A Phenomenological Study on the Difficulties of Ukrainian Immigrants in Learning Languages

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Abstract

Individuals or groups are forcibly displaced due to economic problems, wars, terrorism, political conflicts, and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or religion. War-induced migration often leads to movement towards neighboring countries, creating challenges for host nations like housing, healthcare, basic needs, and education. Similarly, the Russia-Ukraine War, starting in 2022, led many Ukrainians to migrate to Türkiye and required them to learn Turkish, along with their efforts to work and continue their education in Türkiye. This study aims to identify Ukrainian students' challenges when learning Turkish and Turkish instructors' experiences and problems when teaching Turkish to these students, which offers solutions to the language learning/teaching process. Hence, to deeply understand Ukrainian students' and Turkish instructors' experiences, we adopted a phenomenological study and gathered the data through focus group discussions with students (n=8) and instructors (n=5). Utilizing the content analysis, the study revealed that Ukrainian students learn Turkish to settle in Turkey, continue their education, and find employment. Notably, both students and instructors indicated difficulties in productive skills due to the lack of practice. Students also find learning Turkish challenging because it belongs to a family of different languages with different alphabets. The study suggested activities to develop students' language skills.

Keywords: Ukrainian migrants, teaching Turkish to foreigners, language learning difficulties, phenomenological study, foreign students

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Introduction

War, one of the significant mass problems, not only affects the country and its citizens in which it occurs but also impacts neighboring countries and their citizens in various ways. War forces the country's citizens to migrate, and these migrating individuals settle in different countries as immigrants. Türkiye is one of the foremost destinations for those immigrants as it is geographically a neighbor of many countries. The economic, political, and social changes in those countries hosting diverse cultures closely concern Türkiye. Located in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, Türkiye holds a significant position as the main gateway to Europe within international migration regimes and as a departure point for migrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Considering the recent events, political changes and civil wars in nearby countries have led to mass migrations towards Türkiye, and refugees and migrants from different countries have sought refuge in Türkiye.

Recently, Türkiye has been hosting many refugees and migrants from different countries affected by various wars. The Syrian Civil War since 2011 has impacted millions of people and led to a significant influx of refugees into Turkey. Syrians have sought refuge in Türkiye to ensure their safety when leaving their country. Refugees fleeing the civil wars, conflicts, and political instability in Iraq and Afghanistan have also come to Turkey, and it has been going on. Türkiye has also opened its doors to individuals affected by various regional conflicts in Southeastern Europe. Most recently, the Russia-Ukraine War, which has been ongoing since 2022, has caused people to leave their countries to ensure their safety. Türkiye provides international protection to those people fleeing war and conflict. It has offered temporary shelter and aid services to war victims.

The resettlement of refugees and migrants in different regions of Türkiye and their coexistence with the local population has aroused various problems after meeting the basic needs of refugees who came to Türkiye for various reasons. Education stands out as a primary concern among other problems in areas such as economy, health, social integration, and education. For different cultures to live together harmoniously, there should be no communication barriers, and a common language is a must to facilitate understanding and recognition of different cultures. Knowledge of Turkish culture is vital for the integration of both the refugees settling in the country and the local citizens. Learning the language as a means of culture also facilitates understanding and harmony among people from different cultural backgrounds.

Education plays a fundamental role in the social integration of migrant and refugee communities (UNESCO, 2019). Although areas such as economy, health, and social cohesion are also important, education is a primary need in both the short and long term, as it enables individuals to express themselves, exercise their rights, become productive members of society, and build the future of their children (Cummins, 2000). Individuals who do not speak the language face significant obstacles in accessing healthcare services and social assistance; however, overcoming these barriers requires, above all, education—particularly language education (Krashen, 1982). For this reason, education distinguishes itself from other domains and emerges as an overarching priority.

In recent years, Türkiye has received a substantial number of migrants and refugees from different countries, including Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine (İçduygu & Millet, 2016). These individuals generally settle in Türkiye without prior knowledge of Turkish. Those who do not speak Turkish encounter difficulties participating in educational processes, accessing public services, and engaging in social life (Aydın & Kaya, 2017). In particular, children experience serious challenges in adapting to school. Therefore, teaching Turkish is of critical importance for ensuring social integration, enabling individuals to independently meet their basic needs, and establishing a common language of communication (Şeker & Sirkeci, 2015).

School-age children who do not speak the language are unable to participate in lessons, experience feelings of failure, and eventually lose interest in attending school (Kaya, 2020). Families also face considerable difficulties in understanding official procedures, accessing healthcare services, and following their children's educational progress (Erdoğan, 2019). The inability to communicate with the local population leads to the social isolation of foreign students, which in turn exacerbates prejudice and social tensions (OECD, 2015). Additionally, teachers experience challenges in classroom management due to language barriers and require greater support in planning the teaching process (Demirtaş & Sertkaya, 2016).

