



## Determination of Problems in the Basic Language Skills of University Students learning Turkish in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the relationship between student characteristics (gender, major), and the problems they face when learning Turkish language skills at university level in Kazakhstan. Participants included 120 Kazakh students from three faculties (Law, Philology, and Engineering). They completed a 28 item Likert-type questionnaire which also included two open ended items. MANOVA results indicated that gender and the problems students face were not significantly related while there was a significant relation between major and the problems they face. The only statistically significant relation was found for writing skill. The Chi-square analysis results indicated no relation between both gender and major, and the most difficulty skill to learn. The possible reasons behind the results and suggestions for further research are discussed.

**Keywords:** *Turkish as a Foreign Language; Problems in Teaching Turkish; Turkish Language Skills; Teaching Turkish*

### Introduction

After the adoption of Islam, Arabic were accepted as a scientific language and Persian as a literary language by Turks. Westernization efforts, which began with Tanzimat, first appeared in art, especially in literature. French language was popular between our writers and poets at that time. In the Republican Period, our language has begun to be influenced by the impact of globalization, and the fact that our state policy has declared the United States as its ancient ally. Almost no political party has given the necessary importance to teach Turkish to the foreigners during the Republican Period. (Öksüz, 2011).

The issue of teaching Turkish to foreigners has gained importance since the 1970s. With the collapse of the Soviet regime in the 1990s, the Turkic states gained their independence. The rapprochement with the Turkic states continued rapidly since then. However, the desired level has not yet been reached. Considering that we share the same culture and talk different forms of the same language; this convergence will play a

major role in the development of both languages, and cultures.

Nowadays, foreign language learning is strengthening its place among the teaching activities all over the world. For this purpose, many schools, departments and courses are opened by state and private organizations in Turkey. Dependently, on behalf of the Turkish language teaching, the activities both from different countries as well as in Turkey are increasing. Recently, just as learning English and French, it has become increasingly important to learn Turkish by foreigners. In order to teach Turkish to foreigners, educational centers are opened, researches are conducted, books are prepared, seminars and conferences are organized nowadays. It can be said that the studies on this issue are still not sufficient. As Turkey's weight in the world's agenda is increasing, teaching Turkish activities gains speed, while the weight decreases these activities is slowing. Developments in teaching Turkish to foreigners brings along also some problems.

Increasing the quality in teaching Turkish to foreigners is an important issue. A poor quality in teaching activities will not lead to progress, but will lead to a decline. Therefore, in order to provide a high quality Turkish teaching, it is necessary to identify problems and find solutions to these problems. Detecting the problems in this subject, investigating the areas where students fail and reasons for failure will help educators to identify the problems and offer solutions. In the determination of the problems in language learning, the thoughts of those who learn the language are among the sources that should be applied first. This study is important in terms of revealing the thoughts and suggestions of the students during learning Turkish in Kazakhstan.

## Conceptual Framework

### The Concept of Language

Language is a concept that has many definitions but is often united on a meaning. Language is the greatest helper when individuals aim to convey their personal feelings, dreams, thoughts, desires or proposals to the others. The language, whose task cannot be limited, is the greatest collaborator to provide an understanding of the readings, speeches, writings or visuals sent from others, not just those that are transmitted to others. In a sense, language is the toolkits that help to establish the communication between living beings (Gemalmaz, 2010).

As a communication tool, language is a mortar that holds the community; a common treasure of culture; a mirror reflecting society; it is the arbitrator, judge or physician who regulates the relationship between individuals, groups and communities (Güvenç, 2002). Aksan (1977) draws attention to the fact that language is the means of thinking, generating ideas as

communicating with other people and emphasizes this point in the definition of language.

One of the main characteristics of the language is that the language has a structure and it has a grammar. Grammar is a symbolic system defined by content-style relationship. Language cannot be defined as a system of signs. Language is based on a complex system of understanding (Halliday 2004). Ensuring the full communication through language is depending on the use of the words correctly and in place, setting up sentences correctly, adding the appendixes properly to the words, and using various words by taking into account the meaning expressed in the society (Aytaş & Çeçen, 2010).

