

Key Problems and Solutions in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the key issues encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and proposes solutions to these problems through a literature review. The research identifies core problem areas such as teaching materials, teaching methods, student motivation, language proficiency, cultural differences, and teacher competencies. It also evaluates how these problems affect the teaching process. Findings reveal that students face difficulties in language learning when teaching materials are not aligned with their level, teaching methods are limited, and teachers lack sufficient training. Additionally, it is emphasized that strategies to increase student motivation and cultural awareness must be developed. The proposed solutions include adapting teaching materials to students' language levels, providing in-service training for teachers, increasing the use of technology, and promoting cultural integration.

Keywords— Teaching Turkish as a foreign language, teaching materials, teaching methods, cultural differences, teacher competencies, student motivation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Turkish as a foreign language has become an important topic globally due to increasing interest in recent years. While the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language has historical roots, it has gained even more value today in terms of academic, commercial, and cultural interactions. The growing number of individuals learning Turkish has led to the proliferation of academic studies and teaching programs in this field. In this context, research on teaching Turkish to foreigners has also gained significant momentum in recent years (Göçer, Tabak & Coşkun, 2020).

According to Tunçel (2015), teaching Turkish as a foreign language is particularly important in terms of education and career opportunities. Studies reveal that among the factors motivating individuals to learn Turkish are personal development, cultural integration, and job opportunities. Learning Turkish is considered a critical skill for students who wish to pursue higher education in Turkey, increasing their interest and motivation in the language.

Learning a foreign language is not limited to learning grammatical rules; it also requires understanding the cultural elements of the target language. Students' learning of the target language's culture facilitates the language

learning process and provides them with new perspectives (Sarıkaya et al., 2023, p. 395).

Divanü Lügati't-Türk is considered one of the first works in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Although this work is referred to as a "dictionary," it offers a rich data source for teaching Turkish as a foreign language through its inclusion of Turkish dialects, phonetic features, morphology, and word analyses (Mete, 2012, p. 103). As such, it represents an important starting point for the systematic teaching of Turkish as a foreign language.

Although Turkish is a language that foreigners wish to learn today, it is not always possible to claim that it is taught systematically with scientific data, methods, and techniques (Bulut, 2020, p. 377). This issue also applies to students learning foreign languages in Turkey. According to the study "Postgraduate Students' Foreign Language Tendencies and the Problem of Foreign Language in Academia" by Bayındır and Kara (2019), foreign language education in Turkey, from primary to high school, tends to be repetitive and lacks practical application. The study reveals that participants received superficial, rote-based education in schools, leading to a lack of progress in the language learning process and causing students to develop

prejudices against foreign languages. Particularly, students face great difficulties in speaking skills and struggle to develop this skill. Additionally, academic language proficiency exams like YDS and YÖKDİL focus solely on reading comprehension and fail to fully reflect language use skills.

The purpose of this study is to identify the key problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and propose solutions based on existing literature. The study's unique contribution is to present a more holistic perspective by addressing the relationships between these problems. Issues such as student motivation, teacher competencies, teaching materials, and cultural differences have been analyzed in terms of how they interact. In particular, this study deeply examines the impact of teacher competencies on teaching materials and the relationship between student motivation and challenges in the language learning process.

In this context, the research questions are as follows:

Research Questions

1. What are the main problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
2. What challenges do teaching materials and resources present in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
3. How do teachers' methodological deficiencies cause problems in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
4. How do students' cultural differences affect the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language?
5. What challenges arise from the mismatch between students' language proficiency and the curriculum in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
6. What are the proposed solutions to the problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

General Overview of Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language:

The motivation levels of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language have been examined. The study found that instrumental motivation varies across countries, with Iranian students showing higher motivation compared to students from other countries. However, intrinsic and cultural motivations did not show significant differences in terms of country, age, or language level (Yağmur, 2021, p. 1637).

Başar (2018) highlighted the lack of standardization in teaching Turkish in Afghanistan, noting that war conditions have complicated the process. While the Yunus Emre

Institute's "Yedi İklim" series is widely used, there is no general standard for language teaching. The study emphasized the need for a language teaching policy specific to Afghanistan.

