

Project-Based Learning and Language Skill Development in Turkish as a Foreign Language: An Assessment of Reading, Writing, and Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the contribution of Project-Based Learning (PBL) to developing reading and writing skills two of the four core language skills (reading, writing, listening, and comprehension) in teaching Turkish to foreigners. The research was conducted with 60 students at a university in Kazakhstan, where the PBL method was employed. The project began by assigning students tasks within the context of a "Turkish for Kin Communities" course, asking them to answer practical, real-life questions related to the topics. The students, at B1-B2 levels, were invited to engage with topics from units 1 to 8 of their coursebook and respond to related questions. At the start of the project, an initial test was administered to assess the student's proficiency levels, and a final test was conducted to measure progress. The results of both tests were taken into consideration for evaluation. In addition to evaluating the impact of the project on student success, comparisons were made between their reading comprehension levels, and students were also asked to write stories to assess their writing performance. These stories were individually evaluated. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used, and peer assessments were conducted to gather student feedback.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Teaching Turkish to Foreigners, Kazakhstan

Introduction

It is defined as "a multifaceted and highly developed system that enables the transmission of thoughts, emotions, and desires to others within a society through the use of shared elements and rules regarding sound and meaning" (Aksan, 1990, p. 55). Humans—multifaceted beings whose nature adapts to the changing structures of societies—have sustained their existence through cultural products and language. In doing so, they have succeeded in making their voices heard from the past to the present. All major discoveries and epoch-making inventions that have been the subject of global study have been able to express themselves through

language. "Language is a means of disclosure and expression; it is the putting into words of what the eye sees and the ear hears, and an effort to communicate and be understood" (Aksan, 1990, p. 12). Project-Based Learning (PBL) is one of the most widely used methods today—a trend driven by the significant emphasis placed on maximizing students' roles in the instructional process. PBL is essentially a learning strategy organized around projects (Thomas, 2000; Larmer, Markham, and Ravitz, 2003; Bell, 2010). In a PBL classroom, students plan, implement, reflect upon, and evaluate their own learning while working on authentic tasks, such as problem-solving or completing specific assignments.

The Current State of Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

Various teaching methods have been developed and implemented in education for centuries. As technology continues to advance, new teaching methods and approaches have emerged. These methods serve as tools and guides for teachers in the language teaching process.

Today, teaching Turkish as a foreign language has

However, several challenges remain. Among the most significant are the lack of fully standardized instructional materials, the shortage of qualified instructors, and the absence of consistency among pedagogical approaches. In addition, determining language proficiency levels and developing effective assessment and evaluation systems remain important areas of need.

Studies on Teaching Turkish of Türkiye in Kazakhstan

The objective of the Republic of Türkiye, as reflected in the educational agreements it has concluded, has been to strengthen the long-standing historical and cultural ties with the Turkic republics of Central Asia by undertaking joint investments in the field of education and promoting the teaching of Turkish to people of shared cultural heritage. "As a result of these agreements, one of the most significant projects implemented in the field of education was the Great Student Project (BÖP)" (Özdemir, 2018, p. 1326).

According to Turumbetova (2013), who evaluated attitudes toward Turkish in Kazakhstan and examined the status of Turkish education at universities continuing their educational and instructional activities in this field, Turkish is among the most widely taught foreign languages in Kazakhstan.

The universities in Kazakhstan that conduct activities aimed at teaching Turkish culture and the Turkish language include the International University of Foreign Languages and Professional Career, established in 2001; the Department of Foreign Languages established within the Kazakh State Women's Teacher Training University in 2006; Kazakh-American University; Central Asian University; the Academy of Social Relations and Labour Economics; Taraz State University; Korkyt Ata State University; and others. Through departments such as Turkology, Turkish Language and Literature, Philology, and Oriental Studies established within these universities, Turkish of Türkiye is currently taught to thousands of students of shared cultural heritage.

become a field attracting considerable interest both in Türkiye and abroad. Several factors have contributed to this development, including Türkiye's increasingly prominent position in international relations, growing cultural interaction, and migration. The number of foreigners wishing to learn Turkish is increasing every day. Accordingly, Turkish language teaching centers at universities (TÖMER) and cultural institutions abroad have begun to expand their activities in this

Suleyman Demirel University, which currently serves approximately 8,000 students in Kazakhstan, together with 27 Kazakh-Turkish High Schools with a total of 10,543 students, five private schools, and two colleges, provides Turkish language education to thousands of students of shared cultural heritage. Today, the Kazakh-Turkish High Schools have been renamed BİL (Schools of Science and Innovation) (bil.edu, 2025).

Turkish of Türkiye is being promoted through institutions such as Turkology departments and the Yunus Emre Institute (Aydın, 2021). It has been stated that the teaching of Turkish of Türkiye in Kazakhstan is conducted more effectively due to cultural proximity and historical ties between the two countries (Aydın, 2021, p. 112). "It is emphasized that the methods used in teaching Turkish to foreigners should be adapted to the needs of students in Kazakhstan" (Demirel, 2012, p. 89).

"Kazakhstan is one of the countries among the Turkic republics that officially supports Turkish of Türkiye" (Kırkkılıç & Gündüz, 2008, p. 45). It is also stated that "the effective incorporation of cultural elements into the language learning process facilitates learning among Kazakh students" (p. 67). In his study, Yüce (2010) "emphasizes that significant steps have been taken toward the adoption of Turkish of Türkiye as a common language in Kazakhstan" (p. 153).

