Yunus Emre Institute Students' Views on the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

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Abstract

Only a few applications to teach Turkish as a foreign language through remote or distance learning platforms have been developed in recent years in Turkey. Distance Turkish Learning Portal (DTLP), developed by Yunus Emre Institute to teach Turkish remotely, is one of these applications. An unexpected interest in this practice was observed after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the portal is still in the trial phase. For this reason, although user feedback is vital in order to improve the portal, no academic research on this issue has been conducted yet. In this context, the researcher aims to evaluate the Distance Turkish Learning Portal as regards students' opinions. For this purpose, a qualitative research model, which is frequently used in educational sciences, was used to collect data, and a subsequent case study was carried out for an in-depth evaluation of their beliefs. The methods were employed to effectively and reliably collect data on learners' beliefs on the issue in question. Data was collected through a Google form that was shared with the participants. As a result of the research, it is understood that the participants enjoyed using the portal in that, firstly, it is free; secondly, it provides the opportunity to get to know Turkish culture, and finally, it also supports autonomous and self-learning. On the other hand, the technical infrastructure of the portal is insufficient, and there is no instructional or tutorial support, lack of interactive speaking features, besides the number of videos have been found to be inadequate by the users. At the end of the study, based on the findings, some suggestions were offered by the researchers to improve the Distance Turkish Learning Portal.

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Introduction

People have been trying to learn a foreign language to communicate with other cultures and civilizations since the dawn of history. They have wanted to learn languages for several purposes such as interacting with people of different nationalities. Language teaching activities have been carried out in various institutions and organizations to meet the need of people. Language teaching activities are divided into two categories as in-class (classroom) and out-of-class (extracurricular) activities.

The classroom environment is one of the most basic elements of the learning process. Learners both participate in learning activities in the classroom and find the opportunity to socialize with their peers who have similar goals. In-class practices at all levels of education, from kindergarten to higher education, lie at the core of all teaching processes.

In addition, developments in internet technologies around the world have enabled a new learning-teaching environment to find itself a place in the relevant literature. Platforms, also called virtual language learning environments, help learners learn languages regardless of time and space. In addition, thanks to such platforms, individual learning environments are offered to learners, and it is now possible to customize one's learning depending on personal traits and learning habits. Educational materials used in the process provide permanent learning, make the learner understand concrete and difficult issues more easily, save time, and interesting contents are being used and learned more easily (Gücükoğlu ve Türker, 2015, s. 448).

According to the research carried out by Hazer et al. (2011, p. 11-12), the increase in computer use at home causes an increase in the activities of people about their work-life in their homes, and people have started to 'convert' their homes into their offices. Based on this result, the researchers predict that more time will be devoted to computer-oriented activities in the future and that individuals will have to develop their computer literacy skills.

Since then, the use of computers and the Internet has increased gradually. However, the Corona Virus (COVID-19) epidemic, which broke out on December 1, 2019, in Wuhan, China, and spread all over the world, forced people to spend time in lockdown in their homes, and countries have started to take different measures to prevent the outbreak from getting worse. One of these measures is to make people stay at home and prevent them from getting out on the streets. This practice is carried out in different ways in different countries. While some countries have prohibited their citizens from leaving their homes at certain times, some countries have declared short or long-term lockdowns or curfews and imposed some sanctions on their citizens.

The fact that people stay in their homes also affect habits related to their computer and internet use. Many people prefer to use different websites, social media platforms or other

applications in order to spend time in their homes without getting bored. On the other hand, those who have to go to work and those who can work from home continue their work on the Internet.

One of the sectors affected by the epidemic is the education sector. Countries in different parts of the world have had to make changes in their education systems. Schools have had to give a break in most countries with insufficient technical infrastructure for long and unresolved periods until schools are reopened in the unforeseeable future. In technologically developed countries, educational institutions have switched to online/distance education systems.

Distance Education in Foreign Language Teaching

"When distance learning is considered in its most general sense, it can be described that learning takes place without the need for learners to be [physically present] in traditional classroom settings" (Mutlu & Mutlu, 2014, p. 25). For this reason, distance education applications provide a significant advantage, especially for individuals who want to learn foreign languages. It is not usually possible for many people to learn the target language in the native country where the language is spoken. It is often costly to study at a language school abroad; therefore, most learners prefer to study in language courses in their own country. In these courses, individuals meet the target language only in the classroom environment and cannot find out-of-class learning environments where they can practice what they have learned. However, the important thing here is to practice the target language with the native speakers so that learning could be functional and the retention period might last longer. To meet this need, many language schools bring their learners together with native speakers, and learners have the opportunity to speak and practise with them via distance/online education platforms.

On the other hand, Behjat (2013, p. 1759) states that vocabulary knowledge of language learners from different fields of study can improve to different degrees when they use the Internet to improve their language skills. Nowadays, internet access has become easier worldwide, which also has an impact on language teaching. Indeed, the Internet is at the core of distance education tools. With distance education applications, learners can develop both their vocabulary and other language skills.

There are also some difficulties in employing distance/online education systems in distance language teaching. The biggest problem is the lack of face-to-face communication with learners' peers and teachers. It is possible to develop, change, and increase the number of course contents, but this requires much additional work. Upon merging pedagogical approaches and modern technologies, it is possible to carry out a successful foreign language course (Trajanovic et al. 2007, p. 451).

Distance Learning Applications and Practises as to Teaching Turkish

Distance education studies can be carried out either synchronously or asynchronously. In synchronous learning environments, both the teacher and the learner could actively participate in teaching simultaneously. In asynchronous applications, however, a learner can usually start using the educational content pre-prepared for them. Although it is planned that the "Turkish Teaching Portal" examined in the article will have synchronous features in the long term, the portal is still an asynchronous one. For this reason, some applications that allow learning Turkish asynchronously are included in this section.

When looked at the applications and platforms of distance/online Turkish learning, it is seen that some websites are established to support Turkish learners, as well as direct language teaching websites. Examples of these sites are "turkishexplained.com" and "dilbilimi.net". The first two websites are offered in both Turkish and English. On the "dilbilimi.net" website, English is partially used. A paid membership is not required for all three websites, and they offer supplementary resources for Turkish learners.