Başar (2020) also developed policy recommendations for teaching Turkish as a foreign language in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Due to the historical and cultural ties between Turkey and Iran, the importance of Turkish teaching in Iran has increased, but current programs are not coordinated and lack a standard structure. The study emphasized the need for different teaching approaches and materials for Persian-speaking and Turkish-speaking learners and argued that institutions like the Yunus Emre Institute should develop a Turkish teaching strategy tailored to Iran.

According to Hasan Fehmi Erol's (2019) study "Readability of Texts in Turkish Language Textbooks for Foreigners," the texts in textbooks used to teach Turkish to foreigners must be appropriate for students' language levels. The length of words and sentences, along with word frequency, directly affect the efficiency of these texts in language teaching. The study calculated readability scores of texts from four different Turkish textbooks and found a 27% difference in readability, indicating significant variation in the readability of texts prepared for the same level.

Speaking skills are crucial in teaching Turkish as a foreign language due to the communicative function of the language. Together with listening skills, speaking is one of the most commonly used language skills in daily life. Therefore, students learning Turkish as a foreign language must develop these skills effectively and correctly (Günaydın, 2021).

According to Şen and Boylu (2015), speaking skills are particularly challenging for students learning Turkish. Students tend to avoid speaking due to anxiety about correct pronunciation, which negatively impacts their success. Additionally, speaking anxiety does not vary based on factors such as age, gender, or educational status, but it has been observed that regularly conversing with a native Turkish speaker helps reduce anxiety levels.

In the integration process, language is a fundamental condition for adapting to society. Language and integration courses in Germany, for example, serve as important tools to facilitate the participation of immigrants in society. However, it has been noted that short-term courses make it difficult to learn complex languages like German (Özbent, 2008).

Cultural differences play a crucial role in the language learning process. Authentic materials, especially brochures, can increase students' interest in the target language by conveying cultural elements in language teaching. These

materials help bridge language and culture by reflecting the lifestyle and values of a society (Tanrıku & Çelik, 2019).

According to Keskin (2024), the competencies of educators are crucial in providing effective teaching of Turkish as a foreign language. Teaching Turkish as a foreign language requires not only grammar instruction but also a comprehensive and practical education process aimed at developing students' language usage skills. In this context, the importance of teacher training programs for educators in teaching Turkish as a foreign language is emphasized.

Problems Encountered in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language:

Among the fundamental problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language are the lack of materials, inadequacy of textbooks, and the absence of a natural language usage environment. Additionally, teachers' lack of grammar knowledge and insufficient specialized training are other significant factors complicating the teaching process. While the use of a common language can sometimes cause confusion in communication, the lack of expertise in language teaching techniques also negatively impacts the process (Metel, 2012, p. 122).

In his study, İşcan (2020) evaluated various problems in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The absence of a dedicated undergraduate program and the shortage of qualified instructors are seen as key issues. İşcan emphasized the need for a suitable teaching program for Turkish as a foreign language, pointing out that the failure to develop existing programs based on needs analysis has led to problems. Furthermore, the lack of teachers' competence in methods and techniques causes difficulties for students in their language learning processes. The study found that students experience the most difficulty in writing and grammar, and it proposed a constructivist approach to address these issues.

According to Tiryaki (2013), there are many challenges in developing writing skills when teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The structure of the Turkish language, particularly the differences in syntax, creates significant obstacles for foreign learners. For example, while the word order in English is subject+verb+object, in Turkish it is subject+object+verb. This difference causes students to make mistakes when forming sentences. Additionally, the difficulty in developing sufficient vocabulary and the proper use of grammatical structures create major barriers to improving writing skills. Students struggle to construct meaningful and coherent paragraphs and find it challenging to express their ideas logically at the text level (Tiryaki, 2013).

According to Balcı and Melanlıoğlu (2020), the main issues encountered in the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign

language include the quality of instruction, lack of materials, and inadequacy of content that meets students' learning needs. In this process, the lack of specific standards for Turkish and insufficient content stand out as major problems.

