



Verbal Aptitude Levels of Prospective English Teachers: A Study in an EFL Context

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Abstract

Verbal aptitude is described as the ability to use the written language and to grasp concepts which are delivered through words. Aptitude plays a prominent role in foreign language learning. The studies conducted by researchers resulted in a sociopsychological theory of second or foreign language learning. The theory holds that any successful learner of a second/foreign language must be ready to adopt the certain aspects and linguistic and social factors of the target language. However, scrutinizing the potential differences between aptitude levels and other variables such as gender, age, and learners' grade point average scores could yield to significant results and these results would be prolific for language teachers. The current study is a quantitative study with cross-sectional research design the purpose of which is to determine the aptitude levels and check if the aptitude levels of the participants reveal differences in relation to the variables of the population characteristics. The aim of this study is to reveal if there are any differences of prospective English teachers' aptitude levels by their age, gender and GPA scores. This descriptive quantitative study is of cross-sectional design. 101 prospective English teachers participated in the study. For the purpose of tracing the aptitude levels of participants and revealing the possible differences between their aptitude levels and other variables, the participants were given a 40-item multiple choice verbal aptitude test embodying items which measure their ability to spell words correctly, use grammar accurately, grasp word meanings and word relationships. The data were analyzed with SPSS 22 program. The results revealed that having information about the language aptitude levels might help researchers to have a better understanding about the language learners, the milieu of learning, and the learning outcomes. The results were presented within the light of the related literature. The ethics committee approval report was not added into the body of this study since the manuscript had been submitted into the system of the journal before the decision concerning the ethical committee approval was issued.

Keywords: Language aptitude, verbal aptitude, prospective teachers, language learning.

The Ethical Committee Approval: Since this research was conducted before 01.01.2020, it does not require an ethics committee decision.

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Language aptitude research has a long history and the beginning of the area was marked by the American educational psychologist John Carroll's research on the concept of language aptitude in the 1950s (Rysiewicz, 2008). In his study, Carroll maintained that individual learners had different capacities in terms of language learning and that speaking a second/foreign language required a special skill, which is the language aptitude (Wen, Biedroń and Skehan, 2017).

Associated with the name of J. B Carroll, the concept of language has a significant function in predicting the rate of L2 learning (Carroll, 1981). Marking the aptitude research, the cooperative studies of Carroll [the developer of The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT)] and Stanley Sapon had a significant effect in an abundance of different instructional contexts and with students from various age groups (Carroll and Sapon, 1959). Carroll (1981) defines language aptitude as the beginning "state of readiness and capacity for learning a foreign language" (p. 86). Recognized as one of the most notable individual difference variables within second language acquisition (SLA, henceforth) (e.g. Cochran, McCallum and Mee-Bell, 2010), language aptitude has attracted a lot of research in SLA and yielded to many unanswered questions despite a considerable amount of empirical research in the field (Li, 2015). There exist various studies suggesting that there are positive correlations between measures of language aptitude and second language learning outcomes (Carroll, 1981; Skehan, 1989). These studies mainly focus on the connections between aptitude and prospects of language proficiency, the effects of aptitude on the influence of the educational discourse and the relationship between aptitude and age.

Given the fact that the aptitude scales are utilized for the purposes of selection and placement of foreign language learners who have the potential for success in some countries, and that some institutions such as the Public Service Commission of Canada use aptitude tests and rely on these aptitude profiles, the concept of aptitude requires more research since there is always need for change in second language learning settings. Understanding the nature of verbal aptitude in a language learning context will shed light on possible classroom applications in the field.

Wesche (1981), for instance, took language aptitude into consideration and tried to determine language aptitude levels of the participants who were working as federal public servants. The participants were grouped into the appropriate instructional contexts for them and they took a language aptitude test which consisted of five subtests of MLAT and two subtests of LAB (the sound discrimination and sound symbol association). Following this, the participants were classified based on the criterion of language aptitude in the form of three groups: Audio-visual Method, Analytical approach, or Functional approach. Overall, the results of the study indicated that the participants manifested fulfilment with regard to the teaching approach they had been appointed to. Besides, they showed positive attitudes and motivation and they reported that they were eager to exercise and make use of the target language not only within the four walls of the classroom but also outside. Similarly, in Hwu, Pan and Sun's (2014) study, the participants were allocated into

three groups as deductive (DE) group, explicit-inductive (EI) group and the control group which received no treatment. These groups were asked to take language aptitude test, which included memory for text, associate memory (MLAT), and grammatical sensitivity (MLAT). The results demonstrated that in both production and correction tests, the participants of EI group did significantly better in comparison with their counterpart, DE group. Regarding this field of research, many studies revealing in terms of the connections between second language acquisition and language aptitude (Erlam, 2005; Hwu et al., 2014; Sheen, 2007; Baker-Smemoe and Haslam, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013).

Language aptitude is deemed to be one of the eminent individual differences in a language learning context (Skehan, 1989). Similarly, language aptitude is delineated as a blend of cognitive abilities which predict how well an individual can learn a foreign language compared to other individuals (Carroll and Sapon, 2002). Emphasizing the predictive power of aptitude in grasping a second language, this view stresses the link between aptitude and the eventual L2 attainment regardless of the learning context or instruction type. Deriving from this view, Carroll (1963) argues for an eclectic approach to language instruction by stating that modifying instruction to accommodate individual differences is non-essential. In terms of aptitude, this view represents a product-oriented and fixed view of language aptitude.

Robinson (2005) maintains that language aptitude derives from the stage of information processing during learning the target language and it occurs 'various contexts and at different stages'. In contrast to Carroll's (1981) view that language aptitude holds a static view of L2 learning, Robinson (2005) considers language aptitude as a process-oriented and dynamic entity, which is highly influenced by environmental factors either by being inhibited or triggered in various learning contexts. Robinson (2005) also notes that language instruction is only prolific for language learners only when there exists an alignment between their cognitive contour and the features of the educational context. Accordingly, language teachers should adjust instruction in order to satisfy the variations in learners' aptitudes.

