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Proficiency exams in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in TÖMER (Turkish and foreign languages research and application centers)

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Abstract

Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (TÖMER) is one of the important institutions for learning Turkish as a foreign language. In these institutions, proficiency tests are applied at the end of each level. However, test applications in TÖMERs vary between each center as there is no shared program in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in Turkey. The purpose of this study is to examine the tests offered in TÖMER in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The study engages a qualitative design. As the data sources include documents related to exams offered in TÖMERs, a document analysis was completed. The data consist of proficiency tests offered in 13 different TÖMERs that agreed to provide sample proficiency tests. In analyzing the data, a deductive approach used to look for themes and then codes. The main finding of the study is that the proficiency tests for each level are not compatible with each other. This incompatibility results from the types of questions on skills, the number of reading texts and the number of words in texts, the limit on word count in writing skills and the diversity of questions, the presence or absence of grammar questions and their placement in the exam, and not meeting the phases of skill development according to CEFR. In order to reduce these incompatibilities, there is a need for a program for teaching Turkish as a foreign language that would be followed by all TÖMERs.

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Keywords: teaching Turkish as a foreign language; TÖMER, proficiency tests, measurement, evaluation.

1. Introduction

The demand in learning Turkish as a foreign language keeps increasing every day. There are a variety of reasons for the increase in demand including political, and commercial reasons. One of the important reasons contributing to the demand is the institutions such as Yunus Emre Institution (YEI) and Turkey Maarif Foundation (TMF) that operate in foreign countries focusing on teaching Turkish and institutions such as TÖMER that are established in universities in Turkey. Although Turkish is taught in many institutions both in Turkey and in other countries, there is not a common program and measurement and

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evaluation applications. As this issue is timely, assessment of exams implemented in TÖMERs from multiple aspects is a need.

1.1. Literature review

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language has shifted from theory to application over time. *Divanü Lugati't Türk* produced by Mahmud Kashgari in 1072 is a significant example for being the first theoretical work in this field. Over time, various publications emerged based on grammar-translation towards teaching Turkish both by Turks and non-Turkic nations in geographies where Turks are present (Arabs, English, French, German, etc.). In light of current information, works on teaching Turkish as a foreign language have been grounded in theory except for the school “*Enfants de Langue*” (Hitzel, 1995) opened in 1612 in Beyoğlu, Istanbul by Jesuit pastors with the purpose of training bureaucrats in Ottoman Turkish. After the foundation of republic, TÖMERs established within universities, and institutions such as YEE, TMW, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and Ministry of National Education (MEB) are among the significant stakeholders of teaching Turkish as a foreign language (Şen, 2019). Additionally, public education centers and private trainings offer Turkish courses to foreigners. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) issued in 2001 has also impacted Turkish education significantly.

CEFR (2018) is a framework program aiming to provide certain standards to language education in the world. This program provides a framework for curricula, course materials and books used in TÖMERs. Also, the common language levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) provided by CEFR (2013, 2018) and the development phases defined in CEFR (2013, 2018) provide a direction for level and certificate exams of TÖMER.

Ankara TÖMER (1984) established in Ankara University and Gazi University TÖMER (1994) are the pioneers of Turkish Education Application and Research centers in Turkey (Şen, 2019, p. 13). As of 17.12.2019, there are 113 TÖMERs in universities in Turkey according to Higher Education Information Management System. The quality of the language education offered in TÖMERs for international students take level and development phases identified by the CEFR (2018) and are aligned with the measurement and evaluation applications prepared according to the framework program.

Measurement is defined as the procedure to identify the level of certain qualitative or quantitative characteristics of assets or events (Özçelik, 1998, p. 13). According to Tan (2015, p. 44), measurement is defined as the procedure of assigning numbers or symbols to characteristics without losing the relationships between the measured characteristics (such as magnitude). Turgut (1984) defined measurement as the representation of a characteristic with a number or symbol as a result of observation (as cited in Yaşar, 2011, p. 12). Considering the definitions provided, measurement can be described as

revealing a characteristic and representing it quantitatively. Measurement is a process and the phases of this process are explained in the next section.

