Views of Turkish as a foreign/second language learners on grammar

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ABSTRACT

Turkish Language Teaching Application and Research Centers (TÖMER) support basic language skills with grammar lessons. Although practices vary from center to center, in many TÖMERs, grammar lessons are taught as a separate, independent component from skill lessons, and learners are subjected to exams on these subjects. Studies on grammar teaching advocate that grammar should not be prioritized but taught intuitively, and instructors also state in interviews that this approach is correct. However, when we look at the current situation and practices, the situation is different. Grammar lessons take precedence over skill lessons and even become the focus. The views of instructors are generally taken into account; the views of experts are included, but the views of learners of Turkish as a second/foreign language on grammar courses remain in the background. To fill this gap in the literature, interviews were conducted in the current study to determine the views of learners of Turkish as a second/foreign language on grammar courses. A total of 20 advanced-level participants who had learned Turkish as a second language were included in the study. In addition to their demographic information, participants were asked 8 open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were designed to elicit participants' views on grammar and grammar courses. The participants' answers were recorded both in writing and audio recording by the researcher. The data analysis for this study followed an inductive approach focused on category construction. When the participants' answers were examined, it was concluded that learning grammar is essential for proper communication, motivates them to use language productively, and helps them understand the full context of receptive skills. However, when grammar is not learned correctly, it prevents them from speaking and writing, and keeps them unaware while reading and listening.

KEYWORDS: Teaching Turkish as a foreign/second language; grammar; learner's view

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1. Introduction

How much to teach, and how to teach grammar in a foreign language, has always been a matter of debate. Whether grammar should be taught implicitly or directly, and whether it should be taught functionally or as a completely rule-based system, are matters of debate among researchers and instructors. While researchers associate grammar instruction with basic language skills, instructors believe grammar should be treated as a distinct skill. According to researchers, while it is important to view language as a whole, including grammar and skills, instructors argue that addressing skills separately will make education and training more effective (Ekşi et al., 2021, p. 74). For this reason, there are differences between theory and practice in grammar teaching. "Very different perspectives

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have been put forward regarding grammar teaching, such as transferring structures explicitly or implicitly, following the learning order in the mother tongue as much as possible, allowing learners to discover this order on their own without following a certain learning order, and even ignoring grammar." (Güven & Özmen, 2016). In addition to the differing views of researchers and instructors, it is essential to determine learners' views on grammar instruction and take them into account when planning the teaching process. Although learners tend to be more receptive to more formal, traditional grammar instruction and direct error correction, instructors tend to adopt more innovative approaches in this regard (Borg, 2003).

Grammar is often misunderstood in the field of language teaching. Grammar is often thought of as the rules governing constant structures in a language. There is a belief that structures should not be taught, that learners will acquire them on their own, or that, if structures are taught, subsequent lessons will be boring (Zhang, 2009). In mother tongue acquisition, grammar can be acquired on its own without the need for any teaching process. However, this is not possible in the process of learning a foreign or second language, and grammar must definitely be taught. Teaching grammar remains central to language teaching today, and it is widely accepted that it is not possible to completely exclude grammar from the language-teaching process. Ellis (2006), in his study of grammar teaching, states that grammar teaching is important not only for form but also for conveying meaning and different grammatical uses. The focus of grammar teaching should be on problematic structural elements so that learners can understand clearly. The most important period for teaching grammar is the intermediate level, when learners can produce the language. However, giving feedback is important for helping learners learn grammar correctly. Learners should have the opportunity to practice grammar with communicative tasks after learning it through the focus-on-forms approach. The other point is that grammar should be taught using a massed approach rather than a distributed approach. Grammar should be used as both input-based and output-based instructional options. Explicit grammar instruction can bridge the gap to implicit acquisition and fit within both focus-on-form and focus-on-forms approaches. Regarding the latter, a balanced combination of deductive and inductive teaching methods is recommended for optimal results. Unlike the intensive, deep study found in 'focus-on-forms,' an incidental 'focus-on-form' approach is valuable for its ability to address a broad spectrum of grammatical problems as they occur. Corrective feedback is essential for grammatical development. The most effective approach employs a diverse range of strategies, combining implicit and explicit techniques, as well as input- and output-oriented feedback. Consistent with this view, grammar pedagogy should adopt a dual structure: it must include dedicated instruction on specific structures (a 'focus-on-forms' approach) while simultaneously integrating attention to grammar into meaning-focused communicative tasks (a 'focus-on-form' approach).