### Language Culture Relationship

Language cannot be separated from culture. Language is the most important tool in transferring cultural heritage from generation to generation. It is a bridge between yesterday and tomorrow. Mankind internalizes, maintains or changes its own culture through language. Although language is an element of culture, it is also the transmitter and creator of culture (Okatan, 2012).

The aim of the mother tongue teaching, which is of great importance in the education systems of all countries, is to develop the thinking and communication skills of individuals (Tekin, 1980). Sometimes even a word in the language of the nation can give idea about the material and spiritual culture, beliefs, traditions, people's behavior and relationships between them (Aksan, 1995). Language is like body and culture is like blood (Jiangn, 2000). All the features of culture, history and social accumulations are all within the language. Every word in the language

points a specific area in the outer world, has an external world reality, and this specific area is related to culture (Bölükbaş & Keskin, 2010).

Language instruction is not only teaching vocabulary or grammar, but also teaching the culture in which it develops. Second language learners should be aware of the cultural status of the language to be learned (Demircan, 1990). Learning a foreign language means understanding and being aware of a foreign culture. Every word that a learner learns in a foreign language, every sentence he/she understands, every new text he grasps, causes new thoughts and new images about those who speak this foreign language and the world they live in (Tapan 1990).

### **Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language**

The aim of language education is to improve people's language skills and help them develop their communication skills (Ungan, 2007). Persons should adequately learn reading, listening, speaking and writing skills in the target language in order to be able to communicate with different groups and people (Şahin, 2007). For this reason, these four basic language skills should be taken as the basis for teaching the native language or a foreign language. In the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language, the skill areas of the language, as in the language of the mother tongue education, should be understood satisfactorily (Göğüş, 1978). The adequacy of individuals in the target language depends on their ability to use the basic language skills (Karatay, 2011).

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language is a matter of importance as much as the teaching of Turkish as a mother tongue (Emiroğlu, 2013). It can be said that the studies carried out until today are mostly focused on

the studies related to Turkish language grammar. However, in recent years, important studies have been carried out on the issue of teaching Turkish to foreigners both in Turkey and abroad. Even though there are some studies on contemporary Turkic accents (Azeri, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, etc.) studies on teaching Turkey Turkish to compatriots is increasing.

Teaching Turkish to the kin of the Turkish community constitutes a branch of Turkish teaching, and nowadays has become more popular. In particular, Turkey has started to communicate with many compatriots Turkish communities with the collapse of the USSR.

Güçüyeter and Veyis (2013) stated that the history of teaching Turkish to foreigners can be taken as far back as the Orkhon inscriptions, but it is more accurate to say that it gained importance with the dissolution the USSR and Yugoslavia. In order to further strengthen the geography, religion and historical ties, one of the most important policies implemented by the Republic of Turkey was teaching Turkish to brother countries. With the support and guidance of the Republic of Turkey many institutions, and universities have initiated studies on Turkish teaching.

### **Problems of Turkic Students in Learning Turkish**

When the European Language Portfolio is examined, it is seen that language teaching is divided into three levels as basic (A1-A2), medium (B1-B2) and high (C1-C2). Beginning, ie, A1- A2 level language teaching is a level in which basic language requirements are determined and presented. Therefore, at this level, more activities should be organized to meet the primary needs of the individuals. However,

the medium and high levels are the stages at which it is best to present texts that are blended with cultural elements for language learners (Kalfa, 2013).

The path to be followed in the teaching of languages that are close to each other should be to focus on the differences and the problems encountered rather than similarities. A trial and error, and an unscheduled teaching approach can cause an individual to react negatively to language learning, and to get the wrong impression for the society and the country whose language is being taught (Senemoğlu, 1983). In this respect, in the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language, it is necessary to develop programs suitable for the needs and levels of the learners. In the preparation of these programs, the characteristics, capabilities, emotions and thoughts of the target groups are very important factors that should be taken into consideration.

The issue of teaching Turkish, which has increased its effectiveness on the world, has brought some problems along. A lot of research has been done in the field of teaching Turkish to the Turkish kinship societies, especially in relation to the emerging problems and the solutions of these problems (Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2007; Arslan & Adem, 2010; Aydın, 1994; Erdoğan, 2015; İsmail, 2000; Özyürek, 2009; Turumbetova, 2013, Yılmaz, 2015). The results of these studies have put forth the existence of very different problems in teaching Turkish language skills to Turkic societies. Increasing the number of studies to identify and solve these problems will provide a basis for more effective and accurate teaching of Turkish as a foreign language.