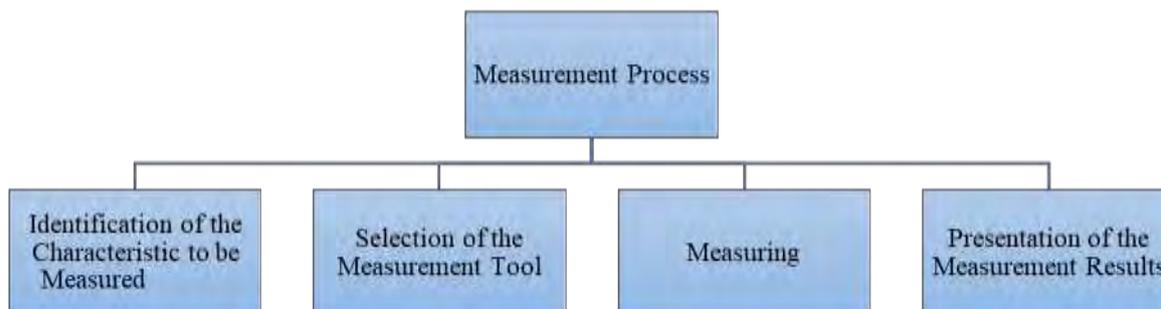


Figure 1. The phases of a measurement process (Yaşar, 2011: 16)

The phases of a measurement process shown in Figure 1 include identification of the characteristic to be measured and the purpose of measurement, identification of a reliable and valid tool to measure the characteristic, detection of the level of presence in the target to be measured in an appropriate time and environment, and presenting the results with symbols or numbers. There are certain characteristics that a measurement tool should have which include reliability, validity, usability, objectivity, distinctiveness, sampling, practicality (Göçer, 2014, pp. 20-28). Another dimension of measurement is evaluation.

Evaluation is the process of assigning the measurement results to a criterion to make a conclusion about the characteristics that is measured (Turgut, 1987, p.3). In other words, it is the conclusion as a result of comparison of measurement results to a criterion. There are three steps in evaluation that are; measurement results, criterion, and conclusion (Şahin, 2019, pp. 10-11). Measurement results can be expressed in numerical values obtained through the measurement tool. For example, the sentence “Ömer got 70 in the listening exam” expresses the result of a measurement. The sentence “a minimum score of 55 is required to be successful in the listening exam in TÖMER A” is an absolute standard. The sentence “Ömer received a score above 55 in the listening exam and is successful” indicates a conclusion.

Measurement and evaluation in teaching Turkish as a foreign language is important in terms of showing the quality of the education offered and the students’ competency in Turkish. TÖMERs offer proficiency exams at the end of each level that allow students to continue to the next level as well as exemption exams to receive a certificate indicating competency in Turkish. These exams are considered to be prepared in alignment with the CEFR (2018) approach to level competencies and measurement and evaluation. However, as Boylu (2019a, p. 50) stated, “not having unity between institutions that teach Turkish, flawed measurement and evaluation in proficiency exams, not using CEFR fully, and not having an overarching institution to audit the institutions” are among the issues indicating the measurement and evaluation problems in TÖMERs.

Literature search showed that there are various research and publications on measurement and evaluation in teaching Turkish as a foreign language (Göçer, 2007; Köse, 2008; Yılmaz, 2014; Işıkoğlu, 2015; Demir, 2017; Gedik, 2017; Boylu, 2019a; Boylu, 2019b). However, these studies do not address the exams offered in TÖMERs from multiple aspects. The purpose of the current study is to examine the exams offered in TÖMERs in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. In alignment with this purpose, the guiding research questions and sub-questions of the study are as follows:

1.2. Research questions

1. What is the status of proficiency exams offered in TÖMERs in relation to language skills?
 - 1.1. What is the status in terms of listening skills?
 - 1.2. What is the word count of texts provided for reading skills?
 - 1.3. What is the status in terms of questions related to reading skills?
 - 1.4. What is the status in terms of questions related to writing skills?
 - 1.5. Is there a word limit in open ended questions related to writing skills?
 - 1.6. What is the place of grammar in exams? What is the status of questions related to grammar?
2. What is the status of proficiency exams offered in TÖMER according to the CEFR?
 - 2.1. What is the word count of reading texts and questions on listening and writing according to the areas of language use in CEFR?
 - 2.2. What is the status of reading texts and writing skills questions in terms of development phases in language skills in CEFR?
3. What is the status of reading texts in proficiency exams in terms of transferring culture?

1.3. Limitations and importance of the research

The study is limited with A1 and A2 exam questions. The texts for listening are not included in the study as some of the texts are in digital format and some were not provided by TÖMERs. Additionally, as there are no written records of speaking exams, the study does not include data related to the speaking skills. Due to the circumstances explained, the data sources for the study include listening questions, texts and questions for reading, writing questions and grammar questions. This study contributes to the field by providing an examination of exams used in TÖMERs in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

2. Method

In this section, the design of the research and the object of the investigation, and the collection and analysis of the data in the research are included.

2.1. Research design

The study engages a qualitative case study design. Case studies can be conducted with either qualitative or quantitative approaches. In both approaches, the purpose is to reveal findings related to a certain situation. The main characteristic of a qualitative case study is examining one or more situations deeply (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 77). Additionally, on the contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research provides an opportunity to understand deeply the developing and changing world, new understandings, and issues and struggles that come with it (Seggie & Bayyurt: 2015, p.16). In this study, as the exams offered in TÖMERs are examined from multiple perspectives, the design of the study engages a case study approach.

