

27. Turkish Heritage Language Programs for Immigrant Children in the United States: The Current State and Opportunities

Selim TİRYAKİOL²

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Abstract

This study investigates Turkish community centers (weekend schools) in the United States. These centers are usually used as places of worship, cultural centers, and/or heritage language programs for immigrant children. This study aims to provide a snapshot of Turkish heritage language programs with a descriptive research design by collecting information from administrators and/or teachers of Turkish community centers in the United States. Administrators and/or teachers from 12 different centers responded to the online survey which consisted of questions on categories such as organizational, teacher-related, student-related, and parental issues. The data was analyzed with content analysis based on these categories. The results of the study demonstrates that Turkish heritage language programs overwhelmingly function within the informal cultural context on a voluntary basis and are not integrated into the formal education system. Although the center leaders expend effort to attract kids and parents, enrollments remain low and concentrated among primary school-age children. These centers are overwhelmingly funded by the community, the Turkish state, and private organizations and lack support from U.S. institutions. While some centers prioritize religious education, others give only cultural education. They generally offer few classes, employ teachers with minimal experience, and do not sufficiently collaborate with each other. This study concludes that community centers play a critical role in maintaining heritage languages since they are the only spaces for Turkish children's professional language development. They provide immigrant families and children with complex social, cultural, and educational experiences. The field needs further study that explores the role of these complex interactions in heritage language proficiency.

Keywords: Community centers, heritage language programs, immigrant children, heritage language education, Turkish.

Amerika'da yaşayan Türk toplumunun çocukları için Türkçe Miras Dil Programları: Mevcut durum ve imkânlar

Öz

Bu çalışma, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki toplum temelli hafta sonu okullarını incelemektedir. Bu okullar genellikle camiler, kültür merkezleri ve/veya göçmen çocukları için ana dili eğitimi okulları içerisinde bulunmaktadır. Çalışma bu okulların yöneticileri ve/veya öğretmenlerinden bilgi toplayarak betimsel bir araştırma tasarımı ile Türkçe hafta sonu okullarının bir tasvirini sunmayı

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² Assist. Prof., Istanbul Medeniyet University, Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education (Istanbul, Türkiye) (Istanbul,Türkiye), selimtirakiol@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5735-2320 [Araştırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 20.05.2023-kabul tarihi: 20.06.2023; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1316209]

amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında 12 farklı okuldan yöneticiler ve/veya öğretmenler çevrimiçi anketi yanıtlamıştır. Bu anket okulla ilgili, öğretmenle ilgili, öğrenciyle ilgili ve ebeveynle ilgili kategorilerde sorular içermektedir. Veriler bu kategorilere dayalı olarak içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları Türkçe hafta sonu okullarının resmi eğitim sistemiyle entegre olmadan genellikle gönüllü ve informal kültürel bağlamlarda yürütüldüğünü göstermektedir. İdareciler ve öğretmenler çocukları ve ebeveynleri çekmek için çaba harcamalarına rağmen, okul kayıtları düşük seviyede kalmakta ve çoğunlukla ilköğretim çağındaki çocuklara yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bu okullar genellikle Türk toplumu, Türk devleti ve özel kuruluşlar tarafından finanse edilmekte ve ABD kurumlarının desteğini almamaktadır. Bazı okullar din eğitime öncelik verirken, diğerleri sadece kültürel eğitim sunmaktadır. Genellikle az sayıda sınıfla eğitim sürdürülmekte, deneyimi sınırlı öğretmenlerle çalışmakta ve okullar arasında yeterince iş birliği yapılmamaktadır. Bununla birlikte okullar göçmen ailelere ve çocuklara ileri düzeyde sosyal, kültürel ve eğitimsel deneyimler sunmaktadır. İleride yapılacak çalışmalar özellikle bu okullar etrafında oluşan sosyal, kültürel ve eğitimsel etkileşimlerin çocukların dil becerilerine nasıl etki ettiğine odaklanmalıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kültür merkezleri, hafta sonu okulları, miras dil programları, göçmen çocuklar, miras dil eğitimi, Türkçe

