

Solution suggestions in elementary literacy teaching to elementary school students whose mother tongue is not Turkish

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Suggested Citation:

Gozukucuk, M. (2016). Solution suggestions in elementary literacy teaching to elementary school students whose mother tongue is not Turkish. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. 6(1), 46-54.

Received December 11, 2015; revised January 07, 2016; accepted February 08, 2016.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc. Prof Dr. Ali Rahimi, Bangkok University.

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to offer solutions to the issues first grade students whose mother tongue is not Turkish face in elementary literacy teaching. The current research employed case study, one of qualitative research methods. The sample consisted of 40 elementary school first grade teachers chosen according to maximum variation sampling who worked in Diyarbakir city center, province centers, towns, and villages in the 2012-2013 academic year. The data was collected using semi-structured interview forms. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Frequency and percentage intervals were used in the interpretation of the data. The most frequent view (25%) reported by teachers related to mother tongue education was: "Parents should be aware of the education their children receive and they should care about the education their children receive". The 22, 5% of the teachers reported that: "Education must be in the mother tongue first and then the official language". The 17, 5% of the teachers reported that: "Students should be facilitated to speak in Turkish as well as their mother tongue before they start school". The 10% of the teachers reported that: "Education must be in the mother tongue"; however, they did not comment on how to proceed with this education. It may not be possible for students whose mother tongue is not Turkish to receive education solely in their mother tongue. Even if students receive education in their mother tongue they still need to receive education in Turkish as well, since the official language of our country is Turkish and it is used in formal procedures.

Keywords: Mother tongue, bilingual education, elementary literacy teaching, solution.

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1. Introduction

Bilingualism is a multidisciplinary field of research; however, bilingualism is investigated from the educational standpoint in the current study. The language difference is a reason that makes Turkish elementary literacy teaching difficult both for the teachers and the students. Even students whose mother tongue is Turkish have difficulties mastering the elementary literacy teaching, hence it is possible that students whose mother tongue is not Turkish have disadvantage.

It would be more beneficial for educators and authorities in Turkey to develop productive educational studies for students whose mother tongue is other than Turkish as alternatives to "Bilingual Education" and "Only Turkish" arguments that continually occupy the agenda. These kinds of investigations in the field of multilingual studies and applications that prepare teachers better to these types of education can be used to improve educational policies that will resolve issues teachers in Turkey face in teaching and students in learning (Aydın, 2013: 25). It is inevitable that both teachers and students will face challenges if the mother tongue of the teachers is Turkish and it is the second language of the students in education. The main goal of the current study is to offer solutions to first grade students whose mother tongue is not Turkish face in elementary literacy teaching.

The subproblem investigated within this frame are as follows:

1. What are the classroom teacher views on the solution suggestions of the problems first grade students whose mother tongue is not Turkish face in steps of elementary literacy preparation, starting literacy and progress, and reaching literacy?
2. What are the views of the classroom teachers on mother tongue education?

2. Methods

In the current study, case study was employed as one of the qualitative research methods. The group to be studied was formed using maximum variation sampling among purposeful sampling methods. The elementary schools that could represent the universe in the 2012-2013 Academic year within the borders of the city of Diyarbakır were divided into five groups as: village elementary schools with combined classes, village elementary schools with independent classes, province elementary schools, town center elementary schools and city center elementary schools. Eight teachers from each type of school were interviewed; 40 teachers were reached in total.

The qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interview forms. The data collected from the 40 teachers were then coded separately by the researcher and an independent coder who is an expert in the field. Both the researcher and the independent coder prepared a code and theme list from the data. Two themes emerged from the codes obtained from the data. The first theme is: "Solution Suggestions to Problems Faced in Elementary Literacy Teaching Theme". Codes related to this theme are as follows: "*Solution Suggestions to Problems Faced During the 12-Week Period of Preparation*", "*Solution Suggestions of the Problems Faced in Feeling and Recognizing the Sound*", "*Solution Suggestions of the Problems Faced in Understanding Sentences*". The second theme is: "Teachers' Views on Mother Tongue Education".