"Turkish Explained" (https://turkishexplained.com) website consists of seven sections. These sections are named as the basics of Turkish language, adjectives, verbs, modal verbs, speaking, signs and links, respectively. The section called the basics of the language includes the alphabet, sound harmony, sounds and phonemes and grammar sections, and it is also possible to download electronic books from the site for a certain fee. On the site, grammar rules are explained in English, and then it is aimed to reinforce the subject with sample sentences about that specific grammar rule.

There is a section called "I Learn Turkish Step by Step" within the website of "dilbilimi.net" (https://dilbilimi.net). There are some grammar rules, reading and listening texts in six units to assist users in learning Turkish. Grammar rules are explained in Turkish, and then examples of the rules, multiple-choice tests and gap-filling exercises are offered to users. The website also includes grammar reference resources, dictionaries and visual materials sections.

When we look at the websites of distance learning Turkish, Yaşar University's "I am learning Turkish", "My Mother Tongue Turkish" of Anadolu University and "Distance Turkish Learning Portal" of Yunus Emre Institute come to the fore.

Yaşar University's "I Learn Turkish" site was designed as an adaptive massive open online course (Adaptive MOOC) developed within the scope of the "Differentiated Distance Education of Turkish as a Foreign Language" project within the scope of TÜBİTAK 3501 Program. The project, which takes the individual differences into account in teaching Turkish throughout the world and aims to create an education system that differs according to the readiness levels of the learners, is limited to

the A1 level only. While preparing the site, the designers combined the contents of Yunus Emre Institute and TÖMER. The site has 53 sections, including dictionary for rules, a vocabulary section, forum and virtual meeting room to teach Turkish to foreigners. The system has English, Arabic, Russian and French language support (Yaşar University, 2016).

Anadolu University launched the Distance Turkish Teaching Program (TSP) in 2007. The program was prepared for both foreigners who are over 17 years of age and for Turkish people whose native language has not improved just because they live abroad (Pilancı et al., 2015, p. 1281). "In the program, each language level consists of 12 units; 11 different learning portals including study, video, book, workbook, assignments, simultaneous counselling services (synchronous), asynchronous counselling services (asynchronous), sample test and oral and written exam" (Şen, 2016, p. 419) were being offered, but later on, Anadolu University ended the TSP program and launched the "My Mother Tongue Turkish" project. The main language Turkish site could be entered via typing the address "turkce.anadolu.edu.tr" using Google, Facebook and Microsoft accounts or by just creating a new profile. It is possible to learn Turkish at A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 levels on the site. While A1 level is presented to the learners as 7 units, the other levels consist of 8 units. Topics prepared using animated characters are presented to users via a video player applet. When users complete the task, they go to the next stage via using the video player, and when the activities for skills are completed, the unit ends. In practice, the students are allowed to write comments and discuss the lessons in the section called "canteen", through which they can also communicate with each other.

Yunus Emre Institute has prepared the Distance Turkish Learning Portal to provide a language learning environment for those who want to learn Turkish, independent of time and location. The portal's home page can be accessed through the addresses of "learnturkish.com" and "turkce.yee.org.tr". The portal offers Turkish, English, Russian and Arabic language support. The site, which aims to teach Turkish from A1 level to C2, does not have any applications for C2 level yet. The portal, the purpose of which is to improve the reading, listening, speaking and writing skills of the users, aims to teach Turkish to users through fun. The more the users progress in the system, the more they gain points, and a ranking [the league of fame] is made among these users. In the "Words" section, users are given the word and image, and the pronunciation of the word is read aloud simultaneously. Learners can add the words they have difficulty in learning to their personal glossaries/dictionaries and repeat these words whenever they want, which makes it easier for learners to learn the words that they do not know. There is a dictionary section on the portal, too. The portal, which aims to increase the competitive edge among the learners with the option of adding friends via the portal, is planned to offer "learning coach" support and private lessons to the users in the future.

Theoretical Framework

Purpose of the Study

In the discipline of teaching Turkish to foreigners, applications related to distance education are very few. Some of the programs mentioned above have been developed in recent years, yet the number is limited, and also the number of total active users is still quite small. The reason for these low numbers could be that these applications are still in their trial versions. For this reason, although the user feedback is very important in terms of improving the applications, academic research is not seen to have been made in this field yet. Considering the importance of developing technology and distance education each day experienced in today's world, it is, therefore, crucial to prepare "content-wise quality" distance education applications for teaching Turkish to foreigners as soon as possible. In this context, the aim of the research is to evaluate the Distance Turkish Learning Portal developed by Yunus Emre Institute to teach Turkish online, in line with the students' opinions. For this purpose, the research questions have been formulated as follows:

"What are the opinions of the students using the Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Teaching Portal about the website in question?" Within the framework of this main problem statement, the answers to the following sub-problems are sought in the study:

1. In what ways do the learners find the Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Learning Portal weak?
2. In what ways do the learners find the Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Learning Portal strong?
3. According to the learners, are the assessment and evaluation practices in the Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Learning Portal useful?
4. According to the learners, are the videos in the Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Learning Portal useful in improving their Turkish?

Method

Research Methodology

A qualitative research model, which is frequently used in educational sciences, was used in this study. The open-ended questionnaire was administered to learn about participants' beliefs about Yunus Emre Institute's Turkish Teaching Portal for learning Turkish. Accordingly, the case study, which is one of the techniques used in the qualitative research model, was taken as the basis in the study.

According to Köse (2017, p. 109), the purpose of this type of research is to examine a particular situation in depth and reveal detailed results as this model is widely used especially in the

field of educational sciences. In this context, the thoughts of the learners using the portal in question will be studied in depth. User feedback is very important for the correction and improvement of the portal. After determining the learners' expectations of the portal and the problems in the system, the upcoming improvements will make the portal functional leading to a more useful system.

In addition, correspondence technique was used to collect data in the research. Correspondence is the technique of collecting data through written communication. Letters, questionnaires, written tests, etc. are commonly used tools to collect such data" (Karasar, 2019, p. 221).