Türkmen (2007), has determined the following problems in teaching Turkish to Chinese, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz students: Phonetical difficulties; difficulties in building sentences; problems related to the Turkish suffixes and phrases; errors arising when the elements of the sentence is established. According to a study conducted by Okatan (2012) with 29 Kazakh, 117 Kyrgyz and 142 Turkmen students, writing skills were very difficult for students. In particular, students from countries that do not use Latin letters have trouble in writing Turkish words correctly.

Kara (2010) has identified the following problems in studying with 441 Central Asian student in his research: Errors are made in the use of the current time mode; instead of using “y” auxiliary consonant, the “n” auxiliary consonant is used; spelling mistakes caused by the confusion of vowel letters are made; students think that every word in Turkish has a synonym and an opposite meaning.

One of the main reasons of the problems experienced by Turkic origin students in learning Turkish is that; although we speak the same language, we speak different dialects. Another reasons is the usage of different alphabets. One more problem is that educators who teach Turkish are not aware of most of these problems.

### **Teaching Turkish in Kazakhstan and Related Problems**

The Turkic states, whose origin, language, religion, culture are one, have long been in common in terms of feelings, grief, and happiness. In 16 December 1991, after receiving the independence, Turkey and Kazakhstan signed agreements in many areas (Batmaz, 2004). These agreements have shown

themselves more in the economic field. Along with the agreements made in the economic field, cooperation in the field of education gained speed in a short period of time. The first product of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Turkey in the arena of education was the Ahmet Yesevi University which was established in Turkestan city in southern Kazakhstan, in 1992, by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Prime Minister of Turkey Süleyman Demirel. With this decision, an important step was taken to teach the Turkish language to the citizens of Kazakhstan. In addition, this university is the first common university between two countries in the Turkic world.

Kazakh and Turkish languages which have the same origin are very close to each other. Although they have similar structural features, in the historical process some changes, especially in terms of sound and grammar have appeared in these languages. Turkish is in the Ural-Altai language family, in terms of structural features it is an agglutinative language, and it has a flexible structure in terms of syntax. That is why it is extremely difficult to learn Turkish by many foreigners (Özyürek, 2009).

Many people perceive learning a foreign language as only speaking that language. However, in a language, we do not only speak, we also read, listen and write. When all of these skills are accomplished then we can say that the language is being learnt (Arslan, 2010). Therefore, the point that needs to be emphasized is to approach the event in a holistic manner and teach all aspects of a language.

One of the studies conducted in order to determine the problems that Kazakhstan students experience while

learning Turkish was done by Yılmaz (2015) with 180 students. As a result of this study, students had the least problems in reading skill which was followed by the listening skill. The most frequently stated problem about listening skill was that they did not understand the rapid conversations with 33.2%. The participants found speaking as the most difficult skill in learning Turkish. On the other hand, 91.5% of the students stated that they have various problems related to writing in Turkish.

The teaching of Turkish as a foreign language in Kazakhstan has a history of more than 25 years. It is still difficult to talk about the existence of an effective method in teaching Turkish, although there have been many institutions in this field in such a long period of time. That is why, it is necessary to conduct more research. First of all, problems should be identified and then the causes of problems should be revealed. In line with the aim of the research, the following questions were sought to be answered.

1. To what extent do Kazakh students face problems in learning Turkish language skills?
2. Is there a difference about the problems students face in learning Turkish language skills across gender groups?
3. Is there a difference about the problems students face in learning Turkish language skills across major groups?

## **Method**

### **Research Method**

In this research, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to identify problems associated with learning Turkish. This kind of research, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, approaches

and concepts together, is called mixed method (Creswell, 2003).

### **Sample**

The research was carried out at Suleyman Demirel University in Kazakhstan in 2018-2019 academic year with 120 students at A2 language level. Of the 120 students 88 were female and 32 were male. Students were from three different faculties. Of the 120 students 42 were from faculty of law, 39 were from faculty of philology and 39 were from faculty of engineering. The main reason for the selection of students from A2 level is that they have two years of experience in learning Turkish as a foreign language at the university level in Kazakhstan. We assumed they will correctly reveal the problems they experienced in learning Turkish language skills.

