

## The History Of Foreign Language Teaching In Türkiye

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### Abstract

The study focuses on foreign language instruction and foreign language teacher preparation in Türkiye as of the Ottoman Empire's revitalization processes initiated in the middle of the 19th century. From the Tanzimat, when the Ottoman Empire's westernization researches first started, to the present, the study examines the foreign teaching and foreign language teacher training policies and practices. The choice of foreign languages taught was heavily affected by the nations that were part of the Empire then. There has been consistent growth in language teaching systems in our modern world. In this case, developments in the fields of language teaching are significantly important for the whole partners especially for the teachers, administrators and students. Using modern language teaching methods at schools have been so significant particularly recently as these new methods will prepare the students for their future life. Because of all these reasons, one of the most important tasks of teachers, administrators and linguists should be to help students about language teaching. Behaviors of administrators, teachers, families, students and education programs form important roles during this process. Accordingly, the study shows how practices and rules for teaching foreign languages have changed throughout time so far. The research's conclusions demonstrate how language education strategies have changed throughout time, from Ottoman attempts to alleviate the lack of foreign languages' instructors to contemporary programs in line with EU regulations.

**Keywords:** Language learning, language teaching, history of language teaching.

### INTRODUCTION

Language is defined as a system of communication that provides interaction among people and creates a nation's identity. It is a natural means for people to understand each other, a living entity with its own laws, and a complex yet rule-based structure woven with sounds in speech and characters in writing. Language is the most basic system for communication among members of a society and acts as a medium for transmitting culture, which in turn unites a community and helps form a nation.

A person's native language, learned from birth, is the primary tool for connecting with the outside world and understanding concepts. Languages other than a person's native language are considered foreign languages.

The history of foreign language education in Turkey dates back to the pre-Ottoman Empire era. After the Turks adopted Islam, Arabic and Persian were learned. Foreign language education

continued during the Ottoman period (1299-1923), divided into two periods: pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat to the Republic. In the pre-Tanzimat era, Arabic was taught in children's schools (sıbyan mektepleri) and madrasahs, while the Enderun schools taught languages like Arabic and French to train qualified statesmen. These schools were notable for teaching Turkish as a second language to non-Turkish children. In the 19th century, Translation and Language Chambers were established to prevent diplomatic problems caused by incorrect translations by non-Muslims. These chambers aimed to train Muslim translators and officials who knew languages. Notable figures like Namık Kemal and Ziya Paşa were trained in these rooms.

After the Tanzimat declaration in 1839, foreign language education continued in different institutions. French was taught in military schools and medical faculties. Later, foreign language education continued in high schools (sultaniler), with Galatasaray High School being the first state high school to offer such education and Robert College being the first private school to teach English. During this time, Western languages like French, German, English, and Italian began to replace Arabic and Persian. In the Republican era, Western languages, especially English, are predominantly taught in primary, secondary and higher education institutions.

In the modern world, learning at least one foreign language has become a prerequisite. Foreign language skills are the first step in communicating with others and integrating into society. According to Gümüş (1991), the goal of foreign language education is not just to provide a new communication tool, but to increase students' interest in global issues, facilitate international cooperation, introduce them to other cultures and ways of life and strengthen their critical thinking skills.

Learning a foreign language at an early age has become more important than ever. Individuals who learn a foreign language at a young age start their personal development earlier and find it easier to learn new languages later. As stated in a 2017 Eurydice report, European Union countries agreed on the "Barcelona objective" in 2002, which aims for all European students to learn at least two foreign languages in addition to their native tongue.

Today, it is often emphasized that children should begin foreign language education from the preschool period. While adults learn a foreign language out of necessity for work or education, children can easily learn a new language if they are provided with the right learning environment, age-appropriate programs and increased internal motivation. Early age learners can also more easily accept and internalize the challenges and changes compared to adults, turning the positive effects of learning a foreign language into a behavioral pattern.

### **The Problem**

Discussing foreign language teaching in Turkish education system will give the opportunity of learning more about the historical development to the all partners, starting from the early ages, that will have important places in the society in the future. In this context, to train individuals who have interiorized the foreign language teaching will have an important place in dominating the society by reading the foreign language teaching process.

### **Purpose**

The aim of this study is to show the process and necessity of discussing foreign language teaching in Turkish education system as of Ottoman period. It is also aimed to give information

about the developing process of foreign language teaching with the results of the researches previously done.

