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## An Investigation of Secondary School Students' Attitudes Towards Their Native Language Course in the Context of Foreign Language Preparatory Education

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The primary aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of secondary school students whose native language is Turkish toward the Turkish Language and Literature course by comparing students who have received one year of foreign language preparatory education with those who have not. The study was designed using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative and qualitative data. Due to non-normal data distribution, non-parametric statistical methods were employed. Attitude scale data collected from 275 secondary school students were analyzed using the Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests. The qualitative dimension of the study was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with students selected from both groups. Interview data were examined through content analysis to identify themes related to students' perceptions. Quantitative findings indicated that female students exhibited more positive attitudes toward the course than male students. In addition, a statistically significant decrease in attitude scores was observed among 11th-grade students compared with other grade levels. However, no statistically significant difference was found between students who had received foreign language preparatory education and those who had not. Despite this quantitative similarity, qualitative findings revealed cognitive differences between the groups. Students who received preparatory education demonstrated a more analytical and comparative awareness of their native language, whereas students without preparatory education emphasized differences mainly related to teaching methods.

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### Introduction

Language is a fundamental phenomenon that shapes an individual's world of thought, connects them to social life, and forms their cultural identity. An individual's cognitive and social development cannot be considered separately from the language development process (Arıç, 2016). Individuals make sense of the world around them through language; they form mental representations of objects and phenomena through language, and language is

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fundamental to their thinking abilities (Oymak, 2012). Language is an indispensable structure for individuals in every area and moment of life (Yalçın, 2018). Individuals' ability to comprehend the world they live in and acquire the skills required by the age depends on a quality language education (Yaşar, 2008). The process of understanding oneself and the universe occurs especially through the mother tongue. The mother tongue is the first language an individual learns within the family or community environment in which they are born and raised (Vardar, 2002). This language is initially learned from the mother and close environment, becoming ingrained in the individual's subconscious and enabling them to form their strongest bonds with society (Aksan, 2015). Therefore, the mother tongue can also be defined as the language through which a person recognizes entities and first experiences learning (Karaağaç, 2009). The mother tongue, which creates a sense of belonging by connecting the individual to their family and society, also unites communities into a nation and, when used in the social sphere, becomes a means of sustaining that nation's existence (Ağca, 2001). For this reason, mother tongue education is considered one of the most fundamental building blocks of an education system. The development of native language skills not only enables individuals to express themselves but also forms the basis for higher-level cognitive abilities such as reading comprehension, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Studies in the literature show that proficiency in the native language is a prerequisite for success in all other academic areas, regardless of whether they are numerical or verbal. Indeed, research conducted by Şengezer (2021) found a positive and significant correlation between secondary school students' success in Turkish Language and Literature classes and their success in English, a foreign language class. A ten-year study conducted by Sparks et al. (2006) showed that native language literacy skills measured in elementary school are the strongest predictor of foreign language proficiency years later. Tan et al. (2003) also examined the relationship between the native language and foreign language at the neurocognitive level. The study emphasized that the learning of the native language and foreign language are not independent processes in the brain. Cummins (1981) argues that academic proficiency in the native language and second language are not separate from each other, but rather manifestations of the same underlying dimension. According to him, academic skills developed in one language can be transferred to another language. This demonstrates the crucial role that native language teaching plays in other disciplines as well.

Emotional characteristics are as important as cognitive factors in influencing student success during the educational process. Attitudes are one of the most important components of this emotional domain. Attitude is an unobservable mental and emotional state of readiness or predisposition that is formed through experiences and social phenomena and directs an individual's responses to a particular object or situation (Erkuş, 2003). Attitude is generally defined as an individual's learned tendency to display a positive or negative stance toward a specific object or class of objects (Albarracín, Wang, & Noguchi, 2008; Petersen & Dutton, 1975). According to Smith (1968), attitude is a personal tendency that consistently organizes an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward a psychological object. Gardner (1985) defines attitude as a response to a specific object or concept that stems from a person's beliefs and thoughts. Positive attitudes developed by students toward a course facilitate learning, while negative attitudes can hinder the learning process. Student attitudes play a particularly critical role in mother tongue education, because a negative attitude developed towards this subject has the potential to negatively affect not only success in that subject, but also all learning processes. Therefore, understanding students' attitudes towards mother tongue courses and the factors that influence these attitudes is essential for improving the quality of education.