Introduction

Migration has a profound impact on the social and linguistic landscape of the host country, as well as on the lives of immigrants. As people migrate, they bring their languages and cultures with them, leading to the emergence of multilingual and multicultural communities. When speakers of different languages come into contact and interact with one another, both languages are affected and their linguistic features blend. Mostly, with school entry, immigrant children shift their dominant home language use to the dominant majority language. They start using the societal language naturally in most parts of their life. Home language, also called Heritage Language (HL), use becomes restricted only to very limited contexts. Therefore, heritage speakers need more varied exposure to, or systematic education in, their HL in the long run.

The United States accommodates diverse ethnic groups and is commonly referred to as "country of immigrants."³ While English serves as the dominant language in public education, there exists a rich tradition of private and parochial schools using alternative languages, such as German, French, and Spanish, as the primary medium of instruction (Leeman, 2015). Besides speakers of these "colonial languages" (Fishman, 2014), the United States has also been taking immigrants from other parts of the world, including Türkiye. Even though individuals' motivations behind immigration have changed over time, Turkish immigration to the United States began before the Modern Turkish Republic and continues to this day (Balgamış & Karpat, 2008).

Immigrant families raising children make conscious decisions and efforts to keep their home-country culture alive for themselves and their children. These efforts can be both at an individual level (e.g. keeping in touch with those in the home country, reading books, news, etc.) and at the community level by establishing and/or attending community/cultural centers. Similar to other minority communities, Turkish immigrants have established community centers across various states in the United States. As expected, these community centers exhibit substantial variations in terms of their objectives, services, structure, organization, and available resources (Lee & Wright, 2014). Individuals who visit these

³ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-the-united-states>

centers, regularly or otherwise, also do so in various ways and with different motivations. While some participate in only informal social/cultural activities, others attend in formal educational programs such as home language literacy, culture, history, religious education, sport, music and more. There is no doubt that (the home) language plays a significant role carrying out such activities both at the individual and institutional levels.

Community/cultural centers in the United States are physical spaces designed to serve as gathering places for members of a particular cultural or ethnic community. These centers often provide a range of services and activities, such as language classes, cultural events, educational programs, and social services. They may also serve as advocacy organizations, promoting the interests and welfare of their community and working to combat discrimination and inequality. Community/cultural centers play a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage of minority groups and providing a sense of belonging and support to their members. As a sociocultural and educational space, community centers can play important roles in creating opportunities for HL maintenance within ethnic/immigrant communities. For instance, recent studies (Bayram et al., 2019; Kupisch & Rothman, 2018) show that high level of L1 literacy via engagement in (formal) training offered in such centers has a positive effect on HL competence as compared to those with no formal literacy training. Literacy provides learners with input containing properties that may not be as ample in colloquial dialects or day-to-day language (Rothman & Treffers-Daller, 2014). However, literacy is still a small part of the complex and multidimensional social, cultural and educational networks in community centers. Individual, societal and educational experiences are nested within each other in these centers. The complex nature of these centers provides immigrant children a varied sociolinguistic context. The variation in immigrant children and their parents' engagement to community centers affects their language behaviour. However, Luk & Grundy (2022) report that fewer than 30% of the studies have described sociolinguistic contexts or participants' language ecology so far. Thus, this descriptive survey is expected to contribute to filling this gap by providing detailed information regarding the sociolinguistic contexts in community centers and lead to further studies.

From a linguistic perspective, immigrant children are initially exposed to their native language during their early years. However, as time progresses, the transition from home environment to societal exposure occurs, leading to a shift from the predominant use of their native language, such as Turkish, to another language, primarily English in this context, through formal schooling. This shift imposes limitations on the opportunities for these children to encounter linguistically rich input and meaningful language contexts in their native language (Bayram & Wright, 2016). In this regard, heritage language (HL) programs play a crucial role in preserving and enhancing the linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge of ethnic communities, including the Turkish community. These programs not only establish a language-based community for immigrant children and their parents but also provide a platform for children to connect with a multicultural identity, thereby serving a broader social purpose (Aberdeen, 2016).

