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What Do Stakeholders and Social Media Say About Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Children?¹

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ABSTRACT

The increase in and development of studies in the field of Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Children (TTFLC) can be attributed to the political and cultural events that took place within the last decade. Especially, as a result of the Syrian War that started in 2011, huge number of Syrians migrated to Turkey and it became mandatory to conduct studies in the field of TTFLC. The extraordinary increase in the number of children learning Turkish in Turkey led to an insufficiency of the current education program and teaching resources in the field of TTFLC. The aim of this study is to lay out the teaching and program-related problems and needs encountered in the field of TTFLC between the ages of 7-11. In this study designed as a qualitative phenomenological study, interviews were conducted with stakeholders and analyses of teachers' social media posts were carried out. Participants were selected using the criterion sampling method. In this study, interviews were held with 16 Turkish teachers, three faculty members, three parents, and three non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives. Social media posts relating to teaching Turkish to foreigners were also analyzed. The findings obtained as a result of the data analysis pointed out inadequacy of the TTFLC program, lack of teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, differences in the cultural characteristics of children, and various other issues.

Key Words: Turkish as a foreign language for children, teaching Turkish, foreign language teaching

Paydaşların ve Sosyal Medya Kullanıcılarının Görüşlerine Göre Çocuklara Yönelik Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğretimi

ÖZET

Çocuklara yönelik yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi (ÇYDTÖ) alanında yürütülen çalışmaların artması ve gelişmesi son on yılda yaşanan siyasi ve kültürel olayların sonucunda gerçekleşmiştir. 2011 yılında başlayan Suriye Savaşı sonrasında yaşanan gelişmelerin sonucunda ÇYDTÖ alanında çalışmalar yapmak bir zorunluluk hâline gelmiştir. Ülkemizde Türkçe öğrenen çocuk sayısının olağanın üstünde bir seyirle artması, ÇYDTÖ alanındaki mevcut öğretim programı ve öğretim kaynaklarının yetersiz kalmasına neden olmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı, 7-11 yaş arasındaki çocuklara yönelik yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi alanında karşılaşılan öğretim ve programa ilişkin problem ve ihtiyaçları ortaya koymaktır. Olgubilim deseninde nitel bir araştırma olan ihtiyaç analizi çalışmasında paydaşlar ile görüşmeler yapılmış ve öğretmenlerin paylaşımlarının olduğu sosyal medya analizleri yapılmıştır. Katılımcılar ölçüt örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırmada çocuklara Türkçe öğreten on altı Türkçe öğretmeni, üç öğretim elemanı, üç öğrenci velisi ve üç sivil toplum kuruluşu (STK) temsilcisiyle görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Yabancılarla Türkçe öğretimi ile ilgili kurulmuş olan sosyal medyadaki paylaşımlar da analiz edilmiştir. Veri analizinin sonucunda elde edilen bulgular; ÇYDTÖ'nde programın yetersizliğinden, materyallerin olmamasına, sınıf mevcudunun kalabalıklığından, çocukların kültürel özelliklerine kadar çeşitli sorunların yaşandığını ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuklar için yabancı dil olarak Türkçe, Türkçe öğretimi, yabancı dil öğretimi

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Introduction

In today's world, foreign language education has gained significance as a result of globalization. One of the fundamental values of the European Union is respect for linguistic diversity, the most important component of global diversity (Can, 2009). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which lays the groundwork for the preparation of education programs oriented towards target languages, program instructions, and exams and textbooks in EU countries, has been shaped in line with three basic principles determined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CMCoE). The first principle emphasizes the need to protect and foster cultural diversity and indicates that activities need to be carried out in the field of education to ensure European languages become an enriching resource. The second principle states that knowledge of European languages will promote a decrease in discrimination and facilitate mobility, interactions and cooperation between countries. The final principle puts forward that member states can build stronger ties with respect to political precautions by determining and improving national policies involving modern language teaching (TELC, 2013). One of the decisions made by the CMCoE to encourage and protect a multilingual and multicultural environment in Europe includes the decision to promote and support linguistic and cultural diversity among children.

As an extension of these policies, it has been observed that studies in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Children have been developing rapidly. Relevant studies show that adopting approaches focused on the development of the communicative dimensions of language enable more effective and more permanent language learning (Cameron, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Haznedar, 2013; Nunan, 1989; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As an extension of socio-cultural theory, researchers in the field have frequently emphasized the use of meaningful content and language in the language learning process of children (Cameron, 2001). Children acquire the communicative dimension of language by using it in meaningful, real and authentic experiences (Cameron, 2001). For this reason, several studies have highlighted the importance of using activities focused on meaning and communication, such as storytelling, playing games, drama and group activities, as language learning and teaching tools in order to engage children in class and keep them involved (Akcan, 2013; Aktaş & İşigüzel, 2013; Cameron, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Gül-Peker, 2013; Haznedar, 2013). Studies on the development of the four basic language skills hold a significant place in teaching language to children (Cameron, 2001; Yüksel, 2013; Hanbay, 2013; Yangın-Ersanlı, 2013). As the development of literacy takes time since it relies on the development of cognitive and motor skills, the view that emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking skills in language learning, particularly for young children, has gained prominence.

