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## An Insight into the Attitudes of Foreign ESL Students to Learning Turkish

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigated the attitudes of foreign students' toward learning Turkish as a second language. The study was carried out with 30 foreign students studying at Bartın University the Language Education and Instruction Application and Research Center in the 2018-2019 academic year by administering a survey designed on a five-point Likert scale with 43 items. The scales examined in the questionnaire were "integrativeness, attitudes to L2 community, cultural interest, attitudes to learning Turkish, criterion measures, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, family influence, instrumentality (promotion and prevention), and fear of assimilation". The data were analyzed by using SPSS program. The results revealed that Foreign first-year university students had positive attitudes towards learning Turkish since they need it in their lives and through their education.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Motivation, ESL Learners, Professional Needs.

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# Türkçeyi İkinci Dil olarak Öğrenen Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrencilerin Türkçe Öğrenmeye Yönelik Tutumlarına Bir Bakış

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## ÖZET

Çalışmada yabancı öğrencilerin ikinci dil olarak Türkçe öğrenmeye yönelik tutumları incelenmiştir. Çalışma, beşli Likert ölçeğinde 43 maddeden oluşan bir anket uygulanarak, 2018-2019 eğitim öğretim yılında Bartın Üniversitesi Dil Eğitim ve Öğretim Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi'nde okuyan 30 yabancı öğrenciyle gerçekleştirildi. Anketteki maddeler, Dörnyei ve Csizér (2006) ve Ryan (2005) tarafından yakın zamanda tasarlanmış bir ankette seçilmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı olarak kullanılan alanlar: bütünlük, bütünlüşme, ikinci öğrenilen dil topluluğuna tutum, kültürel ilgi, Türkçe öğrenmeye yönelik tutum, ölçüt önlemleri, ideal ikinci dil öz, kendi kendine ikinci dil edinimi özeti, aile etkisi, araçsallık (tanıtım ve önleme) ve asimilasyon korkusu. Toplanan veriler SPSS istatistik programında tanımlayıcı istatistikler kullanılarak analiz edildi. Sonuçlar, Yabancı birinci sınıf üniversite öğrencilerinin, enstrümantal nedenlerden ötürü, ikinci bir dil olarak Türkçe öğrendiklerini ve ayrıca, bütünlüşürücü motivasyonun, bir dereceye kadar katılımcılar için baskın motivasyonel yönelim olduğunu göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tutum, Motivasyon, Bütünlük, L2 Topluluğu, Araçsallık.

## 1. Introduction

With the development in communication and information technologies, the disappearance of the borders with the spread of globalization, and the world's getting smaller make it necessary to learn a foreign language. In accordance with these advancements, the interest in Turkish language also increases.

Thanks to the interest in Turkish language, those working in the field mostly focus on how to teach Turkish more effectively. In other words, the developments in the field of education have started to be applied in teaching Turkish as a second language.

To be able to learn a first or second language, people should master in four basic skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, while some learners learn it as ease and master it in a component way, some learners have difficulty in developing their proficiency and make slow improvement. To be able to understand the reason for it, a great deal of research has been conducted and second-language acquisition (SLA) researchers have concluded that although the learners follow a general development process, each of them has different degrees of success. The question of "What makes some language learners more successful than others in the same opportunities?" has been tried to find out by the SLA researchers since the 1970s. Finally, they agreed that there are some aspects that enhance language learning success (Şentürk, 2017).

Attitudes are important and are influenced by many things like parents, peers, and interactions with people. Thus, attitudes "form a part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture in which one is living" (Brown, 2000).

In line with this background, this study looks into Turkish first-year undergraduates' attitudes towards learning English in an EFL setting. Therefore, the research question addressed in this study is:

- What are the foreign university students' attitudes towards Turkish language learning?

## 2. Review of literature

Attitude is described as "a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing, idea, person, situation, etc." For education, Brown (2000) points out that teachers must be conscious that all

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learners have varying degrees of positive and negative attitudes and clarifies that by using different methods or/and activities, the students with a negative attitude may change their opinions.