Interviews, observations and documents are among data collection methods in qualitative research. As the data sources of this study include documents related to the exams offered in TÖMERs, a document analysis was used. “A document analysis involves examination of full texts or excerpts of organizational, clinical or program records, correspondence, official publications or reports, personal journals, and written answers to open-ended questions in surveys” (Patton, 2014: 4).

There are multiple steps involved in designing a qualitative study. These steps, according to Seggie and Yıldırım (2015, pp. 23-34), are as follows:

- Identifying the research topic
- Identifying the research problem
- Identifying the purpose of the research
- Formulating the research questions
- Using literature from the field
- Identifying the research methodology
 - Research design
 - Research context and participants
 - Data collection
 - Data management and analysis

The first five steps stated by Seggie and Yıldırım (2015: 23-34) are addressed in the introduction section of this study while the sixth step is addressed in the method section.

2.2. Research objects

Qualitative findings stem from three different data collection methods that are interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2014, p.4). Documents can be defined as research objects in qualitative studies. In order to obtain research objects for the study, the researcher contacted TÖMERs via e-mail through the contact information provided in their websites to request sample exams starting on 19.01.2018. The sample exams from 13 different TÖMERs that agreed to provide the materials constitute the research objects of this study. The institutional names of TÖMERs are not presented in the study and instead, they are assigned numbers from 1 to 13.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The data of the study were obtained through reading the exams provided. As stated by Kızıltepe (2015: 253-254), in examining the data in qualitative research, various methods are used including discourse analysis, speech analysis, descriptive analysis, and content analysis. In this study, a content analysis was used. Content analysis is used to identify and quantify the words, concepts, themes, phrases or sentences in one or more texts. The guiding sub-questions shaped the data collection phase. In other words, a deductive content analysis was completed in this study. A deductive content analysis is based on current frameworks on the contrary to inductive content analysis (Patton, 2014, p. 453). The themes in the study were identified in the beginning of the research process and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes in the research

No.	Themes	Categories
1.	Language skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening skills question types • Word count in reading texts • Reading skills question types • Writing skills question types • The length of text in writing skills questions

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar question types
2.	CEFR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of use of language skills • Development phases according to skills
3.	Culture transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture transfer in A1 level reading texts • Culture transfer in A2 level reading texts

As shown in Table 1, there are 3 themes and 10 categories in the study. The codes that need to be included in the identified themes and categories were obtained from exams through content analysis. The codes obtained through examining the proficiency exams were placed under related themes in a table. The frequency and percentage of the data were calculated. As stated by Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel (2008), “quantification/counting is one of the main characteristics of content analysis. Each unit that is under an appropriate category is counted every time. The final product of a coding process should be numbers. Numbers are used in identifying the frequency of units that can be coded openly such as certain words, expressions, symbols, and pictures (p. 266).

3. Results

The findings in relation to research sub-questions are addressed in this section.

3.1. Question types to measure listening skills

In this section, information on the question types used to measure listening skills in proficiency exams of TÖMER.

Table 2. Question types for listening skills in proficiency exams

Question types	TÖMERs	
	A1	A2
Open-ended	4, 6, 9, 10	6, 9
Fill-in-the-blank	5, 6, 10, 12, 13	6, 12
Multiple choice	1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 13	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 11, 13
True/false	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13
Matching	1, 5, 8	8, 10
Yes/no	-	1, 5

According to the information provided in Table 2, 4 open-ended questions (30.76%), 5 fill-in-the-blank questions (38.46%), 6 multiple choice questions (46.13%), 9 true/false questions (69.23%), and 3 matching questions (23.07%) were identified in the A1 level exams. In addition to the identified question types, there is also a question on putting sentences in chronological order based on the text that were listened (TÖMER#5).

In the A2 level exam, open-ended, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and yes/no question types with each having 2 questions (15.38%) and 7 multiple choice questions (53.84%) were identified. Additionally,

there is a question asking to order the provided sentences in a logical way according to the text related to listening (TÖMER#10).

3.2. Reading word count

In this section, the word counts of reading texts provided in proficiency exams are addressed.