Native language education in Türkiye has undergone a significant transformation, particularly



with the implementation The Century of Türkiye Education Model (2024) in 2024. This new model moves native language education away from a traditional structure-focused approach and places it on a meaning and skill-focused foundation that holistically addresses listening, watching, reading, speaking, and writing skills. The model aims to develop students who not only acquire knowledge but also question, critique, make decisions, and use language as an active means of communication. This effort in the education system also makes students' attitudes towards Turkish language and literature classes more critical. In this context, foreign language preparatory education, which is the focus of this study, serves as a natural laboratory for the processes of deepening and metalinguistic awareness targeted by the model. The analytical perspective developed by students receiving intensive foreign language education in preparatory classes through cross-linguistic structural comparisons is theoretically consistent with the Maarif Model's desired ability to comprehend the logic of language. Therefore, it is thought that this study will contribute to understanding the role of the linguistic awareness provided by preparatory education and students' attitudes towards the course in acquiring the competency-based skills promised by the new model.

Student attitudes towards Turkish and Turkish language and literature courses, which are included in the curriculum as mother tongue education in Türkiye, have been one of the focal points of educational research due to their key role in achieving the course objectives and their potential to affect success in other courses. Understanding the factors that shape these attitudes provides critical data for improving teaching processes and increasing student motivation. In this context, various studies have been conducted in the literature examining student attitudes in terms of different variables. Research examining attitudes towards Turkish and Turkish language and literature courses in terms of gender reveals that female students' attitudes are more positive than male students' (Ateş, 2008; Erdem, 2013; Bağcı & İpekci, 2016; Gür et al., 2013). However, the study by Gözütok and Demir (2017) found that male students' attitudes were more positive, while the studies by Şengezer (2021) and Demir and Parlak Kalkan (2022) found that gender did not create a significant difference. Grade level is also a determining factor in attitudes. It has been determined that, in general, as the grade level increases, attitudes toward the course decrease, and the attitudes of students in lower grades are more positive than those in higher grades (Akçam, 2019; Bölükbaş, 2010; Mercan, 2017; Vural and Yıldız, 2025). However, Gözütok and Demir (2017) stated that while secondary school students have a moderately positive attitude towards Turkish language and literature classes, the attitudes of 9th grade students are lower than those of other secondary school grades. Erdem (2013) stated that secondary school students could not develop a positive attitude towards Turkish language and literature, which is their native language course, and that their attitude averages decreased starting from the 9th grade.

In addition to native language education, foreign language proficiency has also become an indispensable skill for individuals worldwide. This situation has led to foreign language education being given increasing importance in education systems. The literature frequently emphasizes that individuals who are proficient in their native language are more successful in foreign language learning processes. Indeed, Çiçek and Bağçeçi (2013) stated that students with good reading and comprehension skills in their native language are also successful in foreign languages. In line with this requirement, some secondary education institutions in Türkiye offer preparatory classes that provide intensive foreign language education for one year, outside the standard curriculum. While this intensive process aims to develop students' foreign language skills, an important question is how it affects their general awareness of language learning and their perspective on their own native language. A review of the literature reveals that while there are studies on the impact of preparatory education on foreign language success, there are

limited studies that directly and comparatively address the impact of this process on students' attitudes towards Turkish language and literature, which is their native language course. Whether an intensive foreign language program positively or negatively affects students' interest in and attitudes toward their own language is an important gap in the literature that needs to be addressed.

### **Research Objective**

The main purpose of this research is to comparatively examine the attitudes of students who receive and do not receive foreign language preparatory education in secondary education institutions towards their mother tongue course, Turkish language and literature, taking into account the variables of gender and grade level. This study is important in terms of filling the relevant gap in the literature by revealing the affective effects of intensive foreign language education on the mother tongue course. It is believed that the findings obtained from the research will provide important data to program developers who organize mother tongue and foreign language teaching programs and to teachers working in both fields in terms of understanding the interaction between the two courses. In line with this purpose, the research sought answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the general attitude levels of secondary school students towards Turkish Language and Literature courses?
- (2) Do students' attitudes towards Turkish Language and Literature courses show a significant difference depending on whether they receive foreign language preparatory education or not?
- (3) Do students' attitudes towards Turkish Language and Literature courses show a significant difference based on their gender?
- (4) Do students' attitudes toward Turkish Language and Literature courses show a significant difference based on their grade level?
- (5) What are students' views on the Turkish Language and Literature course?

### **Method**

This section provides information about the research model, study group, data collection tools, and data collection and analysis processes.

### **Research Model**

This research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed methods is an approach in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted together in order to understand a research problem more comprehensively (Brannen, 2005; Creswell, 2003, 2021). In this study, a sequential explanatory design was adopted in which qualitative data were collected to explain and support the quantitative findings in depth. The quantitative dimension of the research was based on a correlational survey model aimed at describing the existence and level of the relationship between variables. In the qualitative dimension of the research, the interview technique was used to examine participants' experiences and how they interpreted these experiences in depth. In this context, interviews were conducted with students to enrich the findings obtained from the analysis of quantitative data.