Universe and Sample

Students who benefit from Yunus Emre Institute Turkish Teaching Portal constitute the universe of the study. In this universe, 132 learners who responded adequately to the correspondence tool constitute the sample of the research. Each individual responding to the questionnaire was coded as "Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2) …" and numbered accordingly. These codes, which are included in the quotations in the findings section of the research, show to which participant the statement belongs. The data on the gender of the participants are as follows:

Table 1. Data on the gender of the participants

Gender	f	%
Female	76	57,6
Male	56	42,4
Total	132	100

Seventy six of the participants are female (57.6%) and 56 (42.4%) are male. The data on the age groups of the participants are as follows:

Table 2. Data on the age groups of the participants

Age Group	f	%
18-20	9	6,8
21-25	54	40,9
26-30	25	18,9
31-35	18	13,6
36-40	15	11,4
41-50	7	5,3
50+	4	3
Total	132	100

Nine (6.8%) of the participants are 18-20 years old; 54 (40.9%) of them are 21-25 years old; 25 (18.9%) of age 26-30; 18 (13.6%) were 31-35 years old; 15 (11.4%) of 36-40 years old; 7 (5.3%) are between the ages of 41-50 and 4 (3%) are over the age of 51. The data on participants' level of education are as follows:

Table 3. Data on participants' level of education

Level of Education	f	%
High School	27	20,5
Bachelor's	71	53,8
Master's	30	22,7
PhD	4	3
Total	132	100

Twenty seven of the participants (20.5%) are high school students; 71 (53.8%) Bachelor of Arts or Science, 30 (22.7%) Master's and 4 (3%) hold PhD degrees. The data on the Turkish levels of the participants are as follows:

Table 4. Data on Turkish levels of the participants

Level of Turkish	f	%
A1	49	37,1
A2	26	19,7
B1	31	23,5
B2	15	11,4
C1	11	8,3
Total	132	100

Forty nine of the participants (37.1%) are at A1 level; 26 (19.7%) are at A2 level; 31 (23.5%) are at B1 level; 15 (11.4%) stated that they knew Turkish at B2 level and 11 (8.3%) at C1 level. The Data on the duration of participants' use of the Turkish Teaching Portal is as follows:

Table 5. Data on the duration of participants' use of the Turkish Teaching Portal

Duration of usage	f	%
0-6 months	66	50
6-12 months	19	14,4
1-2 years	38	28,8
2-3 years	6	4,5
3 years or more	3	2,3
Total	132	100

Sixty six of the participants (50%) have spent time on the website between 0-6 months; 19 (14.4%) for 6-12 months; 38 (28.8%) for 1-2 years; 6 (4.5%) stated that they have been using the Turkish Teaching Portal for 2-3 years and finally 3 (2.3%) for 3 years and more. . The data on the usage frequency of the Turkish Teaching Portal by the participants are as follows:

Table 6. Data on the usage frequency of the Turkish Teaching Portal by the participants

Frequency of usage	f	%
Always	28	21,2
Usually	32	24,2
Occasionally	52	39,4
Rarely	14	10,6
Never	6	4,5
Total	132	100

Twenty-eight of the participants (21.2%) said they use the portal: Always; 32 (24.2%) usually; 52 (39.4%) occasionally; 14 (10.6%) reported that they rarely use the Turkish Teaching Portal, and lastly, 6 participants (4.5%) reported that they no longer use the portal.

Limitations

The research is limited to 132 learners who learn Turkish via Yunus Emre Institute Turkish Teaching Portal. Learners who could not be reached during the data collection process or who gave incomplete answers to the questionnaires were not included in the study sample in order to obtain reliable data. Again, the research was limited to the problem statement and finding answers to the sub-problems.

Data Collection and Analysis

Firstly, a questionnaire development study was carried out by the researchers for the research. As stated by Daşdemir (2019, p. 93), the survey is a data collection technique applied by asking written questions and receiving written answers. It is generally used in educational sciences in order to obtain written information about a situation or a condition, attitude, behaviour, existing knowledge and ideas or thoughts of the subjects/participants. Opinions were received from two field experts to check whether the questionnaire prepared by the researchers served the purpose of the research or not. The questionnaire was finalised with the feedback from the field experts. Since the questionnaire will appeal to users of all levels, it has been translated into English and Arabic by official translators to make it trilingual. Subsequently, an expert opinion was retaken on whether the questions were consistent and the translations were correct in all three languages. After the positive feedback, the questionnaire was transferred to the electronic media through the application of "Google Form".

There are two sections in the questionnaire: Part One, the demographic data and Part Two for the belief section. Finally, the link of the questionnaire was sent to Yunus Emre Institute, and the form was re-examined by the experts at the Institute and sent to the system users via e-mail. The form, which was kept in the electronic form for one week to be answered, was toggled off at the end of one week.

Descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of research data. "The data obtained in this type of analysis are summarised and interpreted according to the previously determined themes. In the descriptive analysis, direct quotations are often included to reflect the striking views of individuals interviewed or observed. The purpose of this type of analysis presents the findings to the reader in an organised and interpreted way" (Şahin, 2017, p. 190). Accordingly, the findings obtained from the learners are mainly dealt with in seven sections. Subsequently, the beliefs of the learners in each section were analysed by the researchers. Some of the learners' beliefs are reported verbatim for authenticity.

Findings and Comments

In this part of the study, the opinions of the participants regarding the Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Learning Portal are listed under subtitles.

