



## The role of L+ Turkish and English learning in resilience: A case of Syrian students at Gaziantep University

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### APA Citation:

Cinkara, E. (2017). The role of L+ Turkish and English learning in resilience: A case of Syrian students at Gaziantep University. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 13(2), 190-203.

Submission Date:21/03/2017

Acceptance Date:10/09/2017

### Abstract

The study investigated Syrian students' resilience, the ability to bounce back from some form of disaster, disruption, stress, or change. The situation in Syria caused thousands of deaths and millions of refugees, which is the main source of disaster and Syrian students need to recover from this. According to UNHCR, Turkey welcomed around 2.523.554 refugees, 314.917 of whom are located in Gaziantep, which constitutes about 20 % of total population of the city. In this study, we aimed to investigate the role of L+ (Turkish and/or English) learning in resilience of Syrian students studying at Gaziantep University intensive Turkish and English language programs. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale and interviews. The results suggested that our participants had a medium level of resilience and L+ Turkish and English have different roles in building resilience among Syrian refugee students.

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*Keywords:* Language education; language for resilience; refugee integration

## 1. Introduction

Refugees are people who flee from their countries for various reasons and require protection by the country in which they take sanctuary. These people and their situations have been investigated by numerous formal institutions and the most comprehensive as well as internationally binding document regarding the refugee issue entitled “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees” was released by the United Nations in 1951. At the convention, the refugee situation was internationally recognized and the legal status of refugees and asylum seekers was determined. In this document, refugees are defined as “people that have fled the country of his nationality and is unable to return owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,” (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1951, p. 14). Throughout history, there have always existed unwanted situations which have forced individuals to leave their countries; nevertheless, this issue is not improving. In fact, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 59 million forcibly displaced and 19.5 million refugees around the world as of December 31, 2014 (UNHCR, 2015).

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One of the most significant factors relating to refugees and their integration into the host community is resilience. The term resilience originates from the Latin word 'resiliens', originally referring to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance (Joseph, 1993). Although it has many uses in various fields, resilience in psychology and social studies refers primarily to the ability to bounce back from some shocking event or disaster. The process of regaining normal functionality after this trauma does not necessarily mean that the person has been unaffected by the situation; on the contrary, it suggests that the person holds the capacity to return to a normal or close-to-normal level of his or her pre-shock power and capability. Studies include among these shocking situations and their victims war, death, adolescent pregnancy, child abuse and neglect, children in foster care, crime victims, divorce, families in sparsely populated areas, family caregivers of the frail elderly, gay and lesbian persons, homelessness, immigrants and refugees, imprisonment and community corrections, intimate partner abuse, older persons in need of long-term care, single parenthood, suicide, women of colour, and workers in job jeopardy similarly explore the theoretical, empirical, demographic, programmatic, and clinical issues, alcoholism and drug addictions, borderline personality, chronic physical illness and disability, depression, developmental disabilities, eating problems, learning disabilities, and schizophrenia (Gitterman, 2001).

The modern use of resilience in the social sciences emerged in the 1960s; however, resilience research extends well beyond these years (Pickren 2014). One important element of resilience research is the study of the nature of this capability to return to normality and the factors that affect it. The factors affecting resilience have been classified into two categories: protective factors and risk factors (Benard, 1991; Weine, et al., 2014). Protective factors increase the probability of resilient behaviour in individuals, and they have been regarded as important features to promote positive development (i.e. social skills, security, strong personal relations, religious beliefs, etc.) (Knight, 2007). They can be internally or externally oriented moderating factors playing a positive role in adaptation to new situations or in buffering individuals from risk factors. In short, resilience is improved with protective factors. In educational settings, these factors have been proven to diminish stress levels and, therefore, the risk of failure (Esquivel, Doll & Oades-Sese, 2011). Among these factors are certain personal and environment processes, which include but are not limited to social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future. These are known to assist vulnerable people in overcoming severe obstacles and in functioning competently (Benard, 1991). For instance, in an Australian refugee setting, the time span in the host country was found to positively affect the resilience of refugees. It was noticed that teenage refugees adapted to Australian culture more easily as their time spent in the host country increased (Ziaian, de Anstiss, Antoniou, Baghurst, & Sawyer, 2012). Thus, adequate knowledge of resilience research and protective factors play a crucial role in the success of any language teaching programs designed for refugees.