## Study Group

The study group consists of a total of 275 secondary school students whose native language is Turkish and who are enrolled in Anatolian high schools in Istanbul during the 2024-2025 academic year. Participants were also selected from a school with a foreign language preparatory class using purposive sampling, in line with the aim of the study. Of the students in the study group, 149 (54.2%) had received foreign language preparatory education, while 126 (45.8%) had not. Of the participants, 167 (60.7%) were female and 108 (39.3%) were male. The qualitative dimension of the study consisted of a total of 24 students selected on a voluntary basis from each grade level and from both groups (those who received preparatory education and those who did not).

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variables	Demographic Characteristics	Number of Students (n=275)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	167	60.7
	Male	108	39.3
<b>Grade</b>	9th grade	84	30.5
	10th grade	70	25.5
	11th grade	59	21.5
	12th grade	62	22.5
<b>English Foreign Language Preparation Education Status</b>	Students Receiving Preparation Training	149	54.2
	Students Not Taking Preparation Training	126	45.8

## Data Collection Tools

The Personal Information Form, the Turkish Language and Literature Course Attitude Scale, and the Semi-Structured Interview Form were used to collect data for the study.

### *Personal Information Form:*

This form, prepared by the researcher, was used to collect demographic data on students' grade level, gender, and whether or not they had received foreign language preparatory education.

### *Attitude Scale Towards Turkish Language and Literature Course:*

The "Attitude Scale Towards Turkish Language and Literature Course" developed by Arslan and Şimşek (2018) was used in the research. The five-point Likert scale has a single-factor structure and consists of a total of 14 items. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the reliability of the scale was found to be 0.96. This value indicates

that the scale is highly reliable (George and Mallery, 2016). High scores on the scale indicate a positive attitude towards Turkish Language and Literature courses.

### ***Semi-Structured Interview Form:***

The qualitative data of the study were collected using a semi-structured interview form consisting of four open-ended questions developed by the researcher and finalized after consulting three field experts. This form aims to gain an in-depth understanding of students' general thoughts about their native language course, how their foreign language education experiences have affected their perspectives on their native languages, their views on the functionality of the course, and their suggestions for making the course more interesting.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained from the research were analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 software package. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the demographic characteristics and general attitude scores of the students. Before proceeding to the analysis of the quantitative data of the study, the normality assumption required for parametric tests was checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and it was determined that the data did not show a normal distribution ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, it was decided to use non-parametric tests in the analyses. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test whether there was a significant difference in attitude scores according to the variables of receiving preparatory education and gender. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was applied to determine whether there was a significant difference in attitude scores according to class levels. If a significant difference was found, complementary pairwise comparison tests were used to identify the source of the difference. In the analyses, the statistical significance level was set at  $p < .05$ .

In the qualitative data analysis of the study, written responses obtained from the semi-structured interview form were analyzed using content analysis techniques. In this process, all data were first transferred to a digital environment, then the data were read and codes were created, and similar codes were grouped together to identify categories and themes. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the analysis process was submitted to three subject matter experts for evaluation to check inter-rater reliability. The findings were organized under themes and supported by direct quotations.

### **Findings**

This section presents the findings obtained by analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data collected in line with the sub-problems of the research. The findings are presented under two main headings, quantitative and qualitative findings, in a sequence parallel to the research questions.

### **Quantitative Findings**

The quantitative data of the study were obtained by analyzing the survey data collected from 275 secondary school students. In the study, the normality of the attitude scores, which were the dependent variable, was examined to determine the statistical technique to be used in the analyses.



### Findings Regarding Data Distribution

**Table 2.** Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk) Results for Attitude Scores by Groups.

Variable	Group	Statistic	sd	p
<b>Gender</b>	Male	.964	108	.005
	Female	.945	167	.000
<b>Preparatory</b>	Preparatory Education	.965	149	.001
	Not Receiving Preparatory Training	.933	126	.000
	9th Grade	.957	84	.007
<b>Grade</b>	10th Grade	.962	70	.031
	11th Grade	.952	59	.020
	12th Grade	.954	62	.021

When examining the Shapiro-Wilk test results in Table 2, it is seen that the “p” (Sig.) value is less than .05 in all subgroups in the study. This finding indicates that the data does not meet the assumption of normal distribution, i.e., the normality assumption is violated. Therefore, it was decided to use nonparametric tests (Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis H Test), which do not require this assumption, instead of parametric tests in the hypothesis tests for the sub-problems of the study.

### Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem

The first sub-problem of the research was stated as “What are the general attitude levels of secondary school students towards Turkish Language and Literature courses?” To answer this question, descriptive statistics were calculated for the total scores obtained by the students on the attitude scale, and the results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics Regarding Students' Attitude Scores Toward the Turkish Language and Literature Course.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation (Sd)
<b>Attitude Score</b>	275	14.00	70.00	47.22	13.47

Table 3 shows that the average attitude score of the 275 students participating in the study towards the Turkish Language and Literature course is 47.22 (Ss=13.471). The lowest possible score on the 14-item scale is 14, the highest possible score is 70, and the theoretical midpoint of the scale is 42. The fact that the obtained average score (47.22) is above the midpoint of the scale indicates that the secondary school students participating in the study generally have a slightly above-average positive attitude towards the Turkish language and literature course,

which is their native language course.

### Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem

The second sub-problem of the study was stated as “Do students' attitudes towards Turkish Language and Literature courses show a significant difference depending on whether they receive foreign language preparatory education or not?” Since the data did not show a normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed to compare the rank averages between the two independent groups. The analysis results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Attitude Scores Based on Whether Students Received Preparatory Education.

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Preparatory Education	149	137.74	20,524.00	9349.00	.954
Without Preparatory Education	126	138.30	17,426.00		

When examining the Mann-Whitney U test results in Table 4, it is seen that there is no statistically significant difference between the rank mean of students who received preparatory education (137.74) and the rank mean of students who did not receive preparatory education (138.30) ( $U=9349.00$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The fact that the rank averages are very close to each other also supports this finding. This result shows that whether or not students receive foreign language preparatory training does not have a statistically significant effect on their attitudes towards Turkish language and literature courses.

### Findings Related to the Third Sub-Problem

The third sub-problem of the study was stated as “Do students' attitudes towards Turkish language and literature courses show a significant difference according to their gender?” Since the data did not show a normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed to compare the rank means between two independent groups. The analysis results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Attitude Scores According to Students' Gender.

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Female	167	149.92	25,036.00	7028.00	.002
Male	108	119.57	12,914.00		

When examining the Mann-Whitney U test results in Table 5, a statistically significant difference is observed between the rank mean of female students (149.92) and the rank mean of male students (119.57) ( $U=7028.00$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Considering the rank averages, it is understood that female students' attitude scores are significantly higher than male students'. This finding indicates that female students have a more positive attitude towards Turkish language and literature courses than male students.

### Findings Related to the Fourth Sub-Problem

The fourth sub-problem of the study is stated as “Do students' attitudes towards Turkish Language and Literature courses show a significant difference according to their grade levels?”



First, descriptive statistics showing the mean attitude scores and standard deviation values of students according to their grade levels are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Descriptive Statistics Regarding Students' Attitude Scores According to Grade Levels.

Grade Level	N	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation (Ss)
9th grade	84	51.76	10.09
10th grade	70	49.30	12.27
11th grade	59	38.72	15.27
12th grade	62	46.83	13.45
Total	275	47.22	13.47

As shown in Table 6, the highest average attitude score belongs to 9th grade students ( $\bar{X}=51.76$ ), while the lowest average belongs to 11th grade students ( $\bar{X}=38.73$ ). Since the data did not show a normal distribution, the Kruskal-Wallis H test, one of the nonparametric tests, was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the attitude scores of these groups, and the results are given in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for Attitude Scores According to Grade Level.

Grade Level	N	Mean Rank	sd	$\chi^2$	p
9th Grade	84	162.74			
10th Grade	70	149.04	3	29,267	.000
11th Grade	59	92.03			
12th Grade	62	135.77			

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test in Table 7 reveal that the rank averages of students' attitude scores toward the Turkish Language and Literature course show a statistically significant difference according to grade levels ( $\chi^2(3)= 29.267$ ,  $p<.05$ ). When examining the rank averages, it is seen that the highest attitude scores belong to 9th grade students (Rank Avg. = 162.74), while the lowest attitude scores belong to 11th grade students (Rank Avg. = 92.03). Complementary post-hoc analyses conducted to determine between which groups this significant difference occurred showed that the difference was primarily attributable to 11th grade students. According to the analysis results, it was determined that the 11th grade students' attitudes toward were statistically significantly lower than those of both 9th grade ( $p=.000$ ) and 10th grade ( $p=.000$ ) students, as well as 12th grade ( $p=.011$ ) students. There was no statistically significant difference between the other grade levels, namely 9th, 10th, and 12th grades. These findings indicate that the overall difference between grade levels stems from 11th grade students having a more negative attitude than all other grades.

### Qualitative Findings

To answer the fifth sub-question of the study, “What are the students' views on Turkish language and literature classes?”, the responses given by 24 students selected from the study group on a voluntary basis to written interview forms were analyzed through content analysis. The data obtained from the analysis were grouped under four main themes parallel to the interview questions. The findings are presented with examples directly from student quotes under each theme.