There are studies in the literature that include instructor and learner views on teaching grammar. Ekşi et al. (2021) applied to both instructor and learner views in their study on teaching grammar in the native language. The study concluded that both instructors and learners found grammar instruction necessary, but textbooks were insufficient in this regard. While there are studies on instructors' views on teaching grammar in foreign language teaching, very few take learners' views into account. The findings of another study that gathered instructors' views revealed that instructors have a positive and constructive attitude toward the importance of teaching grammar and agree that proficiency in the target language is achieved faster with good knowledge of grammar. The instructors who participated in the study stated that immediate correction of grammar errors harms learners' self-confidence levels and negatively affects their motivation (Al-khresheh & Orak, 2021). Male (2011) obtained the

views of foreign language learners on learning grammar and concluded that grammar is generally important for learners in foreign language learning, that grammar plays an important role, especially in writing skills, but that it does not have a significant effect on speaking skills. In the study by Saengboon et al. (2022), the views of both instructors and learners on the role of grammar in the foreign language learning process were addressed. The vast majority of participants in the study said that grammar education was useful for academic reading and reaching the goals in academic exams. Based on the participants' views, it was concluded that grammar plays a fundamental role in developing language proficiency, contrary to the idea that it makes communication difficult and hinders it.

In the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign/second language, which is the subject of the current study, most studies have focused on instructors' views; there are not enough studies on learners' general views, and few have examined skill-based views on grammar. Akbaş (2023) gathered the views of Turkish as a foreign language instructors on functional grammar in her study and, in line with these views, concluded that instructors believed functional grammar should be integrated with language skills, be related to daily life, and be context-based. Yılmaz & Dilidüzgün (2019) studied text-based grammar with learners of Turkish as a foreign language. In the study, which used text-focused grammar teaching activities, learners were asked about their views on learning grammar through texts. Learners said that they found these studies meaningful, useful, fun, and memorable.

In this study, which was prepared to fill the gap in the literature regarding the views of learners of Turkish as a foreign/second language, the following research questions were sought to obtain learners' views on grammar teaching and grammar courses:

1. Do learners spot the grammar in use?
2. How does grammar affect basic Turkish language skills?
3. How does grammar affect their motivation to learn Turkish?
4. What are the learners' views on the formal structure of grammar courses?

2. Method

This research aims to determine and evaluate the views of B2–C1-level learners who learn Turkish as a second language regarding grammar, using a qualitative content analysis model. In the current study, the number of participants was limited to 20, and the views and experiences of those learning Turkish as a second language regarding grammar were examined. Turkish-language preparation school learners are required to take grammar lessons in addition to skill lessons. The institution uses the New Istanbul Turkish for International Students course set, and lessons are planned according to the coursebook. Students receive 4 hours of separate grammar lessons, totaling 20 hours of weekly instruction. For one language level (6 weeks), it means 24 hours of grammar lessons. In the institution's curriculum, not all courses are taught by the same instructor, but by at least two different instructors. Therefore, when examining the findings, it is important to consider that students receive grammar lessons from at least two different instructors, 8 hours a week, with reading-skill lessons and the New İstanbul coursebook. Learners' views were classified accordingly.

The study was approved by the Bartın University Ethics Committee. The data analysis for this study followed an inductive approach focused on category construction, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The primary goal was to make sense of the participants' experiences by identifying recurring patterns within the dialogue.

Analysis began immediately following the first interview to allow for emerging insights to inform subsequent data collection. The transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

First, the researcher checked the writing records against the audio recordings. Then read through each transcript line-by-line, noting key concepts and significant phrases in the margins. Next, these open codes were grouped together based on similarities to form tentative categories. Through a recursive process of comparing incidents to incidents and incidents to categories, these groupings were refined until a final set of themes emerged that directly answered the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

2.1. Participants

The study included 20 participants at B2 and C1 levels who were learning Turkish as a second language at the same institution. It was ensured that the participants were receiving Turkish-language education at the same institution, starting at A1, and were following the same course book and syllabus. Participants were selected from different countries, but because the study was limited to a single institution, it was not possible to avoid including participants from the same country. Participation by those who met the study's eligibility criteria was entirely voluntary. The demographic information of the participants is given in Table 1:

Table 1 ***Demographic information of the participants***

Participant	Gender	Country	Mother Tongue	Age	Level
P1	F	Uzbekistan	Uzbek	18	C1
P2	F	Turkmenistan	Turkmen	19	C1
P3	M	Kazakhstan	Kazak	18	C1
P4	M	Indonesia	Indonesian	20	C1
P5	M	Congo	French	24	C1
P6	M	Kazakhstan	Kazak	19	C1
P7	M	Indonesia	Indonesian	22	C1
P8	F	Indonesia	Indonesian	20	B2
P9	F	Egypt	Arabic	18	B2
P10	M	Indonesia	Indonesian	21	B2
P11	F	Indonesia	Indonesian	19	B2
P12	M	Indonesia	Indonesian	20	B2
P13	M	Kazakhstan	Kazak	17	B2
P14	F	Indonesia	Indonesian	20	B2
P15	M	Indonesia	Indonesian	20	B2

Participant	Gender	Country	Mother Tongue	Age	Level
P16	M	Egypt	Arabic	20	B2
P17	M	Indonesia	Indonesian	19	B2
P18	F	Turkmenistan	Turkmen	19	C1
P19	F	Kazakhstan	Kazak	17	C1
P20	F	Kazakhstan	Kazak	18	C1

According to the table, 11 male and 9 female learners participated in the study; their ages ranged from 17 to 24. 10 participants continued their Turkish education at the B2 level, 10 at the C1 level, and all were international learners from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Egypt, and Turkmenistan. Advanced-level learners at B2–C1 levels were chosen intentionally because they possess sufficient linguistic proficiency to articulate nuanced opinions about grammatical structures. It is known that all participants were high school graduates who had received Turkish preparatory education before beginning their undergraduate studies. The participants were coded as P1, P2, P3....