### **Instrument**

A Likert-type questionnaire was developed by the researchers to identify the problems that Kazakh students encounter while learning Turkish. The questionnaire used in the research was prepared by examining related studies (Biçer, Çoban, & Bakır, 2014; Okatan, 2012; Tüm, 2014; Yılmaz, 2015) conducted in the field of teaching Turkish. Several items were added by the researchers by taking into account the problems they faced while teaching Turkish to foreigners in Kazakhstan.

The questionnaire used in this research was discussed among the authors and revised by two researchers in related academic fields. The reliability of the questionnaire was based on a SPSS statistical analysis to obtain the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value for the total scale was 0.906, for the reading, speaking, listening and writing sub-scales were 0.780,

0.731, 0.767 and 0.856 respectively. These results confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire.

Even though all participants know Turkish, to increase the understandability of the items, their Kazakh translations were also added to the questionnaire. The questionnaire had four dimensions. There were totally 28 items of which seven were for reading, seven were for speaking, 6 were for listening and 8 were for writing skills. The questionnaire items were organized in the form of statements that one could agree or disagree with on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) with 3 signifying a neutral response.

Along with 28 Likert-type items, at the end of each dimension, there were also open-ended questions that enabled participants to add the problems they had experienced during learning Turkish. Finally, as a separate question, students were asked to specify the most difficult skill (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) for them while learning Turkish.

### **Data Collection**

Subjects were recruited on a volunteer basis to participate in the study. Data were collected from only Kazakh students and from those who know Turkish at A2 level. Participants were also assured that all identifying information would be kept anonymous. Following their consent, participants were administered the online questionnaire. The online questionnaire was administered during Turkish courses which took approximately 15 minutes to be completed.

### **Data Analysis**

Initially, data cleaning were conducted and 23 respondents were removed because of incomplete responses, other nationalities, not A2 level, and

entering the same value for all items. The coding of the positively stated items was reversed in order to ensure that low scores meant low agreement on all items of the scale. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for all items and variables on the survey questions. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare the problems in the basic language skills of university students learning Turkish among gender, and major groups. We used gender, and major as independent variables and the levels of the problems in language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) as dependent variables. Subsequent univariate analyses were conducted on separate groups followed by LSD post hoc tests. Separately Chi-square test was done to

determine the difference between gender and major groups for their opinions about the most difficult learning skill.

## Results

Initial descriptive statistics were carried out in order to disclose the item average scores on each factor of the instrument for each gender, and major. Inferential statistics were then utilized to test whether the effect of gender and major, and the interactions among the two independent variables were statistically significant. Ratings for each skills of Turkish language across gender are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the language skills for female and male students

Gender	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Mean
Female	2.28	2.69	2.73	2.68	2.59
Male	2.45	2.74	2.91	2.71	2.70
All	2.33	2.70	2.77	2.69	2.62

Table 1 shows that male (M=2.70) students have more problems related to language skill when compared to female students (M=2.59). The significance of this difference is assessed through MONAVA in the next section.

Students' averages for reading, speaking, listening and writing across major groups are indicated in Table 2.

The mean overall scores were 2.33 for reading, 2.70 for speaking, 2.77 for listening and 2.69 for writing. These values indicate that Kazakh university students at A2 level in all faculties reported little problems with respect to all dimensions of language skills.

Table 1. Mean statistics of reading, speaking, listening and writing for each faculty

Faculty	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Mean
Law	2.10	2.54	2.58	2.40	2.41
Philology	2.39	2.74	2.82	2.73	2.67
Engineering	2.51	2.84	2.93	2.95	2.81
All	2.33	2.70	2.77	2.69	2.62

Table 1 indicates that Kazakh students relatively face more problems in listening ( $M=2.77$ ) and have least problems in reading ( $M=2.33$ ). The mean scores of students were 2.41, 2.67, and 2.81 for law, philology and engineering faculties. The interpretation of differences between the groups can be seen in the inferential statistics section.

