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Full Length Research Paper

The extent to which teachers of Turkish as a foreign language accept themselves as competent

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The purpose of the present study is to determine the extent to which teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language think that they are professionally competent. For this purpose, first the qualifications expected from these teachers were investigated and as a result of the literature review, these qualifications were grouped under three headings (knowledge, application, development). The statements put under these headings were turned into questionnaire items by the researcher after which the questionnaire was administered to the participants. The findings of the study show that high majority of the teachers think that they are highly competent. Moreover, it was found that the departments graduated from do not have significant impacts on their perception of self-efficacy. However, work leads to significant difference in the perception.

Key words: Language teaching, Turkish as a foreign language, teacher of Turkish as a foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a social phenomenon and reflects the ways of perceiving, thinking and living of a society. This is clearly seen in the saying of Atatürk "Turkish language is the heart, memory of the Turkish nation" (İnan, 1969: 352). Language is a vehicle to protect and transfer cultural links. Hence, teaching of a foreign language also includes the teaching of a new culture (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Language teaching is somehow teaching of a culture. Culture is the living style of a society and language is the most powerful tool forming and transferring the culture by connecting individuals to each other through reflection of emotions and thoughts. Language brings the society into existence and transfers the existing culture. In this respect, teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language open a window to Turkish

culture. Of course, the first thing to be seen by an individual looking through this window is the teacher. Therefore, a language teacher is like a mirror reflecting the culture of a society.

Determination of the qualifications to be possessed by the teacher is of great importance to reveal the current state and highlight the points to be developed. Specific subject area competencies of Turkish Language teachers, Turkish Language and Literature teachers and foreign language teachers were set up by the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2008); yet, there is no institutional work conducted so far to determine the professional competencies of the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language. However, teaching of Turkish as a foreign language is a field requiring teaching

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qualifications different from those of Turkish Language teaching or any foreign language teaching.

Mother tongue teaching aims to impart skills rather than information (Kavcar, 2008:40). The main purpose of Turkish Language teaching is to enable students to acquire competencies in various skill areas. Each language represents a pattern of thinking, expressing and understanding with its own structural and semantic rules and functioning system (Yüce, 2005: 82). From the birth onwards, listening and speaking skills of people in their mother tongue start to develop. When they come to certain age, they start to get education to develop their reading and writing skills at school. In this respect, the aim of mother tongue education is to enable students already having mastered listening and speaking skills with the support of family and close environment to acquire reading and writing skills and to improve these four skills.

Foreign language can be described as another acquired language different from the mother tongue. Merger of syntax, content and use components of a language is realized through four basic language skills. Development of one skill affects the development of another skill. Foreign language acquisition requires teaching of four basic skills in a conscious and planned manner and mastering of knowledge, skills and perceptions related to the target language. Unlike mother tongue acquisition process, while learning the language of a foreign culture, it is usually unlikely to start learning with listening and speaking skills already mastered; hence, four skills should be taught and developed. The objectives of foreign language teaching can be understanding someone talking in the target language, speaking correctly and properly, reading and understanding a text written in the target language, writing intelligibly and having some information about the culture and traditions of the people using the target language as their mother tongue and understanding their living style (Türkkan, 1997:227). In this regard, the process of learning a foreign language is completely different from the process of learning the mother tongue.

Education is constantly changing and evolving dynamic structure. Teachers have the most important role in teaching-learning process. One of the main elements of the development of the evaluation model of the education system is important for the development of the teacher's performance (MEB, 2001:29). However, there is not even in existing higher education program about the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, yet.

Teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language are graduates of departments such as Turkish language teaching, Turkish language and literature, English, German and French language teaching. The graduates of foreign language teaching departments get education to teach their respective foreign languages. The graduates of Turkish language teaching or Turkish language and literature departments get education to teach their mother tongue and improve their language skills. The teachers

teaching Turkish as a foreign language are provided with in-service training by the organizations and institutions after they start working in these organizations and institutions. However, as there is no cooperation and coordination among the institutions, there are some differences in this in-service training.

It is known that teaching of Turkish as a foreign language has been conducted inside Turkey and in many regions of the world by various organizations and institutions.

With the Fundamental Law of National Education put into force in 1973, teaching profession was defined as a profession responsible for conducting educational and related administrative duties (Articles 19, 20, 21). "In the Article 43 of the same law, it was stipulated that each teacher should have at least undergraduate education and for preparation to teaching profession, pre-service teachers should be equipped with general cultural knowledge, subject area knowledge, and pedagogic formation (Demirel, 1989:5). On the other hand, there is no program to give accredited special subject area education to the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language in higher education.