2.2. Data Collection

A semi-structured interview form was prepared to obtain learners' views and collect data. The views of 2 experts were obtained for the questions created during the preparation phase of the interview form. After the expert views were obtained, a 12-question interview form was created. The data was collected face-to-face by the researcher. At the beginning of the interview form, there is a section that collects information on gender, country, mother tongue, age, and level to determine participants' demographic characteristics. The first 4 questions on the form are “yes/no” questions, and the remaining questions are designed to determine the relationship between grammar and each skill. In addition to these, questions were asked to gather learners' views on the grammar courses in their current course syllabus. The data was collected by researcher in written form. The researcher conducted verbal interviews with participants and, at the same time, wrote down the participants' views and recorded audio. The data collected on paper was transferred to the computer environment by the researcher. The interview questions in the interview form are as follows:

1. Do you use the grammar you have learned in speaking skills? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. Do you use the grammar you have learned in writing skills? Yes ☐ No ☐
3. Do you notice the grammar you have learned while listening to a text or a person? Yes ☐ No ☐
4. Do you notice the grammar you have learned while reading a text? Yes ☐ No ☐
5. Do you think learning grammar is important while learning Turkish? Why?
6. Is it possible to speak, listen, write and read Turkish without learning grammar?
7. How does trying to use grammar correctly affect your speaking/motivation? Does the thought of using grammar incorrectly affect you negatively?
8. Does the thought of using grammar incorrectly prevent you from using the learned grammar while working on writing?
9. How does the thought of hearing a grammar rule you do not know while speaking Turkish with others affect you? How do you feel when you encounter grammar structures you do not know while listening to someone or a text?

10. How does the thought of encountering unfamiliar grammar while reading a text affect your understanding of the text? How do you feel when you encounter unfamiliar grammar while reading a text?
11. Would you prefer grammar to be given as a separate course or as part of reading/listening/writing/speaking courses? Why?
12. Do you think the number of grammar lessons is sufficient? Should the number be increased or decreased?

2.3. Data Analysis

The written data collected through the interview form was analyzed using content analysis. “By content analysis, key themes emerge from the documents after they are classified and coded. Content is analyzed by breaking it into conceptual chunks, which are then coded or named. Qualitative analysis develops the categories as the analysis takes place. The results are used to make inferences about the messages in the text” (Wilson, 2016, p. 41). The collected responses were analyzed using content analysis, and themes were determined and created. When creating themes, attention was paid to topics mentioned by at least two participants. Responses mentioned by a single participant but considered important for the research were included as other expressions.

2.4. Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study, strategies outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) were employed to address credibility, consistency, and transferability. To establish credibility and ensure the findings accurately represented the participants’ perspectives, triangulation was used. Member checking was conducted by showing the written data to participants for double-check to confirm accuracy and ensure that the researcher’s interpretation aligned with the participants’ intent. Then the audio records and written forms were compared once again by the researcher. The researcher also engaged in reflexivity to monitor potential biases throughout the data collection process.

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of the findings with the data collected. To ensure this, an audit trail was maintained that detailed how categories were constructed and how decisions were made during the analysis. Furthermore, peer examination was utilized by taking the views of 2 experts to assess the plausibility of the emerging categories.

To allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts, rich, thick description was provided. By presenting direct quotes, detailed information about participants' grammar programs, and participant variables, this study enables readers to determine the extent to which these findings transfer to their own situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the number 2025-SBB-0870. Informed consent was ensured by providing all participants with a clear explanation of the study’s purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to protect their privacy. To guarantee confidentiality, codes were assigned to all participants, and all digital data was stored on a password-protected personal drive.

3. Findings

The data obtained in this research, which was conducted to determine and evaluate the views of those learning Turkish as a second language on grammar and grammar lessons, were thematically tabulated. The participants' responses to the questions were directly opposite the themes. In

addition, the responses to the first four questions, which were restricted to “yes/no” answers, are shown collectively in the table below:

Table 2 ***Yes/No Responses for the first 4 questions***

Questions	Yes		No		Total
	(f)	%	(f)	%	(n)
1. Do you use the grammar you have learned in speaking skills?	20	100	0	0	20
2. Do you use the grammar you have learned in writing skills?	19	95	1	5	20
3. Do you notice the grammar you have learned while listening to a text or a person?	18	90	2	10	20
4. Do you notice the grammar you have learned while reading a text?	17	85	3	15	20

When the responses to the 4 interview questions, which were designed to directly determine views on the 4 basic language skills, were examined, all the students who participated in the research answered “yes” to the first question and stated that they used the grammar they had learned in speaking. It was determined that the “yes” response regarding the use of learned grammar in writing skills was 95%, the “yes” response regarding participants' listening skills was 90%, and the “yes” response regarding reading skills was 85%. This shows that learners use grammar in productive skills more than in receptive skills.