However, studies are not limited to teaching English as a foreign language to children. There are also studies that were conducted much earlier on the teaching of a country's official language to children of immigrant and refugee families (Krashen, 1982; Verhoeven, 1987). In Turkey, until roughly ten years ago, English teaching came to mind when the matter at hand was teaching a foreign language to children. The few studies on Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Children (TTFLC) focused on the education of the children of immigrant Turkish families who lived in Europe. Nevertheless, since the students who attended these classes offered in European countries were of Turkish origin, it has been argued that these programs were not truly Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (TTFL) programs (Yağmur, 2009).

The increase in and development of studies in the field of TTFLC can be attributed to the political and cultural events that took place within the last decade. Especially, as a result of the Syrian War that

started in 2011, huge number of Syrians migrated to Turkey and it became mandatory to conduct studies in the field of TTFLC. The extraordinary increase in the number of children learning Turkish in Turkey led to an insufficiency of the current education program and teaching resources in the field of TTFLC. Learning the language of the country in which they live during the adaptation process is the most important factor that enables refugee children to access education opportunities, develop resilience, and improve their self-sufficiency skills (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). For this reason, in Turkey, the language barrier has been the greatest obstacle in the way of education for foreign children who arrived in large numbers within a short period of time.

In order to solve this fundamental issue, a program called "Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language" for children between the ages of 6-12 was prepared by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Directorate General for Lifelong Learning in 2016. The program was designed for non-formal education centers and implemented in centers called Temporary Education Centers (TECs). TECs were established with the aim of enabling children under temporary education whose education was interrupted to continue learning and preparing them for the schools they will attend in either their native countries or Turkey. At these centers, half of the lessons are allotted to the curriculum of the children's native countries while the other half is allotted to Turkish teaching. In the "Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language" (MEB, 2016) program, procedures relating to the implementation of the program, teaching methods, content, and assessment and evaluation were explained. However, with respect to the content of the program, no details were provided aside from information on themes, learning outcomes, and a few examples of grammatical constructions. Most recently, in 2019 Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF) and the MoNE jointly prepared a more detailed program for Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language in order to be used in domestic and international (non-)formal education for teaching Turkish as a foreign language. This program consists of the following: the base and approach of the program, the program's goals, the general layout of the program according to the grades, the assessment and evaluation approach, suggestions for the instruction of the program, the objectives according to skills and levels, the list of language structure according to levels, and syllabuses (TMV, 2019). However, limited research has been conducted on the implementation of the program prepared by the TMF. For the improvement of the program, identifying the problems encountered in the implementation of the program and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the program are important (Ulutaş & Kara, 2019).

It is important to note that TTFL is not limited to Syrian children. Since the number of children learning Turkish under temporary protection is much higher than other groups, several studies have focused on them (Aykırı, 2017; Biçer & Kılıç, 2017; Er & Bayındır, 2015; Moralı, 2018); nonetheless, TTFL also encompasses international students enrolled in international schools or other formal education institutions in Turkey along with children from different nationalities learning Turkish abroad. In this respect, although there are studies that cover all children learning Turkish, they are very limited in number (Ak, 2019; TMV, 2019).

Research reveals that teachers in particular experience various problems in practice. The primary problem lies in the insufficiency of the teaching materials used by teachers. It has been stated that the existing textbooks and tools are not suitable for children's language levels and ages (Biçer & Kılıç, 2017; Moralı, 2018). Studies conducted abroad also point to this problem (Balcı & Melanlıoğlu, 2016). Other problems include classroom management issues, such as students' absenteeism or tardiness, and maintaining classroom discipline (Aykırı, 2017; Büyükkız & Çangal, 2016; Moralı, 2018). An additional problem that has been observed is the fact that teachers feel inadequate (Aykırı 2017; Büyükkız &

Çangal, 2016; Er & Bayındır, 2015; Eyüp, Arslan & Cevher, 2017; Koçoğlu & Yelken, 2018). In order to find solutions to such problems, teachers have formed groups on various social media platforms and have shared their problems along with their own solutions. Overall, various problems have been observed in the teaching of Turkish to foreign children in both national and international primary schools, and many of the relevant studies focus primarily on Syrian children and the views of their teachers.

For this reason, the present study aims to put forth the problems relating to the program and teaching of Turkish as a foreign language by taking into consideration all foreign students learning Turkish along with the relevant stakeholders in the field of TTFLC. To this end, the views of Turkish teachers, faculty members who are experts in this field, parents, and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were obtained and the social media posts of teachers were analyzed.

Method

Research Design

In this study, phenomenological design was applied with the aim of revealing perceptions of stakeholders regarding TTFLC based on their experiences. The phenomenon addressed in this study is the teaching of Turkish to foreign children between the ages of 7-11. In phenomenological research, the researcher attempts to identify and define the phenomenon that underlies the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). In order to thoroughly understand what the phenomenon is, the questions of 'what' the participants experienced and 'how' these experiences unfolded need to be answered (Moustakas, 1994). The primary aim of the research is to reveal the universal meaning which lies in the essence of the experience by analyzing the views of the individuals who lived the experience (Creswell, 2013).