Risk factors, on the other hand, decrease the probability of resilient behaviour in individuals. These include environmental factors, diseases, disasters, wars, poverty, parental psychopathology, family discord, as well as opposites of certain protective factors (i.e. weak social skills, insecurity, weak personal relations, lack of religious beliefs, etc.). In order that individuals develop resilience in any refugee setting, risk factors should be systematically investigated and, if possible, these factors should be reversed. That being said, the development of resilience cannot be accounted for merely by reversing such risk factors (Hoge, Austin & Pollack, 2007).

Resilience may be classified into subcategories based on certain factors, such as the types of the shock individual experiences and outcome. For instance, one of the most common types of resilience is psychological and social resilience (Rutter, 1987; Weine, et al., 2014). Others include academic resilience—in the form of some kind of educational achievement as a result of an ongoing effort (Morales & Trotman 2011)—and physical resilience—a person's physical capacity to adjust to

challenges, sustain physical wellness and strength, and recover efficiently from certain diseases (Resnick, Galik, Dorsey, Scheve, & Gutkin, 2011). As the main framework of this study regards language and its role in building resilience, language-related resilience research is of primary focus.

### *1.1. Research on resilience and language*

The socio-economic and educational integration of refugee groups into their host societies depends, to a certain degree, upon host language proficiency. This clear connection is well-known to governments accepting refugees and asylum seekers. For example, the Welsh government has stated the following:

“Good language skills provide firm foundations from which asylum seekers and refugees in Wales can achieve their potential. As well as being the means through which individuals within a community communicate and learn about each other, language carries important cultural and historical signals, which can facilitate inclusion.” (Welsh Government, 2013, p.13)

As clearly stated in the report, meeting the linguistic needs of refugees is a crucial factor for their successful integration into host communities. These needs, in general, include the ability to express themselves in the native language of the host country as well as in the English language, which is an important factor of educational success. In a recent attempt to meet such needs, Irish authorities have launched a language program for immigrants in their country and have claimed that “the ability of immigrants to speak the host language is critical and learning the English Language is a key success factor to facilitate immigrants to integrate into society at social and economic levels.” (Horwath Consulting Ireland in association with RAMBOLL Management and Matrix 2008, p. 3). In a more recent study in the same context, refugees who came to Ireland more than a decade ago have been studied and results have displayed that they were mostly proficient in English and, therefore, could participate in local society (Rose, 2015). For this reason, Rose has strongly suggested the application of host community language instruction programs for refugees, which are less concentrated and spread over time.

In a Mexican English language learner (ELL) context, Padrón, Waxman, Brown, and Powers (2000) investigated the educational success of ELLs and their resilience. In this study, they designed a program to promote resilience in ELLs by engaging teachers in an intervention training. The results suggested an improved level of resilience among learners. Moreover, detailed clarifications to ELLs, allocation of extended time spans for their answers, and encouragement led to elevated resilience in these students.

In Australia, Ziaian et.al. (2012) investigated refugees from Africa, Yugoslavia, and the Middle East by utilizing The Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). They found that 170 participants exhibited a low level of CD-RISC score in general and that male participants’ mean score was profoundly lower than that of female participants (Ziaian, et al., 2012). They also found that with increased time of stay in the host country, refugees developed more adaptation skills by learning the host language and, therefore, had increased resilience scores from the CD-RISC.

