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A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL): Attitudes, Perceptions, and Factors Affecting Language Learning

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Abstract

The civil war that broke out in Syria in 2011 continues to affect Turkey materially and morally. Due to this war, millions of immigrants from Syria have immigrated to our country in recent years. As a result of migration events, a necessity has emerged for people with different cultures and social lifestyles to live together, which has also brought some intricate problems with itself. It is a known fact that education, which is one of the most significant problems that has arisen in this long process, requires a great deal of planning and thinking. The most important problem experienced in this education and training process is that a significant majority of the Syrians do not have sufficient command of the Turkish language. For this reason, teaching Turkish has become a mandatory priority in terms of the education and social integration of Syrian immigrant students. To this end, the Ministry of National Education, different state and foundation universities as well as non-governmental organizations have opened various language courses on weekdays or weekends for teaching Turkish language. In line with this, in this study, it is aimed to reveal the attitudes of Syrian students towards learning and speaking Turkish, the factors affecting the Turkish language learning process, that is the problems experienced in this sense, and the students' frequency of using Turkish language in daily life. In this qualitative study, a semi-structured interview form was employed and the study was conducted with 20 Syrian students studying and learning Turkish at a public school affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the 2022-2023 academic year. Content analysis was used to analyze the data collected. As a result of the analysis, it was revealed that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards learning Turkish as a foreign language. Additionally, it was concluded that the Syrian students, who face diverse linguistic problems such as Turkish sentence structure being different from Arabic language, insufficient L2 feedback from teachers to students, communication anxiety, and lack of self-confidence, consider it as a need to use Turkish in many areas of social life and thus want to improve their Turkish speaking skills efficiently.

Keywords: Syrian immigrant students, Teaching Turkish as a foreign language, Attitudes and perceptions, Factors affecting learning

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A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe (TFL) Öğrenen Suriyeli Öğrencilerin Deneyimleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma: Tutumlar, Algılar ve Dil Öğreniminin Etkileyen Faktörler

Öz

2011 yılında Suriye'de patlak veren iç savaş ülkemizi maddi ve manevi olarak etkilemeye devam etmektedir. Savaş nedeniyle, Suriye'den milyonlarca göçmen ülkemize göç etmiştir. Göç olayları neticesinde farklı kültür ve sosyal yaşam tarzlarına sahip insanların bir arada yaşama zorunluluğu bazı sorunları da beraberinde getirmiştir. Ortaya çıkan en önemli sorumlardan biri olan eğitimin büyük bir planlama ve düşünme gerektirdiği bilinen bir gerçekdir. Eğitim ve öğretim sürecinde ise yaşanan en öncelikli sorun Suriyelerin Türkçe diline yeterince hakim olmamasıdır. Bu nedenle Suriyeli göçmen öğrencilerin eğitimi ve sosyal entegrasyonu için Türkçe öğretimi zorunlu olarak öncelik kazanmıştır. Bu bağlamda Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, farklı devlet ve vakıf üniversiteleri ve sivil toplum örgütleri Türkçe öğretimi için hafta içi veya hafta sonları çeşitli kurslar açmıştır. Bu çalışmada, Suriyeli öğrencilerin Türkçe öğrenmeye ve konuşmaya yönelik tutumları, Türkçe öğrenme sürecini etkileyen etkenler, yani bu anlamda yaşanan sorunlar, ve Türkçe'yi günlük yaşamda hangi durumlarda ve ne sıklıkla kullandıklarını ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Bu nitel çalışmada, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmış ve çalışma 2022-2023 eğitim ve öğretim yılında Milli Eğitim Bakanlığının bağlı bir devlet okulunda okuyup Türkçe eğitimi alan 20 Suriyeli öğrenci ile yürütülmüştür. Verileri analiz etmek için içerik analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Analiz sonucunda katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğunun yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğrenmeye yönelik olumlu tutumlara sahip olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca Türkçe cümle yapısının Arapçanından farklı olması, öğretmenlerin öğrencilere yeterince geri bildirimde bulunmaması, iletişim kaygısı ve özgüven eksikliği gibi çeşitli sorunlarla karşılaşan Suriyeli öğrencilerin Türkçe'yi sosyal hayatı birçok alanda kullanmaya ihtiyaç duydukları ve bundan dolayı Türkçe konuşma becerilerini geliştirmek istedikleri sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli göçmen öğrenciler, Türkçenin yabancı dil olarak öğretimi, Tutum ve algılar, Öğrenmeyi etkileyen etkenler