Table 3 presents Kazakh university students' problems in learning basic Turkish language skills represented by the percent of respondents who endorsed each possible response (1 to 5); items are listed in order of mean score. Responses for 1 and 2 were grouped together because they both represent disagreement while responses for 4 and 5 were grouped together

because they both represent agreement. We can categorize the level of problems: high—70% or more; moderate—40–70%; and low—below 40%. None of the items revealed students having high difficulty in learning Turkish language skills, but four of the items displayed moderate beliefs compared to 25 items displaying low difficulty (See the 4&5 column in Table 3). On the item basis, the 16<sup>th</sup> item referring to “I don't understand fast-spoken phrases” was rated highest ( $M = 3.46$ ) and the fifth item referring to “I have difficulty in reading numbers and foreign words” was scored the lowest ( $M = 1.91$ ).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the items

#	Item	Mean (SD)	1&2 (%)	3 (%)	4&5 (%)
16	I don't understand fast-spoken phrases.	3.46 (1.06)	20.83	15	64.17
9	I'm having trouble setting up long and canonical sentences.	3.38 (1.12)	25.83	13.33	60.83
22	I am having trouble writing my thoughts in Turkish.	3.08 (1.16)	37.5	15	47.5
8	I have no problem with speaking skills.	3.07 (1.14)	41.67	16.67	41.67
7	I do not understand Turkish stereotype words.	2.99 (1.18)	35.83	25	39.17
21	I have no problem with writing skills.	2.90 (1.18)	44.17	20	35.83
23	I'm doing a lot of linguistic mistakes when writing.	2.87 (1.05)	37.5	30.83	31.67
18	I can't understand the words used in movies and music.	2.85 (1.07)	40	28.33	31.67
19	I understand when I read a word, but I do not understand when I hear it.	2.75 (1.00)	41.67	32.5	25.83
15	I can easily understand what I listen to.	2.70 (1.13)	47.5	25	27.5
12	I'm having trouble using the appendices correctly.	2.68 (1.05)	51.67	19.17	29.17
28	I can't write long words correctly.	2.66 (1.09)	49.17	25.83	25
25	I know the meaning of words, but I can't make a sentence.	2.63 (1.11)	52.5	20	27.5
2	My reading speed is slow.	2.62 (1.17)	54.17	17.5	28.33
27	I do not know the methods and techniques of writing.	2.52 (1.02)	55	25.83	19.17

Table 3 continued

26	I am having difficulty writing foreign words while writing.	2.51 (0.91)	53.33	31.67	15
13	I'm having trouble saying the sentences I've built with my mother tongue.	2.48 (1.08)	55.83	20.83	23.33
17	I'm having no trouble understanding everyday conversations.	2.48 (1.08)	61.67	18.33	20
11	I use the words correctly in sentences.	2.48 (1.00)	55.83	27.5	16.67
14	I'm afraid of others blaming when I talk.	2.44 (1.19)	58.33	15	26.67
4	I can't read long words correctly.	2.41 (1.10)	65.83	10.83	23.33
20	I understand when I listen to some conversations more than once.	2.40 (0.96)	66.67	16.67	16.67
10	I'm having a trouble in pronouncing words.	2.39 (1.07)	67.5	9.17	23.33
1	I easily understand what I read.	2.18 (1.08)	74.17	9.17	16.67
24	I have problems with the spelling of letters.	2.12 (1.01)	77.5	9.17	13.33
6	As I read, I cannot devote myself exactly what I read.	2.11 (1.01)	73.33	14.17	12.5
3	As I read, I find it difficult to pronounce words and some letters correctly.	2.08 (1.07)	73.33	11.67	15
5	I have difficulty in reading numbers and foreign words.	1.91 (0.83)	82.5	12.5	5

Note: Items 1, 11, 15, 17, 20, and 21 are reverse coded.

Inferential statistics were demonstrated by carrying out a two-way MANOVA to assess the effect of gender, and major on students' difficulties in learning basic Turkish language skills. Assumptions of MANOVA—normality, independence of observations, homogeneity of covariance matrices of each group, and the random and independent sampling from the population – were tested. Homogeneity of covariance matrices for each group was violated due to the significance of Box's M test ( $p = 0.001$ ). Pillai's trace was utilized for the analysis of MANOVA because the homogeneity of covariance matrices assumption was not met, and it is more robust to violations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The group sizes in this study are over 30 and if group sizes are over 30, then the MANOVA is robust against

violations of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices assumption (Allen, & Bennett, 2008).