Data Sources: Participants and Social Media

Interviews were held with 16 Turkish teachers, three faculty members, three parents, and three NGO representatives who actively work in the field in order to determine the problems children aged 7-11 face when learning Turkish. This study paid special attention to obtaining views from a wide variety of stakeholders.

The maximum variation sampling method was used in the recruitment of teachers. The school diversity and gender of teachers were taken into consideration. The 16 Turkish teachers consisted of the following: teachers that teach Syrians under temporary protection at TECs, Turkish teachers at minority/private/public schools, and Turkish teachers at international schools. Two of the teachers were male and the rest were female; seven teachers worked at TECs, three worked at private schools (with mixed classrooms containing Turkish students), three worked at international schools, one worked at a minority school, and one worked at a public school (with mixed classrooms containing Turkish students).

Three parents to be interviewed were selected through criterion sampling. In terms of criteria, attention was paid to ensure they were parents of children of different nationalities. The three parents that were reached were of different nationalities and their children had different reasons for learning Turkish. Two of the parents were females while one was a male. They came from the United States, Russia and Ukraine. The parents of children under temporary protection were also targeted to reflect diversity; however, due to various reasons also stated in the relevant studies, such as parents not accompanying

their children to school, inability to establish a common language, etc., interviews were unable to be held.

The other stakeholders that were interviewed consisted of three faculty members and three NGO representatives that work actively in the field, and they were also selected through criterion sampling. The criterion for determining the faculty members was having conducted studies in the field of TTFL. Three faculty members held positions at the Turkish Teaching Centers of universities and taught courses in the field of TTFL. Moreover, the criterion for selecting NGO representatives was having worked actively in Turkish teaching for at least one year. Three female NGO representatives held active roles at an NGO which teaches Turkish to children.

Additionally, two social media groups (on Facebook) of teachers who are actively involved in teaching of Turkish to foreign children were also analysed: 'Suriyeliler için Türkçe Öğretimi Materyal & Ders Notu Paylaşımı' (Teaching Turkish to Syrians Materials and Lecture Notes Sharing) and 'Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçenin Öğretimi' (Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language).

Data Collection

Interviewing is a method of data collection that is frequently used in educational sciences. Especially in phenomenological research, it is an effective method that is implemented to thoroughly understand the knowledge, feelings, thoughts and views of participants regarding the phenomenon at hand. The aim of the researchers in interviews is to find out what is in the mind of the interviewee, understand their perspective and collect authentic information from them. Interviewing is opted for in situations where direct observation is not feasible and when past life experiences are desired to be learned (Patton, 2002). Separate interview questions were prepared for each participant group by the researchers, and the views of experts in assessment and evaluation and TTFL were obtained. In the first section of the interview forms, age and gender information was requested to collect demographic information. Under the heading 'General Questions', teachers were asked what their major was in university, whether they attended a certification program in the field of TTFL, and how many years of teaching experience they had both in teaching children Turkish and in general. Under the same heading, faculty members were asked under which department they taught courses, whether the department they worked in offered graduate (thesis/non-thesis) or certification programs in the field of TTFL, and which courses they taught in the field of TTFL. Furthermore, NGO representatives were asked at which NGO they worked, their role at the NGO, and how long they had been involved in that role. Lastly, parents were asked how long they had been living with their child in Turkey, how old their child was, and whether their child had started school before moving to Turkey.

In the final section of the form, teachers were asked about the kinds of problems they faced in TTFLC and their experiences and views regarding TTFLC. With respect to the current teaching program, faculty members were asked about their views on the problems faced in the field of TTFL, certificates granted to teachers, the content of the (non-)thesis graduate programs and their suggestions relating to TTFL for the relevant age group. Parents were asked about the challenges they faced during the Turkish learning process at school. Lastly, NGO representatives were asked about their experiences and views regarding TTFL they offer outside of school.

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the interview if they wished to do so. Moreover, they were informed the interview would be audio-recorded and were asked for permission. The decision of some participants

to refuse an audio-recording was respected and notes were taken instead. During the interview, the necessary conditions were provided for the interviewees to feel comfortable. The interviews lasted about 25 minutes.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. Content analysis is a form of interpretation that provides generalizations from qualitative to quantitative data for the structuring and classification of meaning and to reveal the common aspects of a large amount of textual content. The main purpose of content analysis is to unveil the concepts and relationships that can explain the obtained data. To accomplish this, the collected data must first be conceptualized and then organized into a logical format according to the concepts that emerge, and themes to explain the data must be determined (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

The stages of content analysis applied to the data obtained from open-ended questions can be summarized as follows: In the first stage, the data obtained from the open-ended questions were read a few times, and then the answers of the participants were transcribed. Next, the words and sentences in the data were carefully read and marked using certain codes that were decided on.