Given that most HL programs are run by parents and not by professional educators, these programs require strong collaboration among the community. To build and maintain effective HL programs, community members must devote a significant amount of time and energy. Common challenges in this process include finding funds, recruiting students, attracting parents' support, finding appropriate teaching materials, and collaborating with public schools. These difficulties are beyond the responsibility of a single teacher or administrator (Compton, 2001).

Due to the continued mobility and increasing awareness of bilingualism in the research paradigm, there has been a re-emergence of interest in HLs, as evidenced by the growth in conferences, books, journals, centers, laboratories, and university programs dedicated to HL education and research (Lee & Wright, 2014). However, we know less about how and where the center administrators find funds; how they attract students and what capacity they have. We need to understand what kind of social/cultural activities they offer to their members and the formal educational programs and curriculum they have as well as the kind of materials they use to teach their HL. Attitudes of the students towards these programs and what kind of motivations parents have when they send their children to these schools remain unclarified. All these questions asked in HL education literature are actually related to the four stakeholders of a school. These stakeholders are administrators (school organization), teachers, students, and parents. With these emerging themes and the multidimensional nature of these programs in mind, this study aims to find answers to the following questions in order to describe the current picture of Turkish HL programs.

1. How are Turkish community centers organized?
2. What are the qualifications of teachers who teach Turkish in community centers?
3. What are the demographic features of students who learn Turkish in HL programs in these centers?
4. What are the demographic features of the community (parents) around these centers?

Finding answers to these questions is of great importance because there are few records about any aspects of these programs. Even though the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has documented profiles of some of these schools (Uludağ, 2011), these records are incomplete due to a lack of centralized recordkeeping and systemic governance in such schools (Lee & Wright, 2014). This study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Methodology

This study aims to describe the current state of Turkish community centers in the United States using an online descriptive survey. Adopting a descriptive research design (Cohen et al., 2007), the study gathered data about HL programs with the intention of describing the nature of immigrant children's and their parents' engagement to community centers and identifying the current state in these centers. Thus, the study provides information with four domains; i.e., organization/administration, teachers, students and parents.

Participants

The websites⁴ of Turkish ethnic community associations in the United States indicate that there are almost one hundred community centers operating under umbrella organizations. Nevertheless, the majority of these centers are small initiatives that do not offer a school program. Despite reaching out to 30 community centers with available contact information, the researcher was only able to recruit participants from 12 different Turkish community centers across the United States during the academic

⁴ See the Turkish community centers in these links:
<https://www.ataa.org/ataa-component-associations>
<https://www.tadf.info/derneklerimiz/>
<https://diyanetamerica.org/mosques/>

year 2021-2022. Due to a lack of well-documented contact information, these organizations are often difficult to reach. Therefore, one of the objectives of this study is to contribute to the documentation of these centers/schools.

The researcher contacted the participants using his own network. Since he is a member of a community center in Connecticut, he started to collect data from this state and extended the data collection process to other states using the snowball sampling method. When an administrator/teacher of a community center responded to the online survey, they are also asked the name of another Turkish community center and encouraged to share the survey with them. This way, the study collected data from Turkish community centers located in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Delaware, Massachusetts, Long Island, Maryland, and New York City. The researcher closed the survey at the end of the academic year.

Data Collection Tool and Procedure

Data collection began upon approval of Istanbul Medeniyet University Ethics Committee (2021/04-10). This study employed a questionnaire to gather data, which was created based on the researcher's own observation and the literature, regarding the emerging issues within community centers. Given the diverse stakeholders involved in community centers, the questionnaire was structured into four sections, targeting the organization, instructors, students, and parents. Including 50 items, the questions in the survey consisted of open-ended (long and short answer), multiple-choice, yes-no, and checkbox types. After the survey items were written, the researcher conducted a pilot study and moderated the survey items based on feedback from the pilot survey. Subsequent to the pilot study, the researcher shared the last version of the survey with three field experts and asked their opinions to increase the validity of the questions. The survey was reorganized based on their feedbacks. It was given importance to develop unbiased and neutral questions that do not lead or influence respondents' answers. When using likert-type questions, I provided a balanced set of response options and avoided extreme or imbalanced scales that may introduce response bias. The survey was delivered to the participants via Google Forms.