As a result of the studies carried out over a period of 25 years by Carroll and his colleagues, it has also been revealed that language aptitude is composed of diverse independent cognitive abilities in that it is a permanent learner characteristic, and it is more than verbal intelligence or academic ability though it overlaps with these domains to some extent (Carroll, 1981). Verbal aptitude as closely related to analytical ability, memory and phonetic sensitivity are considered as the constructs of L2 learning aptitude. The fact that these aspects of aptitude are involved led them to be included in any form of testing (DeKeyser and Koeth, 2011). Although there are various views with regard to how aptitude is related with learning outcomes and the process of L2 learning, both views emphasize the following characteristics of language aptitude: (i) language aptitude involves stable cognitive abilities, (ii) language aptitude differs from intelligence and other variables and (iii) it is not an attainment that can be learned (Li, 2015).

It is crucial to state that although the cognitive aspect of language aptitude is mostly emphasized, the essence and the characteristics of aptitude are postulated in educational psychology in a different way (Li, 2015). For instance, attitude toward a second or a foreign language is deemed to be a component of language aptitude in Pimsleur Aptitude Battery (PLAB) (Pimsleur, 1966) parallel with the view of Snow (1991) in that aptitude can be a measurable characteristic as a proceeding plan for a learning state to achieve a learning objective including emotive, conative and cognitive variables.

For more than 50 years, language aptitude and emotive measurements have been an area of interest to identify the most effective factors that anticipates success in L2 contexts (Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, Humbach and Javorsky, 2006). Indeed, research holds that L2 aptitude is the only predictor of language achievement in any L2 (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1992; Sparks and Ganschow, 2001). However, there are some arguments suggesting that aptitude has no pertinence for young learners for whom the language acquisition is assumed to be implicit (Granena and Long, 2013). DeKeyser (2000), on the other hand, maintains that SLA mainly relies on explicit learning and adds that for older learners, following the closure of the sensitive period, language aptitude, particularly, analytic ability should be emphasized since it is more measurable. Analytic ability, assumed to be related to verbal aptitude and also intelligence, is considered as equal to cognitive aptitude which is anticipated as an important condition for adult learners in reaching high levels of language achievement. In addition to explicit learning, learners also have some individual characteristics which might cause them to differ in other domains of cognitive ability (Granena, 2012). However, scholar have considered the analytic ability as a fundamental component of language aptitude among memory and phonetic sensitivity (Carroll, 1964; DeKeyser and Koeth, 2011; Skehan, 1989, 1998). The study conducted by Granena and Long (2013) also indicated that L2 learners with higher analytical level of aptitude proved themselves to be more successful in terms of monitoring their pronunciation during reading.

However, from 1970s on, the research on language aptitude has slowed since the concept of language aptitude has been criticized on several grounds: since the origins of language aptitude research were associated with the outmoded audiolingual methodologies, which primarily emphasized linguistic skills and speaking (Valdman, 1970) over meaningful negotiation and psychological and social factors (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Besides, the low aptitude scores tended to label language learners as untalented people in language learning processes (Li, 2015). However, the view that learners without a good level aptitude cannot succeed in learning a foreign language has been refuted in some studies which highlight the role of memory in language learning (Archibald, 2017; Baddeley, 2012; Desmond and Fiez, 1998); therefore, the concept of language aptitude has been strengthened again (Grymska, 2016).

This study aims to investigate the possible relations between prospective language teachers' verbal aptitude levels and their demographic characteristics such as their genders, ages, English level etc. Since language evaluating aptitude plays a key role in many language training programs [e.g. the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), the Foreign Service (FSI), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Defense Language Institute (DLI)] and in conducting placement procedures of language learners with different learner profiles, there is a need for a careful review of language aptitude research. Understanding the nature of human learning will undoubtedly contribute to the objectives and methods of language learning positively. Research in the field may also help in updating these methods and applications in foreign language learning. Besides, discovering the possible relations between different learner variables and their aptitude levels might yield to significant outcomes in understanding language learning aptitude along with other factors such as the role of different personality types, attitudes, motivations as predictors of success. The reason this study was carried out with prospective language teachers derives from the fact that understanding the rationale behind successful teacher candidates and drawing some possible links between their personality types and their aptitude levels in terms of might give some fruitful ideas to researchers for reconsidering their practices and preparing more efficient activities that might work well in language classes.

Research Questions

Since 1980s, there has been a tendency to enhance the current methods in language learning settings. Researching language aptitude with all its components along with its potential associations in relation to other learner variables would undoubtedly yield some important insights in terms of language teaching. Accordingly, answers will be sought for the following research questions:

1. What are prospective English teachers' aptitude levels toward English in general?
2. Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by gender?
3. Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by their English level?
4. Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by their age?
5. Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by their grade point average (GPA) scores?

Method

In the methodology section, research design, participants, data collection procedure, and data collection instrument of the research were explained in detail. The authors did not attach the ethics committee approval into the body of this study since

the manuscript had been submitted into the system of the journal before the decision concerning the ethical committee approval was issued.

Research Model

This is a quantitative study with a cross-sectional research method. In this method, the differences between the two characteristics of the study group are examined. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), the extent to which a researcher ascertains a statistical correlation between two characteristics relying on some degree of how well the researched characteristics have been estimated is significant. Therefore, validity and reliability are two important factors that influence correlation coefficients. The aim of correlational research is to ascertain whether two or more variables are related. Although limited in terms of collecting data at once in a limited time, the cross-sectional research design indicates possible relationships between variables; therefore it provides an opportunity to generate assumptions for different quantitative research in the future (Levin, 2006). Creswell (2002) also maintains that correlational research is based on a statistical test in order to establish patterns for two variables. In a nutshell, correlational research is a type of non-experimental research in which the researcher tries to investigate and assess the statistical relationships with little or no effort to control extraneous variables. In the current study, the relationships between aptitude and other variables such as age, gender, etc. are comprehended and some specific interconnected conditions between participants' aptitude levels and other variables are described.