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1. Introduction

Since the earliest times of human existence, there has been a constant case of motion or migration in between diverse geographies due to some force majeure or situations, either voluntarily or involuntarily. One of the most important reasons for these migrations is internal or external

turmoil that develops uncontrollably and leads to some unpredictable results among different nations or societies (Akkaya, 2013, p.180). Factors such as unresolved civil wars, political uncertainties, or interventions of other foreign countries can force people to migrate to other countries either individually or collectively. Sometimes, people may have to migrate to other cities or countries so as to improve their economic situations and increase their quality of life. These displacement or migration phenomena not only affect immigrants but also directly or indirectly affect the communities they migrate to. In the case of Turkey, the war that started in Syria in 2011 has resulted in many refugees entering Turkey in the form of large masses of immigration, either legally or illegally. It is seen that this civil war has deeply affected our country both materially and spiritually in many ways. As a consequence of this, large groups of immigrants having fled the civil war and conflicts have come to our country.

Unfortunately, in this unwanted process that has developed uncontrollably from the very beginning by causing a number of socio-cultural, economic, and political problems in the whole country, Turkey has been one of the few countries having particularly experienced this ongoing ordeal in Syria in all its aspects most closely, both as a migration transit and as a border country. For instance, according to the data obtained by the United Nations Refugee and Asylum Organization (UNHCR) for the last 20 years, the number of people forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, and persecution has reached record levels globally, which proves the fact that Turkey still continues to be the

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world. In this sense, Turkey has been hosting approximately 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees, as well as some 320,000 refugees from other nationalities of interest to UNHCR over the last two decades.

Turkey has made significant sacrifices as a devoted host for Syrian refugees for a long time. Syrians and refugees from other countries, whose numbers are mentioned in millions, have been scattered in many provinces of Turkey, especially in the provinces and metropolitan areas adjacent to the Syrian border. As a result, people from other cultures have come together in many parts of our country. The obligation of people to live together has brought along many problems as well (Aksoy, 2012). As mentioned above, these problems have had an impact in such areas as economic, political, cultural, and educational in social life throughout the whole country. In addition to the necessity of meeting the material and physical needs of these immigrants, it is obviously seen that the most important problems encountered are integration with social life, cultural values and norms in our country, and adopting or assimilating the spoken language in the society.

The significance of a language or languages spoken in a country in communication is undeniable. That is particularly because language has been the most important tool that provides interaction and reconciliation between individuals since the existence of human beings. “Language is an indicator of mental development and a means of understanding, which is effective in the social and cognitive development of the individual by serving to express his or her feelings and thoughts among

people" (Özbay & Melanlioğlu, 2008, p. 31). As it is understood from this, it is highly clear that the importance of language in the transmission of culture or cultural values is unquestionable. In the periods when writing was widely used, people would transfer their cultures orally to other generations. This too indeed makes the concepts of culture and language inseparable from each other.

Considering the salient issues mentioned above, the attitudes of Syrian students towards Turkish language and thus their attitudes towards Turkish people and culture are of great importance during the compulsory education and training process being implemented in Turkey. It is quite evident that these attitudes they adopt will either encourage them to learn this language or will prevent them from learning it efficiently (Akdemir, 2016). In this context, if we look at the Turkish equivalent of attitude, it is expressed as "the way taken, the disposition" in the dictionary (TDK, 2011, p.2393). According to Demirel (2010), attitude is a learned tendency that pushes the individual to show certain behaviors in the face of certain people, objects, and situations (p.133). Katz (1967), on the other hand, defines attitude as "a form of pre-thinking in which an individual perceives a symbol, an object, a person or the world with its good or bad, beneficial or harmful aspects, depending on the system of values he or she has." (as cited in Kazazoğlu, 2013). As can be understood from these definitions, individuals can develop a positive, negative, or neutral attitude towards something. In line with this, through this study, it is aimed to examine the attitudes and perceptions of high school Syrian TFL learners towards

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

learning Turkish language, willingness to speak Turkish, and getting to know Turkish people and culture. In the light of the data and findings obtained, it is hoped that the results will be beneficial in terms of identifying the situations or factors that prevent learning Turkish language, improving the attitudes of Syrian students towards this language in a positive way, and motivating them to speak it inside or outside the classroom as often as possible.