Teaching Turkish facilitates the exercise of the right to education and reduces communication problems. Migrant children who learn the language are able to participate actively in school, increase their motivation for success, and develop a sense of belonging within society (Cummins, 2001). Furthermore, when parents acquire basic

Turkish language skills, it becomes easier for them to benefit from healthcare, legal, and social support services (Aydın, 2019). For these reasons, teaching Turkish constitutes a strategic tool for both individual well-being and social harmony.

As the refugees coming to Türkiye do not speak Turkish, teaching Turkish to foreigners has become crucial during this process, so these people have sought to learn Turkish through their own means or the educational opportunities the Turkish government provides. In Türkiye, Turkish language instruction for foreigners is conducted through various institutions and programs. Many universities in Turkey have established language centers or Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (TÖMER) for this purpose. These centers offer courses at various levels, and institutions such as the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) also organize Turkish language courses for foreigners. They are typically state-supported courses designed for foreigners officially residing or working in Türkiye. Additionally, private language courses are available throughout Türkiye. Commercial enterprises usually run these private courses, offering Turkish instruction at different levels. Recently, teaching Turkish through online platforms has also become widespread. These platforms, reaching students worldwide, provide interactive and flexible language instruction. Some cultural centers and associations in Türkiye also organize courses to teach Turkish to foreigners. These courses are often supported by cultural activities and provide information about Turkish culture. The various options for teaching Turkish to foreigners in Türkiye address different needs and student profiles. As a result, foreigners coming to Türkiye can benefit from multiple resources to meet their language learning needs and facilitate better communication in the country.

Learning Turkish is considered an essential part of the integration process for refugees or migrants who come to Türkiye for various reasons. The reasons for foreigners to learn Turkish can vary according to their preferences, living conditions, and needs in Türkiye. However, for migrants who want to work or are looking for a job in Türkiye, speaking Turkish might offer a significant advantage in finding employment and pursuing a career (Sofiienko, 2019, p. 45). In addition, speaking Turkish allows migrants to benefit more effectively from educational opportunities, especially in the schooling and educational processes of children. Learning the language can also help migrants better understand Turkish culture and society and feel more comfortable in social interactions. Some migrants plan to live in Türkiye long-term or establish a permanent life. In this context, speaking Turkish is critical for understanding local life better and facilitating daily activities.

It is apparent that foreigners, especially those coming to Türkiye due to war or various other reasons, face problems both while learning Turkish and in social life. Turkish, with a structure and grammatical rules different from the languages spoken by foreigners, might be complex for learners. Understanding the various suffixes and phonetic changes in Turkish can be particularly challenging (Karadavut, 2020; Khomeniuk, 2020). Pronunciation is one of the main aspects of speaking, which is a key language skill, and some sounds in Turkish can be difficult for foreigners to pronounce. In particular, pronouncing vowels and consonants correctly requires specific attention (Açık & Takıl, 2019; Kanat, 2022).

Furthermore, Turkish contains many words from different language families, which can make it difficult for foreigners to understand the meanings of some vocabulary or to use them correctly in context (Derman, 2010; Moralı, 2018). The language learning process also involves becoming familiar with the cultural context in which the language is used. Foreigners living in Türkiye may struggle to understand Turkish culture and traditions while learning the language.

Communicating without sufficiently learning or understanding the language can negatively impact daily life and the ability to interact effectively (Demirci, 2015, p. 339). In addition, some language teaching programs or courses may not fully meet the needs of foreign language learners (Ünlü, 2011; Güven & Özbilen, 2020). The adequacy of teaching methods and materials is an important factor in successful language learning. Moreover, the lack of sufficient training and expertise among teachers or instructors may be another problem encountered by learners (Doğan, 2019).