Participants

The participants were 101 prospective English teachers studying at the English Language Teaching Department (46 males, 55 females, aged between 18-35) at a state university in Turkey. None of the participants has lived in English-speaking countries once in their lives although few of them have been abroad once in their lives. Their level of English varied from the B2-C1 level. These students take a placement test following the proficiency test in English before they are placed in their class. At the time of the research, all participants were doing their courses in their first year at the tertiary level.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in the middle of the spring term of 2018-2019 academic year through a 40-item verbal aptitude multiple choice test. Only voluntary students participated in the study. Consent forms were also achieved. The verbal aptitude test was given by the researchers who were already teaching classes at the time of data collection. It took participants one class hour to complete the questionnaire.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, the purpose was to observe if the participants verbal aptitude levels differed in relation to their demographic characteristics. Data were obtained through a 40-item verbal aptitude test, which was modified from the psychometric success site of the university and the scale can be accessed online from the official website

(<https://psychometric-success.com/verbal-aptitude-tests>). The multiple-choice test items in the verbal aptitude scale required the participants to choose more than one correct or incorrect answer at times and also, they were required to correct the incorrect items if needed. Each true answer counted 1 point. The verbal aptitude test included 40 questions related to the four components of language aptitude; thus, the questions measured prospective language teachers' grammatical sensitivity, phonemic coding ability, inductive language learning ability, and rote learning ability.

Answers which were chosen appropriately but not corrected were not accepted as correct by the researchers, which means the participants were also expected to write the correct versions of the misspelled words. The verbal aptitude scale consists of some items which measure the ability of participants in spelling words correctly, using grammar accurately, understanding the meanings of the words and word relationships, and/or interpreting detailed written information. It aims to evaluate practical verbal skills (grammar and spelling, vocabulary, and verbal comprehension). The reliability score of the scale is 0.75. The researchers also calculated the reliability score of the instrument through SPSS, which was found to be .77. Besides, expert views were achieved for validity.

The verbal aptitude scale was not originally prepared for prospective language teachers. However, it is a standardized test which was developed to measure any job candidate's knowledge of English in addition to their reasoning abilities. In general, the test provides employers with a comprehensive assessment of how well the candidate can think and solve problems in their own ways and how they can understand and analyze information they read. Some sample questions are listed below:

1. Which of the following words are incorrectly spelt?
 - A) separate
 - B) ordnance
 - C) obviously
 - D) suces
 - E) none of these

2. Choose the pair of words that best completes the sentence:
The ----- of the timetable caused some -----
 - A) rivision/inconvenience
 - B) revision/inconvenience
 - C) reversion/inconvenience
 - D) revition/inconvenience

5. Which of these words completes the sentence in the way that makes most sense?
He avoided ----- because he was -----
 - A) redundancy
 - B) indispensable

- C) redundancy
- D) indispensable

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 22). To test the data for normality, Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were utilized. Shapiro-Wilk test demonstrated that the data of the current study were not distributed normally (Table 1). The Mann-Whitney U test was run to understand whether the prospective English teachers' aptitude show a change depending on their gender. Kruskal-Wallis test was used to understand whether the prospective English teachers' aptitude show a change depending on their 1) English level, 2) age, and 3) grade point average (GPA) scores.

Table 1

Normality Test Result (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Test)

Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
Statistic	df	p	Statistic	df	p
.083	101	.085	0.966	101	.011

The demographic characteristics of the participants in terms of all variables were outlined in Table 2. As presented in the table below, male and female participants were almost equal with females outnumbering males only 1%. When the levels of the participants were concerned most of them (56%) are upper-intermediate students whereas 29% of them are advanced. 92% of participants were between 18-21 range in terms of age. Almost all students were studying (100%) English program since all lectures were presented in English in their department. The cumulative grade point average scores (GPA) of participants at the time of this study were mostly (41%) distributed between 2.50-2.99, which suggested that they were doing well in their department.

Table 2

The Sample of the Study

	Variables	f	%
Gender of the participants	Female	55	56
	Male	46	44
	Total	101	100%

(continued)

Table 2 (continue)

	Variables	f	%
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Level of the participants	Elementary	0	0
	Pre-Int.	5	5
	Int.	8	8
	Upper-Int.	59	59
	Advanced	29	29
	Total	101	100
Age of participants	18-21	92	91
	22+	9	9
	Total	101	100
GPA (Grade Point Average) scores of participants	4.00-3.50	12	12
	3.49-3.00	28	28
	2.99-2.50	40	41
	2.49-2.00	17	17
	1.00 and below	3	3
	Total	101	100

As for research question 1 *What are prospective English teachers' aptitude levels toward English in general?*, the results indicated that the majority of the participants (100/101 participants) gave correct answers between 10-30 range out of 40 questionnaire items. The aptitude level of the participants in general is 41%, which suggests that the mean scores of the correct answers given by the participants seem to be distributed under 50%. It indicates that most participants' aptitude levels were under average. The descriptive statistics derived from the study were also presented below in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of All Variables

Variables	Range	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.
Gender of the participants	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.46	0.50	0.18	-2.01
Level of the participants	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.11	0.75	-0.91	1.32
Age of participants	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.09	0.29	2.93	6.71
GPA (Grade Point Average) scores of participants	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.71	0.98	0.03	-0.37

In the above table (Table 3), descriptive statistics regarding the variables of participants (their gender, language level, age and GPA scores) were presented along with the standard deviation scores. It is shown that gender of the participants were almost distributed equally (mean = 1.46; 55 females, 46 males), which shows a homogeneous distribution in terms of gender. Moreover, the table showed that the majority of the participants were at upper-intermediate or above level in terms of their language levels (mean = 4.11 out of 5 maximum). The majority of participants' age range, on the other hand, was distributed between 18-21 range (mean = 1.09). Finally, regarding the GPA scores of the participants Tables 2 and 3 are revealing in that the

GPA scores of the majority of the participants are distributed between 2.99-2.50 range (40 participants, mean = 2.71 out of 4).