### *1.2. Background to the refugee situation in Gaziantep and Gaziantep University*

Although the role of age, gender, language, religious and ethnocultural diversity in refugees’ experience of displacement has been illustrated in various contexts, there is little research pertaining the contribution of quality language education to building resilience at both the institutional level and the individual level. Gaziantep is one of the most convenient places to study the role of language education in the resilience of Syrian refugees as the city has attracted hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. Since the civil war erupted in Syria, an unprecedented number of people have escaped from

war and taken refuge in Turkey. According to UNHCR, Turkey has welcomed around 2.523.554 refugees (Toros, 2016), 314.917 of whom are located in Gaziantep, which constitutes about 20% of the city's total population (Gaziantep City Council 2014). Although there has been a sharp increase in formal education enrolment since the previous academic year, the 2016 3RP plan reveals that there are still over 663,000 school-aged Syrian refugees, 433,000 of whom are not registered in any form of education as of August 2015. When these enrolments were closely investigated, it was seen that the rates are higher at the elementary level; however, they significantly decrease in regards to higher education (The UN Refugee Agency, 2016). This trend could be explained by the greater demand of language requirements and academic skills in higher education.

Before the Syrian Civil War commenced, Gaziantep and Aleppo Universities had begun to develop close relations. However, there were two major factors that moved Gaziantep to the top of the application list for Syrian students. The first one is the variety of English-medium programmes offered by Gaziantep University. For Turkish-medium programmes, Syrian students must learn Turkish and pass the TÖMER Turkish proficiency test as a prerequisite, despite English proficiency. However, at Gaziantep University, with required English proficiency, students are not required to master Turkish in order to participate. There existed still another problem for international students pertaining entrance to universities: in order to study at a Turkish university, as is required by the Higher Education Council, international students must provide satisfactory scores from the YÖS<sup>†</sup> exam. This problem was eliminated when Gaziantep University began accepting in 2009 international students who lacked YÖS exam results. This step paved the way for Syrian students into Gaziantep University. Therefore, in the following years and especially after war erupted in Syria, an increasing number of students were admitted without YÖS scores to various English and Turkish programs at Gaziantep University.

### *1.3. Purpose and research questions*

The current research investigates two main issues: the resilience levels of Syrian students enrolled in Gaziantep University's intensive Turkish and English language programs and the role of L2 and/or L3 (will be referred to as L+ henceforth) Turkish and English learning in these students' resilience. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed: (a) Is there a noteworthy difference between the resilience scores of L+ English and L+ Turkish learners? (b) What are the roles of L+ English and L+ Turkish in the development of resilience?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Design*

In order to answer these research questions, we employed a non-experimental mixed method research paradigm. To address the first research question, a quantitative procedure was followed and for the second question, a qualitative procedure was followed. For the quantitative aspect, a resilience scale was utilized to collect data on students' resilience levels and to compare L+ English and L+ Turkish learners. A t-test calculation addressed whether Syrian students studying at SFL and TÖMER possessed different levels of resilience. For the qualitative component, data collected through semi-structured interviews was used to determine refugee learners' perceptions of the role of language-learning in promoting resilience. A content analysis of interviews was conducted in order to determine

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<sup>†</sup> YÖS (International Student Exam) is a university entrance exam for international students in Turkey. As the test is administered in Turkish, not many international students can get satisfactory scores from it.

the role of language learning in building resilience. Moreover, this part of the study provided a tool for understanding the protective and promotive factors of resilience.

## 2.2. Data collection tools

### 2.2.1. The Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

The CD-RISC extensively has been utilized to investigate resilience (Connor and Davidson 2003). The authors of the scale report more than 400 resilient researches employing the scale (Davidson and Connor 2015). Being one of the most influential and effective scales, the CD-RISC was used in the current study. The Arabic version of the scale was administered to 209 participants and their resilience scores were calculated. The students were asked to rate statements according to the extent to which they agreed by using the following scale: not true at all = 0, rarely true = 1, sometimes true = 2, often true = 3, true nearly all the time = 4. Scoring of the scale is based on summing the total of all items, each of which is scored from 0-4. For the CD-RISC-25, the full range is therefore from 0 to 100. Higher scores on the CD-RISC indicate higher levels of resilience. The Cronbach's alpha for the CD-RISC for the sample was .73, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