Recently, an interest in learning Turkish has increased both abroad and within Türkiye. Understanding the problems faced by foreigners who want to learn Turkish for various reasons might offer significant benefits both on an individual and societal level. These benefits might include opportunities for foreigners and newcomers to participate actively and effectively within society by facilitating their integration into Türkiye. This study is important as it identifies the problems faced by Ukrainian individuals who came to Turkey due to the war while learning Turkish and adapting to the regions and cultures in which they have settled. It also contributes to the knowledge base by providing suggestions. The findings obtained from the opinions of Ukrainian students and the instructors teaching them Turkish are expected to contribute to the field. This study investigates the challenges

foreigners encounter while learning Turkish in Türkiye, specifically within the context of Ukrainian students who came to Türkiye due to the war. Furthermore, the views of the instructors teaching Turkish to these students have also been utilized to understand the challenges deeply. Both learners and instructors as data sources provide a comprehensive perspective, and no studies have been conducted on Ukrainian students learning Turkish in the knowledge base. Hence, identifying problems and solutions in the Turkish learning/teaching process underlines the importance of this study. The main objective of this study is to identify the difficulties encountered by Ukrainian students who have come to Türkiye due to the war during the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language and to reveal their experiences; furthermore, it aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language by thoroughly examining the experiences gained by Turkish language instructors throughout the instructional process.Within this context, the study questions have been raised as follows:

- What are the purposes of Ukrainian students in Türkiye for learning Turkish?
- What problems do Ukrainian students encounter in Türkiye while learning Turkish as a foreign language?
- What problems do instructors face in Türkiye while teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
- What do learners and instructors of Turkish as a foreign language suggest for the language learning/development process?

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological design which focuses on understanding the meaning and content of experienced events (Creswell, 2021, p. 79). Researchers in this design aim to explore the fundamental structures and meaning of these experiences based on the direct experiences of the participants or subjects. The phenomenological design is typically carried out through in-depth and structured interviews, in which participants are asked to describe their specific experiences in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 97). Researchers strive to uncover participants' inner worlds and experiences to understand their lives better. The phenomenological design adopted in this study is directly aligned with the primary objective of the research. As the study aims to identify and understand the difficulties encountered by Ukrainian students learning Turkish as a foreign language and to uncover their lived experiences, a phenomenological approach provides the most appropriate framework to capture the essence and meaning of these experiences from the participants' own perspectives. This design enables the researcher to deeply explore how students perceive, interpret, and make sense of the challenges they face during the language learning process. Similarly, the phenomenological approach is also suitable for examining the experiences of Turkish language instructors who teach Turkish to these students. By conducting in-depth interviews, the study can systematically reveal the instructors' insights, observations, and reflections regarding the teaching process. Thus, phenomenology allows for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of both learners' and teachers' perspectives, which is essential for developing an in-depth picture of the teaching and learning of Turkish as a foreign language in this specific context. In this way, the chosen research method and the objectives of the study are closely interconnected, as the phenomenological design makes it possible to access rich, detailed, and subjective data that directly correspond to the core purpose of the research.

Participant

In a phenomenological design, the participants should be selected from individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon or experience that is the focus of the research as the experiences of the participants are vital. The participants should represent relevant information and rich experiences to answer the research question for a deep understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Adopting this criterion for selection of the participation, a location was chosen where there is a high concentration of Ukrainian refugees in Türkiye. Within this location, specifically TÖMER students and the instructors teaching them Turkish at this institution were chosen. Accordingly, the participants included eight Ukrainian students with at least a B1 level of Turkish who came to Turkey due to the war and five instructors teaching these students Turkish. Since the interviews were managed in Turkish, it was ensured that the students had a certain level of proficiency in Turkish, and the researchers tried their best to reveal their experiences. In a nutshell, the criterion sampling method was utilized in the participant selection by applying the predetermined criteria. Table 1 presents the profile of the students, and Table 2 displays the profile of the instructors:

Table 1. The profile of the students

Students	Gender	Age	Language Level
S1	Female	20	C1
S2	Female	26	B2
S3	Female	19	C1
S4	Female	18	B1

S5	Female	18	B1
S6	Female	39	B1
S7	Female	20	B1
S8	Female	21	B1

Table 2. The profile of the instructors

Instructors	Gender	Status	Language Level They Offer
I1	Male	P.H.D Instructor	A1, B1
I2	Male	Instructor	A1-C1
I3	Female	Instructor	B2
I4	Male	Instructor	A1-C1
I5	Male	Instructor	A1-C1- Turkish For Academic Purpose

Moreover, the instructors participating in the study had experience delivering different levels of language, which was purposefully adopted to examine their experiences deeply.

Data Collection
The necessary ethical approval to conduct interviews with Ukrainian students and Turkish instructors for data collection was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Fırat University Rectorate (dated 10.01.2023 / document number 13626 / 28). The semi-structured interview protocol used in the study was prepared by the researchers, considering the studies in the knowledge base, and expert opinions were obtained (n=3). [2]Based on the expert opinions making necessary modifications, the final version of the protocol was created. Accordingly, the protocol consisting of three parts was applied to both students and instructors. The first part included questions to determine the participants' background information and their purposes for learning Turkish. The second part contained questions identifying the problems experienced by the students and instructors during the Turkish learning/teaching process. The last part included questions to reveal suggestions for the Turkish learning/teaching process. After obtaining the participants' consent through the consent form, focus group interviews were conducted.