Derya and Demet Yaylı (2014) indicated that one of the main challenges faced by students learning Turkish as a foreign language is focusing solely on the structural features of the language. Traditional language teaching tends to focus heavily on grammar and spelling rules, while neglecting contextual factors. This makes it difficult for students to understand how the language is used in real communication contexts. Students learning Turkish struggle not only with following the rules of the language but also with using it naturally and fluently in communication.

In their study, Halime Barış and Ülker Şen (2019) examined the writing anxiety of university students learning Turkish as a foreign language. The study indicated that anxiety is associated with negative emotions like fear and worry. Writing anxiety is particularly high in foreign language learning, and this anxiety negatively affects students' success. The research found no significant impact of gender on writing anxiety, but students' environment-related anxieties were higher than task-related anxieties. Additionally, it was observed that as students increased the frequency of their writing practice, their anxiety levels decreased.

According to Emek and Feyzioğlu (2024), students learning Turkish face the most challenges in speaking and listening skills. Additionally, difficulties in accessing materials such as dictionaries, workbooks, and films pose significant barriers in the Turkish learning process. The lack of materials for learning Turkish in Algeria and the failure of teaching programs to fully meet students' needs are other issues. Students, in particular, experience inadequacies in learning how Turkish is used in everyday life. The lack of technology-based materials (e.g., computers, electronic dictionaries) is also cited as a factor hindering the learning process.

According to Tunçel (2015), one of the main problems faced by students learning Turkish is high anxiety levels. High anxiety negatively impacts students' motivation to learn. Students who experience anxiety about attending language classes and preparing for lessons encounter significant difficulties in their language learning processes. It was also noted that male participants exhibited higher motivation towards learning Turkish compared to females.

The challenges in teaching Turkish include grammar instruction, speaking and listening skills, and writing skills. It has been noted that learning Turkish suffixes is difficult,

that non-native speakers particularly struggle with listening and speaking skills, and that creative and academic activities play a key role in the development of writing skills (Özdemir, 2023).

Recommendations Regarding the Teaching of Turkish as a Foreign Language

İnal (2023) emphasizes the need to shape the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language according to the pedagogical needs of different age groups. The learning styles, needs, and expectations of different age groups create significant differences in the design of teaching programs and materials. İnal highlights the importance of developing teacher competencies and teaching methods according to the age group.

In his study, Zeyrek (2020) emphasizes the importance of teaching not only the rules but also the cultural elements in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. This enables students to learn the language more effectively.

Akay, Bağlar, Uslu, Sorgu, and Bağlar (2024) point out that pronunciation training improves students' speaking skills and prevents misunderstandings. Additionally, they highlight the importance of pronunciation training due to the differences between Turkish phonetics and the students' native languages.

According to Şen and Boylu (2015), the most effective strategy for improving speaking skills is to create environments outside of classroom activities where students can use the language in their daily lives. These practices are noted to be effective in reducing students' speaking anxiety and improving their success in language learning. Furthermore, a certain level of anxiety is said to be motivating in language learning.

Şeylan (2013) argues that grammar should be taught simultaneously with the five core skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing, and comprehension) in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. He focused on teaching the present tense at the A1 level and suggested that it is the most appropriate tense for beginner students. Şeylan also notes that using visual tools such as gestures, facial expressions, and dramatization can make learning easier.

Özbal (2020) emphasizes the importance of ensuring that self-learning materials are simple, clear, and understandable. These materials should guide the student's learning process through appropriate language levels, content organization, and evaluation sections.

Benzer (2020) underscores the importance of adopting a functional approach to teaching grammar in Turkish as a foreign language. This approach aims to enable students to use the language in real communication situations rather than merely teaching grammar rules.

Türkben (2018) states that higher quality teaching materials need to be developed for teaching Turkish as a foreign language. In this regard, new research should be conducted, and strategies that facilitate language learning should be developed. In conclusion, Türkben suggests that both quantitative and qualitative research in the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language should be increased, and the studies should be approached from a broader perspective.