### **Method**

This study was designed in conceptual model. Foreign language teaching is one of the most important discussing problem in Turkish educational system. It can not be easily alleged that the term 'foreign language teaching' is examined and discussed sufficiently in the field of education. Within this perspective, this article is an introduction to the concept of foreign language teaching in Türkiye. It aims to improve our understanding of foreign language teaching. In this context, in this article, mainly the concept of foreign language teaching has been described and related concepts have been introduced.

### **The Definition of Language and Foreign Language Teaching**

Language is a system of communication that provides interaction among people and creates a nation's identity. Language is a natural tool for understanding one another, a living entity that has its own rules. Language is defined as a system of vocal signs that people use to express what they want to say. It also creates a sense of unity in thought and feeling within a society and is one of a nation's most important cultural assets (Ergin, 2009).

Language is the most fundamental system for communication between individuals in a society. This system is a complex yet regular structure woven with sounds in speech and characters in writing. Language serves as a common communication tool and a transmitter of culture, which helps to bring individuals in a society together under one roof and form a nation. The system that enables individuals of a nation to communicate with each other is their mother tongue.

The mother tongue is the language learned from the mother and close family circle, and it is the language that forms an individual's strongest ties to society. It is the most important tool that helps a person connect with the outside world and understand concepts. A person's mother tongue helps them learn another language and communicate with people from different nations. Languages other than a person's native language fall into the category of foreign languages. While people begin to acquire their native language from the prenatal period, a foreign language is a skill that is learned, not acquired (Aksan, 1979).

### **A Brief History of Foreign Language Education in Turkey**

The history of foreign language teaching in Turkey dates back to before the Ottoman Empire. With the Turks' acceptance of Islam, Arabic and Persian languages were learned. Foreign language education also took place during the Ottoman Empire, which was established in 1299 and ruled until 1923. The history of foreign language teaching during this period is divided into two eras: the period up to the Tanzimat and the period from the Tanzimat to the Republic (Soner, 2007).

Until the Tanzimat, Arabic language held an important place in children's schools and it was the language of instruction in these institutions. Madrasahs, where Arabic and Persian were taught, were also places where young people of the era received education. In addition, Enderun schools provided foreign language education. These schools were established to train qualified statesmen and civil servants for the palace, and languages such as Arabic and French were

taught.

Turkish was also taught as a foreign language to many children from different nations, and importance was placed on having qualified people who served in state institutions get to know Turkish. Many non-Turkish statesmen learned Turkish to a high degree in these schools (Demirel,2016).

The shortage of civil servants who knew foreign languages sometimes led to diplomatic problems due to incorrect translations. To prevent this, translation and language chambers were established in the 19th century. The translation office for the state's translation work was under the responsibility of the palace, and language teaching was done in the Language Chambers. The purpose of establishing the Translation Chamber was to train Muslim translators and civil servants who knew languages and to raise Western-style intellectuals. It is known that important figures such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Paşa, and Sadullah Paşa came from this department, which was closed in 1871.

After the Tanzimat was announced in 1839, foreign language education continued in different institutions until the Republican period. After the Tanzimat, French continued to be taught in military schools and in medical education. Foreign language education later continued in Sultaniler, which are today's high schools. Galatasaray High School was the first public school to provide foreign language education at the secondary level, while Robert College, the first private school established in 1863, taught in English. From this period, Western languages such as French, German, English, and Italian replaced Arabic and Persian. During the Republican era, foreign language education, especially in Western languages, is provided in primary, secondary and higher education institutions.

### **Purposes and Reasons for Foreign Language Learning**

People need languages to make sense of what is happening around them and for survival. If a person does not know the language of the environment they are in, they remain passive because they cannot make sense of it. When this happens, a person's level of awareness is high in all respects, and their relationship and communication with the environment become healthier. This ensures the integration of a foreign individual into society. Therefore, knowing a foreign language is the most fundamental step in enabling communication with people and society and facilitating integration with the environment.

Gümüş (1991) explains the purpose of foreign language teaching as follows: "The purpose of foreign language teaching is not just to provide a person with a new means of communication". The main goal is to increase students' interest in global issues; facilitate international exchange of ideas, assistance, and cooperation; expose students to other worlds of thought; and provide them with the opportunity to learn about the social, economic, and cultural life of other countries. It also aims to strengthen the view of global unity, prevent false prejudices, develop critical thinking skills and help individuals develop a more distinct and comprehensive personality.

In the modern world, it has become mandatory for every person to know at least one foreign language. In today's world, where borders have almost disappeared, people communicate with each other more than in the past. Foreign languages learned for the reasons such as education,

work, or hobbies broaden a person's perspective on events and situations. One of the greatest investments a person can make for themselves, and that a state can make for the younger generation, is foreign language education (İşcan 2011).