Basic Skills Acquired in Foreign Language Learning

Two important dimensions of mother-tongue education and instruction are comprehension and expression. Comprehension encompasses listening and reading skills, whereas expression encompasses speaking and writing skills (Kavcar, Oğuzkan, & Sever, 1999). The development of the skills individuals use in communication is interconnected, because each skill constitutes a step in the language learning process and the development of one skill positively influences the development of the others.

Hagevik (1999) states that people spend 40% of their time listening, 35% speaking, 16% reading, and 9%

writing (as cited in Cihangir, 2004). Based on these statistics, the amount of time and the activities allocated to the teaching of these skills can be determined. Organizing foreign language instruction according to individual language skills facilitates the teaching process.

Reading

Reading is the process of seeing, perceiving, and comprehending a written text in terms of its words, sentences, punctuation marks, and other elements (Kavcar et al., 1999). Reading involves recognizing the letters, words, and symbols in a written text and comprehending their meanings (Göğüş, 1978). It is also a cognitive activity based on perceiving printed words through the senses and subsequently interpreting, comprehending, and making sense of them (Özdemir, 1991).

Listening

Listening is the first language skill acquired in a person's life and the one used most extensively throughout the remainder of life. According to Robertson (2008), listening is the process of understanding messages and responding to stimuli. Robertson (2008) further notes that, among students of average intelligence, the relationship between listening ability and academic achievement is stronger than the relationship between intelligence level and academic achievement (Maxwell & Dornan, 2001; Buzan, 2001). These observations demonstrate that listening is one of the language skills most frequently practiced throughout an individual's life.

Writing

Writing is a means of communicating and expressing our emotions, thoughts, plans, and experiences in written form (Ünalın, 2006). It involves expressing emotions, thoughts, and events through writing and constitutes the final component of the four fundamental language skills (Demirel, 1999).

Before examining writing as a language skill, it is useful to briefly consider the activity of writing itself. Rivers (1978) examines the writing process under two main categories: *Practical Writing* and *Creative Writing*. Writing is regarded as one of the most important means of acquiring knowledge about writing and retaining that knowledge permanently in memory. Through writing, human knowledge is transformed into culture and, over time, becomes an integral part of human life.

Like reading, writing is a skill that is acquired and developed through subsequent practice. Learning an alphabet enables individuals to acquire reading and writing skills. Accessing the meanings conveyed by

letters, words, and sentences is possible only through knowledge of a particular writing system.

Speaking

Speaking is one of the most important objectives of foreign language teaching. "Through conversing with one another, people can put the language they have learned into practice and establish communication with each other" (Rampillon, 1989, p. 97).

What Is the Project-Based Teaching Method (PBT)?

The Project-Based Teaching (PBT) method was initially developed in the 1950s for use in medical education. In the *Problem-Based Learning* model developed at McMaster University in Canada, various clinical scenarios were prepared instead of conventional textbook-based instruction, and medical students were asked to develop solutions to the problems presented in these scenarios. "This approach was subsequently developed and standardized and began to be applied not only in medicine but also in mathematics, engineering, economics, and other fields" (ekampus.org, 2024).

PBT is an interactive learning model in which students actively participate in the learning process. Unlike other methods, it can also emphasize universal values in foreign language teaching. Through this method, students learn the fundamental language skills—reading, comprehension, listening, and writing—in an integrated manner. The PBT method represents an innovative approach to the teaching and learning process. This approach focuses on general concepts, ideas, and the principles of a particular discipline. Its foundation lies in learners' collaboration in solving problems that they may encounter in their everyday lives.

Rather than a teacher-centered learning environment in which individual subjects are taught independently through short, disconnected classroom activities, PBT emphasizes long-term learning activities, the establishment of interdisciplinary connections, learner-centered instruction, and topics based on real-world issues. PBT creates opportunities for learning by establishing connections among different subject areas. During the production process, learners identify and apply content from different fields of knowledge in ways that are authentic, relevant, and reliable. These activities take place beyond artificial learning environments. While learning a language, students can simultaneously establish connections with real-life situations and thereby reinforce what they have learned. The benefits that project-based learning can provide in foreign language teaching have been discussed in the academic literature as

follows:

1. Projects provide students with environments in which they can develop self-confidence and express themselves more comfortably (Fried-Booth, 2002).
2. Projects contribute to the development of grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. Furthermore, foreign language learners can communicate in contexts that facilitate authentic language use (Haines, 1989).
3. "Projects provide authentic activities in foreign language teaching, and this helps foreign language learners approach tasks from different

perspectives while increasing cooperation among students" (Reeves, 2002). "Project-based learning enables language skills to be learned as an integrated whole" (Stoller, 2006, p. 33).

Korkmaz and Kaptan (2001) report that PBT is a versatile approach that can be used in conjunction with other teaching methods and techniques. PBT is particularly recommended by experts as a means of understanding real life, preparing learners for life, and developing solutions to problems encountered in everyday life (Bell, 2010; Blumenfeld et al., 1991; ETDME, 2006; Talat & Chaudhry, 2014; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Uysal, 2016). The Buck Institute for Education,