Table 3. Word counts of reading texts in the exams

TÖMERs	A1	A2
1.	126, 201	140, 169, 270
2.	41, 105, 118	123, 124, 153, 169
3.	6, 7, 21, 22, 24, 43, 52, 69, 85	11, 14, 18, 19, 25, 61, 80, 119, 129
4.	108, 189	88, 109, 121, 125, 130
5.	36, 111, 176, 210	59, 63, 64, 132, 139
6.	40, 131	22, 144
7.	83, 94, 102	146, 249
8.	235, 256	362, 463
9.	240	343
10.	88, 202	150, 239
11.	15, 111, 134	125, 144
12.	86, 120, 145	251
13.	40, 84, 119, 155	58, 84, 115, 318

Various findings were obtained as a result of examining the word counts of texts related to reading provided in the exams. In the A1 level, the texts have a word count of ranging between 6 and 256 words. In this level, there are 12 texts with a word count range of 0-50, 9 texts with a range of 50-100 words, 11 texts with a range of 100-150 words, 2 texts with a range of 150-200 words, 4 texts with a range of 200-250 words, and 1 text with a range of 250-300 words. It is seen that the word ranges of 0-50, 100-150, and 50-100 are the ones preferred the most.

In the level A2, the reading texts have a wide range of word count from 11 to 463, similar to A1 level. There are 6 texts with a word range of 0-50, 7 texts with a range of 50-100 words, 15 texts with a range of 100-150, 4 texts with a range of 150-200 words, 2 texts with a range of 200-250 words, 1 text with a range of 250-300 words, 2 texts with a range of 300-350 words, 1 text with a range of 350-400 words, and 1 text with a range of 450-500 words in level A2 exams. The ranges of 100-150, 50-100, and 0-50 are the most preferred ranges in A2 level reading texts.

3.3. Question types to measure reading skills

In this section, question types to measure reading skills in TÖMER proficiency exams are addressed.

Table 4. Question types to measure reading skills in the exams

Question types	TÖMERs	
	A1	A2
Open-ended	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12	4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12
Fill-in-the-blank	3, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13	1, 3, 5, 6, 13
Multiple choice	1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13	1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13
True/false	1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13
Matching	5	8
Yes/No	1, 5	1, 8

According to the information presented in Table 4, there are 9 open-ended questions (69.23%), 6 fill-in-the-blank questions (46.15%), 7 multiple choice and 7 true/false questions (53.84), 1 matching (7.68%) and 2 yes/no questions (15.38%) were identified in the A1 level. Also, there is one question asking to order sentences in a logical way (TÖMER#1).

At the level of A2, there are 6 open-ended questions (46.15%), 5 fill-in-the-blank questions (38.46%), 8 multiple choice questions (61.53%), 10 true/false questions (76.92), 1 matching question (7.69%), and 2 yes/no questions (15.38). Additionally, there is one question asking to order sentences chronologically (TÖMER#8) and questions asking to order sentences in a logical order (TÖMER #1 and #13).

3.4. Types of writing questions

In this section, questions related to measuring writing skills in the exams are addressed.

Table 5. Types of questions to measure writing skills

Question types	TÖMERs	
	A1	A2
Open-ended	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Short answer	2, 4, 6, 7, 11	4, 6, 7
Fill-in-the-blank	5	-
True/false	7	-

The questions related to writing skills in the level proficiency exams are provided in Table 5. In A1 level exams, 11 open-ended (84.61%), 5 short answer (38.46%), one fill-in-the-blank and one true/false questions (7.69%) were identified while 13 open-ended (100%) and 3 short answer (23.07%) questions were identified at the A2 level. Additionally, in one exam a question on writing related to ordering was identified (TÖMER#6).

TÖMERs #1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12 at the A1 level and TÖMERs # 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 at the A2 level measure the students' writing skills through one question.

3.5. Text length in questions related to writing skills

In the questions about writing skills, the limits of the number of words and sentences are given below.

Table 6. Limit on word and sentence counts in questions related to writing skills

TÖMERs	A1	A2
1.	Minimum 80 words	100-150 word range
2.	No limit specified.	Minimum 60 words Minimum 80 words
3.	Minimum 50 words Minimum 70 words	Minimum 60 words Minimum 80 words
4.	Minimum 15 sentences	Minimum 20 sentences
5.	Minimum 80-100 words	Minimum 70-80 words
6.	No limit specified.	Minimum 40 words
7.	No limit specified.	No limit specified.
8.	Minimum 80 words	Minimum 100 words
9.	Minimum 15 sentences Minimum 15 sentences	Minimum 100 words
10.	Minimum 50 words	Minimum 70 words
11.	No limit specified.	No limit specified.
12.	Minimum 100 words	Minimum 100 words
13.	-	Minimum 60 words

In the open-ended questions asked for writing skills, there is a limit placed on the number of words or sentences a student would use. In A1 level 7 TÖMERs and in A2 level 11 TÖMERs specified the number of words or sentences to be used by the students. These specifications were provided with a “minimum” word or sentence count. Only TÖMER#1 provided a word range in A2 exam without giving a “minimum” word count. 5 TÖMERs asked for a “minimum” number of words and 2 TÖMERs asked a “minimum” number of sentences in A1 level while 1 TÖMER specified a limit on sentence number and 10 TÖMERs provided a limit on the number of words at the A2 level. The specified limitations range from 50 to 100 words in A1 and from 40 to 150 in A2 level.