The codes that were created were reviewed, the finalized codes were categorized, and themes were created based on meaning integrity. These coding efforts were carried out by the researchers. For reliability, upon the completion of the coding, an academic who has a good command of quantitative research methods and specializes in Curriculum and Instruction was consulted. Accordingly, by comparing the themes formed by the two parties, the differing themes were reviewed and a consensus was reached. An example of content analysis is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Sample

Transcript 1	Code	Theme
"[Under normal circumstances, we teach them enough Turkish to allow them to meet their everyday needs] but [there must be a variety of books to promote the development of children's writing skills.]" NGO 1	5.2. Preparation for mixed classes with Turkish students	5.Language level differences
	3.1.Lack of instructional materials	3.Inadequacy of instructional materials and resources

The posts of groups that share significant posts on social media in the area of TTFLC and TFL in general were examined. The selected social media content was analyzed with respect to the school at which the teacher was employed, the grade level and subject matter they taught, the problems they posted about and their suggestions.

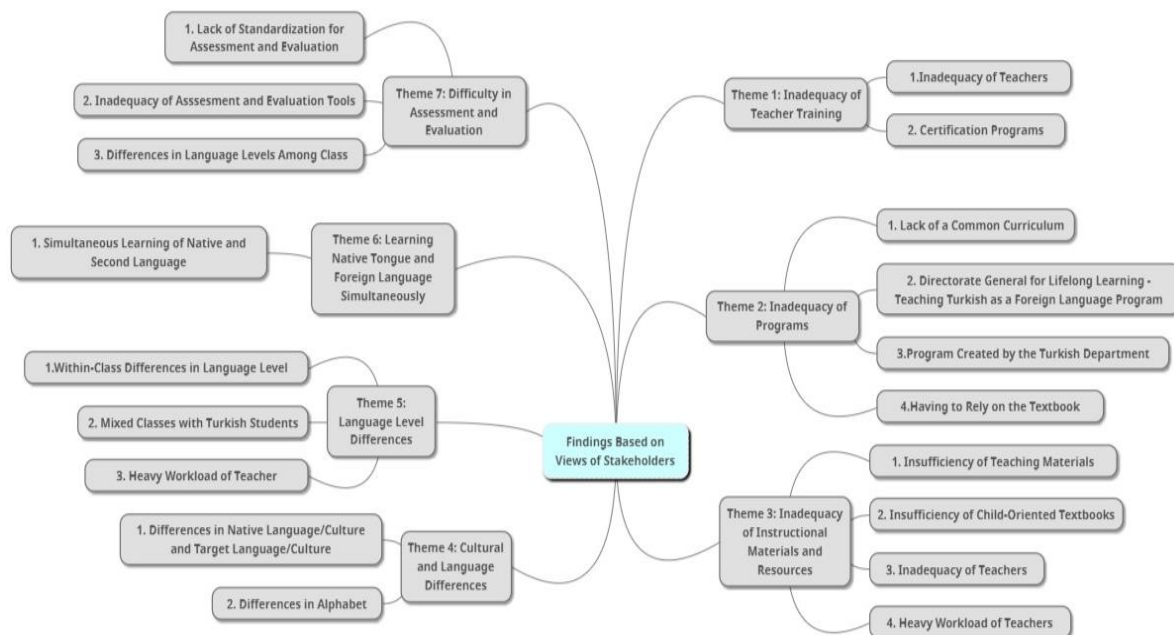
Trustworthiness of the Research

Qualitative research is context-oriented and generalizations cannot be made, as in quantitative research. However, qualitative researchers need to be able to demonstrate the transferability of their findings to similar settings. In order to ensure the transferability of the context of the research to other settings, the case, data sources, data collection process and data analysis process must be described in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1999). For this reason, the methods section provides a detailed explanation. During data analysis, coding was done by various experts and a consensus was reached afterwards.

Findings

In the analysis of data obtained from interviews with sixteen teachers, three faculty members, three NGO representatives, and three parents and from social media posts, seven themes were identified. Figure 1 shows the themes and codes that emerged from the findings. Then, descriptions of the codes collected under seven themes were provided and the views of stakeholders on the subject and social media posts were presented. For confidentiality reasons, codes were assigned for the roles of the participants (T=Teacher, P=Parent, FM=Faculty Members, NGO=Non-governmental Organization Representative, R=Researcher, SMU: Social Media User).

Figure 1. Codes and themes obtained from interviews



Theme 1: Inadequacy of Teacher Training

The faculty members drew attention to the fact that today's teachers are not ready or well-equipped in the teaching of Turkish to children. In this respect, the teachers that were interviewed indicated that they received little or no training in TTFL in the programs they graduated from.

"(...) I majored in Primary School Teaching. In university, I did not receive any training in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language. When I suddenly found myself in this field, I experience several problems." T1

"The individuals doing this job should not be people who have never taught a foreign language to a single person in their lives. Not everything is about certificates. I received my master's and PhD degree in this field as an independent discipline. But this does not mean much either." FM2

Regarding certification programs for the development of teachers in the field, the participants pointed out that there is a lack of practice in the training and the certification programs which are not child-oriented but adult-oriented.