Results

This study has investigated if prospective English teachers' aptitude levels in relation to their demographic characteristics, namely their gender, age, language level and GPA scores to observe the case from a pedagogical point of view. To see if the participants' aptitude levels showed a chance by their gender Mann Whitney-U test was utilized and the findings of the test were presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

The Results of Mann Whitney-U Test: Verbal Aptitude and Gender

Variable	N	Mean Rank	SD	p	Z
Gender	101	47.24	0.50	.150	-1.41
		55.50			

When the mean rank scores are analysed, Table 4 shows that the distribution of the participants in terms of gender are almost equal with 55 females and 46 males (Sd = 0.50). However, when the values in the above table are analysed, there is no significant difference of $p < .05$ level ($p = .150$). For the second research question *Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by gender?*, the results of the Mann Whitney-U test showed that the verbal aptitude levels of the participants did not show a significant difference by their gender. This indicates that no associations can be drawn between gender and the level of aptitude, which may suggest that a high or low level of aptitude does not derive from gender variable or conversely gender affects the level of aptitude.

As for the third research question *Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by their English level?* the results of the Kruskal Wallis test shows that the verbal aptitude levels of the participants do not show a significant difference by participants' their level of English ($p = .139$) as presented below.

Table 5

The Results of Kruskal Wallis Test: Verbal Aptitude and Language Level

Variable	N	Mean Rank	sd	p	χ^2
Language level	5	40.10	.74	.139	5.49
	8	67.75			
	59	46.96			
	29	56.48			

In table 5, it is indicated that there is no significant difference since the p score is lower than .05 ($p < .05$) regarding the analysis of values. This is revealing in that

there exist no associations between verbal aptitude level and the language level of the participants. On the other hand, Kruskal Wallis test was used to research if participants' verbal aptitude levels showed a change by their age as stated in Table 6 below.

Table 6

The Results of Kruskal Wallis Test: Verbal Aptitude and Age

Variable	N	Mean Rank	Sd	p	χ^2
Age	92	49.43	.29	.084	2.99
	9	67.06			
Total	101				

When Table 6 is analyzed relation to research question 4 *Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by their age?*, the results of the Kruskal Wallis test showed that the verbal aptitude levels of the participants did not show a significant difference by participants' ages. For research question 5, Kruskal Wallis test was also used and the results were presented in the table below.

Table 7

The Results of Kruskal Wallis Test: Verbal Aptitude and GPA Scores

Variable	N	Mean Rank	SD	p	X^2
GPA scores	12	61.13	.98	.229	5.62
	28	51.38			
	41	48.01			
	17	55.82			
	3	20.50			
Total	101				

When Table 7 is analyzed in relation to research question 5 *Is there a difference in prospective English teachers' aptitude level by their grade point average (GPA) scores?*, the results of the tests showed that the verbal aptitude levels of the participants did not show a significant difference by participants' grade point average (GPA) scores. When Table 6 and 7 are analyzed in detail, considering the possible associations between aptitude level and ages of the participants, the p score is .084 ($p > .05$) (Table 6). Similarly, the test concerning participants' GPA scores revealed no statistically significant difference with the p score .229. ($p > .05$) (Table 7). This indicates that either participants' ages or GPA scores does not predict a high or low aptitude level. Similarly, the results show that aptitude levels do not show a significant difference in relation to any of these variables.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

Language aptitude has attracted a considerable amount of attention in second language learning in recent years since it has been found to be one of the most important factors. Therefore, in the context of language learning the term has been defined by various researchers (Wen et al., 2017). The current study investigated whether verbal aptitude levels of participants showed a significant difference in relation to the demographic variables of prospective English teachers such as their gender, level of English, age and grade point average (GPA) scores. The results revealed no statistically significant differences in terms of the abovementioned variables. These results indicate that there are no associations between verbal aptitude levels of participants and their demographic characteristics. In other words, the variables such as gender, age, level of English, and grade point average scores do not have effect on their aptitude levels or aptitude levels are not influenced by these variables.

The term language aptitude involves four important abilities within John Carroll's framework (Ellis, 2008) as grammatical sensitivity, phonetic coding, inductive learning ability and rote learning ability. Since all these different abilities may have positive impact on prospective language teachers' language learning process and be related to their success, language aptitude can be seen as a significant variable. Grymska (2016) also pointed out that language aptitude is an important variable since it may have a positive influence on pre-service language teachers' language learning process. Therefore, prior to researching the relation between language aptitude and achievement, the current study sought to examine if the aptitude levels showed changes in relation to these individual characteristics. Moreover, it was revealed within the body of this study that prospective language teachers' language aptitude scores were quite low. The fact that participants' language aptitude levels showed no significant change by their demographic characteristics might derive from the uniqueness of individual cognitive competences. Cognitive competence and verbal ability depends on individual's capacities for manipulating information, paying attention and effective verbal comprehension capacities. At the time of the study, they were currently studying at freshmen level. Besides, the participants might not have paid enough attention to the items in the scale. In addition, the inability to deal with the items with proper attention along with the lack of using the right strategies could have yielded to these results. Droege (1966) also emphasized the role of practice on aptitude test scores. The fact that the participants did not receive any training in terms of developing their attitude could also explain why the scores were low and did not show any significant difference in terms of the demographics.