Learning a foreign language at an early age has become more important than ever. An individual who learns a foreign language at a young age will start their personal development earlier and will find it easier to learn a language later in life. According to a summary report published by Eurydice in 2017, the European Union states agreed on teaching two foreign languages from an early age in 2002, and this goal was named the "Barcelona objective".

The Barcelona objective not only means an early start in foreign language learning but also indicates the minimum number of foreign languages students should begin to learn. European states have made the process more systematic for young people in Europe to learn more than one foreign language. The "European Language Portfolio" and the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)" are products of this effort.

The modern world frequently emphasizes that foreign language education should be given to children starting from the preschool period. In Turkey and many European countries, the age when the first foreign language is started is between 6 and 7 years old. The age for learning a second foreign language in Turkey is around 13-15.

While learning styles and processes differ between children and adults, their learning motivations and goals also vary. An adult may start learning a foreign language due to a driving force such as work or education, but this is not the case for children. Children can more easily accept and internalize differences, novelty, and change than adults which is called acquisition actually. By providing the necessary learning environment and age-appropriate learning programs and increasing their internal motivation, children can easily learn a foreign language. Therefore, foreign language teaching should start from a young age (Onursal, 2019).

### **Foreign Language Teaching Supported Artificial Intelligence**

The rapid development of technology has also created significant transformations in the field of education. Artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most important actors of this transformation and is reshaping educational processes. AI-supported tools offer individuals more effective and efficient learning experiences, especially in language learning (Brown, 2019: 12). While traditional classroom-based language learning methods are increasingly being replaced by online platforms, AI-based applications have become one of the most striking components of these platforms. AI-supported language learning tools such as IAMX Alara play an important role in customizing users' individual learning processes and providing them with targeted skills (Miller, 2020: 23).

In traditional language learning methods, the role of the teacher has been decisive. However, one-to-one learning opportunities in the classroom environment are limited, and this can affect individuals' learning speed. Artificial intelligence technologies overcome these limitations and provide instant and customized feedback to individuals' learning processes, personalizing language learning processes (Jones & Müller, 2022: 29). For example, IAMX Alara analyzes the user's grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehension skills, identifies deficiencies in these areas, and offers suggestions for the user to improve in these areas (Smith,

2020: 44). In this context, while AI-supported language learning tools have positive effects on individuals, they also have some limitations. The most important advantages of the tools for users include accelerating the learning process, providing content appropriate to individual learning needs, and supporting development with continuous feedback (Chen & Robinson, 2022: 35). However, AI-supported language learning tools also have disadvantages such as lack of social interaction, privacy concerns and ethical problems (Anderson & Patel, 2020: 40). In this context, while AI-supported language learning tools have positive effects on individuals, they also have some limitations. The most important advantages of the tools for users include accelerating the learning process, providing content appropriate to individual learning needs and supporting development with continuous feedback (Chen & Robinson, 2022: 35). However, AI-supported language learning tools also have disadvantages such as lack of social interaction, privacy concerns, and ethical problems (Anderson & Patel, 2020: 40).

Artificial intelligence has created revolutionary changes in language learning processes and transformed learning methods. While traditional methods prioritize student-centered teaching, artificial intelligence tools transform this process into individual learning experiences and provide personalized feedback (Smith, 2020: 45). Artificial intelligence-supported tools such as IAMX Alara identify student's strengths and weaknesses in the language learning process and offer personalized education plans accordingly (Jones & Müller, 2022: 78).

One of the most important advantages of AI-supported language learning tools is personalized learning experiences. According to research, such tools can be customized to the needs of individual learners and can offer content according to the learning speed of individuals (Brown, 2019: 33). For example, IAMX Alara evaluates student's language skills, focuses on areas where they are weak, and offers exercises that will enable them to improve in these areas. This enables more efficient learning processes compared to traditional classroom teaching (Lee, 2021: 56).

In addition, AI tools have the advantage of providing continuous feedback. Students have the opportunity to instantly correct grammar errors or pronunciation mistakes, which contributes to the acceleration of the learning process (Miller, 2020: 102).

In addition to the advantages offered by artificial intelligence tools, there are also some disadvantages. First of all, it is a significant disadvantage that these tools do not sufficiently develop student's social interaction skills. Language learning is largely a social process, and AI-supported tools may not allow individuals to sufficiently experience social contexts in language learning (Anderson & Patel, 2020: 70). While tools such as IAMX Alara provide strong support to individuals in terms of grammar and vocabulary, they may not develop the language use skills required in real-world interactions to the same extent (Larsen, 2021: 65).