Positive Aspects of Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Participants were asked "Positive Aspects of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal". The frequency and percentages table regarding the positive aspects of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal prepared based on the participants' responses are as follows:

Table 7. Frequencies and Percentages Regarding the Positive Aspects of the Turkish Learning Portal

Theme	Codes	f	%
	Being independent of time and place	30	22,7
	Being free of charge	2	16,6
	Improving speaking and listening skills	16	12,1
Positive Aspects of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal	Individualized / Customized Learning	15	11,3
	Effective Vocabulary Teaching	13	9,8
	Gradual/Levelled Learning	11	8,3
	No comments	10	7,5
	Being familiar with the Turkish Culture	9	6,8
	Improving reading and writing skills	6	4,5
	TOTAL	132	100

According to Table 7, it is seen that user opinions are gathered in nine themes. 22.7 percent of the users see the Distance Turkish Learning portal as a positive feature to be used independent of time and place constraints. Some of the opinions from the users according to the first theme are as follows:

> **(P47)** *"I can study Turkish without having to leave home." **(P118)** "Easily reachable at any time, free and connected to Turkish culture." **(P33)** "Learning Turkish easily from any place online." **(P2)** "Adjusting according to one's levels, finding voice recordings, creating a competitive environment (points), being full of pictures and taking lessons in 24 hours when requested."*

It is noteworthy that Yunus Emre Institute, which has started to focus on technology-based Turkish teaching in recent years, has opened the portal prepared by a large team of teachers for free, and also provided quality Turkish education without any cost to the users. On the other hand, Yunus Emre Institute's portal is one of the first websites in this field since there are few distance education applications prepared in accordance with foreign language teaching principles and methods for learning Turkish. It responds to a serious need with this aspect. Some of the opinions of the participants, who see the website is offered free of charge see this as an advantage:

> **(P42)** *"The opportunity to choose the time is perfect for me, and free education is also a good thing." **(P57)** "I will overcome my fear of learning a foreign language. This system is very*

*good for me. I can learn by myself. I saved money for three years to learn English, but I don't have such a problem for Turkish." (**P16**) "Having a lecture in this organised way for free charging." (**P21**) "Learning is step by step and with each lesson there is its grammar.*

Another advantage of the website for the users was its provision of personalised language learning opportunities. This has been stated as a positive feature of the portal by 12.1% of users. Likewise, 11.3% of users and 9.8% of users believed the website was effective in improving their speaking and listening skills respectively. Listening comprehension and oral production skills are among the most important elements of communication. In this context, it is noteworthy that the listening and speaking activities in the portal are found useful by the learners. Contrary to the courses held in the physical environment, the portal provides asynchronous and personalised learning opportunities and the vocabulary teaching activities repeatedly bring target words to the learners, which contributes to the retention of learning.

Levelled learning or learning in line with levels is one of the most important features brought by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Accordingly, when a language is taught to the learner, it is necessary to act in a certain system and follow a sequence in the teaching of skills and grammatical structures. Language teaching is planned as six levels from A1 to C2 in the Turkish Teaching Portal. Of these, A1 and A2 are called basic level, B1 and B2 are intermediate level, C1 and C2 are high level. When one logs into the system, they can see that teaching can be carried out up to C1 level, but the level of C2 has not been activated yet.

When Yunus Emre Institute, Yedi İklim Türkçe [literally translated as: Seven Climate Turkish] sets are examined, it is seen that only focus is not the Turkish language teaching, but also the elements of Turkish culture are often offered to those who want to learn the language. A similar situation exists in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal. As a matter of fact, 6.8 per cent of users see the portal to promote Turkish culture as a positive feature.

In terms of improving their reading and writing skills, 4.5 per cent of users think that the portal is effective. When the portal is examined, it is seen that reading many texts are included. There are also writing activities through which users can practice their Turkish from the basic level.

When the comments of the users participating in the research are examined, it is seen that 122 participants mentioned the positive aspects of the portal, while 10 participants did not express their opinions in the question item. Based on this result, it can be said that 92.4 per cent of the users who used the portal and participated in the research found a positive feature in the portal, and thus were satisfied with the portal.

Negative Aspects of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Participants were asked about the "Negative Aspects of Turkish Learning Portal". The frequency and percentages table regarding the negative aspects of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal based on the answers of the participants are as follows:

Table 8. Frequencies and Percentages Regarding the Negative Aspects of Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Theme	Codes	f	%
	No negative aspect	3	5
	Technical Deficiencies	7	0,4
	Problems as to the recording of speaking skills	7	2,8
Negative Aspects of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal	No interactive speaking option	3	9,8
	No tutor support	12	9
	Some too high-level exercises	11	8,3
	No comments	10	7,5
	Insufficient grammar teaching	9	6,8
	TOTAL	132	100

The percentage of participants who do not think that the portal has a negative aspect is 25% while 20.4% of them complain about technical deficiencies. Some of the opinions of the participants regarding these complaints are as follows:

> *(P9) "It is slow, maybe due to the internet connection." (P40) [With broken Turkish:] "The website is very slow, usually gives an error when I reply to the last exercise or any other exercise, and I need to answer the whole lesson again, sometimes when I answer a course exercise or an exam-oriented exercise, maybe there is one more question, but I made 5 mistakes; I tried to answer this exercise it gives the same wrong score. Speech practice is usually not said here when the headset is well placed on the computer, and I am responding to other speech exercises. There is no response to my e-mails." (P123) "Sometimes, the website doesn't work." (P76) "Technical errors such as voice detention problems, bugs and glitches throughout the activities." (P80) "It is too slow to load, and sometimes it just hangs." (P85) "It took a lot of time to do each task there since it is a lot and the progress is so slow."*

Participants' common complaint; the application sometimes works slowly, and sometimes it does not open; sometimes it suddenly gives an error message. Indeed, this type of systematic problems is often encountered. This situation is considered to have been caused by too many users simultaneously trying to log into the system. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, face-to-face education was interrupted in many countries around the world, and similarly, face-to-face education was also interrupted at the language centres of Yunus Emre Institute, and distance education was initiated. Thousands of users have been moved to the portal in a very short time, and due to this unprecedented

surge of users, problems have begun to surface because the technical infrastructure is not strong enough. Therefore, the portal needs to be updated or strengthened accordingly.