In the manual of the CD-RISC, the authors cited the resilience scores of different populations in the validation study as follows: U.S. general population 80.7; primary care patients 71.8; psychiatric outpatients 68.0; generalized anxiety 62.4; and PTSD samples 47.8/52.8. Other research settings and CD-RISC scores are given in the manual in detail. However, in refugee settings, Ziaian researched African, Yugoslavian, and Middle Eastern refugees and determined their mean resilience scores to be 60, 69, 67, respectively (Ziaian, et al., 2012). In a Chinese context, the mean resilience score was found 60.7 (Yu, et al. 2013). Similarly, in our study, the mean CD-RISC scores were 69.2 for the L+ English group and 68.4 for L+ Turkish group.

### 2.2.2. Semi-structured interview protocol (SSIP)

After initial analysis of the results of CD-RISC, Syrian refugee participants were divided into high-, medium- and low-resilience groups. Participants in both low- and high-resilience groups were invited to SSIP sessions. A total of 9 participants—4 from low-resilience and 5 from high-resilience groups—voluntarily participated in the SSIP sessions. The SSIP commenced with a brief introduction to the study and to the concept of resilience. Then, followed the questions which analysed how refugees' use of languages both inside and outside of the classroom in their host countries affected their resilience.

The main purpose of the SSIP was to determine the role of second/foreign language learning in these students' returns to normalcy in their family, social and educational lives. The researcher and participants met at a quiet and comfortable office for SSIP and each session began with a brief introduction followed by some information about the study and interview. Then, an information and consent form was delivered to participants to grant their consent. After this initial period, participants were asked five pre-determined questions about how their use of different languages in different settings affected their resilience process. The sessions lasted for 18 to 37 minutes and participants' answers and comments were audio-recorded for further analysis with their written consent.

## 2.3. Participants

The findings and insights presented in this study were gathered from a total of 209 Syrian refugees residing in Gaziantep via in-depth analysis of the results of CD-RISC and SSIP interviews. All participants were attending either a one-year intensive English programme at Gaziantep University School of Foreign Languages (SFL) or a Turkish programme at Gaziantep University Centre for Turkish Teaching (TOMER). Details of participants are given in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Participant summary

	Female	Male	Interviewed	Time (months)
L+ Turkish	41	50	4	21.99
L+ English	45	73	5	20.72
Total	86	123	9	21.27

As Table 1 illustrates, 209 language learners participated in this study, fifty-six percent (N=118) of whom were from TOMER and forty-four percent of whom (N=91) were from SFL; moreover, fifty percent were female and fifty percent were male. The SSIP interviews were conducted with 9 participants who were selected based on their CD-RISC scores, and their participation was voluntary. A total of 3 hours and 23 minutes of audio recordings were collected through the interviews. The average stay time in the host country was 21.99 months in the L+ Turkish group and 20.72 months in the L+ English group.

#### 2.4. Procedure

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis among the students studying in SFL and TÖMER. There are 1653 students in the SFL, 1410 Turkish, 156 Syrian and 57 from 23 different countries other than Turkey and Syria. TÖMER is a Turkish language-teaching centre catering to the language needs of around 280 international students at Gaziantep University and to many more in the 10 refugee camps in Southeast Turkey. From these two institutions, a database of on-campus learners was constructed for two groups— Turkish Language Learners (L+ Turkish) and English Language Learners (L+ English). All students were invited to participate in the study and only those who consented were delivered the CD-RISC scale along with a background questionnaire asking to self-report their age, gender, type of graduate program, and second language currently being studied. After the initial analysis of CD-RISC results, a total of 20 students (10 with high-resilience scores from CD-RISC and 10 with low scores) were invited to SSIP; however, 9 of them (5 L+ English, 4 L+ Turkish) agreed to participate in the interview sessions. The interviews were conducted separately with the aid of a translator, if needed, and they were audio-recorded.