Tablo 2.1 Example of a Project-Based Learning Plan

Teaching Objectives/ Learning Outcomes	Student Activities and Process	Teaching Strategies and Tools Used	Success Indicators and Evidence
Evaluate, analyze, and synthesize	Examine media sources and conduct research	Information-source analysis, discussion groups, panel discussions, round-table discussions, individual/volunteer service projects	Students' written texts, media analyses, project outputs, newspaper clippings, reports
Conduct topic research and collect information	Conduct topic research and collect information	Library and online research, guidance from research consultants, discussion sessions	Photographs, documents, video recordings, presentation materials
Think critically, establish relationships, and persuade	Defend the project idea and make a presentation	Defend the project idea and make a presentation	Presentations, surveys, sample designs
Information communication and media skills	Information communication and media skills	Graphic design tools, document formats (DOC, PDF, HTML, etc.), technology integration, media and communication techniques	Electronic documents, media documents, digital presentations
Student collaboration and peer interaction	Work on projects with peers, share tasks, and exchange information	Peer education, group meetings, "Learn by Teaching" chart, guidance materials	Documented collaborative work, task-distribution tables

Technological literacy and multimedia use	Record, share, and convert media files	Advanced digital tools (file-format conversion, virus scanning), cloud/USB/web-based file sharing	Presentation of documents in appropriate formats, demonstrations of technological skills
Purposes: To provide information, establish knowledge, and enable students to select appropriate information in relation to their objectives	Determine the appropriate type of media and prepare content according to the intended objective	Prepare content based on the target media type	Prepared media content (poster, brochure, presentation)

(Fr.scribd.com,2024

Analysis of Students' Reading Comprehension Questions

Among the four fundamental foreign language skills, reading comprehension and other language skills can be assessed through tests, particularly when measuring students' knowledge levels. "However, using such tests to directly assess a particular skill may prevent students from demonstrating and developing their creative abilities" (Özbay, 1997, p. 16; Aşlıoğlu, 1993, p. 251; Poyrazoğlu, 1993, p. 243; Yalçın, 1993, p. 230). This is because, in test-based examinations, students are generally required either to select one of the given options or to complete an incomplete sentence. Consequently, such examinations do not provide students with sufficient opportunities to express, accurately and appropriately for their intended purposes, what they have heard, thought, imagined, read, or examined, either orally or in writing. Binbaşıoğlu likewise states that multiple-choice tests not only fail to develop an individual's

creative abilities but also cannot adequately measure their ability to organize and compose ideas (1983, p. 46).

"Reading constitutes one of the input dimensions of mother-tongue instruction" (Gülyüz, 2000, p. 9). "Reading is defined as a meaning-making process resulting from the interaction among written (author-generated) and non-written sources, the reader, and environmental factors" (Akyol, 2003, p. 14).

Reading comprehension has an important role in language teaching. During the project activities, students' performance before and after writing a story was examined through two separate tests. The results of these tests were analyzed on an individual-question basis. The options selected by the students and their corresponding percentages of success are presented graphically. Interpretations of the findings are provided at the end of each table.

1. Türkçeye yapılan en büyük kötülük, onun anlaşılabilir olduğunu savunmaktır. 2. Türkçeyi sevmeyenler, onun anlaşılabilir bir dil olduğunu ileri ...Cümlelerden Hangisi Anlamca Birbirine en yakındır
26 / 39 doğru yanıt

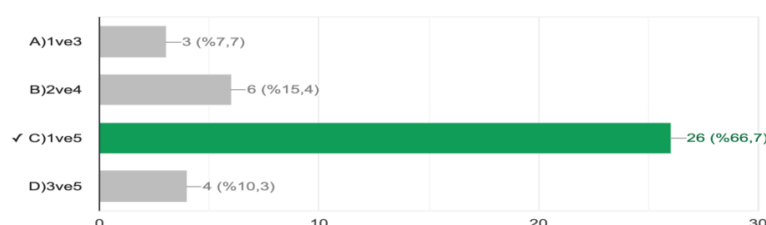


Figure 1.1. First Question and Results

Sixty-six percent of the students answered the first reading comprehension question correctly, while

33% answered incorrectly. This proportion indicates that more than half of the students demonstrated mastery of the topic.

Figure 1.2. Second Question and Results

Seventy-eight percent of the students answered the second question correctly, whereas 21% answered incorrectly. Nearly 80% of the students answered this question correctly, indicating that the subject matter was well understood.