Özdemir (2023) emphasizes the need to use appropriate teaching materials to overcome grammatical challenges, adopt activity-based approaches, and use technology effectively as a teaching tool. Materials should be suitable for students, simple, and understandable, and exercises should be meaningful and interactive to enhance language learning success. He also highlights the importance of technology as a supportive tool in language teaching.

According to Tiryaki (2013), writing education should be conducted through a gradual process. These stages include teaching the alphabet, words, sentences, paragraphs, and text creation. Additionally, teachers should guide students during the writing process and provide feedback appropriate to their level. Various text types and writing methods should be used to improve students' writing skills.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a review model with the aim of identifying the problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and evaluating potential solutions. The review model is a method that involves examining the existing literature to compile and evaluate the knowledge accumulated on a particular subject. The methodological steps of the study are detailed below:

Literature Selection and Review Process

In this study, national and international research related to the main problems and solution suggestions in teaching Turkish as a foreign language was reviewed. These studies were selected from articles, book chapters, and conference papers published especially in the last 10 years. The literature compiled from academic databases like DergiPark formed the foundation of the study. The relevance of the selected literature was determined through keyword searches (e.g., “teaching Turkish as a foreign language,” “teaching materials,” “teacher competencies”).

Data Collection Method

In the literature review, specific inclusion criteria were taken into account when determining the studies to be included. For example, being directly related to the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language and focusing on methodological problems in language teaching and their solution suggestions were among the criteria. The reviewed

literature was used in the qualitative data collection process and systematically categorized for the purpose of analyzing the problems (e.g., teaching materials, teaching methods, cultural differences).

Data Analysis Method

In analyzing the collected data, the content analysis method was used. The findings from the literature were grouped around specific themes (e.g., lack of materials, teacher competency issues, student motivation), and solution suggestions were evaluated accordingly. Moreover, the results of each study were thoroughly examined, and findings that aligned with existing problems were identified. These findings were discussed in more detail in the conclusion section of the study.

Limitations

Since this study is literature review-focused, it is limited to the sources found in the literature. Access to all studies in the field may not have been possible, and therefore, some research may have been overlooked in more comprehensive studies. Additionally, the results of the study are not supported by data from practical applications; thus, further field research on problems encountered in practice may be needed.

Findings

This research, based on a literature review, grouped the fundamental problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language under various headings.

Lack of Teaching Materials and Resources

The inadequacy of textbooks and other materials in matching students' language levels negatively affects the learning process (Başar, 2018; Erol, 2019). This issue is also directly related to teacher competencies. When teachers are not sufficiently trained to use materials efficiently, this deficiency prevents them from offering appropriate lesson content to students. This deepens the problem concerning both teacher competence and the effectiveness of the teaching materials.

Shortcomings in Teaching Methods

Teachers' lack of mastery over modern language teaching methods also reduces student motivation during the language learning process (İşcan, 2020). Students may lose interest in traditional methods used in the classroom, which can hinder the development of their language skills and negatively affect their motivation. Furthermore, a decline in student motivation, combined with the inability to enrich teaching methods, can escalate the problem.

Student Motivation and Anxiety:

A lack of motivation negatively affects student performance. However, this deficiency is not only

dependent on the student's internal motivation; it is also directly related to language level, the teaching materials used, and teacher competence. When the student's language level does not match the materials or the teacher is unable to provide adequate guidance, the student may lose interest in learning the language (Yağmur, 2021; Tunçel, 2015).

Cultural Differences and Integration Issues:

Cultural differences among students are significant factors that influence the language learning process (Zeyrek, 2020). If teachers do not consider these cultural differences or if the materials lack cultural context, student motivation can decrease, leading to problems in the teaching process. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to develop cultural awareness and to adjust the teaching materials accordingly.

Language Level and Curriculum Mismatch:

The lack of materials suitable for students' language levels prevents teachers from developing appropriate teaching strategies (Balcı & Melanlıoğlu, 2020). The misalignment between the curriculum and student needs negatively impacts both teachers and students, hindering the language learning process.