### 2.1. Attitudes and Foreign Language Learning

Attitude has received significant attention in the field of education. It has been proven that the attitude is a part of learning and as a result it is an important part of second language pedagogy. It is believed that “attitudes towards learning influence behaviors like selecting books or speaking a foreign language” (Kaballa & Crowley, 1985 as cited in Weinburgh, 1998). It is concluded that attitudes affect people’s inner mood, thus learning (Şentürk, 2019).

Chamber (1999) states that “learning happens more easily, when the learner has a positive attitude towards the language and language learning”. Chamber (1999) affirms that successful learning depends on positive attitude towards language and learning; thus, it is an important part of success. Studies of Gardner and Lambert (1972) support the idea that an individual needs positive attitude to enhance his/her achievement in language. Brown asserts that (2000; 181), is “that second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and, in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency.”

### 2.2. Studies Related to Attitude toward Learning Foreign Languages in Literature

As attitude is accepted as a predictor of foreign language achievement, the numbers of studies have increased to examine it. There are many studies on the effects of attitudes on foreign language achievement. Researchers have also studied on different variables and their relationships with language attitude and other variables such as attitude and language learning strategies (Gan, 2004), attitudes and level of language achievement (Graham, 2004; Karabıyık, 2019), attitude and anxiety (Levine, 2003) attitude and gender (Karahana, 2007) and so on.

One of the studies conducted in Turkey on attitude is Tarhan’s (2003). She studied on 982 students in 42 Anatolian high schools. She conducted it to see whether the students had positive attitude or not. As a result of her study, it is proved that students have a positive attitude towards English.

Karahana (2007) studied the relationship between language attitudes toward English and gender. He surveyed over 190 eight grade students of a private school. The studies showed that female students have higher rates of attitude towards the target culture when compared to male students.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Participants & Setting

The study was conducted in an ESL setting, at the Language Education and Instruction Application and Research Center at Bartın University, Bartın, Turkey, where university students study Turkish for general purposes during a complete academic year before they start their university education at their departments. 30 A1 level students participated in the study. The students were all four-year undergraduate students. The medium of instruction at the university is Turkish. The study was carried out with the preparatory school students of these departments.

### 3.2. Data Collection Instrument

An attitude questionnaire adopted from Dörnyei and Csizér (2006) was used as an instrument in this study. It was also used by Göztepe (2014). In the questionnaire, there were 43 items including questioning the degree of the participants’ opinions and feelings about learning English. Table 1 below presents the information about the scales in the questionnaire:

**Table 1**

The items of the questionnaire focus on the following domains

Domains	Questionnaire Item No
Integrativeness	7,12,17
Attitudes to L2 Community	8,10,11

Cultural Interest	13,14,15,16
Attitudes to Learning English	18,19,20,21,22
Criterion Measures	24,25,26,43
Ideal L2 Self	27,28,29
Ought to L2 Self	23,30,31
Family Influence	32
Instrumentally Promotion	9,33,34,35,36,40
Instrumentally Prevention	37,38,39,41
Fear of Assimilation	42

There are eleven subscales in the attitude scale. The first is integrativeness and cultural interest, which refer to the willingness to learn the language to communicate with the community members "(e.g. 17. How important do you think learning English is in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers?)"; attitudes to L2 community and learning English are related to the beliefs of the students towards the L2 community "(e.g.11. How much do you like to meet people from English-speaking countries?)"; criterion measures is related with the learners efforts to learn English and Ideal L2 Self proposes what the learner want to learn "(e.g. I would like to study English even if I were not required)"; Ought-to L2 Self is related with the expectations of the society "(e.g. My parents believe that I must study English to be an educated person.)"; and finally, instrumentality (Promotion-Prevention) refers to the idea that learning English is necessary for some personal goals like earning money or career building. Participants made their responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= 'not at all, 5= 'very much').

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The questionnaires were analyzed using a statistical software program, SPSS version 22.00.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 1. What are the foreign university students' attitudes towards Turkish language learning?