## **Qualitative Findings Regarding Students in Preparatory Education**

### ***Theme 1: General Meanings and Feelings Regarding the Turkish Language and Literature Course***

Under this theme, the students' responses to the question “What does the mother tongue (Turkish Language and Literature) course generally mean to you?” were examined. When the meanings attributed to the course and the general feelings towards it were analyzed, it was observed that the opinions fell into three main categories:

#### *1.1. The Foundation of Cultural Identity and National Consciousness:*

The majority of students do not view Turkish language and literature classes as just another subject. For them, these classes are a fundamental part of the educational process, helping them understand their identity, culture, and national values. Supporting this view, PS2 defines it as “*not just a subject, but the foundation for understanding my identity, culture, and emotional world,*” while another student emphasizes the subject's connection to national consciousness, stating, “*Learning our language and embracing it is particularly important these days. Therefore, the topics covered in Turkish language and literature classes are important*” (PS4).

#### *1.2. Development of Communication and Self-Expression Skills:*

Participants stated that one of the most important functions of the course is to develop communication skills. These skills include interpreting events from different perspectives, expressing oneself better, and using Turkish correctly. Indeed, student PS1 emphasized this point, stating, “*It makes it easier for us to express ourselves better and understand the person in front of us better. It enables us to use Turkish more correctly.*”

#### *1.3. Critical Approaches to the Course Structure:*

While acknowledging the importance of the course, some students criticized the way it was structured. PS8, who believes that the course is not open to interpretation, stated that the course limits creativity, saying, “*We are expected to derive meaning from the stories, but the book already tells us how to think on the following pages.*”

### ***Theme 2: The Impact of Preparatory Education: A Comparative Perspective and Increased Language Awareness***

The responses to the question, “How do you think a year of intensive English preparatory education has affected your perspective on your native language, Turkish, and your native language class?” constitute the most striking findings of the research. Almost all of the students stated that intensive foreign language education positively affected their perspective on their native language and gave them a new “language awareness.” This process enabled students to look at their own language from the outside, with an analytical eye.

#### *2.1. Structural Comparison and Discovering the Richness of Turkish:*

Students stated that while learning English grammar, they constantly compared it with the rules of Turkish and thus realized how systematic, rich, and “mathematical” Turkish is as a language. PS2, one of the students in the preparatory program, described this experience by saying, “*As I learned the simple structure of English, I better understood the rich, agglutinative,*

*and flexible structure of Turkish.*” Another student, PS11, stated that their appreciation for their native language had increased, saying, *“While trying to learn English, I realized that our Turkish language is truly a beautiful and rich language that should be valued.”* Similarly, another student, PS7, made a cultural comparison, saying, *“By looking at English literature, I can understand how rich and deep-rooted our Turkish literature is.”*

### 2.2. New Grammatical Awareness:

Intensive language training has enabled students to consciously think about grammatical concepts they previously used without awareness. One student detailed this process, stating, *“When learning English, it is necessary to pay attention to issues such as the structure of the language, tenses, and sentence patterns. This process made me more consciously aware of issues such as subject-verb agreement, verb conjugations, suffixes, and sentence structures in Turkish”* (PS12).

## **Theme 3: The Functionality of the Mother Tongue Course and Its Contribution to Life**

The answers to the question, “How important do you think what you learn in your native language class is for your daily life and future goals?” showed that students have a strong awareness of the functionality of the class.

### 3.1. Effective Communication and Social Skills:

The vast majority of students emphasized that the most important contribution of the course is the ability to express oneself correctly, effectively, and persuasively in daily life and in front of the community. One student listed *“being able to express oneself correctly, reducing misunderstandings, and being able to make more impressive speeches to the community”* (PS1) as the most important contributions of the course, while another stated, *“It supports presentation and public speaking skills. I think this is very important in every profession and job”* (PS7), establishing the link between the course and career goals.

### 3.2. Academic and Cognitive Development:

Participants also noted that the course made significant contributions to academic skills such as reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and gaining a critical perspective. Student PS12 summarized this as *“I can understand what I read better.”*

## **Theme 4: Recommendations for Restructuring the Native Language Course**

In response to the question, “If you had the opportunity to redesign the mother tongue course from scratch, what would you change?”, students agreed that the course should be more interactive, practical, and interpretation-based. The suggestions fell into three main categories:

### 4.1. An Activity and Communication-Focused Approach:

Students emphasized that, rather than focusing on the transfer of theoretical knowledge, lessons should be activity-focused, similar to foreign language classes. Suggestions such as *“more writing activities”* (PS1), *“theater performances could be organized”* (PS5), and *“we can reinforce topics more through group work”* (PS11) were frequently mentioned.