2. Learners' Attitudes and Perceptions about Turkish as a Foreign Language

"All individuals learn and develop the language spoken in a society first by interacting within their families and then by communicating with their friends, neighbors, relatives, and teachers either face-to-face or via media communication tools from the first day they join social life." (Yaylı & Bayyurt, 2014a, p. 29). This situation makes it almost compulsory to learn a language by inducing a psychological pressure on the majority of foreigners in our country, as it is the first experience for most of them to learn Turkish as a second or foreign language. From this point of view, it is clear that one of the most important problems that arises is essentially education. Education is one of the major facilitators for immigrants or asylum seekers in Turkey to integrate or adapt to the society, socio-cultural structure of the society, and school culture in the whole integration process (Bicer and Alan, 2017). This is primarily because a systematic and effective education process includes the solution of other potential problems as well. Therefore, education

requires great care and effort from all stakeholders in this process. In this regard, the primary problem experienced in the education process is that most of the foreign students do not know Turkish as much as their mother tongue. As such, teaching Turkish as a foreign language to Syrian and other foreign students throughout this process has become one of the most important priorities of the national education policy (Ünal, Taşkaya & Ersoy, 2018, p. 136).

According to Ünlü (2011), the fact that Turkish teaching programs for foreigners are not often prepared in accordance with the mother tongue, age, education level and culture of the students is one of the main problems experienced in Turkish language teaching process. This situation not only makes it highly demanding to cover the target language to be learned, but also causes teaching methods and techniques that do not adequately address the taught audience not to serve the purpose efficiently. Quite naturally, this may lead to a great waste of time and effort during teaching and learning process. For this reason, it is of great importance to work with experts in every field of education while preparing the Turkish language teaching program(s) for foreign learners and to cooperate with experts from various disciplines in order to determine the adequacy and suitability of these programs (Atas Akdemir, 2019). According to Derman (2010), while speaking Turkish language, a considerable majority of foreign students see themselves as deficient or inadequate in vocalizing the target language. As argued by Demirci (2015), understanding a foreign language and people who speak it or being able to distinguish their voices, making predictions and

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

inferences about the structural features of that language, all vary depending on the effort of L2 learners and how much time they spend on communication with the native speakers of that language. In this sense, it can be argued that the more these people communicate with other people speaking that language as their mother tongue in social life, the more correctly they can articulate or pronounce the sounds and words of that language. In addition, the need analysis to identify the reason(s) for the students' (un)willingness to learn a target language as well as where to use that language and how to use it will positively contribute to understanding what L2 skills are needed by the students and how much time they spare to learn the target language (Kırmızı, 2008).

Büyükkız and Çangal (2016) suggested that identifying the needs in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and preparing effective language teaching programs accordingly is very crucial for Syrian immigrants to adapt to social life and to realize their acculturation in our country. Further, Karatay and Kartallıoğlu (2016) overemphasize the fact that the more the students' attitudes towards the Turkish lessons are known by the teachers, the more the education process can be arranged accordingly, which will increase the quality of education. Likewise, factors such as age, gender, and culture may also influence students' L2 attitudes. For this reason, while teaching Turkish to foreign students, the individual characteristics of L2 learners and their attitudes should be taken into account. Making such an arrangement will ensure the successful execution of the educational process. Barın (2008) also indicates that one of the most important factors affecting students while

teaching Turkish to foreigners is the teacher. Therefore, the most important thing that a teacher should do while teaching Turkish is to ensure that students develop a positive attitude towards Turkish lessons. Factors such as the teacher's behavior, the way h/she approaches the student, the way h/she teaches the lesson, and the teacher's command of the subject in his or her field will affect the attitudes of foreign students towards Turkish in a positive or negative way. Acat and Demirel (2002) argue that students' developing positive attitudes towards the Turkish language or speaking classes will facilitate their own learning. They also state that teachers should know very well the behaviors, approaches, methods, and techniques by which their students can develop a positive attitude towards Turkish language and use them effectively while teaching it.

