

Candidate Mother Tongue Teachers' Perceptions on Speech Skills

Fulya Topcuoglu Unal¹ and Ahmet Sever²

¹*Faculty of Education, Dumlupinar University, Department of Turkish Language Education,
Kutahya, 43100, Turkey*

²*Ministry of National Education, Turkish Teacher, Kutahya, Turkey
E-mail: ¹<fulyatopcuoglu@hotmail.com>, ²<ahmetsever43@hotmail.com>*

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ABSTRACT Candidate mother tongue teachers have a class on elocution in their third year at university. However it is necessary to determine how candidate teachers feel about their speech skills, what they think of this class, and their expectations from this class. In this research, the researchers worked with 50 candidate mother tongue teachers from Dumlupinar University. Data was collected with open-ended surveys, and analyzed through content analysis. Based on the results of the research, the researchers tried to determine the participants' perceptions of themselves and the class. The researchers found out that the participants do not generally consider themselves to be eloquent speakers. A large majority of them did not take any elocution classes or anything similar prior to coming to university. Participants are aware of certain speech defects they have. These mainly include the use of local dialects, nervousness, and pronunciation problems. The main factors which contribute to their overall poor speech are the lack of self esteem and not being well informed in the subject matter.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are by nature social creatures. They share their knowledge, feelings, thoughts and wishes with others in society. In daily life, speaking is the first and most common way of sharing. Because speaking takes place as a form of communication before writing and its importance in society is indisputable. According to Dogan (2009), speaking is one of the main elements which contribute to making humans, who are already social beings, more social, and it is what makes them human. Speaking skills are the linguistic strength that people need the most in order to be able to have relationships with other people, and in order to establish communication with them (Topcuoglu 2011). Based on studies, human beings spend 45% of the day by listening, 30% of it by speaking, 16% by reading, and 9% by writing (Nalinci 2000). Considering that listening is related to speaking, we can see the importance of speaking more clearly.

According to Akyol (2001), there are three main elements in speaking. These are: ideas, the tool that allows for the transfer of ideas, language and organs that turn language into sound. In order to make ideas more profound, to use the transfer tool more efficiently, and to let the organs produce the sound in a healthy manner, elocution is necessary. Proper speech creates healthy communication, and healthy communication means less confusion and problems in society, and a more serene and secure environment.

The main purpose of speaking is to establish communication. Communication can most simply be defined as understanding and making others understand. Sillars (1997) defines communication as transferring, receiving, or changing information, opinion or thought with written, verbal or visual tools, or a combination of all of these; with the purpose of making the message entirely clear to all interested parties. Not establishing communication with our environment both at school and in society also means not living up to the requirements of being an individual in society. In that sense, speaking is one of the requirements of being a human being (Arslan 2010). Erozkan (2013) indicates that communication skills are important and for this reason, communication education should be offered starting from preschool.

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Fulya Topcuoglu Unal
Asst. Prof. Directory
Education Faculty,
Department of Turkish Language,
Dumlupinar University,
TavsanliYolu, 10.km EvliyaCelebiYerleskesi,
Kutahya, Turkey
Telephone: +902742652031-Ext.4585
Cell: 00905053882755
E-mail: fulyatopcuoglu@gmail.com

Speaking and the level of communication skills also affect the individual's self-esteem in society. If the individual is unable to have a conversation, unable to understand and explain things, his self-esteem will also be affected negatively. The researchers can see that people with developed communication skills also have high self-esteem. Individuals who are successful at communicating with others will clearly have confidence. In other words, individuals with high self-esteem believe that they can reach their goals by their own means (Arslan 2010). According to a study carried out by Cepik and Yastibas (2013) ability to speak may be improved in terms of grammar, pronunciation, self-confidence and motivation through various practices.

Teachers, who play a major role in enlightenment and development of societies, need to possess effective communication and speaking skills. Teachers' communication with students, each other, and other parts of society determines the quality of education, enables a correct flow of information, and creates good and strong role models for students. Elocution is occasionally left out in schools. Many teachers assume that students already possess this skill prior to coming to school, and they do not include this topic in the syllabus (Tompkins 1998). However, teachers should be role models for their students, and guide them towards speaking properly which is the first step in efficient communication. In order for students to learn the skill of speaking, and in order for this skill to be developed, it is necessary to pay utmost attention to training teachers properly as well, because it is impossible for someone who cannot speak Turkish properly and effectively to be successful in educating others (Ucgun 2007). Neeta and Klu (2013) also emphasize the importance of professional knowledge and skills in their studies.