To understand directly if grammar is important for participants, the following question was asked:

5. Do you think learning grammar is important while learning Turkish? Why?

Table 3 ***Views about the importance of learning grammar***

Theme	Expression
For correct communication (P3, P6, P11, P15, P17, P18, P19)	*“It is important, to construct sentences correctly and to be able to explain correctly”, “Yes, it is important. Because grammar rules help to establish correct and effective communication.”, “It is very important because it is important in many things such as meaning, fluency, and self-expression.”, “Of course it is important. Learning grammar is important while learning every language because it allows constructing sentences correctly, helps to understand speech, and makes it possible to express thoughts without errors.”*
For academic life (P2, P4, P5)	*“Yes, it is important because it will be necessary when starting first grade.”, “Yes, because good grammar is the language used officially, especially in the educational world.”, “Yes, because learning new words and improving our Turkish for school is important.”*
For language skills (P8, P11, P12, P16)	*“I think learning grammar is important when learning Turkish because it helps me speak and write better.” “Yes, it is very important for listening.”*

The answers given to the question “Is learning grammar important when learning Turkish? Why?” directed to the participants in the table are evaluated under 3 themes. Most of the participants stated that grammar is important for proper communication, academic life, and language skills. Apart from these themes, P9 said “Yes, I think one of the important things when learning Turkish is grammar, because if you do not pay attention to grammar, you will not be able to learn Turkish quickly.”, and

P13 said "I think learning grammar is very important when learning Turkish because it is not possible to learn Turkish quickly without learning grammar." They answered as follows, stating that learning grammar and the language-learning process cannot be separated.

To see the participants' views on 4 language skills and grammar relationship, the following question was asked:

6. Is it possible to speak, listen, write, and read Turkish without learning grammar?

Table 4 ***Views about the effect of grammar on language skills***

Theme	Expression
Possible (P2, P9, P14, P20)	*"It is possible, if you only talk to Turks, it may take years.", "It is possible, but it takes a long time.", "I think it is possible."*
Not possible (P3, P6, P7, P8, P12, P13, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19)	*"You need to learn grammar every day, if you don't learn it, there is no use.", "I think it is not possible. If you don't learn grammar, you are wrong about writing and speaking, listening and speaking.", "It is not possible to speak, listen, write and read Turkish without learning grammar.", "It will not be easier to speak, listen and write Turkish without learning grammar."*
Both (P1, P4, P5, P10, P11)	*"It is possible but there are probably many mistakes.", "It is possible because I think language is a habit. The longer we stay in a place, the more fluently we can speak the language of that place. However, remember that language is not only an informal language. In some places, especially in the academic world, we need to use the official language.", "It is possible to speak, listen, write and read Turkish without learning grammar, but I think it is easier after learning grammar."*

Participants' responses on whether learning grammar influences basic language skills were evaluated across 3 themes. Since all participants' responses were related to these themes, there were no responses outside the themes. Those who think "it is possible" are on the same page that it takes much more time. However, as shown in Table 4, many participants believe that speaking, listening, writing, and reading are either impossible or difficult without learning grammar.

Most learners fear making grammar mistakes when speaking. This situation prevents them from speaking in other languages, and the biggest obstacle is speaking skills. To understand if the grammar affects their motivation for speaking, the following question was asked:

7. How does trying to use grammar correctly affect your speaking/motivation? Does the thought of using grammar incorrectly affect you negatively?

Table 5 ***Effect of grammar on speaking***

Theme	Expression
Motivating (P4, P8, P15, P20)	*"The better I understand grammar and use it correctly, the more confident I become when speaking and I can speak without stuttering.", "Paying attention to correct grammar motivates me to speak correctly.", "When we speak Turkish, when the grammar is correct and easily understood, this is one of the motivations for learning Turkish."*
Improving (P2, P9, P16)	*"It affects me well.", "No, I have spoken using incorrect grammar many times, then I realized my mistake and made up for it. On the contrary, it affects me positively.", "I speak better thanks to grammar."*
No impact (P1, P11, P13, P18)	*"Trying to use grammar correctly or incorrectly does not affect my speech at all.", "The thought of using grammar incorrectly does not affect me negatively."*

Theme	Expression
Negative impact (P3, P6, P7, P10, P12, P14, P19, P20)	*"Yes, I sometimes make mistakes when trying to use grammar rules correctly.", "Yes, using incorrect grammar makes it difficult for me to interact with others.", "I feel negative when I use incorrect grammar. In other words, I don't feel good about speaking.", "Yes, it affects me negatively. I'm actually afraid of speaking Turkish. Because I'm afraid of using incorrect grammar."*

The responses to the question about how to use grammar and the idea of using it incorrectly affected their motivation were examined under 4 themes: motivating, developing, ineffective, and negative impact. Apart from these themes, P17 expressed his thoughts as follows: "Grammar determines the meaning of the sentences we speak; therefore, grammar greatly affects speaking skills." These themes show that speaking with good, correct grammar positively affects them. However, to motivate them, it is quite important to know grammar well. Which situation is directly linked with the importance of grammar teaching?