3. Method

3.1. Research Model of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of Syrian students in Gaziantep towards Turkish as a foreign language, their willingness to speak Turkish, their perceptions of Turkish people and cultures, and the factors affecting their attitudes towards learning Turkish language. For this purpose, an open-ended interview form consisting of 10 questions was employed in order to shed light on the main issues mentioned above. As the next step, the Syrian students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were asked to fill this form in Turkish or Arabic languages if they wanted to. In this sense, qualitative data collection and analysis methods were used in the study

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

in accordance with the purpose of the study. The research questions to be answered based on the data obtained in the study are given below:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of Syrian students towards learning Turkish as a foreign language, speaking Turkish, and Turkish people and culture?
2. What are the factors affecting the attitudes of Syrian students towards learning and speaking the Turkish language?

3.2. Participants of the Study

In this study, which aims to reach more details about the perceptions and attitudes of Syrian students regarding the above-mentioned research topic, it was decided to interview with 20 students studying at Mehmet Hayri Aknal Anatolian High School in Gaziantep, a city of Turkey hosting thousands of immigrants or refugees from Syria and some other countries, in order to obtain sufficient qualitative data. 10 of the participants in this study are male and 10 of them are female students. Almost all of the students have been in Turkey since the civil war that broke out in Syria on March 15, 2011 and have been learning Turkish as a foreign language for about 7 to 10 years. All of the participants were selected among 11th and 12th grade students according to a certain criterion. In other words, the participants were selected through criterion sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. Therefore, the main criterion regarding the selection of the participants in this study was that the students had the highest, middle, and lowest exam scores in Turkish and other school subjects, and that they were also 11th and 12th grade students who could speak Turkish at a certain level. In order to

learn the participants' perceptions, attitudes, and their solutions to the problems experienced in the process of learning Turkish language and ensure the diversity of the data collected, compliance with this criterion is of great importance. Similarly, it is highly crucial to ensure the quality, reliability, and validity of the data obtained from the students with different success levels in L2 (Çalık & Sözbilir, 2014; Selçuk, Palancı & Kandemir, 2014).

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

During the data collection process, first of all, two researchers who are experts in their fields were consulted and, after the necessary corrections were made, an interview form consisting of 10 open-ended questions was designed. As the second step, two more language experts and an assessment and evaluation expert were consulted for the prepared questions and it was concluded that the interview questions were suitable for the intended purpose. In order to collect the data of the research in a safe and ethical manner, it was decided that the classes at the school should end and the face-to-face interviews with the participants should be recorded and completed within two days. Content analysis was employed in the analysis of the research data. During the analysis process, two researchers examined the answers given by the Syrian students to the interview questions separately and meticulously by eventually determining the main themes, categories, and sub-themes (codes). The themes, categories, and codes obtained by the researchers were carefully compared and the reliability coefficients of the final data were calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) Reliability formula

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

(Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement). In this sense, the rate of the consensus that the researchers reached on the themes, categories, and codes was determined as 94%.

4. Findings

In order to examine in detail what kind of attitudinal profile the participants have, they were asked a series of open-ended questions. The answers given by the participants to the questions about their profiles, frequency distributions, and percentages are presented below in Table 1. The qualitative data results revealed that Syrian students had positive attitudes towards Turkish as a foreign language (TFL) and speaking lessons. As shown in Table 1, all of the students (100%) who participated in the interviews stated that learning Turkish and being able to communicate through this language is a great academic value and goal for them. In addition, the students (95%) also agreed that it is highly essential to know and speak Turkish as fluently and accurately as possible in daily life as well as in academic settings. Some statements about the attitudes of the participants towards Turkish language and speaking lessons are given below.

I think that speaking Turkish is one of the ultimate goals for many people who need to learn at least one foreign language in their academic life. Therefore, I know that I need to improve my Turkish foreign language skills in order to communicate with my friends, foreigners, or other people in different social environments such as my school or virtual internet environment (Neşeli).