#### 2.5. Data analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in this study through CD-RISC and SSIP, respectively. For the quantitative component, each participant's resilience score determined via CD-RISC was analysed with SPSS statistical analysis software. For the qualitative part, the interview recordings were transcribed and content-analysed for the role of language in building resilience.

### 3. Findings

This study aimed to investigate the resilience of Syrian refugees at Gaziantep University and further to reveal the role of learning a language or languages in their returns to normalcy. It has been well documented that the mastery of L2 facilitates integration and resilience among immigrants and refugees. However, this does not necessarily mean that resilience can not only be achieved through L2 acquisition, nor does L2 acquisition guarantee successful integration into host communities. Returning to normalcy is a process including L2 along with a number of other personal, cultural, social and professional factors.

In the context of our study, Syrian students enrolled in intensive L+ English and L+ Turkish teaching programmes were studied to reveal their resilience levels. Then, interviews investigated the role of language in our students' resilience processes. In order to present our findings in a more organised way, we would like to use research questions in the presentation of our findings.

### 3.1. Findings regarding resilience level

#### 3.1.1. Is there a noteworthy difference between the resilience scores of L+ English and L+ Turkish learners?

In order to address this research question, quantitative data about participants' resilience levels was collected via the CD-RISC. Descriptive statistics of the CD-RISC are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive data from the CD-RISC

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
L+ Turkish	91	18.00	91.00	68.43	12.01
L+ English	118	19.00	91.00	69.18	12.32
Total	209	18.00	91.00	68.86	12.16

Table 2 summarises descriptive data from the CD-RISC. As is illustrated in the table, the average CD-RISC mean score was 68.43 in the L+ Turkish group (SD=12.01) and 69.18 in L+ English (SD=12.32). Although L+ English learners exhibited slightly higher levels of resilience, an independent-sample T-test analysis was conducted to see if the difference was statistically significant. The T-test analysis showed that there was not a significant difference in the mean CD-RISC scores for L+ Turkish (M=68.43, SD=12.01) and L+ English (M=69.18, SD=12.32) conditions;  $t(207) = .434$ ,  $p = .665$ .

#### 3.1.2. What are the roles of L+ English and L+ Turkish in the development of resilience?

The qualitative data gathered through the SSIP was investigated to answer this question. The findings are presented according to two categories, namely, findings about L+ Turkish and L+ English.

Describe the sample or participants who participated in your study and the setting when relevant. In most studies, your participants are likely to be people, but a sample can comprise a group of cases or items. You should present information related to the sample, such as how the sample was selected, the size of the sample, and relevant demographic characteristics about the sample. You, as the researcher-author, have to decide which demographic characteristics are relevant to your study. For example, GPA, age, or IQ scores of the study's participants may be considered important demographic characteristics in one study, but not in another. Understandably, the exact information about the sample in your study (e.g., the mean age or the number of males and females in each group) should provide a general description of the study's participants.

##### 3.1.2.1. About L+ Turkish

Being able to learn and use the language of the host country brings refugees numerous advantages in the process of resilience. In the short run, a basic knowledge of L+ Turkish facilitates their social lives outside of their immediate Syrian environment. However, a certain level of L+ Turkish is required in order to easily gain access to official services including health services and an accredited education. This study aimed to uncover via one-on-one SSIP interviews the role of L+ Turkish in Syrian students' resilience. The results of these interviews suggest that L+ Turkish plays two major roles in students' return to normalcy and integration into the Turkish community. These are;

*L+ Turkish as functional integration tool*

Most language utilized in daily life has the aim of realizing a specific purpose, such as greeting people, asking for information, expressing an idea, apologizing, asking for permission, etc. All of these purposes constitute the functions of language. According to Krashen and Terrel (1983, p. 65), the main objective of any utterance is the function of that utterance). Savignon describes language function as “the use to which language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes” (Savignon, 1997, p. 19). As in most cases, acquisition of the host language is a key factor in the successful integration of refugees and immigrants. For this reason, the view of language is not on the structure and form of the language but rather on the meaning of any given utterance. As a result, mastery of functional language is necessary for learners to achieve specific objectives. In this way, students utilize language in order to fulfill a particular task outside their immediate environments and formal instruction at the university, where meaning is of prime importance. Thus, a good command of the Turkish language for functional purposes is highly valued by our students. The following comment by Batoul exemplifies this fact:

Before I started TÖMER here, I thought Turkish was a difficult language to learn, and almost impossible for me. It is still difficult but I have to learn it and speak properly to be able to organize my life here. Very few people know Arabic in Gaziantep and most Turkish people are quite friendly. But, without a way of communication, I have difficulty in understanding and expressing myself. Now after B1, I have more confidence in my Turkish.

One of the most important roles of language is in socialization. To integrate effectively into the university and the host community, our students need Turkish. The following excerpt from Mustapha exemplifies the use of language for social purposes:

I am a very friendly person and I like to meet new people and make new friends. When I first came here I was surprised to see few people speaking English in the city. It was so difficult at first even to greet your neighbour in the lift. All we exchanged was ‘selamun aleykum’.<sup>‡</sup> I know some basic phrases and I can have a small talk.

*L+ Turkish as academic and vocational development tool*

The resilience and integration of refugees may be boosted by learning L+ Turkish for academic and vocational purposes. Especially considering the economic sustainability of the lives of refugees, learning Turkish for academic purposes is important not only for gaining access to tertiary education but also for obtaining employment. Participants commented on the obvious advantage of knowing Turkish in finding a job now and in the future. Khaled made a clear connection between Turkish skills and finding a proper job:

Finding a job with a Turkish boss is rather difficult. Even if you find a job, it is most of the time under your qualifications and you are underpaid. Maybe lower than the minimum wage. My uncle had his own business in Syria, but after moving here, he ran out of all his money and now he has to work as a construction worker. I believe he could have found a better job if he knew Turkish.

As already stated in this paper’s background section, the language of instruction in most Turkish universities is, naturally, Turkish. Therefore, in order to study at one of these universities, Syrian students are required to prove their Turkish language levels. Otherwise, they must enroll in a one-year intensive Turkish programme. Clearly, our participants in this one-year Turkish programme are aware of the crucial role that Turkish plays in their tertiary education.

*L+ Turkish to reach public services*

Second-language learning is not the strongest point in the Turkish education system. As a result, the number of speakers of a second language is quite limited, especially among the personnel of health

<sup>‡</sup> A religion based greeting in Arabic, meaning "peace be upon you", which is also common in Turkey.



service providers, public offices, municipality offices, social services, etc. Although English-speaking staff is assigned to foreign offices at police departments and other public organisations, the levels of English are satisfactory, at best. Ibrahim emphasized this fact by stating the following:

When we moved into our flat, there was a problem with the electricity bill. When I visited the electricity service office, we could not communicate as I did not know Turkish and they did not know Arabic. Then, an English-speaking Turkish person helped me communicate my problem and finally fix it. Without him, I could not have fixed my problem there. I am not blaming anyone but it would be better to have people who speak English at institutions that provide public services.

### 3.1.2.2. *About L+ English*

Resilience research pertaining refugees and immigrants is limited in terms of the role of language, though there does exist research concerning L2 English in English-speaking host communities. However, in our situation, English is not the native language of the host country; rather, it is taught and spoken as a foreign language. In a Turkish context, the majority of people use Turkish in their daily lives and the official language is Turkish. The learning and teaching of English is quite popular among Turkish people, but it has not proven to be successful.<sup>§</sup>

Syrian refugees are also encouraged to learn English in certain contexts. Although there exist private initiatives to provide English instruction to Syrian teenagers, most effort in terms of language instruction is made by public institutions. Especially at the tertiary level, there are many institutions which provide undergraduate- and graduate-level English medium programmes in Turkey. Gaziantep University, which has approximately 1400 Syrian students studying in different programmes, is among these institutions.