Holliday, Whittaker and Loose (1984) also investigated different effects of verbal aptitude on the comprehension of concepts of science rather than focusing on verbal aptitude and its possible relations with other variables. In the study, 217 participants were assigned to a text-only, text along with its comprehension questions or a placebo treatment. The results of the study suggested that low-verbal students performed better when they were provided with a text-only instead of a text with

questions. In contrast, high-verbal students were not as influenced by verbatim study questions as the low-verbal students. It was concluded that verbatim questions had a debilitating effect on students' comprehension since these questions generally resulted in students' copying words from the text without comprehending the copied words and phrases. The current study may be elaborated to include an intervention period to observe how varying degrees of aptitude could have an effect on prospective teachers' reading comprehension in an experimental study design.

Ehrenberg and Brewer (1995) had analyzed the data from the prototypical 1966 study entitled "Equality of Educational Opportunity or Coleman Report" to research teacher characteristics in two ways as verbal ability and race. In terms of verbal ability, this study is important in that it was revealing in terms of the fact that teachers' verbal aptitude scores affected their synthetic grain scores. Apart from the race perspective which is not related to the current study, the "Equality of Educational Opportunity or Coleman Report" also had revealed that the data collected on teacher verbal ability (which were measured by scores on a verbal aptitude test) were positively correlated with students' test scores. In addition to the Coleman Report, the subsequent analyses of the data collected within the body of that study confirmed the results and some researchers stated that this correlation was stronger at higher grade levels (Armour, 1972; Coleman, 1966; Hanushek, 1972; Jencks, 1972).

Sparks et al. (2006) also carried out a study with 54 participants to reveal the best native language (NL) factors that predicted oral and written foreign language (FL) proficiency and foreign language aptitude. The study lasted more than 10 years to complete and participants were tested at specific intervals. The results showed that native language achievement and general (verbal) intelligence were strong predictors of foreign language aptitude. The study was also revealing in that lower level skills in phonological processing are significant for written language development and oral proficiency. However, the relationship between this processing and aptitude could be investigated more to reveal any possible connections. In this study, the possible associations between L1 and L2 and aptitude have not been referred to, therefore, any possible connections among L1, L2 and aptitude could be revealed by replicating the present study. Moreover, using a cross-sectional survey design, this study was not longitudinal, yet focused on revealing any possible associations between participants' demographic characteristics and their aptitude levels.

In terms of aptitude, Granena (2012) also researched the extent to which aptitude for explicit and implicit learning are essential for long term L2 achievement in an immersion context for learning. The results revealed a distribution of cognitive abilities in two major types of aptitudes, elucidated as implicit and explicit. The results further suggested that cognitive aptitudes also have their effects for both early and late L2 learners. However, in terms of age variable the current study revealed no significant difference. This might derive from the fact that in Granena's (2012) study, there existed participants with different age groups like early L2 learners and adult learners. In contrast, when the age variable is taken into account for the current study,

almost all participants' ages were distributed between 18-21 apart from few exceptions due to the convenience sampling method. All the participants were at similar age groups since they were attending university at the time of this study. This could influence these different results obtained and this study could be replicated with various age groups to check if there exist any associations between aptitude level and age.

Kean, Glynn and Britton (1987) studied verbal aptitude to explore the role of college students' verbal aptitude in writing persuasive letters. The results showed that the students having higher verbal aptitude were more inclined to attain higher holistic ratings of letter quality. Besides, the study was revealing in that the students with poor verbal aptitude had more anxiety. Although the researchers mainly focused on production of the letters and writing skill and that the term language level has not been emphasized explicitly, the study provided support for the lecturers who support the importance of verbal aptitude when student placement is concerned depending on the overall quality of their actual writing. On the contrary, the present study only examined the potential associations between verbal aptitude and language level of pre-service language teachers. The possible relation between verbal aptitude and any other specific skill could be further investigated.

Moreover, similar to the results of this study, Hyde and Linn (1988) scrutinized data on gender differences in terms of verbal ability. Their results revealed an unsubstantial female superiority in terms of performance; however, they stated that the difference was so miniscule that they suggested gender differences in verbal ability no longer existed and the analysis of the tests which required different cognitive processes involved in verbal ability yielded to no sound evidence of gender differences.

Hence, apart from this cross-sectional study which aims to reveal if verbal aptitude levels show a significant difference in terms of some variables such as learners' gender, age, level and GPA scores, a more comprehensive understanding is required to contribute to a better understanding in terms of SLA research. Firstly, some more longitudinal research would prove to be fruitful in evaluating the importance of various aptitudes at different stages of learning process so that the same individuals' performances can be tracked to observe their development in different stages. Secondly, rather than researching the learning context and the probable change of verbal aptitude in relation to some variables related to participants, more research is needed with the aim of investigating how learning context plays a role in regulating different aptitudes in predicting students' language achievement. What is more, some more specific research could also be worthwhile in scrutinizing the interaction between different aptitudes and task characteristics for some particular types of tasks. This would shed light on revealing the slight relations between specific task types and learner aptitudes; thus, could be important in adopting a process approach in different learning contexts. Besides, research on working memory would likely be of help in

gaining a deeper understanding since it has been shown to influence an array of different language skills.

In brief, this study contributes to the current bulk of knowledge in SLA theory in that understanding if aptitude levels reveal a significant difference by other individual variables might shed light on the specific classroom practices. Since different learners have different learning styles and aptitudes, having information about the language aptitude levels and their potential relations with these variables might help researchers and language teachers alike to scrutinize their views about the language learners, the learning context and the learning outcomes and accordingly classroom practices might be adjusted to create a more prolific learning environment. Measuring aptitude with sufficient predictive validity has attracted considerable attention in SLA; however, using aptitude tests to measure with utmost accuracy would be far from reality for some reasons. For example, the theoretical understanding regarding how the different constituents of aptitude are interconnected is still limited. Moreover, it is probable that these measures cannot be valid for all proficiency levels or all aspects of language in all learning contexts for all proficiency levels (Hinkel, 2011).