Focus group interviews facilitate richer and more diverse data collection through participant interactions and discussions, allowing individuals to build upon each other's ideas. This method is ideal for exploring shared experiences and uncovering new perspectives, especially when aiming to deeply understand the social and cultural perceptions of groups such as migrants and refugees. Focus groups provide a broader perspective compared to individual interviews by capturing collective meanings and social dynamics. Therefore, focus group interviews were chosen in this study as they allow for the collection of rich data combining both individual experiences and group dynamics, contributing to a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the process of learning and teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

Ethical Approval
All data collection and storage procedures were approved by the Board of Fırat University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (decision numbered 2023-1, date 05.01.2023)

Data Analysis
In a phenomenological study, data analysis involves an in-depth examination and interpretation of participants' statements, so researchers continuously analyze the data set to identify common themes, structures, and meanings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The data obtained from the study were analyzed using content analysis, which includes four steps: coding the data, identifying codes, categories, and themes, organizing codes, categories, and themes, and describing and interpreting the findings (Eysenbach & Köhler, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the study, codes were supported with direct quotations and assigning codes for students (S1, S2, ...) and instructors (I1, I2, I3...). Additionally, the frequency of the identified sub-themes was calculated to provide a quantitative dimension to the analysis, allowing for a clearer understanding of the prevalence and significance of each theme.

Findings
The data mainly indicated the purpose of learning Turkish, challenges in learning and teaching Turkish as a foreign language, the suggestions, and solutions offered by the participants.

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[2] This indicates that opinions were obtained from three experts.

1.   Purposes of Ukrainian Students for Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language

Since the participant students' purposes in learning Turkish vary, different frequency distributions of sub-themes were obtained (Table 3).

Tablo 3 The purposes of Ukrainian students for learning Turkish as a foreign language

Theme	Sub-theme	f
The Purpose of Learning Turkish	To settle in Türkiye (temporarily)	6
	For education in Türkiye	3
	To work in Türkiye	5
	To get a job	2
	To learn Turkish culture	3
	To make friends and to communicate with Turkish people/communication	4

Since Ukrainian students sought refuge in Türkiye following the onset of the Russia-Ukraine War, their primary purpose for learning Turkish as a foreign language is to settle in Türkiye temporarily. They aim to find jobs and work in Türkiye, continue their education interrupted by the war, adapt to the places they have settled in, understand Turkish culture, and live harmoniously by communicating with them. Some quotes display these themes: "I think I will settle in Türkiye and get a job. (S1). I am planning to get a job in Türkiye, so I need to learn the Turkish language. (S2)."

Why do I learn Turkish? First of all, I need to complete my education. Another reason is that it will be beneficial since I study International Relations at university, I think. I have decided to learn Turkish as I am curious about Turkish culture and want to understand it better. Consequently, speaking a foreign language is beneficial in many ways. For example, it gives you a broader perspective on life, helps you make friends from different countries, and adds an edge to your professional life. After completing my education in Türkiye, I want to pursue my career in my field. In my major, speaking different languages is very helpful. For example, it makes it easier to read academic articles and research in that language. We will be able to understand the country's history better, and I believe I can contribute to the relationship between my country and Türkiye. (S3).

"Since the beginning of the war, we have temporarily moved here. Speaking another foreign language will not hurt. Alternatively, I want to become a translator during Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, or after finishing my undergraduate studies in Ukraine, I would like to do a master's at a university in Türkiye or join an exchange program. (S4). I am learning Turkish because I started to live here after the war. I hope I can live in Türkiye until the war ends. I want to speak Turkish and understand Turkish. (S7)."

2.   The Challenges in Learning Language Skills Ukrainian Students Encounter When Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language in Türkiye

The challenges Ukrainian students have mentioned were categorized as the challenges related to language skills and other challenges. Accordingly, Table 4 displays the challenges that the students have experienced when learning language skills. While some students have difficulty in all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), some have one or few skill problems.