3.6. Question types on grammar

In this section the placement of grammar questions and the types of questions to measure grammar in TÖMER exams are discussed.

Table 7. Placement of grammar questions and types of grammar questions in proficiency level exams

Question types and placement of grammar questions in the exam	TÖMERs	
	A1	A2
Fill-in-the-blank	5, 6, 9, 12, 13	4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13
Multiple choice	5, 7, 11, 12	4, 11, 12
Matching	12	-
There's a section on grammar	4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12	6, 7, 9, 11, 12
Grammar in the reading section	5, 13	5, 13
Grammar in the writing section	5	-
No grammar questions	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10	1, 2, 3, 8, 10

Table 7 shows the grammar questions in the proficiency level exams. A section on grammar in the test is offered in 6 TÖMERs at the A1 level and 5 TÖMERs at the A2 level. At the A1 level, in 2 TÖMERs grammar questions are asked in reading skills and in 1 TÖMER in writing skills.

Grammar questions at the A2 level were asked within the reading skills section in 2 TÖMERs. There were no grammar questions at the A1 level in 6 TÖMERs and at the A2 level in 5 TÖMERs. In grammar questions, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice and matching types were used. In addition to the identified question types -that are not listed in Table 7- different question types were used that are; “matching syllables to make a word (A1 level in TÖMER#6), making noun phrases with the words provided (A1 level in TÖMER#6), completing sentences with appropriate verbs (A1 level in TÖMERs #6 and #9), writing sentences in present tense (A2 level in TÖMER#6), making a negative sentence positive (A2 level in TÖMER#6), making meaningful sentences with provided words that are not in order (A2 level in TÖMERs #6 and #12), breaking down words into syllables (A1 level in TÖMER#7), writing the negative of a noun clause (A1 level in TÖMER#7), responding to questions with yes or no (A1 level in TÖMER#7), writing sentences in present continuous tense (A1 level in TÖMER#7), finding possessive constructions in sentences and identifying their types (A2 level in TÖMER#7), making adjective clauses demonstrative pronouns (A2 level in TÖMER#7), re-writing sentences using ‘that’ (A2 level in TÖMER#7), finding adjectives in the text and identify their types (A2 level in TÖMER#7), connecting two sentences to make a comparative sentence (A1 level in TÖMER#7), connecting two sentences to make a comparative sentence (A1 level in TÖMER#9), connecting two sentences using conjunctions (A1 level in TÖMER#9), connecting two sentences using ‘since’ (A1 level in TÖMER#9), re-writing sentences using direct and indirect speeches (A2 level in TÖMERs #9 and #13), completing sentences with using “-to” (A2 level TÖMER#9), writing sentences using the verbs provided (A1 level TÖMER#12), answering questions (A1 level in TÖMER#12) and writing sentences to questions (A2 level in TÖMER#12).

3.7. Exams based on the areas of language use in CEFR (2018)

The alignment of exams offered in TÖMERs with the areas of language use in CEFR (2018) is discussed in this section.

Table 8. Exams according to the areas of language use in CEFR

Language skills	Public		Private (Personal)		Professional		Education	
	A1	A2	A1	A2	A1	A2	A1	A2
Listening	3, 6, 8, 11, 13	1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13			10	1
Reading	3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13	3	3, 4	3, 7, 13	
Writing	4	4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13	1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12	-	5, 8	4	4, 6, 7, 8, 9

Table 8 shows how the questions related to listening, reading, and writing in proficiency exams are aligned with the language use areas identified in CEFR (2018) (public area, private, professional area and educational area). Listening skills at the A1 level were part of the public area in 4 (30.76%) exams, personal area in 10 exams (76.92%), and the education area in 1 exam (7.69%). At the A2 level, the public area was identified in 7 (53.84%), private area in 10 (76.92%), and education area in 1 (7.69%) exams. In relation to A1 level reading skills, the public area was identified in 7 exams (53.84%), private area in 12 (92.30%), professional area in 1 (7.69%) and education area in 3 (23.07%) exams while at the A2 level, the public area was identified in 8 exams (61.53%), private area was in 9 (69.23%), and professional area in was 2 exams (15.38%). Writing skills at the A1 level were identified in public area in 1 exam (7.69%), in private area in 8 exams (61.53%), and in educational area in 1 exam (7.69%) while at the A2 level public area was identified in 6 exams (46.15%), private area in 8 exams (61.53%), professional area in 2 exams (15.38%), and education area in 5 exams (38.46%).

3.8. Exams based on the developmental phases of language skills in CEFR (2018)

The exams in TÖMERs are discussed in this section according to the language skills development phases described in CEFR (2018).