One of the things that developed a positive attitude towards learning Turkish in me is the desire to learn more about the different cultures and lifestyles of people living in countries where Turkish is spoken as a mother language. I know for sure that as I study and learn English, I can develop more sympathy towards people living in different Turkish states because of their free and peaceful way of living in their social life (Gizemli).

Table 1
Students' Attitudes Towards Turkish Language, Turkish Lessons, and Turkish People and Culture

Themes	Categories	Codes	f	%
		Very positive	10	50
	Attitudes towards Turkish language	Positive	10	50
		Appreciating multiculturalism	19	95
		Desire to make friends	19	95
	Attitudes and perceptions towards Turkish people and cultures	A nation knowing patriotism	17	85
		Desire to learn local accents	15	75
Syrian TFL learners'		Desire for cultural integration	15	75
attitudinal profiles				
		Willingness to improve oral skills	20	100
	Attitudes towards Turkish lessons	Necessity of speaking fluently	19	95
		Respect for personal opinions	16	80
		Feeling secure in lessons	16	80
		Gratuitous teacher support	15	75
		Active participation in classes	10	50

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

As seen in Table 1, students' desire to integrate culturally (75%) clearly shows how much they are willing to identify with people from different Turkish-speaking countries, specifically Turkey (Çetin, 2017; Aktaş, 2013; Şahin, 2019). This also indicates that socio-culturally, these students respect the values of other nations, value cultural pluralism and diversity, and are willing to interact with the vast majority of other people living in different societies (Akbaş, 2018; Akkaya, 2013; Göçer, 2009). In general, it is seen that the majority of Syrian students have positive attitudes towards Turkey and the cultures of other Turkish-speaking countries. In this sense, some of the statements demonstrating the attitudes of the participants towards these countries and their common cultures are given below.

I would like to be a university student in one of the Turkish states in the future. If you are an international university student studying in one of these states, you may feel lucky because universities in these countries promote cultural diversity and often try to organize various social and cultural events for their students. Therefore, from a global perspective, students who study and live in these countries feel more confident, extroverted, strong in communication skills and always ready for many social problems compared to other students who have never lived abroad (Angel).

The main reason why I have positive attitudes towards the culture of the Turkish people is that they have higher living standards than ours. I also

believe that they value their own people more than we do ours. For this reason, I would like to say that I envy not only their individual freedom but also their relatively better living conditions in social life (Violet).

Karatay and Kartallioğlu (2016) argue that in the process of learning a foreign language, attitudes towards that target language are one of the most important factors affecting the success in learning a foreign language and the desire to communicate with others. Göçer (2009) also argues that success in learning a foreign language is particularly affected by attitudes towards that language and people who speak it natively. In support of this idea, Dellal and Yücel (2015) suggest that both attitudes towards foreign language learning environment and conditions as well as cultural integration desires of individuals can significantly affect language learning. In an action research conducted by Biçer and Alan (2017) on the needs of the Syrian students learning Turkish as a foreign language, it was revealed that the Syrian students were positively affected by the immediacy, understanding, and attitudes of their teachers and friends in Turkish and other lessons. Hence, most of them began to like Turkish lessons with a sense of ownership and an increased desire to speak Turkish in the following classes.

The factors affecting the attitudes of Syrian students towards learning Turkish as a foreign language or using Turkish as their communication language are given in Table 2. When Table 2 is examined, approximately 18 students (85% to 90%) in the interview group stated that they did not have much difficulty in communicating with their

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

teachers in Turkish either inside or outside the classroom. Further, the participants stated that they were positively affected by their teachers' willingness and motivation to teach them Turkish during lessons or classroom activities, their unprejudiced and non-cynical classroom attitudes, and uncritical correction techniques when correcting their mistakes (Benzer, 2015; Kırmızı, 2008). For this reason, students indicated that they developed a positive attitude in Turkish speaking lessons and felt more confident in their classes. Some of the students stated that communicating with their teachers had a positive effect on their motivation, which in turn encouraged them to communicate with their teachers in the following classes. The participants who were positively affected by their teachers' empathic attitudes in face-to-face communication stated that they wanted to participate more in Turkish speaking and writing lessons. In this regard, they indicated that as they participate in in-class communicative activities with their teachers or classmates, they begin to realize that their oral communication skills develop gradually and they begin to feel more competent in L2 communication (Akdemir, 2021; Candaş Karababa, 2009; Demirci, 2015; Dönmez & Paksoy, 2015).