The portal is built on the development of four basic language skills. However, the tool used in teaching speaking skill is not functional enough. This tool may not work properly, based on the principle by which a user speaks Turkish through the microphone and the program analyses the speech, and the user is expected to utter the listed words and sentences with the correct pronunciation. The percentage of users complaining about this situation is 12.8%. Lack of interactive speech option and live tutorial support is also seen as deficiencies in the portal. Some of the user opinions on these themes are as follows:

> *(P37) "It would be better if there was a conversation section among the learners, I think. Learning alone is good. But learning with others is more useful. Maybe I can add a book, group chat and presentation feature." (P43) "An important deficiency of the program is that it is not a real speaking practice." (P80) "Some questions that require us to speak does not register what we say correctly. I also don't like the questions that require us to spell the answer letter by letter."*

Eleven of the participants state that some exercises are above their current level, and nine of them say that their language teaching is insufficient. Participant number thirty-six (P36) states that when he reaches A2 level, he suddenly faced some subjects with which he could not cope, so his progress is slower when he levels up from A1 to A2.

The participant numbered thirty-three (P33) states that there is no reply to his e-mails, for example, he has not been informed whether he will be given a certificate when he completes the system. The same participant also says that he feels worried if the system or the site is to be closed and his efforts wasted.

When the responses are examined, it is seen that 122 participants have given negative opinions, and ten participants did not give a negative opinion regarding the use of Turkish Teaching Portal.

Weaker Points to be Improved in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Participants were asked if Yunus Emre Institute's Distance Turkish Language Learning Portal has any aspects that need improvement. Frequencies and percentages related to the themes based on the opinions of the participants are as follows:

Table 9. Frequencies and Percentages Regarding the Weaker Points to be Improved in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Theme	Codes	f	%
	No need for improvement	21	15,9
	Need for better technical infrastructure	16	12,1
	Need to add [speaking] club activities	15	11,3
	Need for online tutorial support	13	9,8
Weaker Points to be Improved in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal	Need for extra exams and activities	13	9,8
	Need for mobile application	11	8,3
	Need for enriching grammar exercise	10	7,5
	No comments	10	7,5
	Need for speaking skill recording	9	6,8
	Need for increasing the videos in the system	8	6
	Need for offline feature	6	4,5
	TOTAL	132	100

When we look at Table 9, we can see that 15.9 percent of the participants said "There is no need to develop the Distance Turkish Learning Portal." 12.1 percent of the participants expressed their opinion that the technical infrastructure should be improved. Demand for distance education has increased, especially during the coronavirus outbreak. The Distance Turkish Learning Portal users complain that they have problems in using the portal and that they experience freezes and hangs on the site from time to time, and as a solution to this, they suggest that the site should be technically improved and upgraded.

While 11.3% of the participants expressed their opinion as follows; "[Speaking] Club activities should be added." 9.8% of them stated that "online tutorial support" should be provided. Users need to interact with each other on the portal. Also, there was a demand from the users for the online tutorial support section, which is not available on the portal but yet given a section. In order for the users to practice in the language they learn, it is important for the function of the portal to provide the users with messaging or chat/speaking rooms similar to those on social media platforms, and to serve the users online, which will provide instant answers to the possible questions of the learners. Although there are end-of-section tests on the portal, the need to prepare extra exams and activities is expressed by users.

Smartphones have become indispensable for human life today. People can easily perform all their needs on the Internet thanks to smartphones, and even many people learn language through language applications. Among the Distance Turkish Learning Portal, 8.3% of users state that the portal's mobile phone application should be improved. Some of the participants' views are as follows:

(P22) "You should make a more useful application for the mobile phone." (P56) "When I use it on the phone, I do not get the sound recording correctly, and I have problems with the

*writing sections, so it is necessary to develop the phone application." (**P73**) "First of all, the speaking questions don't work, when I talk nothing happens. Second, it does not work properly with iPad and phones. Third, most of the learners don't have a Turkish keyboard, so please add a Turkish keyboard to all the writing questions." (**P103**) "You should develop it to be a mobile application. you need to provide a tutor to answer our questions, and you need to work more on the speaking questions."*

Keeping the grammar explanations short and making the explanations only in Turkish were found insufficient by the participants. When the application is examined, it will be seen that the sections related to grammar learning area are kept short. In this approach, the principle of offering Yunus Emre Institute's grammar teaching more intuitively in four basic language skills seems to be more productive. However, in this portal where the teacher is not active, it is understood that the participants have difficulty in understanding grammar topics. It would be advisable to review the grammar sections on the portal in this respect. Some of the opinions of the participants who expressed their views on the "enrichment" of grammar teaching section are as follows:

(**P28**) "I am saying clearly that I could not learn grammar from your website because I could not understand so I watched some other videos." (**P47**) You can support the site with the idea that there is a teacher explaining grammar in every level in detail." (**P100**) "Explanations and sections about teaching grammar should be developed. It is not enough." (**P129**) "The grammar part should be explained with more examples."

Ten of the users did not comment in this section. Nine of them said that it requires improvement in speaking skills, eight participants asked for an increase in the number of videos in the system, and the other six suggested making the internet use possible.

The Benefit of Videos on the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

The opinions of the participants on whether they find the videos in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal useful or not are as follows:

Table 10. Frequencies and Percentages Regarding the Benefits of Videos on the Portal

Theme	Codes	f	%
Benefit of Videos on the Distance Turkish Learning Portal	Beneficial	127	96,2
	Not Beneficial	1	0,7
	Cannot decide	4	3
	TOTAL	132	100

The percentage of participants finding videos on the portal useful is 96.2%. Only one participant stated that the videos were not useful, while four participants stated that they could not decide. Some of the participants who think that the videos in the portal are useful are as follows:

(P41) *"Yes, but they need to speak more slowly for me to understand the speech in the videos." (P46) "Yes, but with special [attention to] the pronunciation for learners." (P59) "Yes, but it does not seem to be at advanced levels. I remember it only available in A1 and A2."*

Some participants (P43, P46) find the rate of delivery in the videos high. Besides, there are participants (P41, P59) who state that the number of videos in the application is insufficient. As the participants point out, the number of videos decreases as the application goes from basic to advanced. These videos not only help the target audience improve their speaking skills, but also help them gain cultural awareness.