#### **4.2. Emphasis on Reading and Interpretation Skills:**

Participants requested that, instead of measuring knowledge based on memorization, the ability to discuss and interpret the works read be developed. One student concretized this expectation by stating, “*The exam should ask us to comment on which view or movement the book was written against or in line with during its period, rather than the name of Çalikuşu's friend at the hotel*” (PS8). Similarly, the suggestions that “*there should be plenty of discussion about novels*” (PS10) and “*book reading hours could be added*” (PS5) also support this theme.

#### **4.3. Diversifying Content and Linking to Other Disciplines:**

Students suggested that the course should not be limited to the textbook but should utilize different sources and be enriched with different disciplines such as “*film adaptations, theater recordings, songs, visual arts*” (PS12). Additionally, one student recommended that the course be taught using a comparative approach, stating that “*there should be sections where we can compare our language with other languages to discover its richness*” (PS4).

### **Qualitative Findings Regarding Students Who Did Not Receive Preparatory Education**

#### ***Theme 1: General Meaning and Feelings Towards the Turkish Language and Literature Course: “An Important Course, A Criticized Approach”***

Students in this group also acknowledged the importance and value of the mother tongue course, but they made clear criticisms of the way the course was taught. It was determined that there was a general prevailing opinion among students that the course's potential was not being fully utilized.

##### ***1.1. Emphasis on the Value of the Course:***

Participants acknowledge the fundamental necessity of the course, stating that it is “*important and should be valued more than it currently is*” (NPS1) and that it is “*an important course that every Turkish person should take*” (NPS10).

##### ***1.2. Criticisms Regarding the Course's Delivery and Content:***

Despite this emphasis on the course's importance, many students are dissatisfied with how it is delivered. One student stated that the course “*could have been taught nicely but was taught as an overly long course*” (NPS2), while another student said that the topics in the curriculum were “*clichéd and that the constantly repeated feelings and main ideas were suffocating*” (NPS4).

##### ***1.3. The Determining Factor of the Teacher:***

In this group, the teacher factor strongly emerges as the source of positive feelings towards the course. Students stated that the main reason they liked the course or benefited from it was not so much the course content as the teacher's personality, presentation style, and the richness they brought to the course. One student expressed this situation as follows: “*I think we had a very productive and culturally rich class thanks to our teacher's (...) contribution*” (NPS5), while another student expressed it more clearly: “*I like it because of our teacher. I wouldn't think this way if he weren't a living example*” (NPS6).

## **Theme 2: Comparison of Native Language and Foreign Language Classes: “Differences in Method, Focus, and Interaction”**

The answers to the question, “If you compare the mother tongue class at school with the foreign language (English) class, what similarities or differences do you see between the way these two classes are taught and what they contribute to you?” show that this group fundamentally distinguishes the two classes in terms of method and focus.

### *2.1. Functional and Thematic Differences:*

Students perceive English classes as more focused on practical communication and individual expression, while they find Turkish language and literature classes more theoretical, focused on critical thinking and social themes. One student explained this difference strikingly: *“In foreign language classes, expressing ourselves... is more in the foreground... whereas in literature, unfortunately, the person, the student, almost only talks about social issues. I think this makes the student a team player but takes away their leadership skills”* (NPS4).

### *2.2. Discovering the Depth of the Native Language:*

For some students, the process of learning a foreign language has been an opportunity to understand the depth and complexity of their native language that they were not aware of. One participant expressed this experience by saying, *“In English class, I learn a language I don't know from scratch, with its words; in Turkish class, I gain awareness that I don't actually know a language I thought I knew, and I delve into the depths of this language”* (NPS7).

### *2.3. Negative Transfer Experience:*

Unlike the preparatory group, one student in this group stated that knowing their native language could be an obstacle to learning a foreign language: *“Because I know Turkish, I can't fully learn English. Because I think in Turkish, which makes learning English quite difficult for me.”* (NPS10).

## **Theme 3: The Functionality and Contribution of the Native Language Course to Life**

Students in this group also believe that the native language course has important practical contributions to daily life and future goals.

### *3.1. Communication and Expression Skills:*

There is a general consensus that the most important contribution of the course is that it enables students to express themselves better and use the language more correctly. Indeed, one student said, *“We can use the words we use more meaningfully”* (NPS1), while another expressed the impact of this skill on social status by saying, *“I can appear to be a more cultured person in my daily conversations”* (NPS2).

### *3.2. The Role of the Teacher:*

The teacher factor also comes to the fore in this theme. One student attributed the development of self-expression skills not directly to the course, but to the teacher's supportive attitude: *“I think it's not the course that's important for self-expression, but the teacher. If the teacher is supportive in this regard, even if the course is math, the student can develop in this area”* (NPS5).