Table 2
 Factors Affecting Turkish Language Learning and Use of Turkish as a Communication Language

Themes	Categories	Codes	f	%
Factors affecting Syrian TFL Learners' willingness to learn and speak Turkish language	Factors that positively affect students' attitudes	Motivation	19	95
		Sense of responsibility	19	95
		Attitudes of teachers	17	85
		A peaceful classroom setting	12	60
		Attitudes of classmates	11	55
	Factors that negatively affect students' attitudes	Proficiency in Turkish grammar	10	50
		Lack of speaking proficiency	17	85
		Communication anxiety	17	85
		Peer pressure	16	80
		Lack of self-esteem	14	70
		Difficulty in L2 pronunciation	13	65
		Insufficient L2 feedback by teachers	12	60

Considering the prominent role the teachers have in teaching Turkish and L2 communication, a considerable majority of the students stated that they had some expectations from their teachers during their language learning experiences in the lessons. What the students expected from their teachers was to show them a positive attitude inside or outside the classroom and to use different methods or strategies in the lessons to increase their L2 motivation. In this sense, Gökhan (2014) suggested that both motivation and active participation of teachers in lessons and the immediacy they show their students in foreign language classes are among the most effective factors that positively influence L2 learners' emotions and attitudes towards learning the target language. At this

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

point, different researchers have argued that such constructive approaches and behaviors can significantly increase students' desire, will, and self-confidence in terms of initiating communication in the target language (Büyükkiz & Çangal, 2016; Er, Biçer & Bozkırlı, 2012; Karadağ, 2020).

Some of the statements showing the opinions of Syrian students about their teachers' attitudes and approaches towards them in Turkish lessons are given below.

One thing I appreciate about my teacher is that she is really patient when she listens to me during a one-on-one conversation or discussion in our classes. When I have a mistake about grammar or the pronunciation of words, the teacher's making easy-to-understand sentences for someone with a low level of Turkish knowledge like me, and trying to enlighten me due to my mistakes develops positive feelings in me towards Turkish. In addition, giving us enough time to realize our mistakes and correct them before sharing the right answer is a very effective approach for us to learn Turkish (Cesaretli).

I believe that our teachers play an important role in our education life, as their facial expressions, body language, closeness, attitudes towards us, and their willingness to teach us Turkish positively affect our willingness to participate in classroom activities and in-group discussions during lessons (Day dreamer).

The qualitative analysis results show that the majority of the participants ($f= 16$, 80%) complain of being criticized or considered ridiculous by their classmates in case of any possible mistakes in grammar or

pronunciation during Turkish speaking lessons. Stating that such negative attitudes and peer pressures would both reduce their motivation and negatively affect their willingness to speak in the lessons, most of the students stated that making some grammatical or pronunciation mistakes while learning a foreign language like Turkish should be seen as normal in L2 learning process and that such mistakes should only be corrected by their teachers as authorized persons (Dönmez & Paksoy, 2015; Özyürek, 2009). Therefore, based on the principle of respect for individual ideas and opinions, the majority of the participants emphasized that their classmates should avoid demotivating and humiliating criticism, prejudices, or intolerance in such situations (Şahin, 2020; Tunç, 2015). The participants, who see this as one of the main reasons for their unwillingness in L2 speaking classes or activities, stated that such discourses and behaviors of their classmates can sometimes upset their morale and therefore lower their linguistic- self-confidence in speaking classes. This is also a significant finding that parallels the finding in Yılmaz and Buzlukluoğlu Arslan's (2014) study on the Syrian students learning Turkish as a foreign language. In their study, it was found that the Syrian students were influenced positively or negatively by both their teachers and classmates' perceptions and attitudes towards them when speaking in Turkish lessons.

