

Attitudes of bilingual students of German-Turkish origin in German language departments in Turkey: language, studies and future prospects

This study examines the attitudes of students of German-Turkish origin who are enrolled in or have graduated from German language departments at universities in Ankara. While return migration and bilingualism have been addressed in research on numerous occasions, there are no systematic studies so far on the perspectives of this specific group in the context of Turkish universities. This study thus explores a relevant research gap at the interface of language biographies, experiences with migration and academic careers.

The aim of the study was to systematically record the respondents' attitudes towards language, studying, their fellow students, career plans and the possibility of studying in Germany. In this context, attitudes relate to both linguistic-cultural affiliations and educational preferences/ career plans. The main research question is: What attitudes do students of German-Turkish origin in German language departments in Ankara have in relation to language, studies, career planning and the possibility of studying in Germany?

The data were collected in autumn 2022 using an online questionnaire (Google Forms) addressed at students and graduates of German studies and teacher education for German as a foreign language as well as translating and interpreting (German-Turkish) in Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degree programmes at Hacettepe and Ankara Universities. Graduates were included so as to be able to record attitudes across different stages of tertiary education. The survey consisted of general information on the participants' language biography (age, nationality, school career, language learning experiences, mother tongue) as well as ten open questions on their motivation for studying, choice of subject and university, similarities to and differences from Turkish-speaking fellow students, perceived advantages and disadvantages of being bilingual, career plans and the possibility of studying in Germany. A total of 30 people took part in the survey. A qualitative content analysis was undertaken in which the responses were grouped thematically and categorized in order to reveal patterns and differences.

The results can be summarized along several dimensions. The profile of the participants was clearly dominated by younger age groups, which were characterized by experience of both the Turkish and German education systems as well as by pronounced bilingualism. The decision to study their chosen subject was primarily motivated by an interest in language and culture and being able to use existing knowledge of German; at the same time career planning played an important role. Deciding to study in Turkey was primarily based on biographical motives for returning while institutional factors such as accessibility or costs were only of secondary importance. The choice of university, in turn, was determined by a combination of the institution's reputation, the subjects on offer and geographical proximity.

In relation to social integration, there were similarities with Turkish-speaking fellow students, for example in terms of goals and interests on the one hand but clear differences on the other, particularly with regard to German language skills and linguistic socialization.

The advantages of a bilingual background included good language skills in particular while uncertainties in Turkish or difficulties adapting to local academic routines were cited as disadvantages. The respondents' professional plans were varied, ranging from teaching to translation and from public administration to the private sector and academic careers. Their attitudes towards the possibility of studying in Germany were particularly ambivalent: while some of them saw opportunities in better study conditions and international mobility, others mentioned financial burdens, being far away from family or limited contact with other students.

To sum up, the study illustrates that students with a German-Turkish background use their dual linguistic and cultural roots as a resource in their studies and career planning but they also face specific challenges. Decision-making processes concerning where to study, the choice of subject, and international mobility are not one sided but are balanced according to the individual's situation and biographical background. The results contribute to a better understanding of returning students in the context of bilingual educational biographies and open up avenues for future research and institutional support.