The coherence of the independent codes of the researchers were labelled as "Agree" or "Disagree". The reliability of the data analysis was calculated using $[Agree / (Agree + Disagree) \times 100]$ formula (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the result of the calculation the values obtained for the 4 questions are as follows: 92.5 for the solution suggestions to problems faced during the 12-week period of preparation, 82.5 for solution suggestions of the problems faced in feeling and recognizing the sound, 95.0 for solution suggestions of the problems faced in understanding sentences, and 87.5 for the teachers' views on mother tongue education.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section the content analysis of the interviews and results of the subproblems are discussed.

3.1. Results and discussion related to the first subproblem

What are the classroom teacher views on the solution proposals of the problems first grade students whose mother tongue is not Turkish face in steps of elementary literacy preparation, starting literacy and progress, and reaching literacy?

Table 1. Teacher views on the solution suggestions of the problems faced in the 12-week preparation period code

Teacher views on the solution suggestions of the problems faced in the 12-week preparation period code	%	f	Teachers' personal and vocational characteristics
I try to enrich students' Turkish vocabulary using concrete materials and visuals.	24,1	14	(M, 4 years, village, combined, 25 students), (M, 2 years, village, combined, 18 students), (F, 2 years, village, combined, 30 students), (F, 3 years, village, combined, 25 students), (F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 26 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 27 students), (M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 22 years, town, independent, 25 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 37 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 30 students), (M, 9 years, city, independent, 55 students), (F, 15 years, city, independent, 38 students)
I use simple level sentences.	12,1	7	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (F, 6 years, village, independent, 33 students), (M, 7 years, village, independent, 32 students), (M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students), (M, 9 years, city, independent, 55 students), (M, 13 years, city, independent, 46 students)
I try to obtain school liking using icebreaker activities and games.	10,3	6	(M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 23 students), (F, 6 years, village, independent, 33 students), (F, 22 years, town, independent, 25 students), (M, 4 years, province, independent, 24 students), (M, 13 years, city, independent, 57 students)
I try to teach Turkish using games.	10,3	6	(M, 6 years, province, independent, 30 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 32 students), (F, 3 years, province, independent, 23 students), (F, 16 years, city, independent, 41 students), (F, 9 years, city, independent, 44 students), (M, 12 years, city, independent, 40 students)
I receive translation assistance from students who know both Turkish and Kurdish.	8,6	5	(M, 5 years, village, independent, 24 students), (M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students), (M, 6 years, town, independent, 30 students), (M, 17 years, town, independent, 32 students), (F, 4 years, province, independent, 42 students)
I use the show and do method to get the activities done.	6,9	4	(F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (F, 2 years, village, independent, 35 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 13 years, city, independent, 59 students)
I support student's speech with body language and concrete examples.	6,9	4	(F, 8 years, village, independent, 23 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 27 students), (M, 6 years, town, independent, 30 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students)
I speak both in Turkish and Kurdish with my students.	5,2	3	(M, 1 years, village, combined, 28 students), (F, 8 years, village, independent, 23 students), (F, 2 years, village, independent, 35 students)

I try to attend to students one on one.	5,2	3	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 22 students), (F, 4 years, province, independent, 42 students), (F, 13 years, city, independent, 59 students)
I reward students who speak in Turkish.	3,5	2	(F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students), (M, 7 years, village, independent, 32 students)
I make them do the same activity over and over again.	3,5	2	(F, 7 years, town, independent, 42 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students)
I forbid students from talking in their mother tongue.	1,7	1	(F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students)
I give positive reassuring reinforcement to students as "You can do it! You can make it!"	1,7	1	(F, 3 years, province, independent, 47 students)
TOTAL	100	58	