In the study by Yaylı and Bayyurt (2014b), it is indicated that one of the significant reasons for Syrian students' unwillingness to speak or communicate in Turkish is that some other students in the class make unnecessary interventions or try to interrupt some of their friends while

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

speaking. In this case, it was noted that communication anxiety or lack of self-confidence, as two important drawbacks, was observed over time in the students whose speech was interrupted by their classmates during communication (Lordoğlu, 2015). In addition, 13 (65%) of the interviewees drew attention to some structural, semantic, and phonetic differences between Turkish and Arabic languages by restating that they sometimes had difficulty in understanding various Turkish accents and so they often made unintentional pronunciation mistakes in some words while speaking. The students further stated that these differences in Arabic and Turkish languages caused them to make grammatically incorrect Turkish sentences and that these mistakes were found weird by some of their classmates. In another study conducted by Ünal, Taşkaya, and Ersoy (2018), it was noted that the Syrian students sometimes hesitated about participating in in-class activities due to peer pressure they were exposed to in Turkish speaking activities or the methods and procedures applied by their teachers in correcting their mistakes. Similarly, in the study of Gürbüz and Güleç (2016), it was revealed that the participants complained of peer pressure, untimely error correction attempts, and mockery of erroneous sentences by some classmates in Turkish lessons. Akalın and Zengin (2007) also stated that uncontrolled peer pressure, teacher support, and teacher attitudes play a decisive role in students' motivation, attitudes, and their desire to learn the target language in L2 teaching and learning process. To this end, they emphasized that teachers are responsible for providing a peaceful and safe classroom environment where lessons can be taught effectively and

students can develop positive attitudes towards the target language to be learned.

Below are some statements that show the opinions of Syrian students about the attitudes and approaches of their classmates towards them in Turkish lessons.

It really bothers me to know that some of my classmates will laugh at me when I start communicating in Turkish. I know that I don't speak Turkish as well as my Turkish classmates, but when they make fun of me for mispronouncing certain words like 'I know', 'everyone' or 'social media' in our classes, I get depressed and I want to stop speaking at that moment (Hayat).

Although I often try to speak Turkish with my classmates to improve my oral skills, many of them show reluctance to talk to me even during our breaks. This inevitably causes me to be unwilling and sadly discouraged to start communicating with them another time (Day dreamer).

I would like to state that I love the attitudes of our teachers towards us while learning Turkish in our lessons, but unfortunately one of the things I find most boring when learning Turkish is that whenever I communicate with my classmates in Turkish, we get bored and stop speaking after a while (Asu).

While I and my Arab classmates definitely know that we need to practice speaking Turkish more often in or out of the classroom, we generally prefer to speak Arabic as it is always easier to communicate in our mother tongue (White Mirror).

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

Despite my desire to communicate with many of my friends and my great interest in Turkish language, I often see that my friends are really reluctant in speaking lessons. This unfortunately affects me negatively because I believe that my success in oral skills or speaking in general is dependent on the mood and motivation of my classmates. To be honest, when my other classmates want to actively participate in speaking activities, I would like to participate too (Idealist).

5. Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

In this study, it was revealed that the majority of Syrian students had positive attitudes towards learning Turkish as a foreign language. However, in L2 learning process, the main problems that students encounter are the difference between Turkish and Arabic grammars, sentence structures of both languages, the learners' inability to learn the words correctly, difficulty in forming and speaking correct sentences as well as difficulty in pronunciation in Turkish language. In the studies conducted by Böyükbaş (2016), Parlak (2015), Yılmaz (2014), and Dönmez and Paksoy (2015), it was concluded that both male and female participants had the most difficulty in speaking skills while learning Turkish. In this sense, the results obtained in these studies are consistent with the findings of this study. In his study, Candaş Karababa (2009) indicates that among the factors that negatively affect Syrian students while learning Turkish are phonetic and morphological structure of Turkish language, lack of knowledge in sentence formation, and lack of L2 command in semantics. These findings are similar to the findings of

this study. In the study, it is seen that the Syrian students have problems with L2 oral skills due to the different sentence structure of Turkish language. As an effective solution to this, it is suggested that it will be good for the Syrian students to establish friendships with their Turkish classmates instead of staying away from them in or out of the classes. Biçer and Alan (2017) indicate in their study that the Syrian students who learn Turkish as a foreign language also get some help from their Turkish friends in a Turkish language course and ask their friends about anything they do not understand well. It has been stated that such a cooperation leads student groups from two different nationalities to live in harmony with each other and that this cooperation can also improve intercultural relations when necessary. In addition, it was understood from the statements of the participants that they had particularly some difficulty in learning some Turkish words, recalling them when necessary, and finding a suitable dictionary for the meanings of various words. According to Alyaz, Gürsoy, and Kazanoğlu (2013), during L2 communication or speaking, students often do not know how to express what they want in a foreign language and what they actually need to learn. Regarding this, the researchers suggest that it is indeed the teachers' responsibility to provide foreign language students with access to various materials that will enable them to learn the target language as efficiently as possible and express themselves comfortably in or out of the classroom during L2 learning process (Atas Akdemir, 2018).