“They were theoretical, but practice was also necessary. We were not asked to apply what we learned.” T2

“Well, they talked about subjects like speaking, writing and listening. They provided academic information. In Antalya, we were not given much information on how to use this in the field. The same goes for Istanbul. It was a bit superficial. That's why I don't think they were very effective.” T5

“The graduate programs and certification programs in TTFL are a step of pedagogical formation in establishing theoretical information and conveying it to individuals. (...) For this reason, alongside what is provided, lessons should be monitored or there should be practice lessons and internships. I believe we are lacking in this area.” FM2

“I feel that there is a more adult-oriented program in Turkey.” FM3

Among social media posts, there were also certain criticisms regarding the quality of many certification programs that have been introduced to meet the increasing demand.

“However, recently, subjects apart from English, German, and French language and literature have been included in the area of TTFL, giving rise to solely profit-oriented certificates, which I find to be deplorable. It's inevitable that unqualified products will be born out of this kind of capital. (...) There are people who think/are made to believe they are experts in the field upon obtaining a certificate after 2 weeks or 1 month of training.” SMU1

Theme 2: Inadequacy of Programs

The interview results revealed that there is not a standard and well-established implementation of a TTFLC program. The teachers who teach Turkish to mixed classrooms with foreign and Turkish students expressed that they prepared the TTFLC teaching programs themselves together with the Turkish department in their school in order to achieve a certain standard within the school. The NGO representatives mentioned that they initially had to prepare the program themselves. They stated that they later continued to plan the teaching using their own programs as the teaching became more systematic, but they also took advantage of the newly published resources. The participants employed at a private international school said that they prepared their own program by taking into account the objectives of the MoNE's Turkish (as a native language) curriculum and objectives of their own school. Some of the participants stated that the Turkish teachers at TECs in particular made use of the TTFL Program designed by DGLL.

The findings obtained from the analysis of the interviews show that one problem experienced in teaching was the insufficiency of the current TTFLC programs. One participant that used the program stated that there were discrepancies between the textbook they used and the program and that this created problems during the teaching process.

“I generally adhere to the program. (...) We usually follow its books... I actually want to stick to the program more, but there are so many inconsistencies between the book and program; I analyzed both and there are a lot of differences.” T4

Some of the participants mentioned that due to the lack of a sufficiently detailed teaching program to guide teachers, they mostly had to stick to textbooks, and this situation required them to be in constant communication with other teachers teaching the same language level, which took up a lot of additional time. Another problem that was expressed involved the fact that they were restricted in developing their own teaching materials since they adhered to the books so much.

“I go home and think about what I should do that day or I usually prepare a weekly program. (...) We have to do all of this on our own. This increases our workload, and I could use that time to prepare activities for the children, but there are a lot of things I have to think about with respect to this topic.” T3

“This requires us to closely follow the book. Actually, if there was a curriculum we could use aside from this, maybe we could create our own resources. We could design different materials. Misconceptions may arise leading some to believe the book itself is the curriculum and everything has to be in line with the book.” T10

Theme 3: Inadequacy of Instructional Materials and Resources

Participants expressed that they mostly used textbooks for adults in their lessons or that the textbooks they found for children were not sufficient in engaging children in class. Participants mentioned the need for textbooks appropriate for the children's cultures. They argued that this would allow teachers to establish stronger communication with students and would prevent the gap caused by intercultural differences. Participants also frequently drew attention to the lack of visual and audio materials to complement textbooks in teaching Turkish. Furthermore, participants stated that the online activity pages they were able to access were not sufficient and that the activity pages they did find for children were not suitable for the field of TTFL. Additionally, participants also mentioned a lack of academic resources as a further problem. They said that they were not able to find enough resources in the field of TTFL to improve themselves in the areas in which they experienced difficulties in the teaching process.

“Under normal circumstances, we teach them enough Turkish to allow them to meet their everyday needs, but there needs to be a variety of books to promote the development of children's writing skills.” NGO 1

“I think the books should also contain aspects of our culture. I believe the child will learn better if they can compare. They will be able to conceptualize better if they know the

equivalent in their own language. I'm a bit scared. Because the child might become confused." P3

"The Turkish resources we found were handwritten. This inhibited us from using the materials." NGO 2

The social media analysis also revealed that most of the posts were about the needs for instructional materials and resources. In the social media posts, it was observed that teachers, teacher candidates and parents frequently expressed a lack of materials in the field and asked each other for help. As seen below, the fact that the first option in a study which investigates the most important need for Syrian children is 'materials' corroborates this situation.

"Hi to all, which is the most important need in the field of teaching Turkish to Syrian children?

Material +47

Instructional material and curriculum +17

Practice +8" SMU2

Moreover, in the posts, teachers expressed that they were inexperienced because they had newly graduated or were teaching foreign students in mixed classes for the first time. Besides, it is mostly seen that inexperienced teachers ask for help in topics such as teaching methods-techniques and implementing activities.