Writing is a hard skill when it comes to writing in a foreign language. To see if the fear of using grammar in the wrong way prevented the participants from writing, the following question was asked:

8. Does the thought of using grammar incorrectly prevent you from using the learned grammar while working on writing?

Table 6 ***Effect of grammar on writing***

Theme	Expression
Prevents (P3, P7, P8, P11, P13, P14, P15)	*"It affects, I study it over and over again.", "Incorrect use of grammar prevents writing because I think grammar is important when writing.", "It prevents me from using grammar when writing.", "Yes, it prevents me."*
Does not prevent (P1, P2, P5, P10, P12, P16, P17, P18, P20)	*"No, because Turks understand you even if you make mistakes.", "No, it does not prevent me from using it because if I use it wrong, I will learn and I can use it better in the future.", "No, it does not affect.", "No, it does not prevent me."*
Sometimes (P4, P6, P9, P19)	*"Sometimes I use correct grammar incorrectly and this can change the meaning of what I want to say.", "Sometimes it can prevent me. Because of the fear of making a mistake.", "Indeed, it sometimes prevents me but this is how I learn because if I hear/see a different grammar, I immediately research what it is, where I will use it."*

Three themes emerged from responses to the question about the effect of grammar on writing skills. All participants' answers played a role in the creation of the themes. While some participants said that the thought of using grammar incorrectly prevented them from using grammar in their writing studies, the other two groups stated that it did not, and sometimes did.

For the listening and grammar relationship, the following question was directed:

9. How does the thought of hearing a grammar rule you do not know while speaking Turkish with others affect you? How do you feel when you encounter grammar structures you do not know while listening to someone or a text?

Table 7 ***Effect of grammar on listening***

Theme	Expression
Negative impact (P12, P19)	*"It affects me a lot because I don't understand and I wonder.", "Usually in such a situation I feel very embarrassed and scared."*

Theme	Expression
Difficulty in understanding (P3, P6, P9, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16)	*"I have a little difficulty.", "I may have a little difficulty at first and have difficulty understanding.", "I get a little confused and have difficulty understanding and I try to understand that grammar.", "I feel like I don't understand but maybe if I knew more verbs I would understand."*
Encouragement to learn (P8, P9, P10, P13, P14, P15, P17)	*"I ask and learn.", "If I hear a grammar rule that I don't know while speaking Turkish with others, I then research and learn.", "I get a little surprised when I hear a rule that I don't know while speaking Turkish. I try to understand, and I want to learn.", "When we hear a grammar that we have never heard before or don't know, of course this is a learning material for us."*
No impact (P2, P18)	*"There is no grammar that I don't know. They are all easy for me anyway.", "It has no effect."*

The responses participants gave to the question about encountering a grammar rule they had not encountered before in a conversation were evaluated under the headings: this situation affected them negatively, made understanding difficult, encouraged learning, and did not affect them. Some responses that could not be evaluated under the themes in this question about listening skills are as follows: P7: I'm a little surprised, but I understand. P20: I've never come across it before.

The last question about language skills and grammar is for reading. If the unfamiliar grammar prevents the participants from understanding the text, the following question was asked:

10. How does the thought of encountering unfamiliar grammar while reading a text affect your understanding of the text? How do you feel when you encounter unfamiliar grammar while reading a text?

Table 8 ***Effect of grammar on reading***

Theme	Expression
Need help (P5, P7, P8, P10, P11)	*"When I see a new word, I ask my instructor to explain it.", "I want to ask my instructor.", "I use Google Translate.", "If I don't understand a text while reading it, I ask my friend."*
Effort to understand (P9, P13, P14, P16, P17)	*"First, I reread it and try to understand it by finding the words I know.", "When I come across a grammar I don't know while reading a text, it becomes difficult to understand. Sometimes I stop and reread it.", "I won't understand the text while reading it and I will examine this new grammar.", "I don't understand it but I try to figure it out."*
Negative effects (P4, P6, P12, P15, P19)	*"I feel confused because I don't know it.", "If I don't understand the structure in the sentence, the meaning of the text changes.", "It affects me a lot because I don't understand it and I am curious. I definitely feel confused and sad.", "When I come across a grammar I don't know, I start thinking, "I don't know Turkish.""*
Not experienced (P1, P3, P18, P20)	*"I don't usually have such problems.", "I haven't experienced anything like that.", "There is no language I don't know.", "I haven't encountered this before."*

The responses to the question on how grammar affects reading skills were examined under 4 themes. When they encountered unfamiliar grammar while reading, some participants said they needed help, some tried to understand, some said the situation affected them negatively, and some said they had never experienced such a situation before. In addition, P2 stated that he was not affected by this situation by saying, "It does not affect it in any way."