Table 4 The Challenges in Learning Language Skills That Ukrainian Students Encounter

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Language Skills	**Listening**	Difficulty in comprehension because of fast speech	5
		Comprehension problems due to dialect usage	1
	Speaking	Lack of practice	8
		Pronunciation mistakes	3
	Reading	Less reading practice	1
		Comprehension problems in reading academic texts	3
		No comprehension at first glance	3
		Complex terms	2
		Lack of vocabulary knowledge	3
		Polysemy	2
	Writing	Mistakes due to differences in language structures and grammar	1
		Syntactic differences between languages	1
		Use of a different alphabet	4

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According to Table 4, Ukrainian students face comprehension difficulties while listening due to fast speech and the use of dialects by the speakers. Regarding speaking skills, they mentioned that they cannot practice and have difficulties, particularly, pronouncing certain sounds and words. Reading is the skill where they suffer various difficulties among the basic language skills. The codes reveal that they struggle with reading and understanding academic texts, text is not comprehensible at first glance, they have insufficient vocabulary, and they confuse terms and polysemous words. Some views related to this theme: "I make some mistakes while speaking. I think I need to read and speak more to improve my Turkish language skills (S1). Reading might be challenging sometime, but I manage to do it. Sometimes I have difficulty in writing because the language, sounds, and sentence structures are totally different (S2). Generally, I do not have difficulty, but because of some people's fast speech and use of dialect, I sometimes struggle in understanding. I do not usually have difficulty in speaking. However, some terms might be problematic to understand when speaking in an academic context. I do not also have trouble in reading, but I may not know the meanings of some words while reading academic texts, so, I can need to apply a dictionary (S3). When hearing a familiar word, I can remember its meaning, but as I struggle to remember the meaning of the word, the text I am listening to keeps playing. At last, I can understand the main idea of the conversation (S4). Yes, speaking is hard for me. I do not have many Turkish friends; I can only practice the language at class (S7). On the other hand, the other challenges apart from language skills revealed sub-themes on individual, economy, social and cultural life, and educational sources, which is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Other Challenges Ukranian Students Encounter

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	f
Other Challenges	Individual	Difficulty due to multilingualism Slow comprehension	1
			1
	Economic	X	
	Social/Cultural	Lack of friends speaking Turkish	4
	Education (institutions, materials, instructor, etc.)	Instructors who do not speak English and Russian	3
		Inadequacy of educational materials	3

Ukrainian students learning Turkish do not face economic problems, and their standard of living is relatively high despite coming from a war-torn country, which is considerable. On an individual level, they experience challenges due to their knowledge of multiple languages, which leads them to mix up language features. In a new place with a lack of friends who speak Turkish to practice, they experience some challenges. Generally, they are satisfied with the Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (TÖMER) and their Turkish instructors. However, the instructors' lack of knowledge in other languages (Russian and English) sometimes hinders communication. Some students have mentioned that some reading materials are not appropriate for their language level, which affects their motivation negatively. The following quotes illustrate these findings: "As I can speak more than two languages, I compare their structures, and it leads to some confusion for me. (S2). I understand some topics slowly, and there are many differences between the language I am trying to learn and the one I can speak. The instructors try to teach us and explain everything clearly. However, since they cannot speak English, I have difficulty in communicating with them. (S4). I can only practice my speaking skills in class. (S5). I have few friends who can speak Turkish, so I do not have the opportunity to practice. I really love TÖMER and enjoy the books, but I would not say I like some materials offering activities with many synonyms. It is hard for a beginner to recall all these vocabularies. For instance, journey, travel, trip (A1). I am also satisfied with the instructors. (S7). Some texts in the coursebooks are tough and do not motivate us to learn the language. On the contrary, we lose our passion and motivation to learn Turkish when admitting its difficulty… (S4). The instructors really did their best to teach Turkish and they are helpful. Some even treated us not as students but as their friends and contributed to our language development. (S1).

3. The Suggestion Ukrainian Students Offer to Learn Turkish as a Foreign Language in Türkiye

Table 6 The Suggestions for Learning Turkish

Theme	Sub-theme	code	f
Suggestions	activity	Extensive reading	5
		Speaking practice	8
		Watching series, animation/ TV programs in Turkish	7
		Listening to Turkish songs	
			2
	Material	TV / Turkish series	7
		cartoons	5
		children books	3

		vocabulary notebook	2
	application	Social media platforms	4
		Translation websites	3
		Duolingo	2

Ukrainian students have offered suggestions on how to learn and improve Turkish. They have emphasized the importance of practicing speaking as much as possible and improving their comprehension through extensive reading. They have also mentioned that they can improve the newly learned vocabulary by watching Turkish TV series, programs, and cartoons and listening to Turkish music. Additionally, they have suggested using social media platforms, translation websites, and the Duolingo application for learning and improving their Turkish language skills.