"I live abroad and I teach Turkish to children here. Where can I find resources? Is there anyone that can help? How about an institution from which I can remotely obtain a TTFL certificate?" SMU3

"I'm going to teach A1 Turkish to Arab students at an independent institution. Can anyone recommend any resources? Which is the best? Also, does anyone have materials containing lesson plans, a list of topics to be covered, or the like? It's my first time teaching, so I'm inexperienced. I'm researching other things too and I'm trying to create a lesson plan myself." SMU4

"I'm going to start teaching for the first time. I'm a Turkish teacher. How should I approach the class, kids, and parents? What should I pay attention to? What should I expect? Is the curriculum confusing? Is it difficult?" SMU5

Concerning the activities shared in the group, it was observed that they mostly consisted of songs. However, these do not bear the features of activities and focus more on the grammatical constructions in a song. It was observed that users made use of Turkish songs in their raw form to reinforce children's Turkish learning. Moreover, it was observed that teachers often shared videos produced for educational or entertainment purposes. On the other hand, it was also observed that teachers who experienced challenges due to lack of teaching materials spent a lot of time outside of class to develop their own materials.

It was also observed that the page layout, design and content of most of the activity worksheets that were shared were sloppy, far from creative and not sufficient to draw children's attention. It is evident that most posts are just worksheets on grammar and have not been turned into activities. On the other hand, it has also been observed that due to the lack of materials in the field, many users shared activities prepared for Turkish as a native language without adapting them to TTFLC.

Theme 4: Cultural and Language Differences

The stakeholders underlined a problem stemmed from the fact that the native tongues and cultures of children were very different from the Turkish culture and the Turkish language. Participant NGO1 stated that at the beginning of their efforts to teach Turkish to refugee children, one significant challenge they faced was persuading families to send their children to public schools run by the MoNE. Another issue mentioned by participants was the communication gap caused by teachers' unfamiliarity with the child's culture and language and the differences between the target culture and native culture.

"I think the teacher should have some knowledge of the child's language. Otherwise, the child may feel lonely. Sometimes the children get upset over certain things but cannot express themselves. My child tells me what's wrong at home. My child is upset that their teacher is unable to understand them." P2

Difference in alphabet is also another problem that Arabic speaking children and Turkish teachers frequently face. Participants who voiced this problem indicated that there were insufficient alphabet exercises in the textbooks, creating a serious problem. This is a problem encountered among the social media posts, as well. This is emphasized especially as an important obstacle for children's writing skills.

"For example, because they are Arab children, they have never used the Latin alphabet. We've skimmed through various books and they all quickly go over the alphabet. Very few lessons focus on the alphabet in the program. But we spend nearly an entire semester on it." T5

"They mix up letters when writing. They do this especially with the letters e and i, ü and ö, and b and p. They don't pay attention to writing in a straight line or putting dots on certain letters. For example, they sometimes don't put dots on ü or ç." SMU6

"They don't use vowels. Some write words from right to left. They don't use punctuation. They don't put spaces between words. (...) They confuse the letters p-b, c-ç, u-ü, a-e, and ş-j." SMU7

Theme 5: Language Level Differences

Especially in TECs, one problem Turkish teachers encountered was the fact that the students had different Turkish language levels, or they had varying competencies with respect to the four basic language skills. Participants also expressed that the heterogeneous composition of the students who had to learn Turkish and the lack of detail in the teaching program led to varying language levels among different classrooms of the same grade level. They indicated that, for this reason, teaching became more difficult and that they had to spend more time and effort to prepare for teaching.

"The class I'm about to teach now, for example, is quite heterogeneous. Some of them are great at speaking and some don't speak at all. There are some who can write and some who can't. We administered a test, but this is the best we could do in grouping them." T7

"It's like a combined classroom. We cope by using homework... The Turkish students have certain competencies (in terms of language). For this reason, we assign them homework and then attend to the others. In activities focusing on subjects like synonyms and antonyms, the children work together." T14

Theme 6: Learning Native Tongue and Foreign Language Simultaneously

Another problem that was raised by teachers with respect to teaching Turkish was the fact that children were simultaneously learning their native tongue and a foreign language. They indicated that students who had not completed their native language education experienced several problems when learning a second language/foreign language.

"We observe challenges in reading. When students do not know their own language very well, they have difficulties sometimes. Honestly, they don't realize how important language is." T8

"When your approach towards reading is weak and your reading level is low in your native language, you carry this over to a foreign language, as well. But us language educators try to solve this problem independently. In other words, within the foreign language... But the problem might actually be in the native language." FM1

"The children don't even fully understand everything in our own language. I wish they had more time. I'm scared they are going to be confused." P2

"They are learning three languages at the same time. Arabic, English, and Turkish... They are also learning English. They mix up the letters." T6

Theme 7: Difficulty in Assessment and Evaluation

Participants shared their view that the lack of standardization for assessment and evaluation constituted a significant problem. They suggested that the cause of this problem was the absence of a common curriculum. They drew attention to the fact that this caused inequalities in assessment and evaluation.

"There is no common plan anyway, and in some grade levels there are four classes. For instance, some third-grade teachers make exams really easy while some make them really hard. This has to do with the level differences in classes and with the absence of a common plan." T1

Participants also expressed that creating the exams on their own took up a lot of their time. Participant T4 voiced their need for guidance in assessment and evaluation by saying "Unfortunately, we have to do assessment and evaluation on our own. And there is not expert we can consult here."