#### **Theme 4: Recommendations for Restructuring the Mother Tongue Course**

In response to the question, “If you had the opportunity to redesign the mother tongue course from scratch, what would you change?”, students strongly demanded that the course be more original, interpretation-based, and practical.

##### *4.1. Encouraging Originality and Interpretation:*

Students complain that the activities in textbooks are geared toward a single correct answer. One student expressed this problem by saying, “*Even though the Ministry of Education includes activities that seem to encourage our originality, those activities can only be done with the answer they want, so I could have been more free in terms of originality*” (NPS2). Similarly, it has been suggested that text-end questions be removed and replaced with “*more open-ended personal questions*” (NPS4).

##### *4.2. Applied and Interactive Methods:*

Participants want theoretical knowledge to be integrated into daily life and more space to be given to applied activities. One student said, “*Instead of making us memorize grammar topics, I would integrate them into daily life*” (NPS11), while another suggested, “*I would like to learn through activities and games*” (NPS10).

##### *4.3. Enrichment of Content:*

It was stated that the course content should not be limited to the textbook alone but should be enriched with different sources and in-depth word analysis. One student suggested, “*I would add a section to the book explaining the deep meanings of words that were frequently used in the past*” (NPS1).

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

In this study, the attitudes of secondary school students whose native language is Turkish and who have or have not received foreign language preparatory education toward Turkish language and literature courses were examined using quantitative and qualitative data. The general findings of the study revealed that students' attitudes did not differ statistically based on whether they had received foreign language preparatory education, but they showed significant differences based on gender and grade level variables. In particular, it was found that female students had a more positive attitude than male students and that there was a marked decline in attitudes at the 11th grade level. The qualitative data obtained in the study provide important clues about the reasons behind these quantitative findings.

The most fundamental quantitative finding of the study is that students who received foreign language preparatory education ( $\bar{X}=47.42$ ) did not show a statistically significant difference in Turkish language and literature courses compared to students who did not receive such education ( $\bar{X}=47.01$ ) ( $p>.05$ ). However, the qualitative findings reveal that behind this numerical similarity, there are significant qualitative and cognitive approach differences between the two groups. The quantitative findings of the study show that female students ( $\bar{X}=49.20$ ) have a statistically significant more positive attitude towards Turkish language and literature courses than male students ( $\bar{X}=44.18$ ) ( $p<.05$ ). This result is consistent with many studies in the literature (Akçam, 2019; Ateş, 2008; Erdem, 2013; Bağcı & İpekci, 2016; Gür et al., 2013). However, Gözütok and Demir's (2017) finding that male students' attitudes were more positive, or the lack of a significant difference in the studies by Şengezer (2021) and

Demir and Parlak Kalkan (2022), indicates that the effect of the gender variable on attitudes has a complex structure that can vary across different sample groups. The qualitative data collected in this study did not provide specific insight into the underlying reasons for this gender difference; this topic may be suggested as a research area for future qualitative studies. A significant difference was found in attitude scores according to grade level ( $p < .05$ ), with this difference most notably stemming from 11th grade students having significantly lower attitudes than all other grades. This finding partially coincides with studies in the literature that generally indicate that attitudes decline as grade level increases (Erdem, 2013), but it is noteworthy in terms of the decline becoming particularly pronounced in the 11th grade. Possible reasons for this situation include the intensification of the university preparation process in the 11th grade and students focusing more on courses related to their own fields, thereby relegating Turkish language and literature courses to the background.

The qualitative findings of the study indicate that the underlying dynamics of the meaning attributed to the course by both groups differ. Students who did not receive preparatory education tend to attribute their positive or negative feelings about the course largely to the teacher factor (“*I like it because of our teacher*” - NPS6). This finding coincides with the affective barriers identified in the studies by Ocak, Kuru, and Özçalışan (2010). Ocak et al. identified fear, lack of motivation, and lack of readiness as the underlying reasons for students' avoidance of using the target language. In this study, the inability of students who did not take preparatory courses to internalize the course and their reliance on the teacher as an external source of motivation parallels the finding of lack of self-confidence in the aforementioned study. In contrast, students who took preparatory courses define the meaning of the course through abstract values such as the internal structure of the language and “the legacy of their ancestors” (PS4). The fact that the group receiving preparatory education approaches the course through the structure of the language and with an analytical perspective suggests that intensive language education lowers the threshold of fear in students and increases their linguistic readiness, making them more independent (autonomous) learners. This situation may be one of the reasons for the significant attitude difference ( $p < .05$ ) in favor of this group in the quantitative findings.