Benefits of End-of-the-Unit Tests in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

There are end-of-the-unit tests on the Distance Turkish Learning Portal. The participants were asked whether they found the end of the unit tests useful or not. The table of frequencies and percentages created based on the responses from the participants are as follows:

Table 11. Frequency and Percentages Regarding the Benefits of End of the Unit Tests

Theme	Codes	f	%
Benefits of End-of-the-Unit Tests	Beneficial	118	89,3
	Not beneficial	3	2,2
	Cannot decide	11	8,3
	TOTAL	132	100

When the opinions of the participants are examined, it is seen that 89.3 per cent of the participants find the end of the unit tests beneficial. Three of the participants find the end of the unit tests not beneficial, and 11 participants state that they are undecided on this matter.

Some of the opinions of the participants who found the end of the department tests useful are as follows:

(P39) *"Yes, it is useful and shows if you are working well. However, it has a flaw, which is that the questions are taken as they are from the lessons, and I think this is not good." (P45) "Yes, but some speech tests are not good." (P103) "Yes, but the speaking parts need to be developed."*

Speaking parts at the end of unit tests generally do not measure the users in speaking sub-skills such as fluency, vocabulary and accuracy. It is mostly based on pronunciation. One participant (P39), on the other hand, criticized the questions in the end-of-unit tests in the sense that the questions are directly taken from the content in the section.

Language Supports for the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

The Distance Turkish Learning Portal supports Turkish, English, Russian and Arabic languages. In the questionnaire, users were asked which languages they would like to add to the portal other than these languages. The table of frequencies and percentages created based on the answers given is as follows:

Table 12. Frequencies and Percentages Regarding the Languages Wished to be Added to the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Theme	Codes	f	%
	Not necessary	96	72,7
	French	9	6,8
	Malay	7	5,3
Which languages would you like to be added to the Distance Turkish Learning Portal?	Kazakh	4	3
	Persian	3	2,2
	German	3	2,2
	Italian	2	1,5
	Urdu	2	1,5
	Other	6	4,5
	TOTAL	132	100

The percentage of users who are satisfied with the language options available on the Turkish teaching portal is 72.7%. These people do not find it necessary to add a new support language. As 6.8% of users demand that French be added to the portal, 5.3% of them prefer Malaysian and 3% Kazakh language. Three people ask for Persian and German, and two for Italian and Urdu, while 4.5% of the users marked other languages.

Other Opinions about the Distance Turkish Learning Portal

Finally, the participants were asked if they had different opinions about the "Distance Turkish Learning Portal". In this section, 86 of the participants stated their opinions, while 46 participants did not fill in the questionnaire.

When the participants' comments in this topic are examined, it is seen that they requested that the users who are successful in the application (P33 and P112) should be given certificates by the Institute. It is known that Yunus Emre Institute is not considering giving certificates to the online users at this stage. Besides, there are no course materials or books in PDF format. Some participants (P70, P121) who have addressed this issue have recommended uploading PDF files to the portal. Thus, in cases where there is no internet, learners can study Turkish through these files. In addition, there are also participants who recommend adding Turkish movies or cartoons (P43) and allowing users to upload videos to the system (P101). As in previous titles, the participants stated that the system is working slowly (P33) and they want to communicate with teachers for the topics they do

not understand (P112). Finally, one participant (P35) wrote that the course contents at C1 level could be divided into social sciences and science.

Some of the opinions that the participants would like to add are as follows:

(P33) "There are no replies for my e-mails. For example, I would like to know if I will have a certificate. Is there an end date and the site will close if I didn't finish I will not take a certificate. So, I should retry to take a certificate. The site is so slow and it isn't well updated. It usually closes suddenly, and I am required to start the whole lesson again. Sometimes I get well marks like 94% it seems like 20% or 28% even if I repeat it. It sometimes seems I didn't complete the lesson even if I retried the whole lesson many times. There isn't coach support or anyone to ask when you are in a trouble." (P35) "After the B2 level, C1 levels should be different according to the learner. A separate program for science and social sciences will be given and enriched with appropriate content according to the department." (P43) "It would be great if Turkish movies and cartoons are added as full videos or short videos." (P70) "PDF course materials and books can be added to the system. (P101) "Videos and competitions can be organised with the videos that learners can shoot and upload to the system." (P112) "After each level is over, a certificate must be given. There is no information in the system. It would be nice if we could get a certificate." (P131) "Please add features that will allow you to communicate with a teacher for a reasonable fee and ask an expert teacher for unclear issues."

Discussion and Conclusion

When the studies in the world are examined, it is seen that the developments in technology are reflected in the language teaching processes. With the latest innovations, it is seen that the coined concepts of "(Integrative) Computer Assisted Language Learning" and "Mobile Assisted Language Learning" have begun to be used in the relevant literature. Web-based language learning/teaching, which emerged as an interdisciplinary study, has become more and more profitable, and various applications and websites have been developed for teaching Turkish to foreigners (Pilancı, 2015, pp.262-265). Jarvis & Krashen (2014, p. 5) also state that computer-assisted language teaching entered our lives in the 1960s, and today, technology-assisted language learning or mobile-assisted language learning has replaced computer-assisted learning.

With the inclusion of the internet and multimedia technologies in educational programs, learning has become possible for everyone at any time and from anywhere they like to access. Learners can access information through chat groups, e-mails, blogs and wiki and communicate with any other learners and their educators and teachers in these [virtual] environments. In this way, learners have the chance to continue the process not only in formal but also in informal environments

(Yayla, 2014, p. 128). The "Turkish Teaching Portal" developed by Yunus Emre Institute is important in terms of providing the opportunity to learn Turkish in informal environments with web support. The portal has tens of thousands of users in different countries of the world. According to the survey given to users, female users (57.6%) are more likely to use the portal than male users (42.4%). When we look at the age groups, it is seen that a significant portion (66.6%) of users using Yunus Emre Institute Distance Turkish Learning Portal are users who are aged 30 and under. However, it has been determined that the portal is not only used by people in a certain age range, but also accessed by learners from different age.