4.   The Challenges Encountered by Instructors Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Ukrainian Students in Türkiye

The challenges related to language skills encountered by the instructors are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Challenges Encountered by Instructors Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

Theme	Alt Tema	Kod	f
Challenges Related to Four Skills	**Listening**	Comprehension problems due to fast speech	2
	Speaking	Slow improvement	4
		Lack of practice	4
		Use of mother tongue	3
	Reading	Lack of vocabulary knowledge	2
	Writing	Slow improvement	5
		Syntactic differences between languages	3
		Grammatical Differences	2
		Alphabet	2

Table 7 shows that the problems that the students face most are related to receptive skills (listening and reading) according to the instructors. The students tend to use their mother tongue in daily life instead of the target language, which leads to slow progress in speaking Turkish due to a lack of practice. Additionally, differences in structure and syntax between their mother tongue and Turkish, as well as differences in the alphabet, cause slow progress in writing skills. Other problems that the instructors witness include the students' difficulty in understanding fast speech and their lack of vocabulary, which are also linked to a lack of practice. The quotes below illustrate these findings:

Sometimes I encounter difficulties in teaching speaking and writing skills depending on the readiness of the class. The development of speaking and writing skills can be slow due to various linguistic, cultural, and other challenges that students face in language learning. So, we can experience various problems in teaching. I believe that expanding orientation activities for students and creating classes tailored to their levels will reduce these problems. Due to Ukrainian belonging to the Slavic language family, I think students struggle with sentence structure while learning Turkish. Additionally, I guess their speaking skills develop slower because of a lack of practice. Apart from these, the challenges they face can be considered general language learning problems. (I1).

"Generally, students criticize Turkish grammar's agglutinative structure and alphabet (I2). I see that Ukrainian students have difficulty in writing and speaking most compared to other skills. Speaking and writing skills complement each other, and because they experience general knowledge about B2 level topics in their mother tongue, they may find it a bit more difficult to speak and write about things that they do not have any idea. Another major problem could be the alphabet. (I3). In general, I see some problems with listening skills and, consequently, in speaking. I think the reason behind these problems is their use of mother tongue rather than the target language in their social life. They have limited opportunities to practice. Although they are encouraged to speak the target language outside of the class, it is not possible to monitor it. Therefore, students' speaking skills progression is slower compared to other skills. (I4). Their problems might be considered the common problems in language learning (I5).

The data also uncovered that the instructors have observed some other challenges that the students experience when learning Turkish. These challenges are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8 Other Challenges That Ukrainian Students Encounter

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code	f
Other Challenges	Individual	Marriage and cultural adjustment problems	1
	Economic	X	0
	Social/ Cultural	Lack of Turkish Friends	4
		Negative Attitude Towards Russian Friends	3
		A New Culture	2
		Language Learning Anxiety	5
	Education (institution, materials, instructor, etc.)	X	0

Table 8 shows that Ukrainian students have difficulty because of language learning anxiety, lack of Turkish friends, new cultural adjustment problems, negative attitude towards Russian people, marriage, and cultural adjustment problems of the ones married to Turkish people. It is considerable that Ukrainian students do not suffer economic and educational problems. "I see they do not have problems in general. However, some students demand to be in a different class when they share the class with students who are Russian citizens. This might be a consequence of the war as there was no such demand before. Also, I do not see any social and economic problems. (I1). They (Ukrainian students) sometimes can have trouble with Russian students. We try to deal with this situation by providing different example sentences. They do not have any trouble with us as instructors. They are disciplined and easy-going people in general (I2). My students are married to Turkish people here. They mention their difficulty in social adjustment to Turkish culture. They say they are not used to having many guests coming and going, so they find it hard to adapt to it. However, they find it normal. (I3). The students have, of course, social troubles as they have come here due to war. I observe problems such as trying to adapt to a new culture and learning a new language. (I4).

5. The Solutions Instructors Develop to Teach Turkish as a Foreign Language
Turkish instructors' solutions, which they have developed when observing students' difficulties, are presented in Table 9. The Suggestions to Teach Turkish

Theme	Sub-there	Code	f
suggestions	**Activity**	Speaking practice	5
		Using movies/series/animation/ TV programs in Turkish	3
		Using Turkish songs	2
		Organizing social events	4
		Teaching vocabulary	2
	Material	Turkish Teaching Sets	5
		TV / Turkish series	3
		cartoons	3
	Application	Social media platforms	4
		Duolingo	2
		Netflix	3

According to Table 9, the instructors have explained that they have implemented the same methods (using Turkish Teaching Sets) they apply to other students from other countries. The major problem they see is the lack of speaking practice. They have mentioned that they organize social activities both inside and outside the classroom to encourage students to practice. They also explained that they use Turkish movies/series/animations/programs where the language is used. They have noted that students prefer these activities most and provide positive feedback.