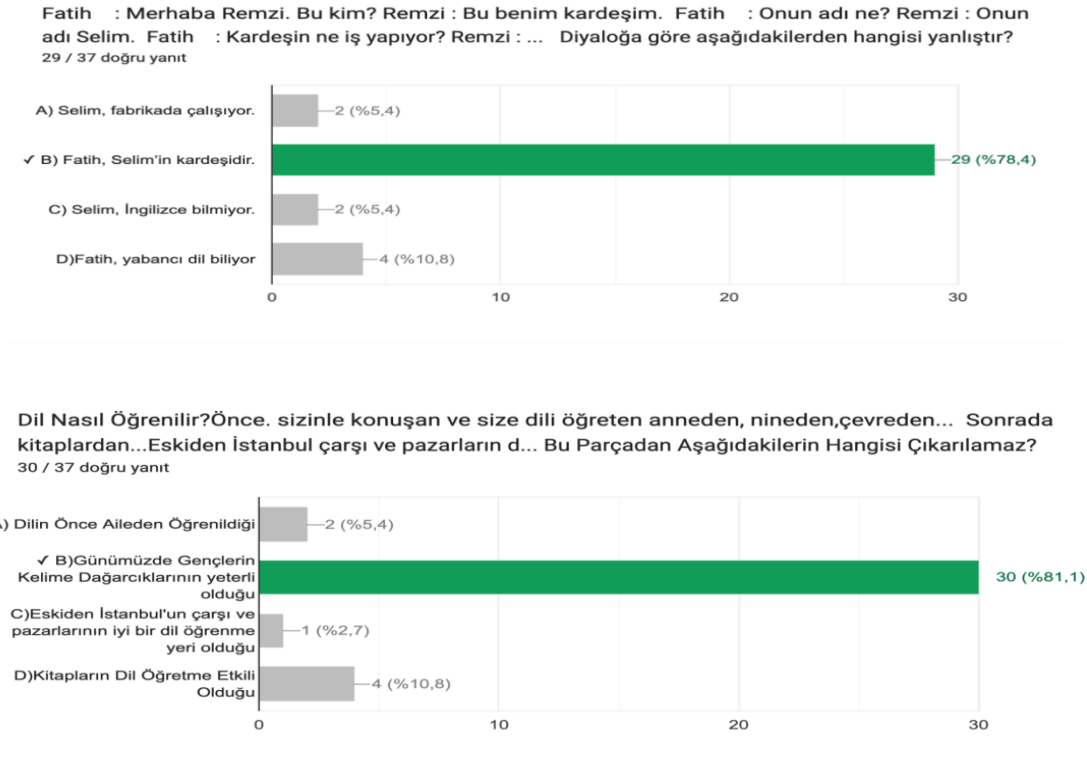
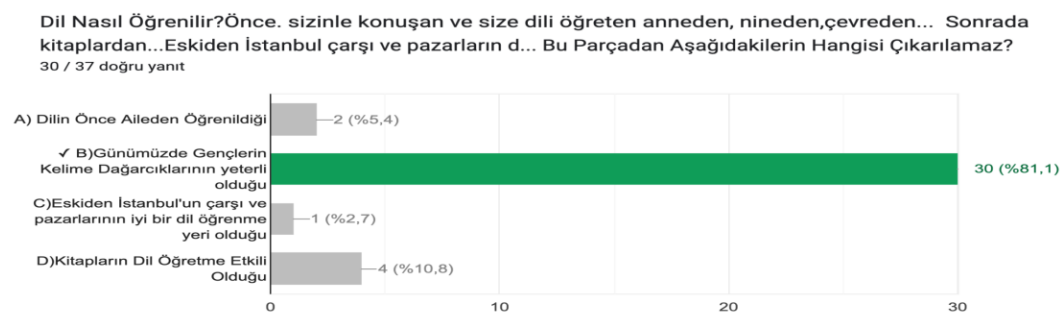


Figure 1.3. Third Question and Results

For the third question, 81% of the students provided the correct answer, while 19% answered incorrectly.



The success rate in this question was also above a satisfactory level.

Figure 1.4. Fourth Question and Results

For the fourth question, 81% of the students again provided the correct answer, while approximately 21% answered incorrectly. The high level of correct responses indicates a strong degree of learning in this area.

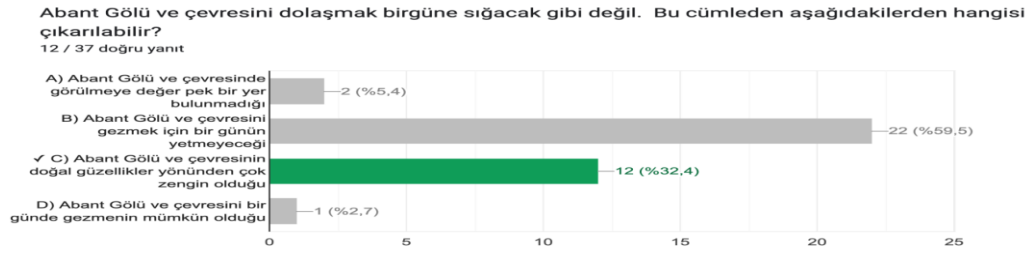


Figure 1.5. Fifth Question and Results

For the fifth question, 60% of the students selected the correct answer, while 40% selected an incorrect option. Since slightly more than half of the students answered correctly, the level of achievement can be considered close to satisfactory.

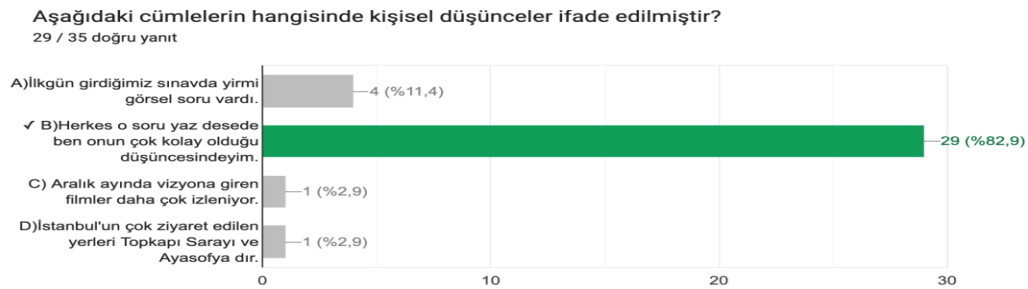


Figure 1.6. Sixth Question and Results

For the sixth question, 82% of the students answered correctly, while the remaining 18% selected incorrect options. With a success rate above 80%, the students demonstrated a high level of achievement on this question.