All interview participants (N=9) in this study mentioned the importance learning English for their daily lives. The students of YDYO—who are enrolled in an intensive English programme—touched upon the role of English in facilitating their bouncing back to normalcy. However, interestingly enough, the students enrolled in TÖMER (currently learning Turkish) were well aware of this fact. In conclusion, the learning of L+ English plays a significant role in the resilience of Syrian refugee students at Gaziantep University.

### *L+ English as academic development tool*

As the YDYO students are already registered to an English-medium programme at Gaziantep University, they acknowledge the important role of English in their academic lives. Hassan commented the following:

Although I have many problems in my life, I have never felt that stressed at the university. All my friends are trying to help me, they speak to me in English in and outside class. Although I am still learning a lot of new things, I feel I am easily following classes and expressing myself (in English). My friends in freshmen year also tell me that English is very important in the department. So, with better English, I will have better grades in my classes.

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<sup>§</sup> English Language instruction starts as early as kindergarten in some private institutions and in 4th grade at state schools. However, more than 90 percent of Turkish students cannot progress beyond basic language skills even after 1,000 hours of English training, according to a joint report from the British Council and TEPAV (British Council & Tepav, 2013).

*L+ English to build a better future*

However, the use of English is not limited to the university setting for participants. They stated that they can speak English outside the university, but it is limited. One important role of English, they believe, is to create better employment opportunities. To illustrate this, Qutaiba stated the following:

English is the most important language in the business world. If you know English, you can find a job easily. But, if you only speak Arabic, you cannot find a job.

One particular comment was striking in terms of the perceived role of English for future success. Mohammad discussed the significance of English for his future when the civil war would end and he would return to Syria. He stated this:

Everything will be over one day and when the time comes, I will go back to Syria and start my business. Then, I will be using English more and I will be able to speak to people all over the world.

*L+ English as a lingua franca*

Students also stated that they use English on social media and on the internet. Especially when they want to share their opinions with international friends (Turkish or another origin), they use English. Likewise, English plays a crucial role in obtaining information. The following excerpt taken from Nadine's interview clearly illustrates the significance of learning English as a lingua franca:

I can follow foreign news sites to get information from the international community and press on the Syrian issue. They are more reliable and objective than national news channels which are government controlled. If I did not know English, I could not do this.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the resilience levels of L+ Turkish- and L+ English-learning refugee students at Gaziantep University. Our results revealed that refugee students at Gaziantep University have mean scores of 67-69 from CD-RISC, which is a low resilience score in the U.S. but in other parts of the world, a score of 67 could typify the mean range and suggest a high level of resilience for the person in that community. In addition, other research concerning refugees found similar results (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Ziaian, et al., 2012; Yu, et al., 2013). Nevertheless, we should note that the participants in this study were teenagers who were enrolled in an undergraduate programme. These properties of the participants should be considered while drawing conclusions about resilience levels of the general Syrian refugee population in Turkey because research suggests that students score lower than adults (Campbell-Sills, Forde & Stein, 2009).

These two different groups of Syrian refugee students did not statistically differ in their resilience levels. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there exists no research concerning the effect of different second-language learning on the resilience of refugees. However, the lack of difference in the resilience of these groups might owe itself to the fact that L+ English students—whose immediate educational environment is in English—are exposed to Turkish outside the university. Therefore, they can function well at school by using English and outside the university by continuing to learn Turkish. Furthermore, L+ Turkish learners are surrounded by Turkish-speaking people both in their university environment and outside. Therefore, we conclude that both L+ Turkish and L+ English learning facilitated our students' recovery from the shock and integration into society. This could be one of the main reasons was to why their mean resilience scores from CD-RISC did not differ statistically.

One important point to note is the reciprocal relationship between resilience and learning. Academic success is an output of many factors including resilience. Research claims that academically resilient learners are mostly high achievers on both standardized achievement tests and in daily school

work. They are motivated and have high rates of attendance. On the other hand, low resilient learners are low achievers on tests and in daily school work, less motivated and attend less classes (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005; Esquivel, et al., 2011; Morales & Trotman 2011). The effect of academic resilience on achievement is, therefore, evident. However, as is shown in our study, learning a language positively affects resilience (Gitterman, 2001; Pickren, 2014). Therefore, we suggest that the reciprocal relationship between resilience and learning—especially, language learning—be carefully considered.