For MANOVA we started with the analysis of the main effects, i.e., the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variables, ignoring the effects of all other independent variables. A two-way MANOVA was performed on the independent variables (gender, and major) and four levels of the dependent variable (reading, speaking, listening and writing). MANOVA results for the main effects indicated that gender was found to have no influence on the students' problems in learning Turkish. On the other hand, results showed positive main effects for major,  $F(8, 224) = 2.67$ ,  $p = .008$ , Pillai's trace=1.174, partial  $\eta^2 = .087$ .

To determine how the problems associated with the reading, speaking, listening and writing (dependent variables) differ for the major groups (independent variable), we need to look at the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects. We found that major has a statistically significant effect on only writing.  $F(2, 114) = 9.38, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .141$ . It is important to note that we made Bonferroni correction for alpha level to account for multiple ANOVAs being run. Thus, in this case, we divided the original  $\alpha$ -value by the number of analyses on the dependent variable. We accepted the statistical significance at  $p < .0125$ .

We followed up the significant ANOVA for writing with Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests. We found that mean scores of law faculty students were statistically significantly different from both philology and engineering faculty students' scores ( $p < .05$ ), but scores of the philology and engineering faculty students were not statistically significantly different ( $p = .109$ ). These differences are visualized by the plots in Figure 1.

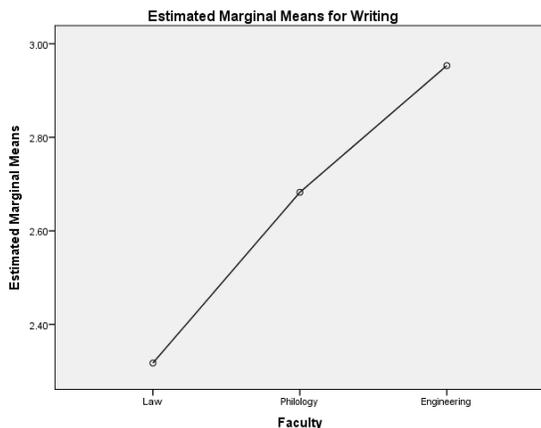


Figure 1. Mean Scores for Law, Philology, and Engineering Faculties

As seen from Figure 1, students' scores for the problems they encounter in writing in Turkish

increases from law faculty to engineering faculty. A low score means little problem while a high score means they have more problems in writing in Turkish language. Thus, students from faculty of law significantly have less problems in writing in Turkish when compared to students from philology and engineering faculties while the difference between the means of the students from philology and engineering faculties was not significant.

A separate question was posed to learn which learning skill students chose to be the most difficult for them. We assessed if there is differences between the gender groups regarding the learning skills as well as the major groups. A Chi-square test was used to see if there was a relationship between two the categorical variables, that is, gender and learning skills, and major and learning skills. The chi-square test results showed that there was no relationship between gender and the Turkish language learning skills  $\chi^2(3, N = 120) = 6.178, p = .103$ . Also, there was no association between major and language skills,  $\chi^2(6, N = 120) = 7.58, p = .271$ . This results generally support the finding from MANOVA analysis which is an indicator of reliability of the instruments we used.

Finally, the last question posed to the respondents was the additional problems in learning Turkish language skills that they wanted to add. The questions and some of students' responses for each category of the language learning skills are as follows:

*What are the other problems you are experiencing in the reading skill?*

New words. I don't know how to use grammar. No problem, I just need to learn a little more words. Over time, I will understand more. Sometimes it is difficult

to understand fast-talking people. We practice a little. Do not understand correctly. We have other lessons other than Turkish, so we cannot allocate all our time to Turkish lesson.