"We prepare the questions ourselves. At the end of every class... We have no resource that tells us how to prepare for Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language and we didn't receive much guidance about this topic during our training. (...) When it comes assessment, I get stuck. Preparing exams takes a lot of time." T3

It seems that this situation led teachers to search for end-of-course/module exams in social media. Among social media posts, exam sheet had been shared. But these exams are not specific to language level but to grade level, such as first and second grade. The shared examples consisted of written exams and were lacking in question variety. They mostly consist of fill in the blanks and matching activities. Moreover, interview results put forth that language level differences of children in a class is a problem in assessment and evaluation as well. Especially teachers, who teach crowded classes consisting of children under temporary protection, mentioned that the heterogeneous composition of classes with respect to language level created challenges in the assessment and evaluation stage and this is stemmed from the inadequacy of placement tests.

"The class I'm about to teach now, for example, is quite heterogeneous. Some of them are great at speaking and some don't speak at all. There are some who can write and some who can't. We administered a test but this is the best we could do in grouping them." T7

Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

This study aims to lay out the views of stakeholders relating to teaching Turkish as a foreign language to children between the ages of 7-11. In line with this aim, the findings obtained from interviews and the analysis of social media posts have revealed that various problems are encountered, including the insufficiency of teacher training, inadequacy of TTFLC program, the lack of materials and activities, cultural and language differences of children and difficulty in assessment and evaluation.

The results put forth that teachers' preservice and in-service training they received was not oriented towards this field, leaving them feeling insufficient in teaching Turkish to children. Thus, undergraduate programs in TTFL need to be opened in universities and for all teacher education programs, a course related to TTFLC should be included to make all branches of teacher to be prepared. Furthermore, the need to include not only adult but also child-oriented language education courses in certification programs offered in the field of TTFL is also evident. In addition, the faculty members and social media posts of teachers stated that there are limited or no applied activities in the existing TTFL certification programs; that is, the lack of practice in these programs. Recent studies (Büyükkiz & Çangal, 2016; Eyüp, Arslan & Cevher, 2017) are of importance in that they point out the prevalence of the observed problem and emphasize the need to integrate applied activities and internship practices in certification and in-service trainings programs to complement theoretical courses.

Stakeholders drew attention to the absence of a comprehensive and thoroughly detailed curriculum oriented towards specific age groups, which has caused problems at each stage of teaching; they stated that this created a significant need for an age-group oriented, realistic and comprehensive teaching program that takes into account children's interests and needs and provides guidance for teachers. Since the insufficiency of the teaching program has led teachers to rely on the textbook, teachers have had to shoulder a heavy load in the creation of the teaching-learning process. As stated by Richards (2001), before the 1950s when developments in the field of foreign language teaching were limited, in other

words, when the concept of curricula had not yet emerged in language teaching, language education was heavily dependent on textbooks. In Turkey where studies in the field of TTFLC have started to emerge in the past few years, the current situation observed in Turkish teaching can be better understood from this perspective.

It was noticed that some problems emerged from the interviews and posts were related to the teaching-learning process of TTFLC. One of the most pressing problems mentioned by stakeholders was the insufficiency of teaching materials and resources in the field. This situation demonstrates the need for a diversification of materials that complement textbooks, such as flashcards, illustrated dictionaries, story books for specific language levels, and educational games. Moreover, the demand for textbooks that target a specific nationality and contain components of the target culture voiced by Turkish teachers that teach homogenous classes consisting of students of a specific nationality. Studies that investigate the problems encountered in Turkish teaching highlight the limitation of teaching materials and tools and show that the existing textbooks are not suitable for the specific ages and language levels of children (Balci & Melanlıoğlu, 2016; Biçer & Kılıç, 2017; Koçoğlu & Yelken, 2018; Moralı, 2018). The findings of the present study align with those of previous research.

Additionally, the posts of stakeholders relating to the indisputable importance of having fun in language learning demonstrates the absolute need for games in the curriculum and materials used and throughout the language teaching process. In addition to educational games and computer games, increasing the variety of complementary materials such as fairy tales, story books, and illustrated dictionaries is also necessary. Many studies support that in order to keep children engaged and attentive in class, games should be included in each stage of teaching (Akcan, 2009; Aktaş & İşigüzel, 2013; Gül-Peker, 2013). In the social media posts, it was revealed that songs are used in teaching Turkish but mostly for teaching grammar. Studies emphasize that songs are very effective in improving children's listening and speaking skills (Akcan, 2013; Cameron, 2001). Therefore, songs should be saved from being only grammar-focused.

Problems arising from differences in alphabet, which stakeholders mentioned with respect to the teaching of reading and writing, especially in groups of students under temporary protection, show that more time needs to be allocated for alphabet-phonetics teaching in the curriculum and textbooks. The results of studies conducted on the teaching of Turkish to children under temporary protection support the views of the TEC teachers interviewed throughout the present study. Researchers (Koçoğlu & Yelken, 2018; Moralı, 2018) have stated that there are problems which arise from alphabet differences and children have difficulty in acquiring writing skills. This study reveals a consensus on allocating more time for alphabet and phonetics education. On the other hand, Yangın-Ersanlı (2013) emphasizes that since children continue to improve their writing skills in their first language in the first years of primary school, it is more appropriate for the writing activities used in foreign language education to progress gradually, starting with activities like copying words and writing simple phrases through games.