Teacher Competencies:

Teacher competency deficiencies directly impact the use of teaching materials and student motivation. Teachers who have not received adequate training may struggle to use materials effectively and fail to provide the necessary support to students (Keskin, 2024). This situation reduces the quality of teaching and slows down students' language learning processes.

Lack of Technological and Material Support:

The limited use of technology-based learning tools is related both to teacher competencies and the need to update teaching materials. A lack of technological tools can prevent teachers from enriching classroom activities and reduce students' interest in the language learning process (Emek & Feyzioğlu, 2024).

These findings show that the fundamental problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language span a wide range, from teaching materials and methods to student motivation, teacher competence, and cultural differences.

INDENTATIONS AND EQUATIONS

The first paragraph under each heading or subheading should be flush left, and subsequent paragraphs should have a five-space indentation. A colon is inserted before an equation is presented, but there is no punctuation following the equation. All equations are numbered and referred to in the text solely by a number enclosed in a round bracket (i.e., (3) reads as "equation 3"). Ensure that any miscellaneous

numbering system you use in your paper cannot be confused with a reference [4] or an equation (3) designation.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examines the fundamental issues encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language through existing literature, revealing that these problems stem from various factors. Key issues include the inadequacy of teaching materials, limited teaching methods, differences in student motivation and anxiety levels, the impact of cultural differences on the language learning process, and the insufficient qualifications of teachers. Additionally, a lack of technological and material support creates significant obstacles in students' language learning journeys. Addressing these challenges is critical for enabling learners of Turkish as a foreign language to have a more effective and productive learning experience.

Recommendations:

Rather than offering general solutions to the challenges in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, more specific strategies need to be developed. The following recommendations outline concrete steps for each problem area:

1. Teaching Materials and Resources:

Teaching materials must not only be adjusted to the students' language levels but also incorporate the cultural context of the target language. Readability analyses should determine the appropriateness of textbooks, and programs to develop leveled materials should be implemented. Additionally, e-learning platforms should be established to develop digital teaching materials and interactive content, making them easily accessible to students. A comprehensive needs analysis should be conducted regularly by gathering feedback from students to ensure materials are developed in line with their needs.

2. Teaching Methods:

Teachers should move away from grammar-based instruction and adopt methods that focus on developing communicative and functional language skills. In-service training programs should be organized, introducing interactive teaching techniques, student-centered approaches, and modern methods such as gamification in language learning, supported by practical training. To expand the reach of these methods, teacher mentoring programs should be implemented. Experienced teachers can guide new colleagues to address methodological shortcomings.

3. Student Motivation and Anxiety:

To increase student motivation, it is important to provide a learning environment that emphasizes not only grammar but also cultural elements. Language learning activities (such as film viewings, language workshops, and cultural trips) should be organized to foster students' integration into the target language and culture. Additionally, a special training program for teachers on anxiety management should be developed. These programs should teach strategies for reducing students' anxiety during the language learning process. Motivation-boosting practices, such as regularly acknowledging and rewarding student achievements, should also be incorporated into the learning process.

4. Teacher Training:

Long-term teacher training programs must be organized to ensure that teachers are proficient in modern language teaching techniques. These programs should not only focus on grammar instruction but also cover cultural integration, enriching teaching methods with technology, and planning lessons for various language levels. The training should be modular, with certification processes to evaluate teacher performance at the end of each module. Teachers should also be encouraged to participate in international language teaching conferences, where they can learn about new teaching strategies and methods.

5. Technological Support:

To enhance the use of technological tools in language teaching, classroom technological infrastructure needs to be improved. Each classroom should have at least one smart board, internet access, and applications designed for language learning. Students should be given constant access to mobile language learning apps and e-learning platforms, and teachers should receive training on integrating technology effectively into their teaching. Additionally, online language conversation clubs can be established to provide students with more opportunities for practice.

6. Cultural Integration:

Language learning materials should not focus solely on teaching grammar or vocabulary but should also aim to enhance students' cultural awareness. Cultural activities, language clubs, and international student exchange programs should be integrated into the language learning process. Moreover, a learning environment that respects students' own cultural backgrounds should be created, turning these differences into learning opportunities within language teaching.

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