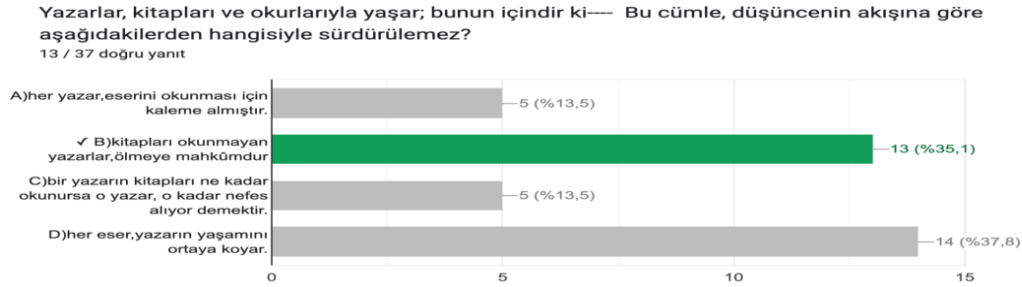
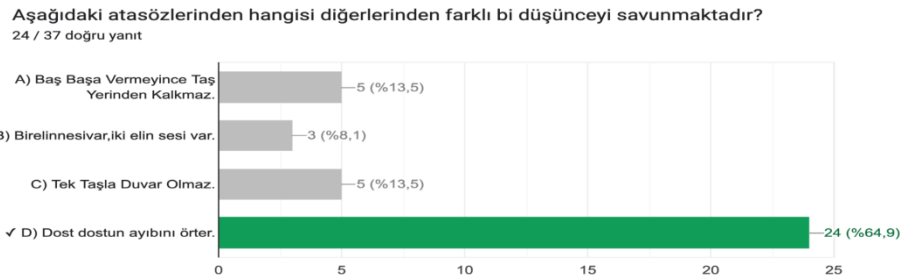


Figure 1.7. Seventh Question and Results



For the seventh question, only 35% of the students identified the correct answer, while the remaining students were unable to do so. The low percentage of correct responses indicates a relatively low level of achievement in this area.

Figure 1.8. Eighth Question and Results

For the eighth question, 64% of the students selected the correct option, while 36% selected an incorrect option.

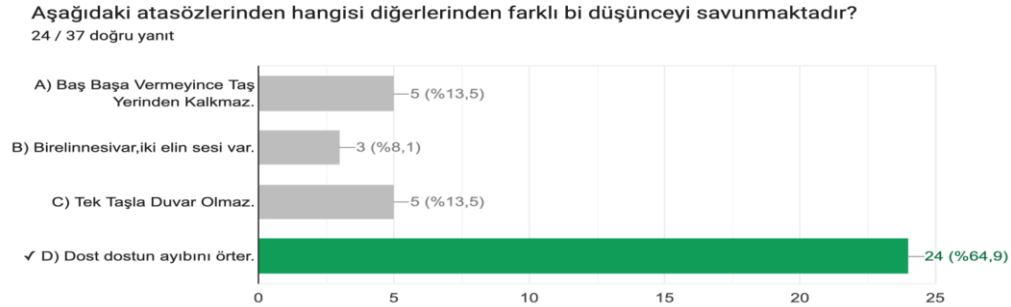


Figure 1.9. Ninth Question and Results

For the ninth question, 64% of the students answered correctly, while the remaining 36% answered incorrectly. The success rate was above 50%, indicating a moderate level of achievement.

Baharı ilk günlerinde yaylalar,insan sesinden yoksundur.Güneşin yeryüzünü ısınmaya başlamasıyla,doğanın görkemli sessizliği hükmünü ya...anhangisine özgü niteliklere yer verilmemiştir?
28 / 37 doğru yanıt

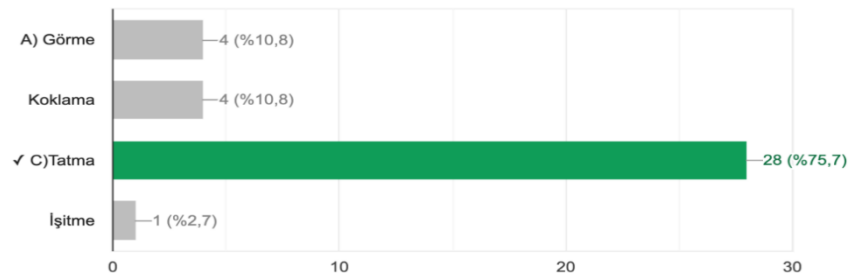


Figure 1.10. Tenth Question and Results

For the tenth question, 75% of the students selected the correct option, while 25% selected an incorrect option. Thus, more than half of the students answered the question correctly.

Dil Nasıl Öğrenilir?Önce. sizinle konuşan ve size dili öğreten anneden, nineden,çevreden... Sonrada kitaplardan...Eskiden İstanbul çarşı ve pazarların d... Bu Parçadan Aşağıdakilerin Hangisi Çıkarılamaz?
30 / 37 doğru yanıt

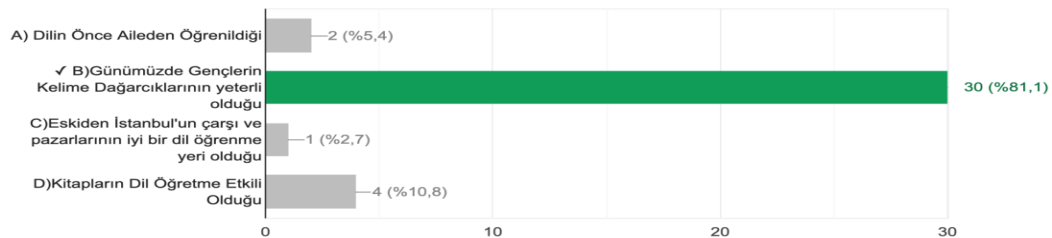


Figure 1.11. Eleventh Question and Results

For the eleventh question, 81% of the students identified the correct answer, while 19% selected an incorrect option. Approximately 80% of the students answered this question successfully.