According to Table 1, solution suggestions to problems faced during the 12-week period of preparation are as follows: "trying to enrich students' Turkish vocabulary using concrete materials and visuals, using simple level sentences, trying to obtain school liking using icebreaker activities and games, trying to teach Turkish using games, and receiving translation assistance from students who know both Turkish and Kurdish. Butzkamm (1998), in his study of mother tongue usage in bilingual contexts study claimed that although the second language is the main language used in the classroom the teacher serves as a dictionary. In the current study the teachers try to enrich the Turkish vocabulary knowledge of the students whose mother tongue is not Turkish using concrete materials and visuals and try to teach Turkish by games. It could be said that teachers serve as dictionaries in the solution suggestion that teachers try to teach Turkish vocabulary to students learning Turkish as a second language. It is possible that classroom teachers who work in classes with students whose mother tongue is not Turkish work harder in the 12-week preparation period and use concrete materials and visuals to decrease the problems students face due to language differences. In Frank and Poulin-Dubois' (2002) study the translation equivalents in the vocabulary knowledge of the children varied between 1% to 95%. The type of exposure to language, age, cognition, demographics and other variables may be variables related to producing translation equivalents. In the current study, the teachers received help in translation and it is possible that they could not verify whether the translation equivalents in the vocabulary knowledge of the students who spoke both Turkish and Kurdish were accurate. The teachers tried to make the process of teaching Turkish words entertaining by making the students play games.

Table 2. Teachers' views on the solution suggestions of the problems faced in feeling and recognizing the sound code

Teachers' views on the solution suggestions of the problems faced in feeling and recognizing the sound	%	f	Teachers' personal and vocational characteristics
I increase the time allotted for the sound being taught.	22,6	7	(M, 5 years, village, independent, 24 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 30 students), (F, 13 years, city, independent, 59 students), (M, 13 years, city, independent, 57 students), (F, 16 years, city, independent, 41 students), (M, 12 years, city, independent, 40 students), (F, 15 years, city, independent, 38 students)
I accentuate the visual-concept relation.	19,4	6	(M, 4 years, village, combined, 25 students), (F, 2 years, village, combined, 22 students), (F, 3 years, village, combined, 25 students), (F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (F, 8 years, village, independent, 23 students), (M, 7 years, village, independent, 32 students)

I stress the sound that is being taught in the word more.	19, 4	6	(F, 3 years, village, combined, 25 students), (F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students), (M, 7 years, village, independent, 32 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 3 years, province, independent, 47 students), (M, 13 years, city, independent, 46 students)
I try to make students comprehend the sound by materializing the words they pass in.	9,8	3	(M, 2 years, village, independent, 23 students), (M, 6 years, town, independent, 30 students), (F, 7 years, town, independent, 42 students)
I increase the students' schemata using flash card games	6,4	2	(F, 22 years, town, independent, 25 students), (F, 3 years, province, independent, 23 students)
I stress the sounds they confuse more.	6,4	2	(M, 2 years, province, independent, 32 students), (M, 9 years, city, independent, 55 students)
I say the Turkish equivalent of the visuals in which the sound is present.	3,2	1	(M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students)
I make them do activities where they find the sounds in their mother tongue.	3,2	1	(M, 2 years, village, independent, 26 students)
I try to resolve the problem using the visuals the students know.	3,2	1	(F, 2 years, village, independent, 35 students)
I get assistance from students who know Turkish while doing sound related activities.	3,2	1	(M, 17 years, town, independent, 32 students)
I focus on drama activities and reinforce with songs.	3,2	1	(F, 9 years, city, independent, 44 students)
TOTAL	100	31	

According to Table 2, the solution suggestions to problems faced in feeling and recognizing the sound are follows: " increasing the time allotted for the sound being taught, accentuating the visual-concept relation, stressing the sound that is being taught in the word more, making students comprehend the sound by materializing the words they pass in, increase the students' schemata using flash card games, and stress the sounds they confuse more". Because the students learn Turkish as the second language the teachers may have to spend more time and effort teaching vocabulary using visual aids and making the students gain the Turkish language skill. Moreover, increasing the time allotted for the sound being taught may delay literacy.