Before starting to fill out the survey form, participants were transparently informed about the purpose of the study and how the collected data would be used. It was stated that their identities would be kept anonymous, and their informed consent was obtained before participating in the study.

Data analysis

The data gathered from open-ended questions was analyzed using content analysis. Since the questions in the survey are categorized based on the research questions, the answers given to these questions are coded thematically. After determining the emergent themes, the researcher made connections between these themes and interpreted them. They described the multiple-choice, yes-no, and checkbox type of questions in tables and figures.

Findings

I present the findings in parallel to the research questions and survey organization in four parts: organizational, teacher-related, student-related, and parental issues.

Organizational issues

A majority (83%, n=10) of the community centers contacted in this study offer dedicated Turkish classes. Although the remaining (17%, n=2) programs do not offer dedicated Turkish classes yet, they focus on religious and cultural content, and the language of education is Turkish. The centers are housed in various settings, including mosques (50%, n=6), cultural centers (40%, n=5), or rented public school buildings (10%, n=1). Two centers indicated that they use online platforms for teaching in addition to physical spaces. The respondents noted that ownership of the educational space is important because it allows administrators to act flexibly, stay independent, maintain their school programs in the long term, decorate the building for their purposes, use the building for a variety of events (such as parent meetings, dinners, to host guests, etc.), and keep expenses low. Otherwise, they have to spend an enormous amount of their funds just for the rent, and sometimes experience conflicts with the building administration regarding shared rooms. Table 1 demonstrates the basic statistics from the centers contacted in this study.

Table 1: Basic Statistics of Community Centers

Center Code	Turkish classes active for (in years)	Number of students (in average)	Percentage of the students within the minority community	Number of classes	Number of Turkish teachers	Teachers' average experience (in years)
C1	20	30-60	25%	4	2	1-3
C2	4	60-90	75%	2	2	1-3
C3	2	30-60	25%	2	2	5+
C4	N/A	1-30	50%	1	-	-
C5	10	30-60	75%	3	2	5+
C6	1	30-60	50%	3	1	1
C7	5	1-30	25%	2	1	3-5
C8	5	90-120	25%	4	1	5+

C9	N/A	60-90	25%	4	-	-
C10	5	1-30	25%	4	1	5+
C11	15	30-60	25%	3	2	5+
C12	1	90-120	25%	8	12	5+

The centers take various actions to increase enrollment in their school programs, such as (a) advertising program activities on social media; (b) delivering teaching in a flexible way using online and hybrid models; (c) making playgrounds and game sets available for kids; (d) visiting and calling parents at their homes and encouraging them to send their kids to the school; (e) organizing national and religious festival celebrations, film nights, sports activities, contests, and home gatherings; and (f) providing qualified education with the help of certified/professional teachers. The schools also organize activities to increase parents' awareness of their native language and the ways they and their kids use it. To do this, they (a) organize regular meetings and breakfasts, (b) invite the Turkish consulate staff to the meetings and stress the importance of Turkish, (c) organize "I read books with my family" hours, and (d) encourage them to watch Turkish TV channels with their family members.

Figure 1: The Funding Sources

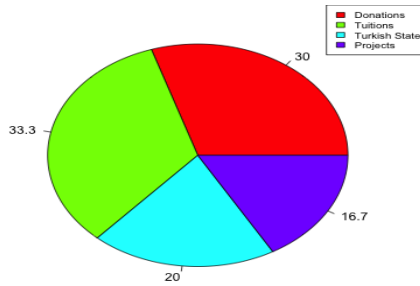
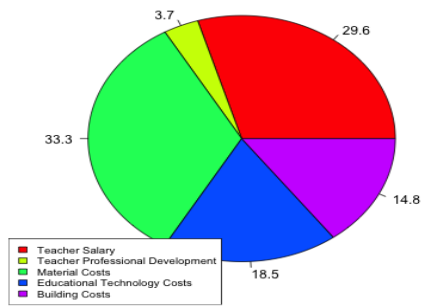


Figure 1 demonstrates program funding sources in percentages. According to the figure, these programs overwhelmingly get their funds from tuition and donations. The school tuition is around \$50-\$250 each semester. They also get funds from Turkish state or civic agencies and their own projects.