There are also some limitations within the body of this study. Firstly, data concerning language aptitude were obtained only from prospective language teachers. These data could also be collected from in-service language teachers and the correlation between the two groups could be observed for further study. Secondly, the data could be collected from different age groups. Data on the same demographic information with different groups could be researched in detail in longitudinal studies. Since language learning is a complex process operating simultaneously at different levels, it is highly unlikely that language aptitude is merely one of the factors in terms of language learning. However, it is clear that learners' cognitive, affective and social individual aspects should be considered in planning educational practices. In this sense, having comprehensive information about prospective language teachers might prove to be useful since they are likely to shape the next generations with their expertise, individual tendencies and experience in terms of language teaching. Finally, the ethics committee approval report was not included within the body of this study since the manuscript had been submitted into the system of the journal before the decision concerning the ethical committee approval was issued.

The Ethical Committee Approval

The ethical committee approval is not compulsory for this research because it was sent to our journal before 01.01.2020.

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The Ethical Committee Approval

Since this research was conducted before 01.01.2020, it does not require an ethics committee decision.



İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Sözel Yatkinlık Düzeyleri: Yabancı Dil Öğretimi Bağlamında Bir Çalışma

MAKALE TÜRÜ	Başvuru Tarihi	Kabul Tarihi	Yayın Tarihi
Araştırma Makalesi	20.08.2019	26.11.2020	29.11.2020

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Öz

Yabancı dil yatkinlığı, yazılı dili kullanma ve sözcüklerle sunulan kavramları anlama yeteneği olarak tanımlanır. Yatkinlık, yabancı dil öğreniminde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Araştırmacılar tarafından yürütülen çalışmalar, sosyo-psikolojik bir yabancı dil (ikinci dil) öğrenimi kuramının tartışılmasının gerekliliği üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Kuram, ikinci bir dilin başarılı biçimde öğrenilmesi için başarılı bir yabancı dil öğrencisinin hedef dildeki belli dilsel ve sosyal etkenleri benimsemesi gerektiği yönündedir. Ancak, katılımcıların yatkinlık düzeylerinde onların yaş, cinsiyet ve not ortalaması puanları gibi değişkenlere göre herhangi bir değişiklik olup olmadığının araştırılması ve ortaya çıkarılması yabancı dil öğretmenleri için önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı katılımcıların sözel yatkinlık düzeylerinin yaş, cinsiyet ve not ortalamaları gibi değişkenlere göre bir farklılık gösterip göstermediğini saptamaktır. Çalışma kesitsel modelli nicel bir çalışmadır. Araştırmaya 101 İngilizce öğretmeni adayı katılmıştır. Yabancı dile yatkinlık düzeyleri ile diğer değişkenlere göre anlamlı bir farklılık olup olmadığını saptamak için katılımcılara sözcükleri doğru heceleylebilme, doğru dilbilgisi kullanma, sözcük anlamlarını anlama ve sözcüğü anlama yeteneğini ölçen öğeleri içeren 40 maddelik çoktan seçmeli bir sözel yatkinlık testi uygulanmıştır. Veriler SPSS 22 programı ile çözümlenmiştir. Sonuçlar, dil yatkinlık düzeyleri hakkında bilgi sahibi olmanın, araştırmacıların dil öğrencileri, öğrenme ortamı ve öğrenme çıktıları hakkında daha iyi bir anlayış edinmelerine yardımcı olabileceğini göstermektedir. Sonuçlar ilgili alanyazın ışığında sunulmuştur. Bu çalışma etik kurul onayı ile ilgili karar verilmeden önce derginin sistemine yüklenmiş olduğu için etik kurul onay raporu bu çalışmaya eklenmemiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Dil yatkinlığı, sözel yatkinlık, öğretmen adayları, dil öğrenme.

Etik Kurul Kararı: Bu araştırma, 01.01.2020 tarihinden önce yapıldığı için etik kurul kararı zorunluluğu taşımamaktadır.

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Amaç ve Önem

Yabancı dil öğretiminde sözel yatkinlık, yazı dilini kullanma ve sözcüklerle sunulan kavramları anlama yeteneği olarak tanımlanır. Yabancı dil yatkinlığı, yabancı dil öğreniminde önemli bir rol oynar. Araştırmacılar tarafından yürütülen çalışmalar, sosyo-psikolojik bir yabancı dil (ikinci dil) öğrenimi kuramına ışık tutmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda eğilim, ikinci ya da yabancı bir dilin başarılı biçimde öğrenilmesi için dilsel ve sosyal etkenleri dikkate alarak hazırlanan bir tasarımın gerektiği yönündedir. Ancak öğrencilerin sözel yatkinlık düzeylerinin yaş, cinsiyet ve öğrencilerin not ortalamaları gibi değişkenlere göre anlamlı bir farklılık gösterip göstermediğinin araştırılması gelecekteki yabancı dil öğrenme tasarımlarını oluşturmada belirleyici rol oynayabilir. Bu nedenle yabancı dile yatkinlık düzeyinin söz edilen değişikliklere göre farklılık gösterip göstermediğinin ortaya çıkarılması gelecekteki yabancı dil eğitimi uygulamaları için ışık tutucu olacaktır.