There are eleven subscales in the attitude scale and the mean scores for each domain is given in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Mean scores of the scales in the questionnaire

Domains	Scale Item No	Mean	SD
Integrativeness	7,12,17	4,47	1,40
Attitudes to L2 Community	8,10,11	4,38	1,91
Cultural Interest	13,14,15,16	4,24	2,37
Attitudes to Learning English	18,19,20,21,22	4,55	2,58
Criterion Measures	24,25,26,43	4,55	1,69
Ideal L2 Self	27,28,29	4,35	2,01
Ought to L2 Self	23,30,31	4,10	2,10
Instrumentally Promotion	9,33,34,35,36,40	4,37	2,75
Instrumentally Prevention	37,38,39,41	4,64	1,81

#### 4.1. Integrativeness and Culture Interest

Integrativeness is the desire to communicate with the members of the foreign community. It includes being part of the target community; therefore, it requires the people to respect to the culture and way of life. The mean score for this scale is 4.47 which shows that most of the students would like to be the part and have a positive sympathy to the language.

#### 4.2. Attitudes to L2 Community and to learning Turkish

According to the results of the scale (M: 4.38), it is clearly said that approximately 70 percent of the students have a high desire to meet people of the target language community. Another interesting finding from this category is that for the question about their feelings and personal beliefs about the Turkish

language, "How much do you find learning Turkish is really interesting?" 74 percent of them pointed it out which shows that they feel positive about learning Turkish.

#### 4.3. *Criterion Measures and Ideal L2 Self*

The mean score for the scale criterion measures is M:4.55 and M:4.35 for the ideal L2 self. Most of the students have strongly agreed that they imagine themselves as a proficient user of the language in the future. This shows that the students are optimistic and self-confident about their ability to speak the language. 74 percent of the students declared that they could imagine themselves speaking Turkish as if they were a native speaker of Turkish. Since they are learning Turkish for their future career and their education at university, they are mostly positive about learning it.

#### 4.4. *Ought-to L2 Self*

The mean score of the scale is (M:4.10) which has a moderate result in the questionnaire. The finding reveals that the students are aware that they need Turkish for their jobs and university education, they need to learn it to have a better future; therefore, rather than internal reasons they also have external reasons to learn the language.

#### 4.5. *Instrumentality (Promotion-Prevention)*

Nearly all of the participants (96%) acknowledged that knowing Turkish would help their future career and they strongly agreed that learning Turkish would help them in getting a job or making money in Turkey. On the other hand, of the participants approximately 75% believed that they had to learn Turkish to pass the course and start their departments.

### 5. **Conclusion & Discussion**

This study intended to seek foreign ESL students' attitudes towards learning Turkish. The findings affirmed that the students are generally motivated to learn the language for their professional needs. Even though they are aware of the fact that learning a language is crucial in today's world, they are forced to learn it. They indicated that since they live in a Turkish speaking country, they have to learn the language to keep their life going, meet the people and learn about their culture. The most striking finding of the study concerned the ideal L2 self, which was that they believed they eventually could speak Turkish like a native speaker. This may show that they have an internally forced motivation, too. This is because of the fact that they want to learn Turkish for their future career, so they need to speak it fluently and learn it accurately.

As another point, the lowest score in the scales was "ought to L2 self" with a mean score of M:4.10. This scale supports the idea that students do not learn Turkish to pass their language classes. Since they live in a different community, they learn it both for their academic needs and also to survive in Turkey. However, it can also be observed that all the scales have the mean score more than 4.00 which is also important. Since it was a five-point likert scale, average 4.00 is a good point to show that all these students have positive attitudes towards learning Turkish as they learn it to pursue their academic career and live in Turkey.

This study underlined the importance of taking into account differences rooted in the factors related to the target language and its culture when designing or adopting approaches to help students to develop positive attitudes towards learning foreign languages and increase students' motivation. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to this study that suggest the need for future research.

The current study was carried out with a small sample size at Bartın University School of Foreign Languages; therefore, further research may be conducted with a large sample representing more widespread participants from different backgrounds and with a different purpose to study English.

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