I plan to increase peer interaction by organizing social activities inside and outside the classroom. I encourage less active students to engage in classroom activities during these events. I believe that these activities help them to develop their communication with peers. Also, I think these activities will be beneficial for learning Turkish. Generally, I can say that they prefer Turkish TV series because it is an effective way to spend social time and find series helpful for learning Turkish. I also think they prefer listening to Turkish songs, so I recommend those as well. (I1).

We use all kinds of materials, methods, and applications. We follow any updates about them. My students also mention that they prefer the Turkish series for practice. I, of course, help them in their social relationships. I believe that developing a dialogue is one of the most important aspects of being a teacher. When this is achieved, the pace

of learning and teaching the language increases both inside and outside the classroom, and class activities and extracurricular events are the most effective ways to achieve it. (I2).

I suggest that students' readiness should be increased through preliminary preparation and vocabulary activities. My students mention that they practice by watching TV shows and series on Netflix and listening to songs by popular artists, and I also offer them such things. (I3).
There is no different implementation in teaching the language compared to the methods and techniques applied to other students. However, since some of the students come from a war zone, we avoid mentioning topics about war both in and out of class. Especially during breaks and after-class times, I try to talk to the students in Turkish about current topics to increase their readiness for social life. Students generally prefer the course materials. I think they need these materials, especially when reviewing what they have learned in class, particularly in the grammar sections. Additionally, audiovisual materials capture the students' attention more. (I4).

Conclusion, Discussion, and Implications

This study revealed the challenges of Ukrainian students, who came to Turkey due to the war, and the instructors who teach them Turkish through their perspectives and views. The problems other than language skills encountered by Ukrainian students were also identified. Uncovering the solutions and suggestions that both students and instructors have developed to overcome the problems in learning and teaching Turkish, this study is considered to contribute to the development and design of teaching Turkish as a foreign language program. The conclusions drawn from the findings are as follows:

The primary reasons Ukrainian individuals who came to Türkiye due to the war want to learn Turkish are to (temporarily) settle and to communicate with the people in Türkiye. They also aim to learn Turkish to understand Turkish culture, continue their education, pursue academic careers in Turkish universities, find jobs, and work in Türkiye. Learning the target language for communication and adaptation is necessary for individuals coming to a new country and culture. Additionally, learning the language is essential to meet their basic needs and maintain their social and cultural lives in the host country. Studies in the knowledge base also underline that learning the language of the new country is a necessity, especially for the ones who have been displaced due to war (Morali, 2018; Nurlu & Kutlu, 2015; Roucek, 1961; Bravo-Moreno, 2009). Also, some studies show similar findings with this study, such as Ukrainians learning Turkish for academic careers in Turkish universities or to find jobs and work in Türkiye (Sofiienko, 2019). Within this context, the popularity of Turkish TV series, political policies, and the rights given to immigrants and refugees in Türkiye have made Turkish an enticing language, which contributes to its recent rise as a language in demand across the globe.

The study reported that Ukrainian students suffer from similar challenges faced in teaching Turkish to foreigners. Both students and instructors have also noted the difficulties, particularly in the productive skills during language learning/teaching. Problems in speaking skills include pronunciation issues, lack of speaking practice, a preference for using the mother tongue instead of the target language, speaking anxiety, low motivation, and differences in syntax and sounds between the mother tongue and the target language. Additionally, the study displayed Ukrainian students' slow progression and their limited practice in improving speaking skills. Similarly, Göçer (2015) reveals such difficulties and the solutions to overcome them in his study. When considered particularly for the Ukraine context, these findings can be explained by the structural differences between the Slavic language family, to which the Ukrainian language belongs, and the Ural-Altaic language family, to which Turkish belongs, as well as differences in syntax features and certain sounds. Çarkıt and Korkutan (2023) also draw similar conclusions based on the views of both students and teachers in their study on students learning Turkish in Ukraine. Demirci (2015, p. 339) mentions that practicing the language can affect the ability to communicate effectively in daily life. On the other hand, students learning Turkish face the most difficulties in productive skills (Açık & Takıl, 2019; Biçer, Çoban, & Bakır, 2013; Kanat, 2022). Based on the recommendations by both students and instructors regarding all these difficulties, this study proposed such solutions: conducting practical activities inside and outside the classroom to increase motivation for speaking and writing, organizing social events to practice speaking, encouraging student participation in these activities, helping students make Turkish friends, recommending Turkish songs, films, and programs as exposure to the use of Turkish, and improving writing skills by gradually progressing from forming simple sentences to creating texts.