Çünkü, 1980'lerden bu yana, yabancı dil öğrenme ortamlarında mevcut yöntemleri geliştirme eğilimi vardır. Diğer dilsel beceriler ile olan olası bağlarıyla ve tüm bileşenleriyle birlikte dile yönelik yatkinlık konusunu araştırmak, kuşkusuz dil öğretimi açısından bazı önemli görüşlere yol açacaktır. Buna göre, bu araştırma aşağıdaki araştırma sorularını yanıtlamayı amaçlamaktadır:

1. İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının genel olarak İngilizce'ye yönelik yatkinlık düzeyleri nedir?
2. İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının yatkinlık düzeylerinde cinsiyete göre bir farklılık var mıdır?
3. İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının yatkinlık düzeylerinde İngilizce düzeylerine göre bir farklılık var mıdır?
4. İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının yatkinlık düzeylerinde yaşlarına göre bir farklılık var mıdır?
5. İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının yatkinlık düzeylerinde ağırlıklı not ortalamalarına göre bir farklılık var mıdır?

Yöntem

Bu araştırma, kesitsel yöntemli nicel bir çalışmadır. Kesitsel çalışmalar katılımcıların tutumlarını, görüşlerini, inançlarını veya uygulamalarını kısa sürede ölçmeyi olanaklı kıldığı için eğitim alanında oldukça tercih edilmektedir (Creswell, 2002). Kesitsel çalışmaların amacı, sonuçlara göre bir evren içindeki bir örnekleme veya bir örneği tanımlamaktır. Bu anlamda bu çalışmalar, doğası gereği açıklayıcıdır. Zamanda kısıtlı bir an içinde tek seferde veri toplamak anlamında sınırlı olsa da kesitsel araştırma tasarımı değişkenler arasında olası ilişkileri belirtir; bu nedenle gelecekteki farklı nicel araştırmalar için varsayım üretme olanağı sağlar (Levin, 2006). Aynı şekilde bu çalışmanın kapsamında, katılımcıların sözel yatkinlık düzeyleri ve onların demografik özelliklerine göre herhangi bir anlamlı farklılık olup olmadığı sorunsalı gelecekteki araştırmalar için varsayımlar üretmede yararlı olabilir.

Bu çalışma etik kurul onayı ile ilgili karar alınmadan önce derginin sistemine gönderilmiş olduğu için etik kurul onay raporu çalışmaya eklenmemiştir.

Katılımcılar. İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümünde okuyan 101 öğretmen adayı (46 erkek, 55 kadın, 18-30+ yaşları arasında) araştırmaya katılmışlardır. Katılımcıların hiçbiri İngilizce konuşulan bir ülkede yaşamamış ancak birkaçı yurtdışında bulunmuştur. Katılımcıların İngilizce düzeyleri B2-C1 düzeyleri arasındadır. Sözü edilen katılımcılar sınıflarına yerleştirilmeden önce İngilizce yeterlik sınavına girmişlerdir. Araştırma sırasında, tüm katılımcılar üniversite birinci sınıfta eğitimlerini sürdürmekteydiler.

Verilerin toplanması. Veriler 2018-2019 öğretim yılı bahar döneminde, 40 maddelik çoktan seçmeli bir sözel yetkinlik testi ile toplanmıştır. Araştırmaya sadece gönüllü öğrenciler katılmıştır. Katılımcıların gönüllü katıldıklarını gösteren onam formları alınmıştır. Sözel yetkinlik testi, veri toplama zamanında ders vermekte olan araştırmacılar tarafından yapılmıştır. Katılımcılara anketi doldurmaları için bir ders saati süre verilmiştir.

Bulgular

Bu araştırmada, katılımcıların yetkinlik düzeylerinin cinsiyet, İngilizce düzeyleri, yaşları ve genel not ortalamaları gibi diğer değişkenlere göre anlamlı bir farklılık gösterip göstermediği bulunmaya çalışılmıştır. Sonuçlar, yetkinlik düzeyleri ile cinsiyet, düzey, yaş ve not ortalamalarına göre istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmadığını göstermiştir.

Tartışma, Sonuç ve Öneriler

Kean, Glynn ve Britton (1987), üniversite öğrencilerinin ikna edici (persuasive) türde kompozisyon yazarken sözel yetkinliğin rolünü incelemek için sözel yetkinlik hakkında çalışma yürütmüşlerdir. Sonuçlar, sözel yetkinlikleri daha yüksek olan öğrencilerin kompozisyon yazımında daha iyi not aldıklarını ve bütünsel anlamda daha başarılı olduklarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ayrıca çalışma, sözlü yetkinlik konusunda eksik olan öğrencilerin daha fazla kaygı duyduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Her ne kadar araştırmacılar esas olarak kompozisyonlara ve yazma süreci sonucu ortaya çıkan ürüne odaklanmış olsalar da bu çalışma, ortaya çıkan yazılı ürünün kur yerleşimi amaçlı kullanıldığı ortamlarda dile yakınlık konusunun önemini savunan öğretmenler için destekleyici nitelik taşımaktadır. Aksine, bu çalışma sadece öğretmen adaylarının sözel yetkinliklerinde farklı değişkenlere göre farklılık olup olmadığını araştırmaktadır. Sözel yetkinlik ve diğer herhangi bir özel beceri arasındaki olası ilişki daha derinlemesine araştırılabilir.

Dil yetkinliği konusunda, Granena (2012), açık ve örtülü öğrenmeye yönelik yetkinliklerin yabancı dilde eğitim ortamında uzun vadeli L2 (ikinci yabancı dil) başarısı için ne kadar önemli olduğunu araştırmıştır. Sonuçlar, bilişsel yetkinliğin örtük ve açık olarak açıklanmış iki ana yetkinlik türü içinde dağılımını ortaya koymuştur. Sonuçlar ayrıca bilişsel yetkinliğin hem erken hem de geç dönemlerde yabancı dil öğrenilen ortamlarda bilişsel yetkinliğin önemli rol oynadığını öne

sürmüştür. Buna karşın bu çalışma için yaş değişkeni göz önüne alındığında, katılımcıların çoğunun yaşları (% 92) uygun örnekleme yöntemi nedeniyle 18-21 yaşları arasında dağılım göstermektedir. Tüm katılımcılar bu çalışma sırasında üniversite eğitimlerine devam ettikleri için benzer yaş gruplarındaydı. Bunun, elde edilen farklı sonuçlar üzerinde bir etkisi olabilir ve bu çalışma, yetkinlik düzeyinin ve yaş değişkenine göre bir farklılık gösterip göstermediğini kontrol etmek için çeşitli yaş gruplarını içeren bir örneklem ile tekrarlanabilir.