It is understood from the statements of the Syrian students that they cannot speak Turkish accurately and fluently enough, that it is very

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

difficult to learn Turkish grammar, and that they cannot often understand the spoken language due to the fact that the Turks speak very quickly. It has been noted that the students think that watching Turkish TV series and movies, communicating with Turkish people more frequently, and making Turkish friends will be an effective solution for this. In the study by Derman (2010), which investigates the views of the foreign students with respect to their adaptation to Turkish social life while studying in Turkey, it is noted that the majority of the students see Turkish television channels as an effective tool for language learning and getting to know Turkish culture better. Er, Biçer, and Bozkırlı (2012) concluded in their research that the use of Turkish movies and music in L2 teaching will positively affect foreign students' attitudes towards Turkish language. These results also support the findings of the current study.

According to the findings of the study, the Syrian students indicated that Turkish people often use different accents, so they have difficulties in correct pronunciation during L2 communication. Similarly, they stated that they have problems due to the difference between the Turkish learned in the books and the language spoken in daily life. At this point, according to Akkaya and Polat (2013), alphabet teaching has an important place in teaching a language as a L2. They further note that recognizing the letters of the alphabet and vocalizing them correctly is the first step of Turkish alphabet teaching, and thus raising awareness about the pronunciation of sounds has an important place in teaching the alphabet. If such a problem is encountered, as recommended by different researchers, some extra practice should be done on the sound equivalents

of the letters in the alphabet. For instance, this can be in the form of having the students pronounce the words in which each sound occurs frequently. Er, Biçer and Bozkırlı (2012) underline in their study that, when teaching Turkish, various audio-visual materials that are suitable for the technology of the age should be used together with textbooks. According to them, many of the common pronunciation disorders in students are due to insufficient use of visual and auditory materials in lessons. It is also obvious that foreign students have difficulties in covering some edge effects in phonetics as well as vowel and consonant harmony in Turkish language. Although the difficulty in pronouncing sounds varies according to the language of the target community, it is clear that foreign students tend to have difficulty in vocalizing some specific sounds, especially in Turkish.

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the Syrian students experienced problems due to their fear of making mistakes while speaking Turkish, fear of being ridiculed by their friends when they make a mistake, feeling of embarrassment, and lack of self-confidence in Turkish lessons. At this point, the students stated that they sometimes ask their teachers for more support in order to handle their lack of self-confidence and communication apprehension in speaking classes. Derman (2010) argues that success in foreign language learning (FLL) is closely related to learners' concern about whether the target language can be learned or not as well as their anxiety of whether or not to make any mistakes while speaking. Considering this, he underlines the fact that ingrained L2 communication anxiety and such a delusional

A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Syrian Learners of Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL)

mood can make students feel constantly uneasy during the FLL process. According to Demirci (2015), one of the effective ways to overcome lack of self-confidence and speaking anxiety in L2 learners in L2 learning process is to provide and activate various interactive speaking activities in the TFL classroom, which will in turn enhance L2 learning motivation in students and generate a positive attitude in them towards learning the target language. Additionally, it is suggested by the researcher that a student's own belief that h/she can learn a second/foreign language and gradual improvement in his or her L2 skills will positively affect the self-confidence and attitude of L2 learners. Most of the Syrian students participating in the semi-structured interviews also indicated that they generally prefer using Turkish when communicating with their friends outside of school, in communication activities, or in their business life. Moreover, the participants stated that they would like to use Turkish more frequently while shopping, during transportation, in different government institutions, and in meeting their daily needs. Regarding this, it should be noted that the findings in the studies of Candaş Karababa (2009) and Büyükkikiz and Çangal (2016) on Syrian immigrant students overlap with the findings of this study.

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