When we consider the importance of speaking in communication, and the necessity of communication in social life, it becomes imperative to teach this skill to individuals through formal education. At this point, teachers come into play. All teachers are responsible for elocution; however mother tongue teachers have greater responsibility in this area. At this point all eyes turn to the training of mother tongue teachers. The opinions on the skill of speaking of teachers who get educated on the subject in university are important. The modern day approaches to education give teachers the responsibility to be a guide. How well the guides are equipped reflects how good the quality of education is.

The goal of the study is to determine candidate mother tongue teachers' perceptions and expectations with regard to speaking skills, to expose their thoughts on their own speaking skills, and to try to identify the causes of speech defects. Furthermore, in the study, we will also analyze candidate teachers' perceptions on speaking skills with regard to their gender, level of education, whether they have prior elocution education or not, the environment they were raised in, and their families' economic status.

METHODOLOGY

In the study, in order to measure candidate teachers' perceptions and expectations with regard to speaking skills, we used an open-ended survey consisting of five questions. The students were asked the following questions:

What is your understanding of elocution?

Have you been educated in the field of elocution before?

What are your expectations with regard to elocution?

Do you consider yourself an eloquent speaker?

What are the speech defects you have identified in yourself, and what do you think has caused these defects?

Information on the genders of the candidate teachers who were interviewed, and the residential units in which they were raised was also obtained with close-ended questions.

Third year students receiving formal and secondary education in the spring semester of the 2012-2013 academic year in the Department of Turkish Language Teaching of Kutahya Dumlupinar University participated in the study. Out of all the participants, 50 participants' papers were selected at random and analyzed. The answers given by the students were analyzed using fixed codes and content-analysis methods, and certain concepts that were found to be repeated were categorized under the same headings. The data was analyzed with regard to a number of variables, and the results were interpreted in tables.

RESULTS

The following findings were obtained in this study focusing on candidate mother tongue teachers' perceptions on speaking skills:

These results were obtained from the question that was asked in order to determine what kind of residential units the participants were raised in, and their families' average monthly income. As we can see in Table 1, prior to starting their education at university, 46% of the participants lived in the city, 36% lived in villages, and 18% in towns. Furthermore, 68% of the participants' families had medium income, 18% had low income, and 14% had high income.

Table 1: Families' income status and residential units where participants were raised

<i>Families' financial status</i>			<i>Residential units</i>		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Low	9	18	Village	18	36
Medium	34	68	Town	9	18
High	7	14	City	23	46
Total	50	100	Total	50	100

The answers that the students gave to the question on their understanding of elocution were categorized under four headings. These can be listed based on frequency (Table 2) to speak using standard language; to speak without speech defects; using gesture, facial expressions, accent, intonation, and other elements of speech in an effective manner; and establishing effective communication were repeated 37, 35, 25, and 23 times respectively. Out of the 136 total answers, the 16 answers that were not frequent enough to be categorized under separate headings were categorized under the heading "other".

Table 2: What is your understanding of elocution?

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Using standard language	37	27.2
Establishing effective communication	23	16.9
Using other elements of speech (gestures, facial expressions, etc.)	25	18.4
Eliminating speech defects	35	25.7
Other	16	11.8
Total	136	100

When candidate mother tongue teachers were asked whether they had elocution education previously or not, 32% answered yes, and 68% an-

swered no (Table 3). The distribution of these answers based on gender is as follows: 28% of the male students and 36% of the female students indicated that they had had elocution education previously. Although a larger number of females answered yes to this question, the overall percentage of students who had elocution education previously is low.

Table 3: Have you had elocution education before?

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	7	28	9	36
No	18	72	16	64
Total	25	100	25	100

In the question which focuses on the participants' expectations with regard to elocution, the expectations were categorized under several headings (Table 4). The answer "gaining self-esteem" was given 32 times. The answers "fixing speech defects", "impressing people with speech", and "being able to pass on knowledge and experience to students as a teacher" were given 26, 22, and 20 times respectively. The answers which were not given too frequently were categorized under the heading "other".

Table 4: What are your expectations with regard to elocution?