The most striking finding of the study is the difference in how the two groups reflect their foreign language experience in their native languages. Students who received preparatory education made cross-linguistic structural comparisons by noticing the agglutinative structure of Turkish (PS2) while learning English grammar. This situation can be explained by the findings of Almohaimeed and Almurshed (2018). The researchers found that “advanced level” students managed interlingual transfer rather than viewing L1 use as an obstacle. The preparatory students in this study also reached a higher level of linguistic proficiency thanks to intensive English training and transferred this “advanced level” awareness to their native language (Turkish). These findings are consistent with Cummins (1981) hypothesis of linguistic interdependence. No such structural comparison was observed in students who did not receive preparatory education, and indeed, negative transfer examples were encountered (NPS10) indicating that learning English was difficult “because they thought in Turkish.” In this context, it can be said that preparatory education transformed the students' view of their native language by developing their general linguistic processing capacity and metacognitive awareness.

Both groups consider the native language course important in terms of “cultural identity.” However, the approach of students receiving preparatory education is based on a more objective foundation. This situation differs from Erdemir's (2013) study on Turkish students in the USA. Erdemir (2013) stated in the study that students developed a strong patriotic reflex with a

perception of “threat” towards their native languages. In this study, however, students in preparatory education, rather than feeling a “threat” like Erdemir's participants, rediscovered the mathematical power of Turkish by comparing the structures of the two languages. This situation shows that preparatory education in Türkiye raises students' respect for their native languages to a more “conscious” level by teaching them the logic of languages without dragging them into a cultural conflict.

Both groups agree that the native language course should be interactive and practical, moving away from rote memorization (“Remove end-of-text questions,” “Create a discussion environment”). Students in preparatory education base these suggestions on their experiences with “speaking practice” (PS16) in English classes. The demands of preparatory students for “practice instead of memorization” and “interaction” are in line with the philosophy of The Century of Türkiye Education Model, which came into effect in 2024. The “Literature Workshop” (speaking and writing production) and meaning-based approach envisaged by the model are of a quality that will meet the students' desire to “produce as their proficiency increases,” as stated by Almohaimeed and Almurshed (2018). In this context, preparatory education appears to have provided students with the “skill-focused” foundation targeted by the Education Model. These results reveal the need to re-examine mother tongue teaching programs, taking into account positive pedagogical experiences in different disciplines, to ensure they meet students' 21st-century skills and expectations.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the findings obtained from this research, various recommendations have been developed for implementation and future research in order to improve the quality of native language education and positively develop students' attitudes towards the course. First, it has been observed that students receiving preparatory education can transfer their structural awareness in the foreign language to their native languages. In this context, it is recommended that a “comparative linguistics” approach be adopted in native language education through interdisciplinary collaboration. Analysis activities that allow students to discover the similarities and differences between the concepts they learn in the foreign language (tenses, sentence structure, etc.) and their native language can prevent possible negative transfer, especially in students who do not receive preparatory education. In addition, it has been determined that the attitudes of students who do not receive preparatory education towards the course are highly dependent on the teacher factor and that they need external motivation. To overcome the “affective barriers” of students in this group and turn them into more autonomous learners, emphasis should be placed on student-centered practices such as peer assessment, project-based learning, and portfolios, rather than traditional methods where the teacher is merely a knowledge transmitter.

Both groups' demand for a structure in their native language classes that is interactive rather than rote memorization aligns with the philosophy of The Century of Türkiye Education Model, which came into effect in 2024. In this regard, applications such as the “Literature Workshop” in the curriculum should not remain on paper; the course should be enriched with discussion environments where students can express themselves verbally and in writing, as well as creative writing and drama activities. In the measurement and evaluation processes, the use of process-oriented tools that measure students' communication skills, rather than traditional tools such as end-of-text questions, will meet students' expectations for “practice and production.” Furthermore, considering the significant decline in attitudes and exam anxiety observed at the 11th grade level, it is important to relate the course content at this level to students' academic



and career goals and to focus on functional skills such as academic literacy and critical reading in order to rescue the course from being a “back-burner” subject.

Finally, it is recommended that researchers focus on the gender factor, the reasons for which cannot be fully explained in this study. In-depth qualitative studies examining the underlying sociocultural reasons for male students' distant attitude towards their native language course or the impact of course materials would contribute to the literature. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal tracking studies to determine whether the “language awareness” effect created by the preparatory class persists throughout high school and how the standard curriculum in upper grades affects this situation would be useful in guiding language education policies.

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**Conflict of Interest:** No potential conflicts of interest have been reported by the author(s). All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

**Informed Consent:** The authors confirm that informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in this study involving human subjects.

**Data availability:** Upon request to the corresponding author, the dataset associated with the research can be accessed.

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