and the statements of the instructor, it appears that the structural differences between the mother tongue and the target language create difficulties in learning and motivation of the learners. Most of the immigrants come from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, and their native languages are Persian and Arabic, both of which are read from right to left. In contrast, Turkish language is read from left to right just as the other European languages. Because of these differences, foreign learners from Arabic and Persian-spoken countries experience various problems in writing, speaking and voicing while they are learning Turkish (Karababa, 2009). For example, it is very difficult for a student with a native Arabic language to be able to pronounce the "ö", because this voice is not in its own language. This leads to great difficulties for the new immigrant learners to read and write Turkish language.

(A. T. Male, Instructor in Ankara, 10 years of experience): *“….Without teaching materials for language courses it is impossible to teach a foreign language in classroom environment. Teaching materials, tools and textbooks appropriate to the needs, levels and diversity of Turkish language learners are not enough. Smart board, projection, and charts make teaching easy and motivate the learners in classroom. Besides, I want to mean curriculum. It is necessary to prepare teaching programs in accordance with the needs and levels of learners who learn Turkish language. For example, if the learners, whether young or adult, are completely different in their language learning styles and interests, appropriate teaching programs and appropriate textbooks should be prepared for them…. “*

The instructor emphasizes the requirement and importance of teaching materials in educational environment, especially for language courses. Training applications are being made use of teaching technologies and materials to meet the three main requirements. The first of these is to provide education services for wider populations. The second is to make learning-teaching processes in existing educational institutions productive and the third is to individualize learning-teaching activities. To put it more precisely, Kaya (2006) states that teaching technology and materials are most concerned with the work to develop systems for creating capacity in education and increasing the efficiency of education.

Uniform curriculum is not always compatible with every language teaching purpose. It should be flexible according to the conditions of the learners. According to Karababa (2009), 'Uniform Curriculum', which is not prepared in accordance with the diversity of those learning Turkish language, and the course materials and textbooks created in parallel with it, could affect teaching environments negatively. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) prepared to guide the teaching of foreign languages in order to create a contemporary educational environment in teaching Turkish as a foreign language will contribute greatly to the teaching of Turkish by using the criteria contained in this file.

 (F. N., Female, Instructor in Gaziantep, 11 years of experience): *“….. It comes to me that one of the most important problems in teaching Turkish language to the foreign students is that the instructors are not able to predict the learning needs of the target group about the language and culture being taught. The novice*

instructors are inadequate about the intermediate language that can communicate with the target group, and the students do not have knowledge about the structure of their own mother tongue. The instructors find themselves in teaching activities of Turkish language after a one-month in-service course. They are having difficulties in teaching Turkish language to foreigners because they are trained to teach Turkish language to Turkish students not foreigners…"

Teaching Turkish to foreigners requires having some qualifications. In fact, the features that every teacher should have should be sought more in teachers who teach Turkish to foreigners (Çoban-Sural and Güler-Arı, 2017). The teaching experts who will train the instructors should be field experts who are specialized in foreign language teaching and who are aware of applied modern language teaching methods and techniques.

The qualification issue in the teaching profession is an important agenda of not only our country but all the countries of the world. Over the past years, the issue that has come to the agenda more intensely is teaching Turkish as a foreign language and educating teachers for this field. Unfortunately, studies carried out so far have revealed the fact that the instructors who teach Turkish are inexperienced in these matters. In teaching Turkish to foreigners, the instructors face different age groups and students from different countries with different interests. These situations require teachers to use different approaches, methods and techniques. However, there is no room for special teacher training for this area, and the lack of explicit teacher qualifications for this area turn out to be a major drawback.

Therefore, teachers working in this area are not in a position to produce solutions to many different problems, but they try to solve the problems they have encountered through trial and error, and they have trouble in creating necessary teaching materials. For this reason, the existence of a qualified supportive teacher and a continuous support provided to the teachers in the professional development for the qualified teaching is inevitable in teaching Turkish language to foreigners.

4. Conclusion

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language has been one of the topics that have been worked on rapidly in recent years. In this context, in the data obtained according to the duration of the service, the teachers who have new experience in the field between 0-5 years are more sensitive and aware about the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language. It is understood that teachers who are 16-year experience in teaching and over are in control of the subject as a result of experiencing life. From the statements of the participant instructors in our study, it can be concluded that instructors should be aware of the characteristics of languages coming from different language families and have the ability to distinguish the difference between Turkish and other languages. They should appreciate the differences in learning style in their teaching practice (Kayalar and Kayalar, 2017). They should make comparative studies about the characteristics of the mother tongue and the target language that the Turkic people will learn by grasping the properties such as syntactic, semantic, phonological and vocabulary. In an effort to improve language skills of the students, teaching staff such as lecturers and instructors should observe, evaluate, record and do the reflection of learning in the classroom and use their findings. They should be trained in in-service training.

The problems faced by the instructors should be solved by the institutions. Teaching materials and tools should meet the needs of the target language learners. Instructional tools and equipment should be compatible with individual differences, and they should include more cultural elements on the target language. The learning environment should be student-centered and will allow the student to move freely. The educational environment must be designed as a solution center for the linguistic, cultural and vital challenges that students will encounter in their daily lives.

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