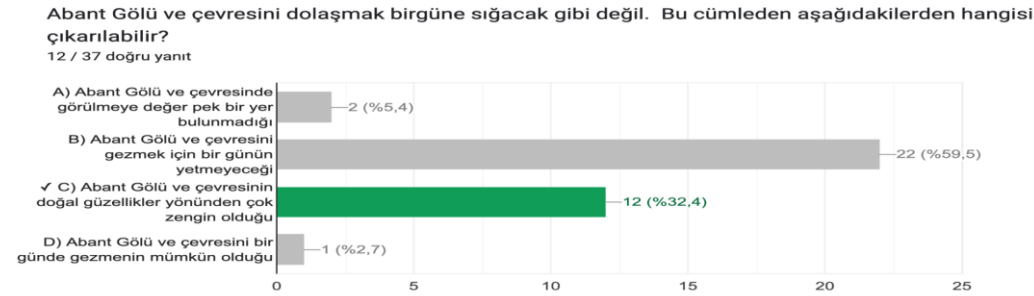


Figure 1.12. Twelfth Question and Results

For the twelfth question, 32% of the students answered correctly, whereas 58% answered incorrectly. The relatively high rate of incorrect responses suggests that the topic addressed in this question was not sufficiently understood.

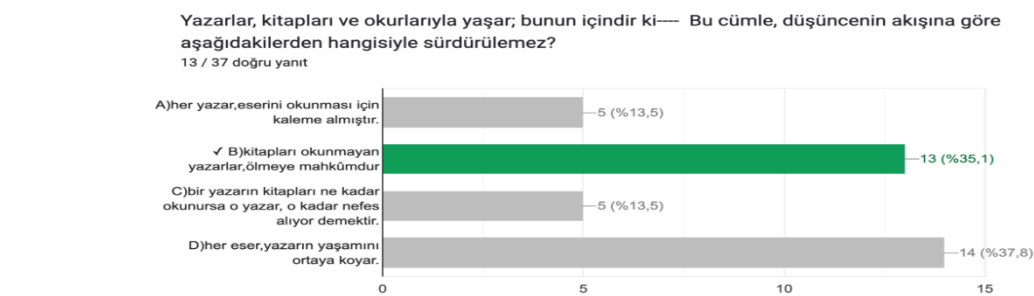
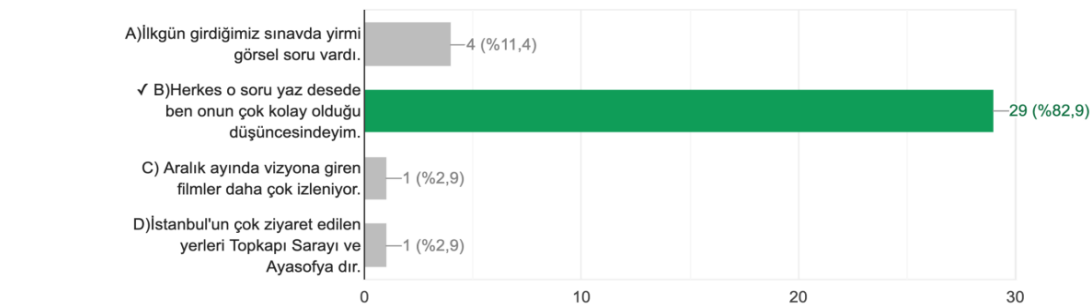


Figure 1.13. Thirteenth Question and Results

Aşağıdaki cümlelerin hangisinde kişisel düşünceler ifade edilmiştir?
29 / 35 doğru yanıt



For the thirteenth question, 82% of the students identified the correct answer, while 18% were unable to do so. The proportion of correct responses was therefore in the 80% range.

Figure 1.14. Fourteenth Question and Results

For the fourteenth question, 35% of the students provided the correct answer, while 65% selected an incorrect option. This result indicates that the subject matter had not been adequately learned.

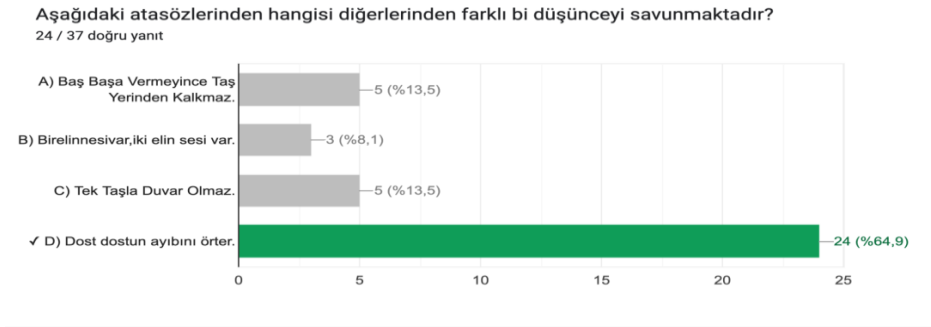


Figure 1.15. Fifteenth Question and Results

For the fifteenth question, 64% of the students selected the correct answer, while 36% provided incorrect responses. Since more than half of the students answered correctly, the findings suggest that the topic was understood by a majority of the students.