Integration into the host community is described as becoming a fully active member of society, participating in and contributing to the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country. (Welsh Government, 2013). For successful integration into the host community, language instruction should focus on the role of languages in the resilience of refugees, such as functional integration tool, academic and vocational development tool, a tool to reach public services, tool to build a better future, and language as a lingua franca. It should also be noted that non-governmental organisations and employers can have a positive effect on the resilience of refugees by providing language-learning and economic integration opportunities. Institutions dealing with refugees should be in close contact with employers to determine their needs and try covering their needs by providing necessary skills through instruction. Therefore, the social and economic integration of refugees should be supported.

In Turkey, the refugee integration is more complicated than in other countries not only because of the large number (more than 3 million) of refugees but also because there is more of a language problem when compared to other countries which accept Syrian refugees. The host country language and the refugee language is the same in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. There is no shared language in Turkey between refugees and the local community, i.e. Turkish is spoken extensively in Turkey but in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt Arabic is the native language. Therefore, Syrian refugee students cannot be simply included in the mainstream education. Integration and community cohesion is therefore affected negatively because not only the students but also their parents are excluded in public education. Even if these children make their way into these schools, their parents cannot support them as they lack language skills. Therefore, no connections can be set up among refugee students and parents, Turkish students and parents and school administration. The language barrier makes integration and social cohesion rather difficult for the refugee population in Turkey.

The study has some main limitations. First one is the reliability coefficient, which was calculated as .73. Another limitation was the use of Arabic translator in the data collection. Lastly, validation and trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected in this study was not confirmed with any statistical or methodological tool. Further research in resilience and language learning could be conducted in Syrian refugee populations, where the participants act as learners and social entities. The scope of further studies could be extended to the point where the effect of language could be observed on not only schooling but also social, cultural, economic and political aspects of life.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to state my gratitude to my participants for generously sharing their opinions with me. I am also grateful to Atta Latif, Nesreen Ahmad, and Rndh Almohammad for their help in translation from and to Arabic.

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## İlave dil olarak İngilizce ve Türkçe öğreniminin kendini toparlamadaki rolü: Gaziantep Üniversitesindeki Suriyeli öğrencilerin durumu

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### Öz

Kendini toparlama gücü (resilience) bir doğal felaket, çatışma, rahatsızlık, stres ya da değişiklik sonucunda bireyin eski haline dönebilme yeteneğini tarif etmek için kullanılır. Suriye'deki durum binlerce insanın ölmesine ve milyonlarcasının da ülkelerinden kaçmasına sebep oldu. Gaziantep'e sığınmış ve üniversitede eğitim gören öğrencilerin de bu travmayı atlatıp eski durumlarına dönmeleri gerekir. BM Göç İdaresi Başkanlığının verilerine göre, 314.917'ü Gaziantep'te olmak üzere Türkiye toplam 2.523.554 mülteciyi ağırlamakta. Bu çalışmanın amacı ilave dil olarak İngilizce ve Türkçe'nin Suriyeli öğrencilerin Kendini toparlama güçlerinin oluşmasında katkısının incelenmesidir. Katılımcı öğrenciler üniversitenin zorunlu İngilizce ve zorunlu Türkçe hazırlık sınıflarına devam eden Suriyeli öğrencilerden seçilmiştir. Connor–Davidson Resilience Ölçeği ve mülakatlarla hem nicel hem de nitel veri toplanmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar öğrencilerimizin orta düzeyde kendini toparlama gücüne sahip olduklarını ve Türkçe ve İngilizcenin kendini toparlanama gücünün oluşmasında farklı rolleri olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* dil eğitimi; kendini toparlama ve dil; mülteci entegrasyonu

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