Today, the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language are the graduates of the departments of Turkish Language teaching, Turkish Language and Literature and foreign language teaching. Language and cultures are interrelated concepts. "Culture is connected to the ground and this ground is the character of the nation" (Atatürk, 1921:17). The teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language should be trained in subject area specific programs so that they should be knowledgeable about Turkish history, culture, value system and mythology as well as Turkish language and they should have a comprehensive world view and general culture. However, the objectives of foreign language teaching programs do not comply with these expectations. In a similar manner, objectives of Turkish language teaching and Turkish Language and Literature programs are not suitable for the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language. Teaching of a language as a mother tongue is different from its teaching as a foreign language.

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language was initiated in a systematic way in the Republic era in the leadership of universities. Boğaziçi University and Ankara University took the lead in these attempts. These institutions have made great contributions to the research in the field.

The pioneering institution in this field is Turkish Language Teaching Center (TÖMER) established within the body of Ankara University in 1984. Particularly, in 1990s, Ankara University TÖMER made great contributions to the field by providing valuable resources for many master's theses.

In recent years, in line with globalization and changing policies, teaching Turkish as a foreign language has gained greater importance.

In the globalized world, because of it geopolitical location, Turkey and accordingly Turkish have gained

greater importance and as a result, the number of people wanting to learn Turkish as a foreign language has increased. According to the statements of the director of Turkish Linguistic Society, Prof. Dr. Şükrü Haluk Akalın (TDK, 2011), there are universities giving Turkish language education in nine countries. Depending on the density of Turkish population and wish to learn Turkish, there are 87 countries offering Turkish language courses in secondary education. In addition to this, there are 46 countries offering private Turkish language courses. The number of countries where there are Turcology departments in which Turkish language is taught and Turkish language and literature research is conducted is 28.

As a result of his studies in 2005, Dolunay reported that there are 223 language teaching centers teaching Turkish for academic and educational as well as commercial and tourism purposes in 57 countries.

As a conclusion, Turkish language taking the fifth place among the most widely spoken languages of the World is taught to the foreigners both in Turkey and abroad in language schools of universities, Turcology centers, private and state language courses and foundations and associations. Educators who will teach Turkish as a foreign language should have adequate information about Turkish history, culture, value system and mythology as well as about Turkish language itself.

In today's world, there is a rapid change in every field of life. In business life undergoing continuous change, it is very costly and difficult to evaluate workers and monitor their development. At that point, performance evaluation comes to the fore to achieve organizational objectives and to determine the personal contributions of the workers to the fulfillment of these objectives (Helvacı, 2002:5). In this regard, performance evaluation is a process used to assess workers' personal achievements and behaviors for a certain period of time. In performance evaluation, there is no failure. The main purpose is to develop the existing one.

Performance can be classified as individual and organizational performance. Individual performance can be defined as working performance of a worker manifested in a certain period of time (Pakdil, 2001:10). In the simplest terms, performance can be defined as the measurement of efficiency (Filiz, 2004:9). A good evaluation means deeply focusing on the goals of education rather than being engrossed in short-term goals (Boud, 1998:2). Effective evaluation means thinking clearly and revising and this does not take as much time as frequently recurring activities.

There are many methods developed to evaluate individuals' performance levels. Performance evaluation methods are divided into two in literature as classic and modern performance evaluation methods. According to a study (Adanali, 2008), when compared to traditional methods, alternative assessment and evaluation methods lead to more positive outcomes. Self-evaluation is one of the alternative evaluation methods including meta-

cognitive knowledge for development in active learning environments.

What a teacher should know and does not know should be elicited for the teacher to execute his/her duties effectively. This may also help the teacher to raise his/her awareness of the present state and to determine the needs of education. Determination of the present state can be performed sometimes through director and expert evaluation and sometimes through teacher evaluation. According to Kubat (2012:56), a person's evaluation of his/her performance and himself/herself by considering all his/her main duties, functions and responsibilities is self-evaluation. In this way, workers can see what criteria are used in their performance evaluation. Therefore, selfevaluation is of great importance to make contribution to securing of justice (Birben, 2000:33). Moreover, selfevaluation of teachers is important to determine the educational needs and arrange the education accordingly.

In the present study, based on what types of differences among the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language lead to different outcomes in relation to their duties, it is investigated on which subjects the teachers find themselves competent and the extent to which they think they are competent.

METHOD

The purpose of the present study is to reveal the extent to which the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language find themselves competent in their profession based on their own evaluations.

For this purpose, answer to the research question "what is the extent to which the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language see themselves competent?" was sought.

In this regard, two sub-questions were generated in the present study.

- 1. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which the teachers find themselves competent based on the undergraduate program they graduated from?
- 2. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which the teachers find themselves competent based on whether they work in Turkey or abroad?