Table 9. Exams based on reading skills developmental phases described in CEFR (2018)

TÖMERs		
Reading competency	A1	A2
1. General reading and comprehension	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13
2. Reading correspondence	1, 10, 12	2, 10
3. Reading for adaptation to the environment	2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 13	3, 11, 13
4. Reading instructions	3	3, 5
5. Reading for information and arguments	5, 9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13
6. Reading for leisure	-	1, 3

Table 9 shows how level proficiency exams are aligned with the developmental phases of reading skills as defined in CEFR (2018). In relation to reading skills in A1 level exams, general reading comprehension was identified in 11 TÖMERs (84.61%), reading for adaptation to the environment in 6 TÖMERs (46.15%), reading correspondence in 3 TÖMERs (23.07%), reading for information and arguments in 2 TÖMERs (15.38%), and reading instructions were identified in 1 TÖMER (7.69%). At the A2 level, in 9 TÖMERs general reading comprehension and reading for information and arguments were identified (69.23%), reading for adaptation to the environment was identified in 3 TÖMERs (23.07%), reading correspondence in 2 TÖMERs (15.38%), and reading instructions and reading for leisure were identified in 2 TÖMERs. At levels both A1 and A2, TÖMER# 1, #2, #3, #5, #11, and #13 provided examples to students in alignment with multiple developmental phases.

Table 10. Exams according to the developmental phases of writing skills as defined in CEFR (2018)

		TÖMERs	
Writing competencies		A1	A2
1.	General written production	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12
2.	Creative writing	3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10	2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
3.	Writing reports and essay/article	-	1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Table 10 shows how exams are aligned with the developmental phases of writing as defined in CEFR (2018). The first phase of the developmental phases of general written production and creative writing in CEFR A1 level is the most preferred one in exams. Students were asked to produce a text geared towards general written production in 11 TÖMERs (84.61%) and towards creative writing in 6 TÖMERs (46.15%). At the A2 level, out of the phases of general written production, creative writing, and writing reports and essay/article, general written production and creative writing are the most used phases (in 7 TÖMERs for each, 53.84%). In 6 TÖMERs, students were asked to produce a text geared towards essay writing (46.15%). Similar to reading skills, in writing skills students were asked to produce texts in different developmental phases both in A1 and A2 levels in TÖMERs #5, #7, #8, #9, and #10.

3.9. Transfer of culture

The texts in reading exams are discussed in this section in terms of transfer of culture.

Table 11. Transfer of culture in reading texts in proficiency exams

	A1	A2
1.	Geography	Relative
2.	Religion	Geography-geographical region
3.	Series	Phrase
4.	Beverage	Religion
5.	Formulaic expression	Beverage
6.	Museum	Profession
7.	Sports	Museum

8.	City	Sultan
9.	History	City
10.	Food	History
11.	-	Food

Elements of culture transfer in texts provided in reading sections of proficiency exams for A1 and A2 levels are presented in Table 11. There are 10 cultural categories identified in A1 level while there are 11 in A2 level. Both levels contain more codes on food culture. Some examples of food culture include “restaurant, lentil soup, mousakka, rice pilaf, meatballs, white beans, lahmacun, eggplant, shish kebab.” Examples in the category of geography include “Mount Agri, Porsuk Stream, Marmara, Egean, and Black Sea” while “mosque, prayer room, imam, prayer, coffin, funera” are among examples for the religion category. In terms of beverages, examples include “tea, ayran” while formulaic expressions include the examples of “good bye, good morning, enjoy your meal.” “Pera Museum, Sabanci Museum, Toy Museum” are among the examples for museums while “Galatasaray, Fenerbahce” are examples of sports. For cities, “Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Hatay, Bolu” are the examples provided while “Sultan Ahmet Square” is an example for history. “Grandfather, grandmother, uncle, cousin” are examples provided related to relatives; “daydreaming” is an example for phrases, and “Abdulhamit I” is an example for the category of sultan.

4. Discussion

It was found that the most preferred questions for listening skills in TÖMER exams are true/false, fill-in-the-gap, and multiple choice questions. As stated by Boyle (2019a: 68), these types of questions should be preferred frequently in measuring listening skills.

The number of open-ended questions for listening skills at the A2 level were less than the A1 level questions. This situation leads to criticism on proficiency exams in two aspects: First, Güzel and Barın (2013: 271) emphasized that there should not be any open-ended questions in texts for listening or there can only be one question that is opinion-based. The results of examining the test documents showing that 4 open-ended questions at the A1 level and 2 open-ended questions at the A2 level conflict with the information emphasized by Güzel and Barın (2013). Additionally, TÖMER #4 and #10 can be criticized as they include questions to measure listening skills at the A1 level while no such questions are included at the A2 level. As the proficiency level increases, students are expected to have an increased level of self-expression in writing through open-ended questions. On the other hand, the fact that true/false questions are the most frequently preferred question type in listening skills exams is expected as these question types can allow language learners to access information easily through the texts used in reading/listening. However, considering the factor of chance in true/false questions being high, these tests may not be appropriate for listening skills.