Figure 2 demonstrates that the school programs use tuition for purchasing/developing teaching materials (33.3%), paying teachers (29.6%), purchasing/updating educational technology (18.5%), and rent/building costs (14.8%). They rarely use the tuitions for teacher professional development (3.7%).

Figure 2: School Expenses



In the United States, in addition to local community centers, there are larger Turkish umbrella organizations. Community center leaders indicated that they do not engage in educational collaboration with these organizations, yet these larger organizations function as networking tools. Only a few of them (n=3) exchange educational experiences with each other.

Teacher-related Issues

While 80% (n=8) of the Turkish-active centers hire certified Turkish teachers along with an Imam or a parent-teacher, the remaining centers delegate teaching only to Imams or parents. Imams, the center administrators, and/or their families act as community leaders. All Turkish teachers were at least BA holders. Five teachers (out of 10 Turkish-active schools) have an MA degree, and one teacher has a Ph.D.

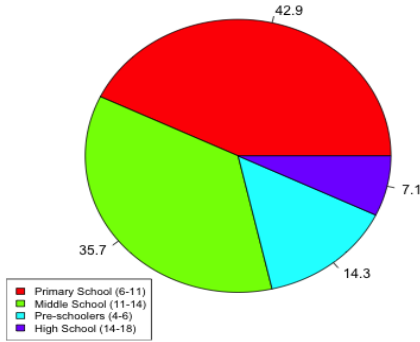
The teachers in the centers' school programs indicated that they mostly use Internet sources and textbooks in their classes. They also prepare materials on their own. In classes other than Turkish, they use DİB (Religious Affairs of Turkey), MEB (National Ministry of Education), and Internet sources which are in English, Arabic, and Turkish. They bring Turkish materials from Turkey. The teachers in the schools find the Turkish language materials that they use highly engaging. In terms of placement, they mostly evaluate their students' proficiency levels depending only on their impressions from conversations with students. They rarely use current or self-prepared proficiency tests.

The teachers in the HL programs teach for several reasons. Their motivations include (a) protecting and maintaining cultural values, (b) contributing to the community's and students' language development, (c) being active in volunteering, (d) earning money, (e) socializing, and (f) being active in teaching. In their own words, they have concerns about Turkish kids losing their language and culture and thus being unable to communicate with their own families. They believe that these children will become more confident individuals if they learn their native language in addition to the societal language. They also think that children who were born in the United States will be able to maintain their connections with their religion, language, history, and culture through learning Turkish. One school administrator indicated that they started a weekend school because they would like to maintain the legacy of Atatürk (the founder of the Modern Turkish Republic).

Student-related Issues

The respondents indicated that the only space for students' professional Turkish language development is weekend schools since Turkish language courses are not available in public schools. Only one respondent from New York City indicated that their students in the HL program can gain credit for Turkish language proficiency in their public school. Figure 3 shows that the HL programs mostly have primary (42.9%) and middle school-age (35.7%) students. Few schools have pre-schoolers (14.3%) or high school students (7.1%).

Figure 3: Student Profiles



According to respondents' comments, the students learn Turkish to be able to (a) communicate in Turkey during summer breaks; (b) speak and write in a second language besides English; (c) satisfy their families' wishes; (d) communicate with elderly people in their families and with their parents; (e) have good communication within the community and socialize with other Turkish children; and (f) learn more about Turkey culturally, geographically, historically, politically, etc. The respondents claim that students find the course materials highly engaging for their current life.

The students in community-based schools predominantly (75%, n=9) do not intend to take a proficiency test in their HL. Even so, two schools (17%) indicated that their students prepare for proficiency tests held by American institutions, and one school (8%) indicated that their students prepare for the proficiency tests held by Turkish institutions.