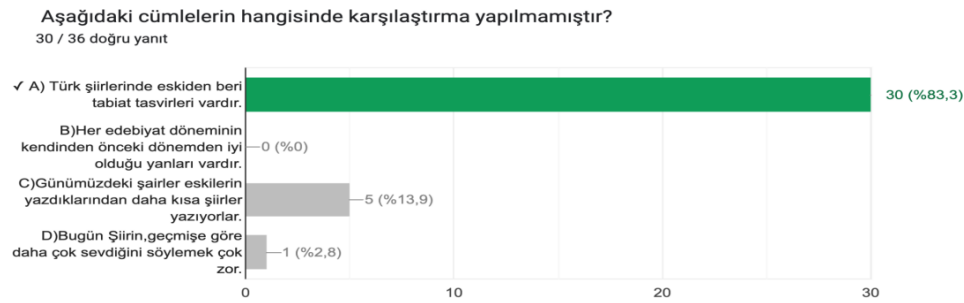


Figure 1.16. Sixteenth Question and Results

For the sixteenth question, 83% of the students answered correctly, while 27% selected an incorrect answer. The results indicate that the topic addressed in this question was generally well learned, with a success rate in the 80% range.

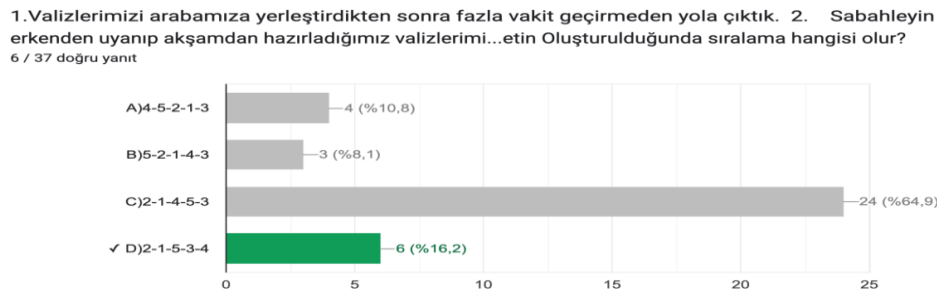
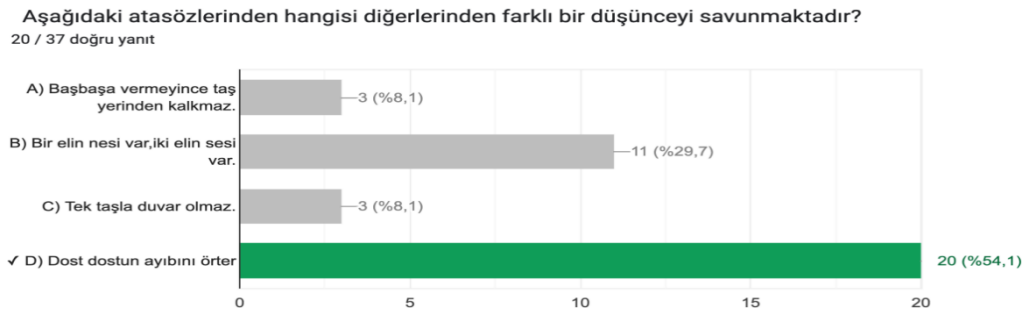


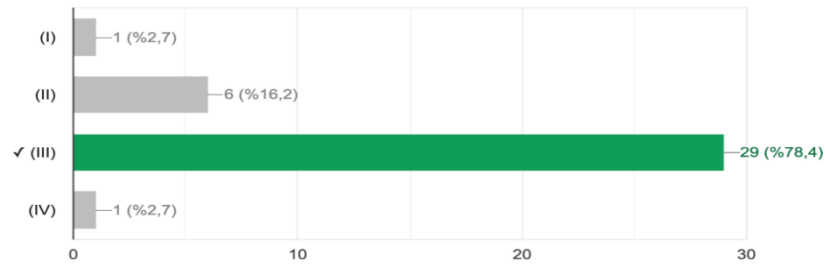
Figure 1.17. Seventeenth Question and Results



For the seventeenth question, only 16% of the students were able to identify the correct answer, whereas the remaining 84% were unable to answer correctly. The very low percentage of correct responses indicates a low level of achievement in this area.

Figure 1.18. Eighteenth Question and Results

(I) Günün ağarmasına daha birkaç saat var. Büyükdere sahiline demirleyen Poyraz'ın sade güverte ışığı yanıyor. (II) Etrafta kimsecikler yok, martılar ...mlerden hangisi düşüncenin akışını bozmaktadır?
29 / 37 doğru yanıt



For the eighteenth question, 54% of the students selected the option containing the correct answer, while the remaining 46% selected incorrect options. The success rate can therefore be considered moderate.

Figure 1.19. Nineteenth Question and Results

For the nineteenth question, the majority of the students (78%) answered correctly, while approximately one-fifth (22%) answered incorrectly. The high percentage of correct responses indicates a strong level of achievement.

Ayşe : Kendini nasıl hissediyorsun? Selma : Kendimi kötü hissediyorum. Ayşe : Neyin var? Selma : Bütün vücudum ağrıyor. Ayşe : -----...: Sağ ol. Diyalogdaki boşluğa hangisi getirilmelidir?
34 / 37 doğru yanıt

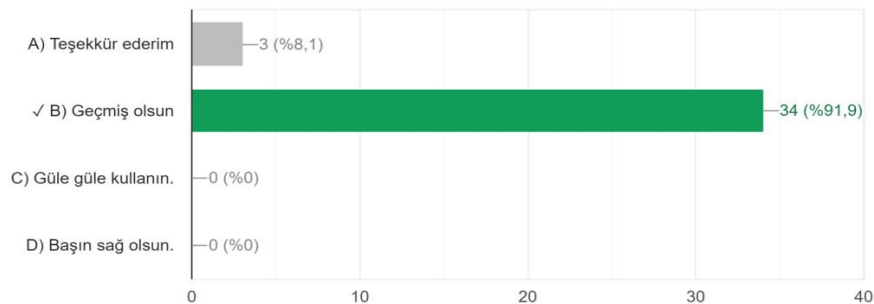


Figure 1.20. Twentieth Question and Results

For the twentieth question, 91% of the students answered correctly, while 9% selected an incorrect

option. With a success rate close to 100%, this result indicates that the topic was very well learned.