Research model

Within the study, national and international works related to the subject of the present study were examined through document analysis method. From the data collected in this way, qualifications expected from a teacher teaching Turkish as a foreign language were elicited and worded as questionnaire items. The items were subsumed under three themes: A. Knowledge, B. Application, C. Development. There are three sections in A. Knowledge theme, five sections in B. Application theme, and four sections in C. Development theme. In this way, 3 themes and 12 sections were formed. So a questionnaire was created by 44 items belonging to these 12 sections. Then they were presented to the scrutiny of 9 field experts and in light of their feedback, the total number of the items was reduced to 44.

These items were then transformed into 5-point Likert format (1. I have low level of competency, 2. My competency needs to be

Table 1. Personal information

	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate program		
Turkish Language Teaching	13	24,0
Turkish Language and Literature	19	35,1
German Language Teaching	7	12,9
French Language Teaching	7	12,9
English Language Teaching	4	7,4
Hungarian Language Teaching	2	3,7
Latin language	1	1,8
Arabic	1	1,8
Total	54	100
Place of Duty		
Abroad	36	66,6
In Turkey	18	33,3
Total	54	100
Length of service		
0-5 years	23	42,5
6-10	13	24,0
11-15	5	9,2
16 or more	13	24,0
Total	54	100

developed, 3. I have moderate competency, 4. I am competent, 5. I am highly competent).

In the questionnaire administered on voluntary basis, the participants were asked to evaluate themselves according to this 5-point Likert scale.

Study group

The present study is limited to the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language in Turkey and abroad. The number of teachers participating in the study is 54 (Table 1).

Out of 54 participants of the study, 32 (59.2%) are graduates of Turkish Language Teaching and Turkish Language and Literature programs of universities, 22 (40.8%) are graduates of foreign language teaching departments such as English, German and French. Thirty six of the participants (66.6%) work abroad and 18 (33.3%) work in Turkey. Out of totally 54 participants, 23 have a length of service of 0-5 years, 13 (24.0%) have a length of service of 6-10 years, 5 (9.2%) have a length of service of 11-15 years and 13 (24.0%) have a length of service of 16 years or more.

Data collection instruments

In the first section of the questionnaire, explanations are made and personal information is collected. In the second section of the questionnaire, expectations from the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language are grouped under the themes of Knowledge, Application and Development and under the theme of Knowledge, there are three sub-headings (language and linguistics, methods and techniques, properties and rules of Turkish language), under

the theme of Application, there are five sub-headings (planning, setting arrangement, material use, development of four skills, assessment and evaluation) and under the theme of development, there are four sub-headings (language use, language and culture interaction, communication and cooperation) and under all these sub-headings, there are totally 44 items.

The data obtained from the questionnaire used in the present study conducted to determine the extent to which the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language think that they are competent in teaching the language was analyzed as follows: 1. I have low level of competency, 2. My competency needs to be developed, 3. I have moderate competency, 4. I am competent, 5. I am highly competent.

Data analysis

The questionnaire was administered on voluntary basis and totally 60 questionnaires were returned; but 6 of them were found to be invalid and accordingly 54 questionnaires were considered for analysis.

In order to establish reliability, Cronbach Alfa reliability coefficient was calculated and it was found to be reliable (Cronbach Alfa Coefficient=0.975). Moreover, the mean of the scores taken from the related parts was found to be 4.61 and their standard deviation was found to be 0.38; accordingly, it was concluded that they displayed attitude over the average.

The data collected in the study were transferred into SPSS (Statistic Package for Social Science) package program for statistical analysis. In the analysis of the data, Cronbach alpha, frequencies, percentages, arithmetic mean and Mann-Whitney U test were employed.

Table 2. Results as a whole.

	Frequencies	Percentage
Highly competent	34	62,8
Competent	18	33,5
Moderately competent	2	3,7
Total	54	100

 Table 3. Knowledge section.

Competencies	Frequencies	Percentage
Properties and rules of Turkish language	34	63,5
Language teaching, approaches, methods and techniques	11	20,3
Components of the Language and linguistics knowledge	9	16,6
Total	54	100

Table 4. Application section.

Competencies	Frequency	Percentage
Planning of the teaching process in line with the purpose	5	9,2
Arrangement of learning setting	7	12,9
Use of appropriate materials and resources	8	14,8
Developing students' listening, reading, speaking and writing skills	32	59,2
Monitoring and evaluating the process	2	3,7
Total	54	100

Table 5. Development section.

Competencies	Frequency	Percentage
Paying attention to proper and effective use of Turkish	35	65,3
Being sensitive to language and culture interaction	5	9,2
Being willing to communicate	9	16,6
Being eager to develop professionally	5	9,2
Total	54	100

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data collected in the study and the participants' personal information such as undergraduate program graduated, place of working and length of service are presented (Table 2).

Out of the participants, 62.8% think that they are highly competent, 33.5% think that they are competent and 3.7% think that they are moderately competent. This indicates that in general participants think that they are competent in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

From Table 3, it is seen that the participants think that they have the highest level of competency in the properties and rules of Turkish language.