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Impressing people	22	18.5
Gaining self-esteem	32	26.9
Becoming a better teacher for my future students	20	16.8
Eliminating my speech defects	27	22.7
Other	18	15.1
Total	119	100

The participants answered the question "Do you consider yourself an eloquent speaker?" as follows: 30% said yes I do, 70% said no I do not (Table 5). When these answers are considered

Table 5: Do you consider yourself an eloquent speaker?

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	7	28	8	32
No	18	72	17	68
Total	25	100	25	100

based on gender, 72% of the male participants, and 68% of the female participants do not view themselves as eloquent speakers. In other words, only 28% of the male participants, and only 38% of the female participants view themselves as eloquent speakers.

Table 6: What are the speech defects that you have identified in yourself?

	<i>f</i>	%
Pronunciation mistakes	30	19.9
Swallowing words	24	15.9
Using local dialects	33	21.9
Nervousness	28	18.5
Using unnecessary words	20	13.2
Other	16	10.6
Total	151	100

The answers to the question “What are the speech defects you have identified in yourself?” have been presented in Table 6. According to this, the use of local dialects is the main speech defect which the participants believe they have. It has been mentioned 33 times, and is followed by pronunciation problems, nervousness while speaking, swallowing words, and using unnecessary words which have been mentioned 30, 28, 24, and 20 times respectively (Table 6). The defects that were not mentioned frequently enough to be categorized under a separate heading were shown in the table as “other”.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained from the study, a large majority of candidate mother tongue teachers do not have any formal elocution education prior to coming to university. This in turn affects candidate teachers negatively in a number of ways. The main negative effect appears to be the lack of self-esteem. Self-esteem is not only important for speaking skills, but in every other area as well. For teachers, who have to speak publicly, self-esteem is indispensable. A good speaker should first and foremost have self-esteem, and this is only possible with a mastery of skills. According to a study conducted by Tillfors and Furmark (2007), the most common type of social phobia is public speaking. All studies conducted in Turkey and in the world independent of culture indicate that public speaking is the most frequently encountered specific type of social phobia (Gultekin and Dereboy 2011). Ac-

cording to a study conducted by Arslan (2012), university students want to speak publicly, however, due to a lack of mastery of the Turkish language, a lack of self-esteem, shyness, diction problems, and other similar reasons, even when they have the opportunity to speak, university students avoid speaking. University students should be able to speak in front of others easily. As for teachers, this should be one of their main attributes. Therefore, as the aforementioned studies have indicated as well, the lack of knowledge and the lack of self-esteem are the first issues that need to be tackled and eliminated through elocution lessons. According to the studies conducted by Yelok and Sallabas (2009), a large majority of students who take classes on verbal lecture indicated that what they learn in class helps them comprehend the rules of speaking and enables them to build self-esteem. Furthermore, shyness is essentially a part of these issues as well. There is a significant connection between shyness and self-respect (Yuksel 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to actively employ elocution. With elocution, we will also be able to eliminate the individual’s fear of public speaking. Furthermore, with elocution, an individual who already possesses eloquent speaking skills will strengthen his communication skills as well. This in turn will contribute to the individual’s social development. People who have participated in various studies and experts in the field also recognize that actively employing proper speaking skills distinguishes the individual in front of friends and in social situations (Ceran 2012). In parallel with the above information, Marais (2013) indicates that emotional development is important and emotional communication is necessary for pre service teachers.

Speech defect is another negative result of the fact that candidate teachers who participated in the study had not had elocution classes prior to joining university. Akkaya (2012), upon completing a study on the subject, said: Candidate teachers have speech defects such as sound, intonation, accent, and pronunciation mistakes, psychological issues (inability to speak publicly, inability to speak at close proximities), hesitation pauses, inability to apply grammar rules, lack of knowledge, and inability to focus on speaking, which have physical causes due to social obstacles. Third Year University students will gain some knowledge on the subject with elocution lessons; however, with the use of stan-

standard language which will start at an earlier age, the possibility of reaching the desired level of performance will increase even more. Teachers, who need to set examples for eloquent speaking, do not wish to show an effort to speak well nor to be educated on elocution (Topcuoglu and Ozden 2012). However, this stance needs to change, and above all, teachers, who are models in society, need to develop them. Communication is indispensable in a globalized World. Kaya (2013), in his research concerning social studies teachers who use talking very frequently, confirmed that pre service teachers are aware of the fact that globalism improves communication, and strengthens solidarity and life standards.