Reading comprehension plays an important role in language teaching. In the present study, students' performance before and after writing a story was examined. The percentages of students who answered the questions correctly are presented in the corresponding tables and figures.

Understanding a written text is often more complex than understanding spoken language because, in a written text, the reader must first decode the written form and identify and resolve the key points within the text. "When students read a text independently, they require the teacher's assistance and guidance, particularly with regard to what they should pay

attention to and how they should distinguish between important and unimportant aspects" (Koşar, 2001, p. 87).

"In informative texts, the language used does not generally possess an emotional or connotative character. Therefore, there is little semantic ambiguity. The information obtained from such texts can be directly transferred to practical life. Such texts convey essentially the same information to readers at the same level of proficiency in terms of reading comprehension. Generally, they do not have a structure that is open to substantially different interpretations; however, the validity or accuracy of the ideas presented can be debated" (Özdemir, 1998, pp. 30–31; Akbayır, 2006, p. 269).

Analysis of the Reading Comprehension Test

In reading instruction programs, "objectives should also include enabling students, according to their level of performance, to draw conclusions from a text, interpret the ideas presented in the text, and make interpretations by relating the information in the text to their own experiences. In other words, in addition to objectives at the knowledge and comprehension

levels, objectives and practices at the application, analysis, and synthesis levels should also be included" (Özmen, 2001, pp. 26–27).

"Multiple-choice tests are among the most commonly used assessment and evaluation tools for assessing language skills" (Kayarkaya, 2018, p. 45; Boylu, 2019, p. 112). However, using multiple-choice questions either exclusively or predominantly in foreign language teaching may lead to certain limitations. Since the language learner does not generate the answer independently in multiple-choice tests, there is little opportunity for productive language use. This may, in turn, restrict the development and application of language skills. There is no inherent problem with using certain multiple-choice items to assess reading or listening skills; however, relying predominantly on such test items may limit learners' productive abilities.

Against this background, this section presents an analysis of the practice reading comprehension tests administered before and after the projects carried out as part of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities. The results of the reading comprehension tests are presented and evaluated in the table below.

Tablo 1.5. Analysis of the Reading Comprehension Test

Student Code	1.Exam	2.Exam
K1	70 / 100	60
K2	65 / 100	65
K3	75 / 100	70
K4	40 / 100	80 / 100
K5	50 / 100	60 / 100
K6	75 / 100	75 / 100
K7	55 / 100	60 / 100
K8	35 / 100	85 100
K9	95 / 100	75 / 100

K10	75 / 100	75 100
K11	70 / 100	65 / 100
K12	95 / 100	80 / 100
K13	95 / 100	80 / 100
K14	75 / 100	70 / 100
K15	60 / 100	65 / 100
K16	80 / 100	80 / 100
K17	70 / 100	80 / 100
K18	70 / 100	85 100
K19	75 / 100	80 100
K20	70 / 100	70 100
K21	30 / 100	85
K22	60 / 100	70
K23	50 / 100	70
K24	70 / 100	75
K25	60 / 100	80
K26	70 / 100	80
K27	90 / 100	75 / 100
K28	85 / 100	80
K29	55 / 100	70
K30	50 / 100	75
K31	45 / 100	65
K32	5 / 100	85
K33	85 / 100	90 / 100

K34	20 / 100	90 / 100
K35	40 / 100	70 / 100
K36	65 / 100	40 / 100
K37	40 / 100	80 / 100
Ortalama	63 / 100	73,2813

Here is the section translated and professionally edited for an academic publication, with the terminology aligned with the previous sections.

When the mean scores of the first and second reading comprehension tests are compared, a positive difference of approximately 10% in favor of the second test is observed. This finding indicates that having students read and write stories contributed positively to their reading comprehension skills. A decrease in scores between the first and second tests was observed among some students. This may be attributed to the fact that certain grammar topics were not addressed in the test. In order to develop a multidimensional assessment instrument, questions covering different types and subject areas were included. This approach is considered beneficial because, when assessing any particular skill, employing a variety of assessment and evaluation techniques appropriate to the intended objective can provide a more comprehensive evaluation. As part of the process, students first completed a project and subsequently engaged in story writing.

Conclusion

As a result of the reading comprehension tests and Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities implemented in this study, a notable overall improvement was skills.

observed in students' reading comprehension skills. A comparison of the mean scores of the first and second tests revealed that the mean score on the second test increased by approximately 10%, rising from 63 to 73.28. This finding demonstrates that the process supported by story-reading and story-writing activities significantly improved students' abilities to comprehend, interpret, and draw conclusions from texts. This improvement may be attributed particularly to students' active participation in the learning process through direct engagement with texts. Story-writing activities not only enhanced students' ability to comprehend texts but also contributed to the development of their creativity, language-use skills, and critical thinking abilities. However, the decline in achievement scores observed among some students may have resulted from the inclusion of questions assessing different levels of grammatical knowledge and interpretation in the assessment instrument. In conclusion, project-based story-reading and story-writing activities contributed positively to students' reading comprehension skills and emerged as an effective instructional method in line with the objectives of the course. Future studies involving similar activities with learners at different proficiency levels and across various text types may further contribute to the holistic development of students' language

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