In addition, ethical and privacy issues related to AI technologies also come to be formulated. These tools collect and use student's personal data; therefore, there are risks of privacy violations (Chen & Robinson, 2022: 87). Security and correct use of data is an issue that should be taken into consideration, especially for AI tools used for educational purposes.

IAMX Alara is an artificial intelligence tool that offers its users an advanced language learning experience. Using natural language processing (NLP) technologies, the tool analyzes student's speaking and writing skills, detects errors and offers suggestions to correct them. Such detailed

analyses provided by artificial intelligence technologies also allow students to self-assess their language learning process (Garcia & Wong, 2023: 94).

One of the most important features offered by IAMX Alara is the feedback it provides on pronunciation improvement. Students pronounce words using voice commands, and the tool identifies mispronounced words and offers correction suggestions (Nguyen & Lee, 2021: 110). This meets the need for pronunciation practice that is missing in traditional learning methods. Artificial intelligence-supported language learning tools, especially advanced technologies such as IAMX Alara, have been doing great contributions to individuals' language learning processes. Personalized feedback, continuous evaluation and suggestions for improving weak areas are among the important advantages offered by these tools. However, the disadvantages of these tools, such as lack of social interaction and data privacy, should be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is important to increase users' awareness for the effective use of such technologies

## **CONCLUSION**

Rapidly developing digital technologies are profoundly influencing English language education and transforming traditional classroom practices. Integrating digital literature into lessons is helping language teaching evolve from a passive process into an interactive and multi-dimensional activity. Unlike printed texts, digital literature has a multimodal structure that combines text, sound, images, animation and interactive elements. These new forms of text require teachers to re-evaluate their cognitive strategies and linguistic competencies.

**Teachers' Cognitive Strategies:** Digital literature's complex structure demands new cognitive skills from teachers that go beyond traditional text reading and comprehension strategies. These strategies are aimed at improving students' ability to process and interpret information in digital environments.

**Multimodal Reading and Comprehension:** While traditional literacy focuses on written text, digital literature requires students to process text, visual and auditory information simultaneously. This has led to a new form of literacy known as "multimodal literacy". Teachers must show students how the images, sounds, or animations in a video can enrich the meaning of a text. This helps students develop the ability to not only understand the meaning of words but also to decipher the meaning created by multimedia clues.

**Hypertextual Thinking:** A key feature of digital literature is its non-linear narrative structure. Hypertextual texts allow the reader to choose their own path and influence the story's flow. Teachers can use this structure to teach students new cognitive strategies, such as making intertextual connections by exploring different story paths and analyzing how different versions of a story create different meanings. This process strengthens students' critical thinking, decision-making and information-structuring skills.

**Creative and Collaborative Approaches:** Digital literature goes beyond passive reading, enabling students to create their own narratives. Teachers can encourage students to participate in digital storytelling projects, which helps them develop both their linguistic and creative skills. In these projects, students use not only language but also visuals, sound effects and interactive elements to express their ideas.

Teachers' linguistic competencies have expanded with the introduction of digital literature into language education. Knowing only grammar rules and vocabulary is no longer sufficient.

**Creating and Interpreting Meaning in Virtual Environments:** In digital literature, meaning is often constructed in a virtual environment beyond words. This context requires teachers to have the ability to decipher meaning in virtual and multimodal texts and explain this process to students. For example, the ability to predict where a link in a hypertext novel will lead or to understand how a character's virtual profile affects the story's progression has become a new part of language proficiency.

**Technological Language Use:** Digital literature is like a laboratory that shows how language is used with technological tools. It's important for teachers to know the linguistic norms of internet slang, forum discussion language and other forms of digital communication. This knowledge helps students better understand the digital texts they encounter in their daily lives.

**Interactive and Dynamic Language Use:** Digital literature encourages dynamic language use through the reader's interaction with the text. Actions like clicking a button or changing a character's fate show that language is not just a tool for communication but also a tool for action. Teachers can use these interactive elements to teach students to use language more actively and purposefully

Digital literature presents both challenges and rich opportunities for English language teaching. The successful integration of digital literature into language education depends on teachers acquiring new competencies such as digital literacy, multimodal thinking and interactive language use. This evolution signals a shift from viewing language as a static system used only for communication to understanding it as a dynamic, creative and multi-dimensional cultural practice.

As a conclusion, language teachers who meet the demands of the digital age will not only teach language but also provide students with the cognitive and linguistic tools they need to succeed in the digital world. This is a crucial step in preparing the next generation for an increasingly interconnected world.

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