It is thought that high school graduate users are mostly university students. The number of undergraduate graduates among users has an important weight (53.8%). It is followed by graduate and high school graduates respectively, with only four graduates with a PhD degree using the portal. The use of the portal by educated people is an important piece of information that will work especially in B2 and for higher level content design. As a matter of fact, in groups where the audience of students in physical/face-to-face courses consists of uneducated (or less educated) people, textbooks can sometimes be too loaded for them because might not be familiar with these concepts and definitions even in their native language, and much less so in another. In particular, such cases are encountered with the immigrants who came to Turkey to lead their lives and the immigrants who want to learn Turkish over the age of 40. In this context, the fact that educated people have an important place in the audience using the portal facilitates the selection of the text. However, it reveals the need for "Academic Turkish" especially for the students who will study at the levels of C1 and above.

The lives of the learners from different international backgrounds who came to Turkey for academic purposes can be classified into two periods: education in TÖMERs (Turkish Teaching Centres) and the time spent in the departments or in the faculties. In the first period, the entire group of learners has the purpose of learning only the language, while in the second period, the learner now becomes a language user and is educated with the medium of Turkish language, which is the language of the majority of native speakers. In TÖMERs, a student who speaks Turkish in general finds himself in an environment where Academic Turkish is used (Demir, 2017, p. 4). In this context, there is a need to determine "Academic Turkish" areas for C2 and later on to prepare the contents for the Distance Turkish Learning Portal.

More than half of the users (56.8%) are at the basic level. 34.9 per cent of the users are at a medium level, and 8.3 per cent are at a high level. When the language levels of the users are analysed, it is seen that the number of users decreases as their level gets higher. There is a similar situation in normal face-to-face courses. In order for learners to use the portal at advanced levels, activities should be designed in a way to motivate the learners and increase the use of the portal. A large number of people spend most of their time in their daily lives by having fun and sharing their status or pictures in

virtual environments. Therefore, the portal should become an environment where learners can interact and share with each other.

Half of the participants (50%) state that they have used the portal for the last 0-6 months. Since these participants are among the 1000 people who use the portal the most, it can be claimed that the promotion and usage of the portal have increased in recent months. It was determined that the profile of the participants was in line with the predictions, especially considering that people were constantly at home and turned to distance education platforms due to the pandemic.

Technology-based education has such features as providing lifelong virtual learning environments, being independent of time and space/location, and giving the opportunity to learn whenever you want to have access (Oran & Karadeniz, 2007, p.169). The computer and the internet are very useful in developing listening and reading comprehension, verbal expression, conversation skills and writing skills in language teaching. Thanks to the web-based distance/remote language teaching and learning technologies, it is now possible to effectively teach Turkish to foreigners having defined a good layout, design and preparation process (Pilancı, 2015, p. 266). According to Türker (2014, p.360-361), the portals for teaching Turkish for foreigners, which are prepared according to the e-learning model, provide equal opportunity to those who cannot participate in formal education, besides users learn Turkish according to their own learning speed without feeling time limitation and save costs such as transportation.

It has become easier to reach more people through Turkish teaching portals; to include pictures, graphics, videos, etc. in addition to the students' book, in the course; to prepare individual education programs and to introduce cultural elements (Türk Toğrul & Toğrul, 2016, p.151). Such factors increase learner satisfaction. All of the participants using the Distance Turkish Learning Portal state that they are generally satisfied. The strengths of the Turkish Teaching Portal, which are determined based on the opinions of the participants, are as follows:

1. There is no time and space restriction.

2. The system can be used free of charge.

3. Users can equally improve their reading, listening, speaking and writing skills.

4. The learning process supports individual/customised learning.

5. Effective and memorable vocabulary teaching is realised.

6. There is a planned and levelled language teaching process, thanks to the levelled learning system.

7. Users have the opportunity to get to know Turkish culture better.

Self-learning is an important feature of the portal. People from different countries and nations of the world can attend the Turkish course quickly and at no cost. According to Pilancı (2015, p. 266),

the importance given to distance/remote learning and education has increased, and it offers diverse and rich learning environments, the opportunity to use different tools for language learning and teaching, bringing people from different countries together by removing the geographical and spatial barriers, and providing flexible lesson and teaching times. Thanks to its advantages, the interest in web-based Turkish teaching programs is increasing.

Social networks attract attention as tools that should be used in language learning processes with their features such as instant access to information and mutual interaction with learner participation at an international level. In these environments, it is possible for learners to develop four basic language skills, namely reading, listening, speaking and writing in the target language (Yayla, 2014, p. 129).

Although distance/remote learning and teaching applications have certain positive aspects, there are also some weaknesses. Pilancı et al. (2015, pp. 1291-1294) states that the weaknesses of distance education programs can be raised due to certain organizational problems, issues in creating course content, technical problems, problems regarding learning and teaching habits, accreditation problems and some regulatory administrative problems.

1. The infrastructure of the site is insufficient.
2. The tool used in speaking skill activities needs to be improved.
3. There is no possibility for interactive speaking.
4. Tutorial or coach support does not work.
5. Some exercises are above the level of learners.
6. Grammar teaching needs to be improved.

When the weaknesses of the Turkish Teaching Portal, according to the participants, are examined, it is seen that organizational problems, technical problems and problems related to creating content come to the fore.

There are ninety-four mobile applications in the App Store and Google Play that are designed to teach Turkish to foreigners. When the applications were examined, it was seen that most of the applications belonged to foreign developers and were prepared with commercial concerns, but the applications should be developed in terms of quality (Becel, 2015, p. 269). "Good examples and electronic resources should increase in order to establish standards for distance education of Turkish" (Ozan & Göçmenler, 2018, p. 147). For this reason, Turkish Teaching Portal alone would be insufficient to meet the needs in the field. The number of similar sites and applications should be increased. The increase in the quantity will be reflected in the quality over time, and quality applications for distance Turkish learning and teaching will emerge.

Yunus Emre Institute has adopted the principle of using the method of inductive learning instead of directly giving the grammar rules. Attention is also paid to this rule in language teaching coursebook sets. However, there is a tutor who teaches the lesson in actual classroom education, and often he/she exemplifies grammar rules by making the necessary explanations to the learners. In this context, it seems necessary to develop new methods on teaching grammatical structures in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal, which lacks tutorials or online live support.