Participants were taking 8 hours of grammar lessons per week, totaling 48 hours per language level.

As stated in the "Method" section, participants were taking separate grammar lessons. To learn their view on this situation, the following question was directed:

11. Would you prefer grammar to be given as a separate course or as part of reading/listening/writing/speaking courses? Why?

Table 9 ***Preference about grammar and skill lessons***

Theme	Expression
A separate lesson (P7, P12, P13, P14, P15, P17, P18, P19, P20)	*"I prefer it to be taught in separate lessons. Because it is easier to understand.", "I prefer it as a separate lesson because we can understand it better. If it has rules, we can understand it more easily.", "I think it would be better if grammar topics were separated.", "I would like it to be a separate lesson because sometimes I cannot concentrate because of other lessons."*
With skills (P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P10, P11)	*"It should be in it because in my view, as a foreigner, we should understand the function and meaning of that grammar in detail.", "Yes, it is really important because, for example, if a person is learning a foreign language, they have to write, listen, read or speak. It is a part of developing the language.", "I prefer it to be in the reading, listening, writing and speaking lessons because it is easier to understand."*
Doesn't matter (P1, P16)	*"It doesn't matter.", "I don't think it matters."*

The responses received from participants regarding whether grammar lessons should be planned as a separate lesson from skills or as an integrated lesson with skills were addressed under 3 themes. While some participants wanted grammar lessons to be separate, others wanted them combined with skills. In addition, some participants stated that this situation would not make any difference for them.

To see their thoughts about the sufficiency of the lesson number, the following question was directed:

12. Do you think the number of grammar lessons is sufficient? Should the number be increased or decreased?

Table 10 ***Views about number of grammar lessons***

Theme	Expression
Unsure (P1, P5)	*"Depends on the course and level."*
Sufficient (P2, P3, P4, P6, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P20)	*"The number of grammar lessons is sufficient.", "The lessons are sufficient.", "I think the grammar we learn is sufficient because we learn commonly used topics while speaking."*
Insufficient (P7, P8, P19)	*"I think a grammar lesson should be added.", "I think the number of grammar lessons is insufficient. The number should be increased.", "I think it would be good if the grammar lessons were increased a little more."*

Since all participants were enrolled in the Turkish preparatory education program at the same institution, they were asked whether the current grammar courses were sufficient. While the majority of participants found the number of grammar courses sufficient, 3 participants found it insufficient. 2 participants were undecided about the number of grammar courses.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

First of all, the biggest limitation of the study is that it is conducted at the same institution; therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to all Turkish second- or foreign-language learners. The study's conclusion applies only to those learning Turkish with the same grammar program at the same institution. However, these findings give some cues about the learners' views on grammar.

In this study, conducted to determine participants' views on grammar in Turkish as a second language, 12 questions were asked, and their general views on grammar and those based on language skills were determined. The following conclusions were drawn from the themes identified in the participants' responses.

The first research question of the study was whether learners notice Turkish grammar in their use of Turkish. In this respect, 4 yes/no questions were asked of the participants. The aim of these questions was to examine the participants' tendency to use the grammar they learned in production skills and their perception of the different grammar learned in reception skills. When the participants' responses were examined, it was found that they tended to use the learned grammar at a higher rate in productive (speaking and writing) skills. All the participants stated that they tried to apply the grammar they learned in their speaking. In writing skills, all participants except 1 stated that they use the grammar they learned. While speaking skills are learned in a natural process, writing skills require an educational process to be acquired (Kurtoğlu & Alkan Serin, 2025). On the other hand, the majority of participants in the listening and reading (reception) skills stated that they noticed the grammar points they had learned. While this rate was 90% in listening skills, it was 85% in reading skills. Speaking skills are learnt after listening skills. It is known that writing skills are generally taught after listening, speaking, and reading. However, when teaching Turkish as a foreign/second language, it is common knowledge that writing is the most difficult language skill for learners to master (Şimşek & Erdem, 2021). While grammar use is not the only factor in this situation, grammar also has a significant impact on writing skills. However, the data from this study indicate that while learners are more successful in using grammar, recognizing grammatical structures is more difficult in receptive skills.

To answer the second research question about how grammar affects learners' language skills, learners were asked whether grammar is important. Learners believe that grammar is an integral part of the language-learning process. In particular, the ability to communicate effectively is the main reason for this. According to learners, learning grammar is essential for proper communication. Without good grammar, it is not possible to communicate properly, as proper grammar prevents misunderstandings that may occur when expressing thoughts and ideas (Afroogh, 2019). At the same time, being successful in academic life depends on learning grammar. Learners think that they can improve their language skills through grammar.