Parental Issues

Based on the respondents' answers, the centers are located half an hour away on average from parents' homes. While 58% (n=7) of the schools have only one-day classes (Saturday or Sunday), 42% (n=5) of the schools have classes on both days (Saturday and Sunday). Respondents claim that parents find class hours sufficient and mostly have positive feedback for schools regarding the content of the classes. However, the parents request content that is more relatable to their children's current lives, and better literacy education.

The centers organize regular religious and community meetings, breakfasts or dinners, film nights, talks, and trips for the parents. The parents contribute to the school in addition to paying tuition by donating money or food, taking responsibility in the organization of activities, and taking on teaching responsibilities.

According to the respondents' notes, parents send their children to weekend schools for a variety of reasons, including (a) sensitivity to children's religious and cultural education, (b) to make a social environment for the child, (c) the center's family-like atmosphere with volunteer teachers who love to teach, (d) the center's contemporary education adhering to Atatürk's principles, and (e) trust in the content of the education and the center itself. On the other hand, some parents do not send their children to these centers for a variety of reasons, including (a) logistical challenges such as living far from the center or schedule conflicts with other activities that students participate in, (b) insufficient number of teachers, and (c) ideological divisions within the community.

Discussion and conclusion

After people move away from their home country, immigrant children's L1 maintenance and development become an issue for parents. At that point, parents' decisions and enthusiasm are the determining factors in language maintenance. Studies have revealed that home language use alone is

insufficient for developing highly proficient L1 speakers, contrary to the popular belief that HLs may be readily maintained and developed in the home if parents communicate to their children in the HL. Lee & Wright (2014) indicates that “the intergenerational transmission of a language is determined not only by individual parental decisions but also by societal and institutional conditions that influence parental decisions about children’s language behavior”. Lo Bianco & Kreeft Peyton (2013) also indicates that a community must invest simultaneously on Capacity, Opportunity and Desire (COD) to maintain their language in a minority context. In their COD model, Capacity refers to the development of language proficiency through both formal teaching and informal transmission; Opportunity refers to the development of societal arrangements to create domains in which language use is natural; and Desire is the stimulation of individual and collective motivation to actively use the language. Based on these definitions and models in the literature, heritage speakers need a strong community support as well as parental and individual motivation to maintain or improve their proficiency. At that point, community-based HL programs are a social hub that can help maintain and develop proficiency in the home language for children who speak it. These centers are the primary places wherein heritage speakers typically encounter their native language within a formal context although some of the speakers may have the opportunity to enroll in HL classes during their later college years (Coşkun Kunduz, 2022).

The study demonstrates that Turkish community centers are not primarily school organizations. They are first established as a mosque or a cultural center and also offer weekend classes. The majority of the centers in this study (83%, n=10) have active Turkish classes. As in the case of other minority communities, these schools overwhelmingly function within a religious and cultural context and cannot take part in the formal education system in the United States. They are able to focus on literary and linguistic development for only a few hours a week. They are mostly taught on a voluntary and unprofessional basis by parents and community leaders/Imams. Although it is always expected to conduct education in a professional way, this voluntary model in HL school programs’ may even be an important factor in the success of HL education. Despite the constraints of limited hours and resources, these programs remain highly effective in enhancing the HL proficiency of immigrant children. This effectiveness can be attributed to the active participation of parents and community members, which fosters a supportive and cohesive environment within these educational institutions. This finding is supported by respondents in the present study and is also evident in previous research conducted by Lee and Wright (2014) and Shibata (2000).

According to the data in Table 1, program enrollments are low in these programs when compared to the immigrant population in the region where the centers are located. Even though the centers organize various events to increase enrollment, they mostly have a few classes, and teachers have limited experience with teaching. They aim not only to attract children but also to enrich the native language awareness of the parents. These two-way efforts are critical in maintaining HL because of the importance of formal education and parental attitudes on maintaining HL skills. This practice is consistent with the recent research that stresses the importance of strong parental support in HL proficiency (Rothman et al., 2016). In a similar vein, Li (2006) concludes in her study that “parents who value maintaining and developing a language and emphasize the need to continue speaking the language often foster a positive influence on the children’s perception of that language”.