In terms of assessment and evaluation, the stakeholders' view that classes are heterogeneous and make the teaching process difficult points to the importance and necessity of well-prepared language placement tests. The posts of stakeholders relating to this issue also show that the assessment and evaluation tools need to be prepared by taking into consideration the four basic language skills. However, depending on the motor, linguistic and conceptual development of children, it is necessary to place varying emphasis on each language skill in the assessment and evaluation process. In this

respect, as the development of literacy takes time and it relies on the development of cognitive and motor skills, more emphasis is given to listening and speaking skills in language learning, particularly for young children (Yüksel, 2013). For this reason, it is necessary to focus on listening and speaking skills in a meaningful and communication-oriented context in the assessment and evaluation process (Cameron, 2001; Sarıçoban & Küntaş, 2013). In this regard, Sarıçoban and Küntaş (2013) offer that foreign language development should be assessed and evaluated through activities similar to the auditory and verbal practices that children are familiar with in the classroom.

Concerning the native/second language acquisition, research state that for younger age groups, learning their native language and a foreign/second language simultaneously causes various problems and the native language development of the child has significant effects on the foreign/second language learning process. Especially, the differences between the linguistic structure of a child's native language and target language, such as differences in syntax, causes children to experience difficulty when learning to read and write in the target language (Cameron, 2001; Yangın-Ersanlı, 2013). Haznedar (2012) emphasizes the importance of studies on native language acquisition by stating that learners of a second language show progress according to their own internal mechanisms, not the order presented in the program, while acquiring structures during language learning. Therefore, it is necessary to know the order in which a child acquires structures in their native language when designing a program for children. In this context, the emergence of studies on second/foreign language learning in parallel with mother tongue acquisition studies and supporting the child's native language development are of importance.

Through an analysis of the views and social media posts of stakeholders, this study has laid out the inadequacies and limitations of the teacher training, TTFLC programs, teaching-learning process and assessment and evaluation processes of TTFLC. The teachers' expressions regarding the lack of academic publications to guide them shows that academic publications in this area need to be increased and diversified. Stakeholders mentioned that they encountered problems in the instruction and assessment and evaluation dimension of TTFLC and that they were in need of studies in this area. However, the absence of studies on these aspects of the TTFLC literature point to an important gap in this field. The lack of theoretical resources on TTFLC in the literature is viewed as a significant problem. As in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Children, it is important to develop theoretical studies with examples of applications relating to language teaching philosophies, teaching strategies, methods and techniques. It is believed that studies in the field of language acquisition will provide important contributions to the rapidly developing field of TTFLC. In addition, the situation faced by teachers that are forced to stick to textbooks due to the insufficiency of teaching programs resembles the situation in the 1950s when English began to be taught on a large scale since both are limited to the syllabus design containing the lesson content (Richards, 2001). The fact that teachers indicated they are in need of teaching books that will guide them due to a lack of comprehensive guidance points to the necessity for such publications. Such publications may enable teachers to overcome their inexperience to a certain extent. Koçoğlu and Yelken (2018), who found that teachers who teach Turkish to children have low readiness levels, expressed a similar view by stating that Turkish teachers should be supported through guidebooks for teachers.

Teachers primarily need a program to guide them. It is important to prepare and disseminate a detailed program which takes into account the relevant needs. Studies need to be conducted on the application of the program prepared by the TMF (2019) on a domestic/international scale for both formal/non-

formal education. This will allow for the identification of the types of problems encountered in the adaptation and implementation of the program, and this in turn will pave the way for the development and dissemination of the program. Moreover, in a study conducted by Ak (2019), a draft curriculum was prepared; however, this design needs to be implemented and evaluated. Therefore, future studies in this field may focus on the implementation and evaluation of the program in question or on the development of the TTFL program. In addition, data to be obtained through research in different regions can be used in program development studies. A needs analysis can be conducted to identify the problems encountered in teaching Turkish to children living abroad in an environment in which their native language is spoken. Afterwards, curricula can be designed by taking into consideration the observed needs. However, these children should not be expected to use Turkish very well in a short period of time through the developed programs. Teachers stated that their students who were in mixed classes with Turkish student held themselves back because they could not express themselves in the classroom and had difficulty coping with this situation. Hanbay (2013) stated that in the quiet period before the speaking skill is acquired, the child should not be forced to speak; instead their short responses should be praised to encourage them to speak. Yüksel's (2013) view regarding the topic states that the non-verbal responses of the child should be met with acceptance in this period. These approaches in the literature are very important in that they offer guidance to teachers.

In this study, it was observed that teachers use social media as a tool to share and solve problems. Therefore, social media has proven to be an important tool that can be analyzed to determine problems. For this reason, social media can be recommended for needs analysis. On the other hand, it has been observed that some of the materials and activities that are shared among teachers are not suitable for solving problems. Therefore, the sharing of exemplary materials that are appropriate for TTFLC by experts in the field should be encouraged.

As a conclusion, this study was carried out in Istanbul, Turkey, the country in which the target language is spoken. A further study can be conducted by increasing the sample size to include different part of the country, results can be compared with the results of the present study, and the differences can be investigated.

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