There was no consistency between the word counts of texts provided in A1 and A2 level exams. The range word count in A1 level is varies between 6 and 256 which is a thought-provoking result. For example, in TÖMER #3, students’ A1 levels are measured with texts consisting of 6, 7, 21, 22, 24, 43, 52, 69 and 85 words while in TÖMER #8, students’ A1 levels are measured with texts consisting of 235 and 256 words. This indicates that there is no compatibility between TÖMERs and that students would not have the same skills as learning outcomes. Same findings are valid for A2 level as well. At the A2 level, reading skills are measured with texts consisting of 22 and 144 words while at the A1 level of TÖMER #9, the proficiency level of students in Turkish is determined with a text of 240 words. This

shows, once again, that there is no compatibility between TÖMERs. In some TÖMERs, there was no consistency in word counts of texts within the same institution. For example, in TÖMER #5, reading skills are measured with texts of 36, 111, 176, and 210 words at the A1 level while texts consisting of 59, 63, 64, 132, and 139 words are used at the A2 level. The total number of vocabulary in reading texts in the A1 exam is 533 while it is 457 at the A2 level. However, texts in A2 level should have a higher word count in comparison to A1 level. Boylu (2019a, p.61) states that the number of words in reading texts at the A1 level should be 150-300, and 300-450 at the A2 level by remarking that the number of words should be more at the A2 level. Güzel and Barın (2013: 270) propose that the reading texts at the A1 level should be 140-160 and 160-180 at the A2 level. The arguments of Boylu (2019) and Güzel and Barın (2013) on the word count of reading texts reveal that individuals preparing proficiency exams in TÖMER do not draw from the literature as they should because the review of exam documents showed that reading texts of 0-50, 100-150, and 50-100 ranges were used the most in A1 level while 100-150, 50-100, and 0-50 were preferred the most in A2 level.

Another finding emerged from the examination of the word count in reading texts is the number of texts. It is interesting that both in A1 and A2 levels, various numbers of texts ranging from 1 to 9 are used. TÖMER #9 measures reading skills through one text while TÖMER#3 measures the same skills through 9 texts. It is clear that there is no consistency in the number of texts between TÖMERs.

Similar to questions related to listening skills, the number of open-ended questions at the A2 level is less than A1 level. Open-ended questions are known as written examination items. Güler (2014: 82) states that exams with open-ended questions have the highest reliability in measuring high level cognitive skills, and that there is no option to answer by chance and that it is very effective during the learning process. Due to the points emphasized by Güler (2014), the expectation would be to have more open-ended questions at the A2 level in comparison to A1 level. Additionally, in some TÖMERs, reading skills are measured with only one question type in proficiency levels (TÖMERs #4, 11, and 12). However, in measuring reading skills, a diverse question set should be provided through using multiple choice tests, true/false questions, matching questions, and fill-in-the-gap questions (Boylu, 2019a, p. 60).

In general, there are less questions on writing compared to listening and reading in proficiency exams. In both levels, using open-ended questions can be explained by how learners and exam preparers consider writing skills as applications of “composition writing” or expressing “thoughts on a subject” freely. Additionally, it is an interesting finding that in 7 TÖMERs at the A1 level and in 10 TÖMERs at the A2 level only one question is used to measure writing skills. In a study conducted by Barın and Başar (2016, p. 54) on Turkish learners from Iran, it is shown that writing skills is the area that Iranian learners were least successful and that it takes time to develop writing skills. Departing from this argument, it is important to engage in different activities during the process as writing is a skill that requires time. Additionally, multiple question types should be used in writing exams to determine the level of writing clearly.

Another point that requires attention is the limitation placed on the length of text in open-ended questions which varies between different TÖMER centers. For example, there are TÖMERs placing a limit of “a minimum 50 words” or “minimum 100 words.” Having a learner who was successful at a writing exam at the B1 level through writing 50 words and having a learner who was not successful at the A1 level through writing 100 words proves the criticism of practices in teaching Turkish as a foreign language are implemented subjectively.

It is seen that there is no consistency between TÖMERs in whether or not to respond grammar questions, the placement of grammar questions in the exams (in a separate section or within the section

on reading-writing), and the question types. The reason for inconsistency is, as stated previously, the lack of a shared program in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

It was found that the special language use area in listening, reading, and writing in proficiency exams reviewed according to the areas of use in CEFR is dominant. Also, low use of professional area is an expected outcome because examples related to areas of language use can be provided to learners starting at the middle level. However, the educational area could be more in the listening and reading questions at the A2 level because Turkish education in TÖMERs is provided in a classroom environment. At the same time, in accordance with one of the principles of teaching language, that is providing examples from immediate environment, examples based on in-class examples can be given or students can be asked to produce texts according to the area of language use.