The videos in the Turkish Teaching Portal are liked by the users, but the number of the videos is requested to be increased by the users. The enriched books prepared by Yunus Emre Institute and the activities of Anadolu University for teaching Turkish with distance education tools are ground-breaking activities (Ozan & Göçmenler, 2018, p. 130). In this context, the inclusion of both the content prepared for the books enriched by the Institute and also the animated films prepared by Anadolu University for the language use and situational contexts will make teaching fun. If the original content on the platforms, such as YouTube with millions of videos, are to be used in teaching provided that they are carefully evaluated by experts and chosen to serve the purpose, the interests and attention level of the learners will be kept alive and the most watched contents will be presented to the learners worldwide.

The end-of-unit tests on the Distance Turkish Learning Portal are useful to learners. Indeed, it is important for learners to test what they have learned before moving on to the new unit. In addition, the end-of-unit tests will serve the principle of repetition in learning.

The Turkish Instruction Portal is currently available in Turkish, English, Russian and Arabic, while users request the addition of French, Malay, Kazakh, Persian, German, Italian and Urdu languages to the portal.

The fact that it is still uncertain whether the participants can get a certificate at the end of the language teaching process or not is the complaint which is frequently voiced by the users. Considering that the system is used free of charge, it is important to give the opportunity to obtain certificates to the users who learn Turkish over the system by offering different options or privileges.

Suggestions

Analysing users' beliefs of the Distance Turkish Learning Portal developed by Yunus Emre Institute, the following suggestions are presented to the stake-holders for the development and the improvement of the portal:

• As stated by many users and supported by the user profiles participating in the research (especially for those who have been using the portal for 0-6 months, which covers half of the participants), the number of users in the portal has unexpectedly increased in recent months. Due to

the increase in demand, a slowdown occurred in the system. The system should be updated, and the technical infrastructure should be strengthened. This will enable users to use the portal more efficiently.

• The videos in the portal are handy for the users. However, video lengths are short and few in number. The number of videos in the portal should be increased. The lecture videos and Turkish films and cartoons shot by Yunus Emre Institute during the coronavirus outbreak and posted on the YouTube platform should be uploaded to the system.

• Currently, users cannot communicate with each other on the portal. In order to create an interactive learning atmosphere, chat rooms should be established on the portal and speaking clubs or other similar events should be organised.

• One of the points that the users directed our attention to is that they cannot get teacher/tutorial support for the subjects they do not understand. The ability to ask questions within the portal or an option to chat with a native speaker should be defined. The speakers of Turkish as volunteers can offer support in the portal as the native speakers of the language. This feature can be opened to users who want it for an affordable fee.

• Grammar descriptions are outlined in the portal. In principle, Yunus Emre Institute teaches Turkish in a way that it is independent of memory-based language teaching. However, it seems that users need detailed grammar explanations. New content and videos must be uploaded to the system for lacking grammar topics. At this point, Turkish teaching videos prepared by the Institute mentioned above can be used.

• The fact that the end-of-the-unit tests in the portal come directly from the sample sentences in the course contents makes the test seemingly easier. In this respect, the end-of-unit tests should be reviewed, while the writing and speaking sections of the tests should be developed to be more sensitive to the user errors.

• Other support languages requested by users should be added to Turkish, English, Russian and Arabic language support by considering the target audience using the portal. Only 132 users participated in the research. In the selection of languages to be added to the portal, the countries where the system is actively used should be identified and their languages should be added to the system first.• For the users who want to do extra activities, additional worksheets should be loaded in PDF format in line with the contents of the sections. In fact, workbook leaflets compatible with the Turkish learning portal should be prepared and made available to the learners over the system.

• Yunus Emre Institute, Seven Climate Turkish Language Teaching sets have been prepared according to levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. The Distance Turkish Learning Portal supports teaching up to C1 level. The portal should first support the C2 level. Then the content should be included in the "Academic Turkish" section, which should be developed by taking into consideration the needs of the target audience who will learn Turkish in order to study at Turkish medium universities. Every year thousands of foreigners come to Turkey, either via higher education scholarship or in the status of a special student, to study Turkish in one-year-long intensive preparatory school and then move on to their faculties to study their major. Especially those who come to Turkey via a scholarship from the Turks Abroad and Relative Communities (YTB) are subject to the Academic Turkish course after the Turkish preparatory school lessons. Those who succeed in passing the Turkish placement having come to study in Turkey start studying in their Turkish-medium departments. The possible changes to be realised in Academic Turkish on the portal will help the prospective students pass their language proficiency exams and enable them to study in their departments through the help of the portal's content. As it will take time to produce new content related to Academic Turkish, "Academic Turkish" books prepared by YTB can be made available on the portal in the first place.

• There is a section called "my friends" in the Distance Turkish Learning Portal, but this section has not been made available yet. The functionality of this section, sharing the success of users with each other, increasing the interaction opportunities between users on the portal will increase the time lengths that users spend on the portal, thus increasing the number of people who continue their education in A1 to C1.

• The Turkish Proficiency Exam (abbreviated as TYS) is simultaneously held in face-to-face physical sessions in different countries of the world. However, COVID 19 has revealed a new need for the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. This need is the development of online Turkish proficiency exams and end-of-the-course exams, which will reduce the space and time constraints relatively, as in TOEFL and IELTS exams. Portal users request certificates to be documented to prove that they have mastered Turkish. Here, there are two different solutions to be offered for this problem. First of all, it is not advisable to issue a proficiency certificate or another certificate to the users only showing the success rate of the online users in the portal. After the users have reached a certain level by completing the activities in the portal, the right to take the Yunus Emre Institute's Turkish Proficiency Exam for free or at a discount should be granted. Another way is to develop online Turkish Proficiency Exam (e-TYS), and if the exams can be implemented so long as online exam safety is guaranteed, students who learn Turkish free of charge via the "Turkish Instruction Portal" should be allowed to take the exam at the qualified exam centres in their own country for a certain fee. Those who succeed in this exam should be granted a certificate of their level in Turkish.

• In the portal, it is planned that users can buy something from the market with the points they have earned and even they can send it to their friends within the system as a gift. However, this option is not currently active. Making the market service available will motivate those who use the portal, and the duration of their stay in the application will increase.

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