In the application section, it is seen that the participants think that they have the highest level of competency in developing students' listening, reading, speaking and writing skills (Table 4).

From Table 5, it is seen that the participants think that they have the highest level of competency in paying attention to proper and effective use of the language.

The results of Mann-Whitney U test run with the total score means show that the program graduated does not lead to significant change in competency levels of the participants (P>0.05). However, the results of the same test indicate that the competency levels of the participants vary significantly based on where they work. There is a significant difference between the competency levels of

the teachers working in Turkey and those of the teachers working abroad (P<0.05). The mean score of those working in Turkey is x=4.75 and that of those working abroad is x=4.50. This means that those working in Turkey see themselves more competent than those working abroad.

It is widely agreed that setting is of great importance in teaching of a foreign language. What is the most important thing in this regard is whether the setting of teaching is the place where the target language is used as a mother tongue. As teaching target language in an environment where it is used as a mother tongue is a facilitating factor, those learning Turkish in Turkey are naturally more successful and hence, teachers working in Turkey may feel more competent. On the other hand, for teachers working abroad, teaching Turkish can require more effort. In this respect, more qualifications are expected to be possessed by teachers working abroad. While there are many components supporting teaching in Turkey, the teacher is the most important element abroad.

The data collected indicate that the teachers of Turkish as a foreign language are the graduates of different programs such as Turkish language teaching, Turkish language and literature, English, German and French teaching. For teachers to meet the requirements of their profession, not only the quality of the education they get but also their beliefs in their competency are of great importance (Yılmaz et al., 2004). The results of the analyses revealed that the program graduated does not lead to significant differences in competency levels of the teachers. Therefore, it can be argued that the program graduated does not affect the teachers' opinions about teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The competency level of the teachers working in Turkey is greater than that of the teachers working abroad. The basis of language teaching is the development of four language skills. Development of language skills is directly related to their frequency of use. Being a living entity, the language can be improved as long as it is used (Celebi, 2006:287). The frequency of using Turkish abroad is lower than that of using it in Turkey. It's known that in foreign language teaching the place, where the target language is spoken as a native language, has supportive and facilitative effects (Mete, 2003:19). Hence, teachers teaching Turkish abroad need more support than teachers teaching it in Turkey.

The results of the study show that in general 34 (62.8%) of the participants think that they are highly competent, 18 (33.5%) of them think that they are competent and 2 (3.7%) of them think that they are moderately competent. This indicates that in general, the participants find themselves competent enough. Morrisey (1981), indicates that the candidates of teachers can develop self-efficacy beliefs and attitudes only in education faculties. However, there is not a higher education program about teaching Turkish as a foreign

language yet.

When the findings of the questionnaire were evaluated according to the sections, following results were obtained. Among the components making up the Knowledge section, the participants think that they have the highest competency in properties and rules of Turkish (63.5%).

The teachers are the graduates of different departments of universities and the properties and rules of Turkish make up the subject area knowledge; hence, the teachers to be educated to teach Turkish as a foreign language should be provided with training about these properties and rules. In the present study, it was found that the teachers think that they are the least competent in language teaching approaches, methods and techniques; hence, it can be argued that they did not have enough training on these issues and they need more training on how to conduct language teaching.

Among the components making up the Application section, the participants think that they have the highest level of competency in developing their students' listening, reading, writing and speaking skills (59.2%).

Language teaching involves improving four language skills. In this regard, the teachers' finding themselves competent in improving their students' language skills is understandable. It is also comprehensible that those teachers have difficulties to plan instructional activities due to having diverse educational backgrounds that are not compatible to what they teach.

Among the components making up the Development section, the participants think that they have the highest level of competency in paying attention to the proper and effective use of English (65.3%). The teachers' thinking that they have a high level of competency in proper and effective use of the language is reasonable as they teach this language. However, they think that they have low level of competency in professional development and cooperation and this may indicate that they are aware of their shortcomings in these areas.

The participants think that they have the lowest level of competency in components of language and linguistics knowledge under the section of Knowledge, monitoring and evaluating teaching process under the section of Application and in willingness for cooperation to improve professionally and being sensitive to development under the Development section.

There is no participant marking "I have low level of competency" or "My competency needs to be developed" options in the questionnaire. Depending on these findings, it can be postulated that the participants perceive themselves as adequate in terms of teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

If all the teachers teaching Turkish as a foreign language were involved in the study, it would be more informative and useful. Moreover, getting students' opinions about the process can be very useful to support this study conducted based on teachers' opinions. In light

of the findings of the present study, following suggestions can be made: a coordination center should be established to ensure coordination in terms of applications and materials, more support should be provided for teachers working abroad, continuous information exchange should be conducted and in-service trainings should be updated.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

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