*What are the other problems you encounter in the speaking skills?*

Could not setting up long sentences. I can't use tenses. I'm having a hard time building difficult sentences. Sometimes I'm embarrassed while talking, I am not sure if I'm telling correctly or it's weird. There are many words that I don't know. I'm not good at talking. I need more practice to improve my conversation. Lack of vocabulary. Problems with vocabulary. It is a problem not to know grammar properly. I make grammatical mistakes while talking, and I need a lot of time because I do not know the words. I do not understand fast-talking. I cannot tell correctly what I think.

*What other problems you encounter in the listening skills?*

Fast conversations. I don't understand it when they speak Turkish quickly. I'm not good at listening, I don't understand music and movies. I just don't understand when I hear something. I that don't know, but it's not a big problem. I don't understand fast-talking persons. I need to listen more. Too fast conversations are a problem. I do not understand the conversations in Turkish.

*What other problems you are faced with in the writing skills?*

Positive and negative interrogative sentence. Not knowing the meaning of many words. I'm doing a lot of grammar mistakes when writing. Writing long and difficult words. I have a problem with making

mistakes when writing. Sometimes, difficulties arise when writing essays.

## Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, we administered a questionnaire of 30 items (two were not Likert type) to 120 students in Kazakhstan to determine the problems they faced while learning Turkish. The students evaluated the problems they encountered in Turkish learning between 1 and 5. Only in four items (8, 9, 16, and 22) students average score were over three (3.07, 3.38; 3, 46 and 3.08 respectively), while in the remaining 24 items the students average scores were below three. This indicates that students are not faced with very serious problems in learning Turkish. MANOVA result revealed that there was no difference between the gender groups in terms of the problems they encounter in learning Turkish language skills while MANOVA result for major groups (Law, Philology, and Engineering) was statistically significant. However, this result was significant for only writing skill. The students of faculty of law stated the least problems in writing, while the students of faculty of engineering indicated the most problems. The problems encountered by law faculty students were significantly less than the other two faculties. There was no significant difference between the students of philology and engineering faculties in terms of writing skill in Turkish. In one separate question we asked students to identify the most difficult skill in learning Turkish. Result of the Chi-square analysis showed no significant difference between both gender and major groups. From the results of the open ended question, we found that students mostly did not understanding speedy conversations and could not form long sentences in Turkish.

The participants' scores in all learning skills were low; the overall, average was 2.62 and it was 2.33, 2.70, 2.77, and 2.69 respectively for reading, speaking, listening, and writing. In other words, in average students were not agree with the problems listed in the questionnaire. This finding can be explained by the closeness of Turkish and Kazakh languages. Among all skills, it is seen that the skill with the least difficulty is the reading. Yılmaz (2015) in his study, also found that Kazakh students experience the least difficulty in reading skill. Contrary, while Açıık (2008) found the writing the most difficult skill, and Küzeci (2007) reported the speaking the most difficult skill, our study found the listening skill the most difficult skill.

The finding that there was no difference between the gender groups can be attributed to self-confidence of Kazakh students. Both male and female Kazakh students are educated in kindergartens and many socializing activities are conducted from early ages. In general, research has found that girls are more motivated to learn foreign languages than boys (Heinzmann, 2009), however, the equality of male and female students in our study can also be explained by the alike motivation of both groups.

Students from faculty of law significantly reported the least problems in learning Turkish in writing skill because note taking activities are very common in this faculty. However, engineering faculty students stated

more problems because instead of essay writing, they usually deal with math and calculations.

From these results there are to evidences for the reliability of the questionnaire we used in data collection. First, there was an agreement between MANOVA and Chi-square analysis results. We wanted to reveal students problems in learning Turkish language skills through 28 Likert type items and except for writing skills of only one faculty, MANOVA showed no significant differences. Besides, we asked students the skill which they have the most problem while learning Turkish and Chi-square analysis results showed no difference between groups. Second, in the last item of the questionnaire we asked students to write their difficulties in learning Turkish skills. Do not understanding the fast conversations and could not setting up long sentences were the two problems most frequently reported by students. The results from the Likert-type items were similar: In 16<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> items (see Table 3) students also evaluated these two problems the most serious problem in learning Turkish.

Future research should focus on the problems that high school students face with during learning Turkish because there are a lot of high schools in which students learn Turkish in Kazakhstan. Moreover, the strategies that male and female students use in learning Turkish should be studied.

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