HL programs follow a service-oriented model, aiming to ensure accessibility to all families, irrespective of their financial circumstances, by offering either free or low-cost participation options (Lee & Wright, 2014). This survey demonstrates that Turkish community centers’ main source of income is tuition and donations from parents and homeland institutions. They spend their funds overwhelmingly on teacher

salaries and material costs. Although in some schools non-professional parents teach, Turkish HL programs mostly have certified teachers, which allows them to deliver higher-quality education.

The preservation of language, religion, and culture, which contribute to one's identity, holds significant importance for teachers, administrators, and parents. Teachers also have professional motivations, such as securing employment opportunities. The National Heritage Language Survey (NHLS) demonstrates a similar variety of goals in learning HLs (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). This variety of purposes for enrolling in community-based schools poses challenges in devising a cohesive curricular or instructional approach. As Lee & Wright (2014, p. 139) explain “In some local contexts, where there is a greater presence of learners who mainly desire a stronger connection to their ethnic identity, identity-based approaches that emphasize the socio-psychological needs of HL speakers in their curricula and instruction may be more applicable. On the other hand, in communities where the use of the HL is vibrant, proficiency-based approaches that call for greater sensitivity toward sociolinguistic differences across HL dialects may be better received”.

Since the only way to gain access to the social world in the host country is to learn the dominant language, the HL speaking children and their parents often tend to give more importance to the dominant language in the larger society. In the United States, they mostly give emphasis to the improvement of English skills and this happens at the expense of Turkish skills. English as a second language (ESL) classes taught in public schools also foster the language shift (Li, 2006). Thus, community-based schools have a critical role at this point in creating social opportunities to use the HL and increase the students’ motivation to learn it. Practitioners in community centers (teachers, administrators and parents) should not only focus on formal teaching, but also on creating opportunities to use the language in natural contexts, as well as encouraging families to actively use the language (Lo Bianco & Kreeft Peyton, 2013). For that reason, the HL programs mostly try to create attractive course content. In the findings of this study, parents’ requests for more attractive course materials from teachers demonstrate this need for their children.

Considering that the dominant age group in Turkish HL programs is primary school-age children, it is quite critical that these children develop a positive attitude towards Turkish. The studies indicate that the experience of a good community school improves a positive attitude for the children in their later life. For example, Li (2006) and Shibata (2000) stress that child heritage speakers who attend classes in weekend schools or speak their HL fluently tend to develop more positive views of the language and ethnicity, be more self-confident, and have ambitious future plans. As the findings of this study put forth, the Turkish diasporic community is scattered across small towns in the United States, and ethnolinguistic vitality is low. Children have limited opportunities to use their heritage language (HL) beyond the confines of their homes. The rapidity of the language shift towards English in such contexts often results in the eventual erosion of the children's proficiency in their first language. Consequently, the support provided by families and organized community schools becomes indispensable in order to sustain the heritage language.

Compared to other countries with major Turkish communities such as Germany, Turkish has been less valued in the United States educational system. For example, while Turkish students in Germany can take Turkish classes in state schools or study in bilingual programs (Bayram, 2015), Turkish students in the United States do not have this opportunity (Evcen, 2020). Only one Turkish school program in this study indicated that the students can receive credit from their public schools for attending HL courses in weekend schools. Indeed, the support of community centers is not only beneficial for immigrant

communities but also contributes to the host country's economy as a natural resource (Shibata, 2000). Heritage speakers are individuals with the potential to be proficient in both languages, establish international connections, work in high-quality jobs, and serve as ambassadors between their host country and home country.