Table 3. Teachers' Views on the Solution Suggestions to the Problems Faced in Understanding Sentences Code

Teachers' views on the solution suggestions to the problems faced in understanding sentences	%	f	Teachers' personal and vocational characteristics
I try to enrich the students' vocabulary knowledge using visuals until they start speaking, learning Turkish.	28, 6	16	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 1 years, village, combined, 28 students), (M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 26 students), (F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students), (F, 2 years, village, independent, 35 students), (M, 6 years, town, independent, 30 students), (F, 22 years, town, independent, 25 students), (F, 7 years, town, independent, 42 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 37 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 3 years, province, independent, 47 students), (F, 13 years, city, independent, 59 students), (M, 9 years, city, independent, 55

			students), (F, 9 years, city, independent, 44 students)
I use short sentences they can understand and comprehend.	14, 3	8	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 23 students), (F, 6 years, village, independent, 33 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 27 students), (M, 6 years, town, independent, 30 students), (F, 22 years, town, independent, 25 students)
I explain the sentences I write one by one.	12, 5	7	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 22 students), (M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 26 students), (F, 8 years, village, independent, 23 students), (M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students), (M, 6 years, province, independent, 30 students), (F, 3 years, province, independent, 23 students)
I make them do ample reading activities.	12, 5	7	(M, 2 years, province, independent, 30 students), (F, 13 years, city, independent, 59 students), (M, 13 years, city, independent, 57 students), (F, 16 years, city, independent, 41 students), (M, 12 years, city, independent, 40 students), (F, 15 years, city, independent, 38 students), (M, 13 years, city, independent, 46 students)
I explain the sentences with the drama method, body language.	10, 8	6	(F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 27 students), (F, 4 years, province, independent, 42 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 32 students), (F, 9 years, city, independent, 44 students)
I try to make them speak in Turkish constantly.	5,3	3	(F, 3 years, village, combined, 25 students), (M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 9 years, city, independent, 55 students)
After they learn how to read I try to develop comprehension using 5N1K questions.	5,3	3	(M, 2 years, village, combined, 18 students), (F, 6 years, province, independent, 20 students), (M, 4 years, province, independent, 24 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 32 students)
I use the equivalent in their mother tongue when there is a word they do not know the meaning of.	5,3	3	(M, 4 years, village, combined, 25 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 23 students), (M, 5 years, village, independent, 24 students)
I make them do activities containing ample examples derived from the current events in their environment.	1,8	1	(M, 7 years, village, independent, 32 students)
I give them every day words, make sentences, and let them find what the sentences try to tell.	1,8	1	(M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students)
I leave it to time, I continue my work with patience, I approach with love and understanding.	1,8	1	(M, 17 years, town, independent, 32 students)
TOTAL	100	56	

According to Table 3, the solution suggestions to problems faced in understanding sentences are as follows: "Trying to enrich the students' vocabulary knowledge using visuals until they start speaking, learning Turkish, using short sentences they can understand and comprehend, explaining the

sentences I write one by one, making them do ample reading activities, and explaining the sentences with the drama method, body language". In Yigit's (2009) study the findings suggested that the obstacles students faced in elementary literacy teaching were overcome by trying to increase the Turkish vocabulary of the students, using visuals, gestures, mimicry, and body language. These findings seem to support the findings of the current study.

3.2. Results and discussion related to the second subproblem

What are the views of the classroom teachers on mother tongue education?

Table 4. Quotes of teachers' views on mother tongue education

Teachers' views on mother tongue education	%	f	Teachers' personal and vocational characteristics
The parents' awareness should be raised and the education of the children should be given importance.	25,0	10	(F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 27 students), (M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 37 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 4 years, province, independent, 42 students), (F, 6 years, province, independent, 20 students), (M, 4 years, province, independent, 24 students), (M, 6 years, province, independent, 30 students)
First, education in the mother tongue and then, education in the official language should be given.	22,5	9	(M, 3 years, village, combined, 30 students), (M, 5 years, village, independent, 24 students), (F, 6 years, village, independent, 33 students), (F, 2 years, village, independent, 35 students), (M, 7 years, village, independent, 32 students), (M, 5 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 7 years, town, independent, 42 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 30 students), (M, 2 years, province, independent, 32 students)
Students should be provided with means to speak in Turkish along with their mother tongue before they start school.	17,5	7	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 30 students), (F, 5 years, village, combined, 19 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 27 students), (M, 6 years, town, independent, 30 students), (F, 3 years, town, independent, 37 students), (M, 8 years, town, independent, 41 students), (F, 4 years, province, independent, 42 students)
Education should be provided in the mother tongue.	10,0	4	(F, 2 years, village, combined, 22 students), (F, 3 years, village, combined, 25 students), (F, 8 years, village, independent, 23 students), (M, 17 years, town, independent, 32 students)
Even if students learn how to read and write, comprehension problems affect the fore coming exams.	7,5	3	(M, 2 years, village, independent, 23 students), (M, 2 years, village, independent, 26 students), (M, 9 years, city, independent, 55 students)
A teacher who knows the mother tongue of the students should be appointed to first grade.	5,0	2	(M, 4 years, village, combined, 25 students), (M, 1 years, village, combined, 28 students)