Sparks Patton, Ganschow, Humbach ve Javorsky. (2006), sözlü ve yazılı yabancı dil (FL) yetkinliği ve yabancı dil becerisinin en iyi anadil belirleyicilerini ortaya çıkarmak için 54 katılımcıyla bir çalışma yürütmüştür. Çalışma on yıldan fazla sürmüş ve katılımcılar belirli aralıklarla test edilmişlerdir. Sonuçlar, anadil başarısının ve genel sözel zeka düzeyinin yabancı dil yeteneğinin güçlü belirleyicileri olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu çalışmada, L1 [birinci (ana) dil] ve L2 ve yetkinlik arasındaki olası bağlantılara değinilmemiştir. Bu nedenle L1, L2 ve yetkinlik arasındaki olası bağlantılar bu çalışmanın tekrarlanmasıyla açık bir biçimde ortaya çıkarılabilir. Ayrıca bu çalışmada uzun süreli bir araştırma deseni değil kesitsel bir araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. Bu nedenle mevcut çalışma yalnızca katılımcıların yetkinlik düzeylerinin demografik özelliklerine göre anlamlı bir farklılık gösterip göstermediğine odaklanmıştır. Bu çalışma, yüksek yetkinlik düzeyinin öğretmen adaylarının okuduklarını anlama üzerinde nasıl bir etkisi olabileceğini gözlemlemek için bir uygulama süreci içerecek biçimde deneysel bir çalışma tasarımıyla tekrar yürütülebilir.

Yeterli öngörücü geçerlikle dile olan yetkinliği ölçebilmek dilbilim araştırmaları alanında büyük ilgi görmüştür. Bununla birlikte sözel yetkinliği en doğru şekilde ölçmek için yetkinlik testlerinin kullanılması bazı nedenlerden dolayı gerçeklikten uzak olacaktır. Örneğin, yetkinlik türlerinin çeşitli bileşenlerinin birbirleriyle nasıl etkileşime girdiğine yönelik kuramsal anlayış hâlâ sınırlıdır. Ayrıca bu önlemlerin, tüm yeterlilik düzeyleri için tüm öğrenme bağlamlarında tüm yeterlik düzeyleri veya dilin tüm yönleri için kullanılmaması olasıdır (Hinkel, 2011).

Bu nedenle yetkinliğin ve katılımcıların demografik özelliklerine göre farklılık gösterip göstermediğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlayan bu araştırmanın yanı sıra, dilbilim araştırmaları için de daha iyi bir anlayışa katkıda bulunmak için daha derinlemesine ve uzun süreli çalışmalar yürütülmesi yararlı olacaktır. İlk olarak, farklı dil yetkinliklerinin öğrenme sürecinin farklı aşamalarındaki önemini değerlendirmek için daha uzun süreli bir araştırmaya gereksinim vardır. Böylece aynı kişilerin edimlerinin (performanslarının) farklı aşamalarındaki gelişimlerini gözlemlemek olanaklı olabilir. İkincisi, öğrenme bağlamını ve yetkinlikle olası bağlantısını araştırmak yerine, öğrenme bağlamının öğrencilerin dil başarısını tahmin etmede farklı yetkinlik düzeylerinin nasıl bir rol oynadığını araştırmak amacıyla daha fazla araştırmaya gereksinim vardır. Dahası, bazı özgül araştırmalar, bazı özel ödev (task) tipleri için farklı yetkinlik ve etkinlik özellikleri arasındaki etkileşimin daha iyi anlaşılmasında da etkili olabilir. Bu, belirli etkinlik çeşitleri ve öğrenci yetkinlikleri

arasındaki küçük ilişkilerin açığa çıkarılmasına ışık tutacaktır. Bu durum da yabancı ve ikinci dil eğitiminin gerçekleştiği öğrenme ortamlarında gerçekleşebilecek bir süreç yaklaşımının benimsenmesinde önemli olabilir. Ayrıca çalışan bellek konusundaki araştırmalar, dile olan yatkınlığın bir dizi farklı dil becerisini etkilediğini gösterdiğinden, daha derinlemesine bir anlayış kazanmada yardımcı olacaktır.

Kısaca, mevcut çalışma ikinci dil edinimi teorisindeki mevcut bilgi birikimine ek olarak, dile ilişkin yatkınlığın diğer bireysel değişkenlere göre anlamlı bir farklılık gösterip göstermediğini anlamak belirli sınıf içi uygulamalarına ışık tutabilir. Farklı öğrencilerin farklı öğrenme stilleri ve yatkınlık düzeyleri olduğundan, dile yatkınlık düzeyleri ve bu değişkenlerle olan olası ilişkileri hakkında bilgi sahibi olmak, araştırmacılar ve dil öğretmenlerinin dil öğrencileri, öğrenme ortamı ve öğrenme sonuçları ve buna göre sınıf hakkında daha iyi bir anlayışa sahip olmalarını sağlamak için yararlı olabilir. Daha verimli bir öğrenme ortamı oluşturmak için araştırmalarda elde edilen veriler ışığında sınıf içi uygulamalar geliştirilebilir. Bu çalışma etik kurul onayı ile ilgili karar onaylanmadan önce derginin sistemine yüklenmiş olduğu için etik kurul onay raporu bu çalışmaya eklenmemiştir.

Etik Kurul Kararı

Bu araştırma, 01.01.2020 tarihinden önce yapıldığı için etik kurul kararı zorunluluğu taşımamaktadır.