It is important to get elocution education at an early age. According to a study conducted by Erdem and Deniz (2008), speech defects vary greatly depending on age. However, at this point, another important issue that needs to be discussed is why this education is lacking. Why are individuals not educated on elocution from an early age? At this point, the families' education and financial status play a major role. The parents of the participants in the study are mostly elementary school graduates. In other words, they may not be able to comprehend the necessity, importance and benefits of such an education. Furthermore, this education can also bear a financial burden, because most of the participants' families have medium incomes. Making this additional effort could challenge them financially, and this could be a determining factor in whether or not children get elocution education at an early age. Since speaking is one of the main elements of communication, it can negatively affect students' communication at school, and therefore their academic success and social skills. Tawarah (2013) points out that asking questions in front of the class is important for teacher and student interaction. The contribution of ability to speak to communication and interaction is very clear. According to a study conducted by Togram and Mavis (2009), families are indecisive on whether or not speech defects can affect students' academic success.

Contrary to common belief, people raised in villages or towns are not the only ones with speech defects or a lack of self-esteem with regard to speaking skills. People raised in city centers also have speech defects and low self-esteem. Therefore, at this point, it is impossible to say that the environment in which the individual

was raised is the only determining factor for his speaking skills. In many small towns, local dialects are used instead of standard language. This affects individuals negatively from an early age with regard to speaking skills. Speaking with local dialects is a problem that is encountered frequently in elocution. The main reason for this is that it takes a long time for it to change and be replaced with standard language, and it follows a similar progress to that of other linguistic skills (listening, reading, learning vocabulary, and writing) (Ozturk and Altuntas 2012). According to the studies conducted by Unal and Degec (2012), one of the most common speech defects encountered in students is the use of local dialects. This result coincides with the findings of the study conducted by Bicakci (2005). According to Bicakci (2005), oral readings are essential to close the gap between local dialects and the standard language since students try to pronounce what he / she reads rather than he / she is familiar with. Many methods may be used in removing the problems of pre service teachers who struggle in their speech trainings. Considering the study carried out by Ulusoy and Demirbilek (2013) a sitcom video may be viewed in order to remove the speech problems. Unal and Sever (2013) also indicate in their study that the use of visual materials improve the attention of the students towards the class. In summary, use of visual elements should not be disregarded in speech education.

CONCLUSION

Speech education is highly important in improving ability to speak and in using it. Therefore, speech education should start at an early age to give this ability to individuals. According to the research results, majority of the participants have not taken any speech trainings before university. This has an effect upon many speech defects in speaking. Main defects are use of local tongues, bad pronunciation and over anxiety when speaking.

In analyzing where the participants lived before they gained a university education and their income status, 46% of the participants lived in the city and 68% were from middle class. Self-confidence of the participants concerning their ability to speak is also low and 70% indicated that they do not see themselves as effective speakers. Moreover, when the expectancies of

the participants of the research from the speech training, most common response was to gain self-confidence. In research findings there is a large aliasing between girls and boys.

Teachers are the ones who raise the students, the future of societies; therefore they have an important role within the society. Teachers are the ones to teach the students how to speak. Therefore it is important that they have proper speaking abilities and that they improve themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to eliminate speech defects in candidate teachers, first we need to identify the problems correctly and find effective solutions. Therefore it is necessary to determine students' perceptions with regard to the lessons and speaking skills.

With low self-esteem being at the top of list, many other speech defects are caused by a lack of knowledge on the rules of speaking correctly, eloquently, and effectively. Learning these rules is possible with elocution. The teachers of this class need to develop themselves as much as possible.

The earlier one starts his education in elocution the sooner speech defects can be eliminated. Therefore, students need to have elocution lessons before their third year at university.

Being an eloquent speaker, or at least being able to speak publicly is a skill that is necessary not only for teachers but for everyone. Therefore, verbal lecture classes, which are compulsory in year one in all departments, and which are fundamentally very similar to elocution classes, should be made more vigorous.

Developing speaking skills and eliminating speech defects should not just be viewed as the responsibility of mother tongue teachers. Students should be trained carefully and diligently by all their teachers throughout their education before university.

Teachers have always been role models for their students. They should also be role models for their students with regard to using proper language.

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