Especially in a village environment and students whose mother tongue is not Turkish are concerned classes as Physical Education, Music, and Art cannot be ignored when it comes to teaching the language.	2,5	1	(M, 2 years, village, combined, 18 students)
Pre-school education should be focused for language development.	2,5	1	(F, 3 years, village, independent, 28 students)
I think education is very difficult for these people.	2,5	1	(F, 22 years, town, independent, 25 students)
We are aware that anyone can learn another language but all the work feels inadequate when they cannot think in that other language being taught.	2,5	1	(F, 3 years, province, independent, 23 students)
These kind of kids are successful in math class but they cannot solve the math problems because they do not have complete command of Turkish.	2,5	1	(F, 13 years, city, independent, 59 students)
TOTAL	100	40	

According to Table 4, the most common view (25%) of the teachers is: "The parents' awareness should be raised and the education of the children should be given importance". The second most popular view with 22, 5% is: "First, education in the mother tongue and then, education in the official language should be given". According to this opinion of the teachers the Dual Language Bilingual Education Model among bilingual education models could be suggested. In this model, the time spent to learn each language differs from school to school. The two main models in the United States of America are 50:50 and 90:10. In the 90:10 model, 90% of the teaching is done in the minority language in kindergarten and first grade and the remaining 10% of the teaching concentrates on English speaking competence and developing pre-literacy skills. In the remaining grades this percentage increases to 50:50. Students usually start reading formal English in 3rd grade but are exposed to informal literacy in the first grade. On the other hand in the 50:50 model, 50%-50% language balance is tried to be maintained throughout all the grades (Baker, 2011: 227). According to the teachers' views education could be provided to students whose mother tongue is not Turkish with the 90:10 model teaching in the mother tongue 90% during kindergarten and first grade and 10% could be focused on Turkish competence and developing pre-literacy skills. This percentage could be raised to 50:50 in the remaining grades. Students usually start reading Turkish officially in third grade however, they can be exposed to Turkish literacy during first grade. On the other hand with the 50:50 model 50%-50% language balance can be maintained throughout all the grades. When opinions on mother tongue education are investigated 17.5% of the teachers claimed that "Students should be facilitated to speak Turkish along with their mother tongue before they start school". The quotes related to this opinion indicate that due to the parents' lack of using Turkish, students cannot speak Turkish when they start school. It could be said that the teachers attribute the problems they face with students whose mother tongue is not Turkish to the parents' lack of enforcing the Turkish speaking skill of their children. According to Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya and Bialystok (2011) study, the advantages of being bilingual develop quite early in life thus there are significant findings in the study that would alleviate teachers and parents who are concerned about early exposure to a second language in children. Elementary literacy teaching could be easier if families whose mother tongue is not Turkish use Turkish as well as their mother tongue while communicating with their children before the children start school.

4. Suggestions

The teachers made suggestions as education should be given in the mother tongue but they did not share any ideas on how to do it. It may not be possible for students whose mother tongue is not Turkish to receive education solely in their mother tongue. Even if students receive education in their mother tongue they need to be able to use the official language that is Turkish and receive Turkish education. Students whose mother tongue is not Turkish could be given a bilingual education that includes their mother tongue and the official language. The teachers also depict that students should be provided with means to talk Turkish along with their mother tongue before they start school. It is possible that the teachers attribute why students face problems due to the lack of Turkish speaking skill enforcement by the parents. Using Turkish along with the mother tongue during pre-school years could ease Turkish literacy teaching for the children.

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