One of the challenges Ukrainian students encounter in learning Turkish is the difference in the alphabet. Ukrainian students familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet encounter difficulties, particularly in writing skills and other language skills, when they come across the Latin alphabet with different sounds and language features, which was also reported by other studies (Çarkıt & Korkutan, 2023; Karadavut, 2020; Khomeniuk, 2020; Sofiienko, 2019). This

problem can be resolved by thoroughly teaching the Latin alphabet and practically pronouncing the sounds. Introducing the Latin alphabet at the A1 level can address this problem before it affects higher levels.

Besides, the study revealed that Ukrainian students have difficulty in comprehension, indicating challenges in receptive skills because students note that they do not understand what they hear, especially due to the fast pace of speech. Additionally, the use of dialects causes comprehension problems as students cannot understand what the speaker (sender) is saying. In reading skills, students struggle to understand because of limited vocabulary, inability to comprehend the text at first glance, difficulty understanding complex texts, confusion with terms in academic readings, and slow reading. Çarkıt and Korkutan (2023) also report similar findings in their studies. A limited vocabulary inevitably causes difficulties for students in both listening and reading. Also, lack of vocabulary awareness and insufficient vocabulary are the main factors in the inability to comprehend texts and slow reading, which Derman (2010) and Kaya (2018) address in their studies. Similarly, Savaş (2015) notes the challenges foreigners face in reading and pronunciation, highlighting such difficulties. To improve listening and reading skills, appropriate listening materials and reading texts should be prepared according to the students' levels. Students can be encouraged to use dictionaries, and vocabulary exercises can be conducted. Teaching vocabulary through games, drama, digital platforms, etc., can also be beneficial. Applications and platforms like Duolingo and Netflix can be utilized. Since receptive and production skills are complementary language skills, the development of one skill will affect the other.

In addition to the challenges related to the four language skills Ukrainian students face, this study has also aimed to identify whether they encounter individual, sociocultural, economic, or educational challenges (institutions, materials used, instructors, etc.). It is considerable that Ukrainian students learning Turkish do not face economic problems, and their standard of living is relatively high despite coming from a war-torn country. At the student level, they face challenges due to mixing the characteristics of the different languages they speak. The lack of friends who speak Turkish in their new home, which they need for practicing the new language, has made things difficult for them. Generally, they are satisfied with the Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (TÖMER), where they learn Turkish, and with the instructors. However, the fact that instructors do not speak different languages sometimes leads to communication problems with students. Additionally, some students point out that some reading materials are not appropriate for their level, which causes them to lose motivation.

On the other hand, instructors note that Ukrainian students who have come to a different country due to the war experience anxiety about learning a new language, have few Turkish friends, and face difficulties in adapting to a new culture. They also tend to develop negative attitudes towards their Russian classmates and encounter cultural challenges, particularly among those who are married to Turkish people. It is also surprising that Ukrainian students do not face any economic and educational problems. From the perspectives of both students and instructors, it is concluded that students have difficulty because of lack of practice due to not having enough Turkish friends, do not face economic problems, and, although they occasionally experience cultural adaptation problems, these challenges are individual cases.

The study also proposes solutions suggested by both Ukrainian students and their Turkish language instructors to address the challenges they face, which includes organizing in class and extracurricular activities, arranging social events for speaking practice, encouraging students to participate in these events, helping them make Turkish friends, using Turkish songs, films, and programs for language exposure, and improving writing skills.

This study reports the challenges encountered in the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language in Türkiye, based on the perspectives of Ukrainian students who came to Turkey due to the war. Additionally, the views of the instructors teaching Turkish to these students were also utilized as a source for the study. This study contributes to not only teaching Turkish as a foreign language but also the barriers for people who are displaced from their homes due to war as it reports data from both learners and instructors, fills the literature gap addressing Ukrainian students learning Turkish in Türkiye, identifies the problems faced in the Turkish learning/teaching process, and proposes solutions to overcome such challenges.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the limited number of participants and the focus on a specific geographical area, particularly within a single institution such as TÖMER, restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, variations in the participants' Turkish language proficiency may have hindered the clear and complete expression of their views. The study relies solely on qualitative data collection methods and lacks quantitative support, which limits the objective measurement of the findings. Given that language learning is a long-term process, the experiences captured within a specific time frame may change over time. Furthermore, the limited consideration of cultural and psychosocial factors, the insufficient examination of instructors' varying

language proficiency levels, and the exclusive focus on Ukrainian refugee students constitute other limitations of the study. These constraints should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Disclosure Statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Author (s) Contribution Rate
The authors contributed equally.

Ethical Approval
All data collection and storage procedures were approved by the Board of Fırat University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (decision numbered 2023-1, date 05.01.2023)

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