Providing texts based on the areas of use in listening and reading skills is a positive experience for learners because there is a need for real activities in alignment with daily life in order for learners to be successful as discussed by Barın and Başar (2016, p. 55). In meeting this need, the areas of language use (public, professional, personal, and education) identified by CEFR (2018) serve as an important guideline for language teachers and exam preparers.

6 TÖMERs provide examples for learners in reading skills with more than one developmental phases at the A1 and A2 levels which is positive in terms of learners being exposed to more daily life-examples. Lack of examples in proficiency exams oriented towards the developmental phases of reading instructions, reading as leisure, and reading correspondence can be considered as a negative because understanding written directions or user manuals, reading fictional texts such as stories for leisure, and understanding postcards, e-mails, and social media correspondence are among the necessary competencies for learners in terms of using the language for communication. Additionally, these competencies are related to the areas of language use. On the other hand, similar to reading skills, asking learners to produce texts in different level groups at the A1 and A2 levels in 5 TÖMERs is a positive situation.

Providing examples in terms of culture transfer in proficiency exams is important to promote the Turkish culture. Güzel and Barın (2013, p. 270, 275) state that the texts in exams should have elements of Turkish culture. Along with Güzel and Barın (2013), Altunkaya (2019, p.141) state that it is important to promote cultural elements, and in promoting it is important to present elements including greeting, eating and drinking habits, manners and customs, wedding ceremonies, national and religious holidays, religious rituals, historical information, culture, geography, music, stories, and tales. Consideration of culture transfer in exams relates to CEFR (2013, 2018) as well. In the sociocultural information described in CEFR (2013: 103) makes the culture transfer essential. Additionally, the interculturality approach as one of the language teaching methods emphasizes culture transfer (Melanlıoğlu, 2013, p. 129).

A1 and A2 level exams included very few phrases. As teaching phrases is not part of the curriculum at the basic level, this is an expected outcome. However, it can be criticised that all the exams reviewed included 6 different formulaic expressions in reading texts because formulaic expressions are taught starting at the A1 level in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. At the same time, these expressions are among the language structures that learners will be exposed to frequently in their daily lives.

5. Conclusions

The main finding of the study is that the proficiency exams that were reviewed are not compatible with each other. This incompatibility stems from issues related to the question types used in skills, the number of reading texts and the number of words in those texts, the length of text and the diversity in

questions in writing skills, having/lack of grammar questions and their placement in the exams, and not meeting the skill development phases according to CEFR (2018). In order to improve these areas, there is a need for a common program for teaching Turkish as a foreign language that would be followed by all TÖMERs.

6. Ethics Committee Approval

The author confirms that this study does not need ethics committee approval (Date of Confirmation: June 09,2020).

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Yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretiminde TÖMER’lerde uygulanan kur bitirme sınavları

Öz

Yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretiminde önemli rol üstlenen kurumlardan biri de Türkçe Öğretimi/Öğrenimi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezleridir (TÖMER). Söz konusu kurumlar, öğretim sürecinde kur bitirme sınavları uygulamaktadır. Ancak Türkiye’de yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretiminde ortak bir program olmadığı için TÖMER’lerdeki sınav uygulamaları kurumlar arasında farklılaşmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, yabancı dil olarak Türkçenin öğretiminde TÖMER’lerde uygulanan sınavları incelemektir. Araştırma nitel bir durum

çalışması olarak desenlenmiştir. Bu araştırmanın veri kaynağını TÖMER’lerdeki sınavlara yönelik dokümanlar teşkil ettiği için doküman analizine başvurulmuştur. Araştırma için örnek sınav vermeyi kabul eden 13 farklı TÖMER’in kur bitirme sınavları araştırmanın inceleme nesnesini oluşturmaktadır. Verilerin analizinde tündengimsel içerik analizi tekniği kullanılarak temadan kodlara gidilmiştir. Kur bitirme sınavlarının birbiriyle uyumlu olmadığı araştırmanın genel sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu uyumsuzluk; becerilerdeki soru türleri, okuma metinlerinin sayısı ve metinlerdeki kelime sayısı, yazma becerisinde metin uzunluğu sınırı ve soru çeşitliliği, dil bilgisi sorularının olup olmaması ve sınav içindeki yeri, CEFR’e göre beceri gelişim evrelerinin sınavlarda karşılanmaması gibi hususlardan kaynaklanmaktadır. Söz konusu eksikliklerin en aza indirilmesi için bütün TÖMER’lerin uyması gereken yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi programına ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar sözcükler: yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi; TÖMER; kur bitirme sınavları; ölçme; değerlendirme.

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