According to most participants in the study, the key to success in reading, speaking, listening, and writing is learning grammar correctly. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017) concluded in their research on this subject that learners have more positive attitudes towards learning grammar than instructors do, and that they believe they can develop their communication skills faster by learning and applying grammar. However, some learners pointed out that if they have the chance to talk to Turkish people, they can learn Turkish without any formal grammar. On the other hand, some say it is possible to learn Turkish without grammar, but this version of the language is suitable only in informal settings. In the academic world, they consider grammar essential. This is proof that students see grammar as a tool, not a goal.

When asked about their use of grammar in speaking and its effect on their motivation, participants' responses were largely positive. In order to acquire speaking skills, it is necessary to know the rules of the language, namely grammar and pronunciation, and to teach all of these in conjunction with each other (Çelik, 2019, p. 37). The learners stated that trying to use grammar correctly motivates them and improves their language skills. The findings of the study show that when they make a grammatical mistake while speaking, they realize this mistake and make more effort not to repeat it and try to correct their mistakes. In addition, the use of incorrect grammar during speaking negatively affects some participants and prevents them from interacting. The learners stated that they experience communication gaps due to their focus on using grammar rules correctly. It is clear that this situation negatively affects their motivation to speak. When it comes to speaking, although learners feel competent and participate in situations that require simple language, instructors report that learners avoid contributing to faculty courses (Konyar & Yılmaz, 2021). For this reason, correct grammar and speaking skills should be taught together. There are also some views that the idea of using grammar correctly has no impact on speaking skills.

Gürbüz & Güleç (2016) state that learners have difficulty with grammar, which negatively affects writing skills. The answers to the interview question about the effects of grammar on writing skills indicate that incorrect grammar does not undermine the writing motivation of most participants. At this point, textbooks again have a very important task. It is essential that textbooks are prepared with the cases and examples that learners encounter in real life in mind. When learners learn grammar rules as presented in grammar textbooks, the application and outputs are unsuccessful. Exposure to language helps learners increase their ability to notice discourse and language features (Hinkel, 2008). Participants stated that even if they made mistakes, Turks somehow understood them, and their motivation was not affected because they knew this. However, some participants also expressed the opposite. According to them, the idea of using incorrect grammar prevented the participants from writing. They stated that they avoided using the new grammar rules they learned due to the fear of making mistakes. Another group said that this did not always prevent them from learning, that they sometimes had problems, but that their motivation to learn increased as a result of these mistakes.

According to students' views, being unable to understand due to a lack of grammar is one of the difficulties they encounter during listening activities in learning Turkish as a foreign language (Halat, 2015). According to the answers given regarding how grammar and listening skills affect learners, it was concluded that not knowing the grammar encountered negatively affects listening skills. Participants stated that when they encounter a grammar rule they do not know while listening, they are negatively affected and have difficulty understanding. One group stated that this situation encourages learning, while a very small number of participants reported that it has no effect on listening. Participants pay particular attention to grammar in writing, while stating that they can communicate meaningfully without using grammar in speaking. However, this situation negatively affects their receptive skills, such as reading and listening. Although they try to make sense of the general context in reading, they state that communication does not occur and that they cannot grasp the meaning when they encounter such a situation in listening. In the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language, learners are often required to understand and respond to unfamiliar structures, words, and sentences; these concepts, which were not part of their prior learning and are encountered for the first time, can cause anxiety in communication (Altunkaya, 2017).

Learners stated that when they encounter a grammar rule they are unfamiliar with while reading, they ask their instructors or peers for help and try to infer its meaning from its use in the text. While some

participants said that this situation affected them quite negatively, they even felt as if they did not know Turkish at all when they encountered this situation, a few participants said that they had never encountered such a situation before. The learners who participated in the study believe that knowledge of grammar is important for good reading skills. Regarding the relationship between grammar and reading comprehension, Grabe & Stoller (2013) stated that solid knowledge of language structure and vocabulary is needed for reading to be fluent and effective. However, Sapoetra (2017), in his study examining the effect of grammar knowledge on reading skills, concluded that good grammar knowledge does not directly affect reading comprehension.

When it comes to the relationship between grammar and motivation, it is obvious that when learners cannot use grammar in the 4 basic language skills, cannot communicate due to grammatical issues, or experience a loss of meaning, these situations negatively affect their motivation. To prevent this situation, grammar instruction can be conducted through language-thought analysis, as suggested by Avcı & Küçük (2017). With this method, in addition to grammar rules, the aim is to present and apply these rules at the levels of words, sentences, and texts in teaching grammar. However, when the opposite happens, learners are motivated, and their motivation to learn increases. They are curious about the grammar rules they do not know and try to learn them.