Immigrants move the social diversity of their home countries to their new countries (Bayram & Wright, 2016b; Doomernik, 1995). The findings from my survey indicate that Turkish community centers manifest distinct ideological perspectives. In the United States, while certain schools prioritize religious education, often associated with mosques, there are also schools that focus exclusively on secular cultural education. The selection of a community center by parents aligning with their ideological beliefs leads to ideological divisions within the Turkish community, thereby influencing the formation of alliances and enrollment patterns in these centers. Evcen's (2020) study on Turkish heritage language education in the United States associates the divisions within the Turkish community with societal polarization in Turkey, yet her analysis of polarization remains superficial, as she categorizes Turkish-American society into only secular and religious individuals. However, just like in Turkey, the Turkish community in America is too diverse to be divided into such simplistic categories. While some families prioritize their children learning Turkish without emphasizing religious education, others desire their children to learn both their language, culture, and Islam. Even within these two groups, there are numerous subgroups and formations. Turkish mosques serve as typical community centers in this regard. These mosques are established through community donations, and individuals gather there for socializing, worship, and education. Additionally, they collaborate with the Turkish government, and imams sent from Turkey reside in the United States for approximately five years to provide education and leadership to the community. In this study, all the weekend schools where data was collected and that provided religious education were of this kind of mosques.

Recommendations

For practitioners:

- Practitioners in community centers (teachers, administrators and parents) should not only focus on formal teaching, but also on creating opportunities to use the language in natural contexts, as well as encouraging families to actively use the language. Since students in the community centers are overwhelmingly of primary-school age, practitioners should also keep in mind that it is quite critical to develop a positive attitude towards HL at these age groups.
- Teachers in these centers can improve their teaching skills by attending certificate programs or workshops on HL pedagogy; the United States has rich resources in that sense. The events organized by Coalition of Community-based Heritage Language Schools (<https://www.heritagelanguageschools.org/coalition>) or National Heritage Language Resource Centers (<https://nhlrc.ucla.edu/nhlrc/home>) could be helpful. The community centers administrators can also apply for Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Community's Anatolia Weekend Schools Project (<https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/abroad-citizens/anatolia-weekend-schools>) and use the curriculum prepared for Turkish child heritage speakers.
- The community-based HL programs primarily meet the capacity development need by delivering formal teaching in HL. However, as the findings of this study demonstrate, there is a strong need to create more opportunities for heritage speakers to use their HLs and to improve

their motivation. Even though Turkish community-based HL programs organize activities to meet the last two conditions, establishing a strong community-based HL program requires stronger collaboration among public schools, the educational system, community centers, and government institutions. In order to reach their goals, Turkish community centers must collaborate with each other and with nationwide resource centers, such as the Coalition of Community-based Heritage Language Schools (<https://www.heritagelanguageschools.org/coalition>).

For policy-makers:

- Community centers serve as a social and educational hub for immigrant families. They bring families together and help them educate their children in their home language. These centers emerge as an important space responding to immigrant families' needs in maintaining their home culture and language. They are critical not only for maintaining home culture and language, but also for immigrants' adaptation to the host country. Gathering in these centers, families share their problems with other families and facilitate each other's integration to the new country. Host countries should value these centers, viewing them as contributors to a multicultural and integrated society. Educational systems should also value the Turkish language both within and outside of the formal school system.
- Although the voluntary organization of community centers has the advantage of creating a social climate, it can be a disadvantage for its community-based HL program function. These centers conduct their HL education mostly through untrained parents. Moreover, they do not have scientifically informed materials. Therefore, policy-makers who are working on immigrants and heritage speakers should invest in the development of attractive and pedagogical materials and hiring qualified teachers.

For researchers:

- Home language input and differences in literacy and formal education with the onset of schooling plays a critical role in shaping HL outcomes (Kupisch & Rothman, 2018). Community centers provide children input in their home language. They are also the only spaces for immigrant children's advanced language development. These centers provide immigrant families and their children with societal, cultural and educational experiences. However, we still know little about the exact function of these centers in shaping HL proficiency. Further studies that investigate social, cultural, and educational dimensions of these centers separately and examine the exact role of each component in HL competence are strongly needed. As emphasized in this study, there is a strong need for research examining the effect of capacity, resources, and motivation factors on HL proficiency.

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