To gather learners' views on the formal structure of grammar courses, two final questions were asked during the interview. Due to the lack of a common program, one of the biggest problems in teaching Turkish as a foreign/second language, course planning and syllabi at each institution differ. Grammar courses are conducted as separate courses in the institution where the research was conducted. When the participants were asked about their thoughts on this issue, although some argued that this situation did not affect the language learning process much, others demanded that it be planned as a separate course that includes skills. Those who argued that it would be more efficient to plan grammar courses as a separate course stated that they would understand the rules better in this way and that they had difficulty focusing on grammar when it was intertwined with skills. Those who demanded that grammar courses be included with language skills stated that they could only learn the function and meaning of grammar rules in this way. Although many instructors are aware of the trend toward integrating grammar with language skills and tasks, they fail to implement it in practice. The main reason is that textbooks are prepared using traditional grammar-based teaching methods. At this point, a solution to this problem would be for instructors to use textbooks only as references and to teach grammar through task-oriented activities in practice (Adhikari, 2018). However, to proceed in this way, instructor competencies must be complete. “Independent grammar lessons, having different instructors in the lessons, using grammar books prepared as supplementary books in the lessons, holding independent grammar exams, etc., are not consistent with the understanding that ‘language teaching is a whole and grammar teaching is a tool that supports the four basic skills in language teaching.’ This situation prevents the equal development of the four basic skills and the immediate detection and correction of student errors” (Özel, 2010, p. 157). It is important to remember that the purpose of language education is not only to understand the mechanics of a language, but also to communicate effectively in that language. Integrating skills with knowledge of grammar is a step towards achieving this goal (Alisoy, 2023).

The last interview question in the research is whether the number of grammar lessons is found to be sufficient by the learners. In this regard, the majority of the learners find the number of grammar lessons sufficient. However, a few participants also find the number of grammar lessons insufficient or are undecided on this issue. As stated before, due to the lack of a program, it is not possible to make a definitive right-or-wrong statement about the number of grammar lessons.

A noteworthy aspect of the findings concerns the role of the participants' linguistic backgrounds. Extant literature on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) often posits that learners from typologically related languages—specifically those from Turkic backgrounds—benefit from positive transfer, potentially leading to lower perceived difficulty and different learning strategies compared to learners from unrelated language families (Atilla, 2001; Ringbom, 2007; Karatay & Kartalıoğlu, 2012; Biçer & Alan, 2019). However, contrary to these theoretical expectations, the qualitative analysis in the current study found no significant differences between the perceptions of Turkic-origin students and those of other international students. Both groups consistently agreed on the same themes. This finding suggests that the instructional context and the specific pedagogical methods employed may play a greater role in learners' perceptions than linguistic proximity. In other words, the challenges of learning grammar appear to be universal in this classroom setting, overshadowing the potential advantages of learners' L1 backgrounds.

4.1. Suggestions

The majority of learners think that learning grammar lessons, grammar rules, and the grammar of a language is important for reading, writing, speaking, and listening to that language. Although current studies emphasize the importance of grammar instruction, they also argue that these lessons should not be separated from skills and that the main focus should be on skills. Institutions that teach Turkish should plan grammar teaching in a functional way and integrate it with basic language skills. However, completely ignoring grammar instruction would be a very wrong practice, and given that learners' needs and demands are to learn grammar well, it should definitely be considered.

Regarding speaking skills, most participants stated that their fear of using grammar incorrectly negatively affected their ability to speak. To help students overcome this negative feeling, it is crucial to prioritize speaking skills in classes, provide constructive correction during speaking activities, and encourage students to use the grammar they learn in their speaking.

When writing skills are examined, it is evident that participants' concerns about using grammar incorrectly do not significantly hinder their writing, though some still have problems due to these concerns. It would be beneficial to do writing practice on the relevant grammar topic after each grammar topic on the use of grammar in writing skills, to have the writing work checked by the instructor, to give feedback to the students, and to make collective corrections to mistakes through peer evaluation.

Participants were found to have one of the greatest difficulties understanding the skill of listening, especially when faced with unfamiliar grammar. To avoid this, taking notes while listening and following along with the text will help discover grammatical structures in listening.

The grammar topics in the reading text have a more negative impact on students. Students have stated that they need help from a teacher or a friend when they encounter unfamiliar grammar, and this has negative effects. To prevent this, students can be advised to use dictionary while reading, and they should also be provided with supplementary reading materials beyond the textbook that cover the grammar topics they are learning.

In future studies, in addition to taking learners' views on grammar teaching in much more detail, it can be measured whether grammar teaching affects the success of Turkish as a foreign language learners in language skills. Thus, regardless of learners' views, treating grammar as a variable will concretely reveal how grammar instruction affects instructors' Turkish language skills.

5. Declarations

5.1. Author Contributions (CRediT)

Author 1 (Öykü Mercan Çetin): Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; Visualization.

5.2. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

5.3. Funding Statement

The authors declare they have not received specific financial support for the research.

5.4. Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

5.5. Ethics Approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Bartın University Rectorate Social and Humanities Ethics Committee (Approval No: 2025-SBB-0870; Approval Date: 10.09.2025). Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed about the scope, purpose, and responsibilities of the study, as well as its potential risks and benefits. Assurance was provided that all personal information would be carefully protected. All participants agreed to take part voluntarily, without any pressure or persuasion, and written informed consent was obtained from each participant.

5.6. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

None

5.7. Acknowledgements

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