

Views of University Students on “*New Turkish Literature*” Course: A Qualitative Study (Karabük University Sample)

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Abstract: Present study has been conducted to detect Turkish Language and Literature Department students’ views and expectations regarding “*New Turkish Literature*” course. Collectively 33 students receiving education during 2010–2011 academic year in Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department have been included within the scope of research. In this study that employed qualitative research method, three open-ended questions have been directed to students. The answers given by participant students have been examined via analysis method. Participant students have stated the reasons accounting for the popularity of “*New Turkish Literature*” course in their eyes; the course is addressing to the modern age; the course is demonstrated as presentations and poems in the curriculum are examined through analysis and also the course is appealing to students’ ideals. The students have ordered unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” this way; that the course topics are challenging, that the topics are quite scattered in the course and the topics are extremely interdependent on history. The students have also stated their expectations from “*New Turkish Literature*” course; use of discussion method throughout the course, more active involvement of the instructor and the student throughout lesson and receiving more fun during the class hour.

Key words: “*New Turkish Literature*” Course • Teaching of “*New Turkish Literature*” Course • Student Views

INTRODUCTION

“*New Turkish Literature*” is a literary genre developed and transformed parallel to the Western effects. Starting from its birth till the 19th century, it is possible to mention the existence of a Turkish Literature formed with a united impact of Central Asia and the Orient. “*New Turkish Literature*” is the literary reflection of Turkish Westernizing or Modernization process which originally started with the declaration of 1839 dated Rescript of Gülhane (Tanzimat Firman). In that sense it would be logical to consider all the stages of Ottoman-Turkish Modernization initiated and systemized during the reign of Sultan Selim the Third as the resources nourishing New Turkish Literature. Tanzimat and Islahat Firmans (1839, 1856), the French Revolution, modernization in the field of learning and education, newly established Western style schools, translations of the new books to be studied in these schools, newspaper and magazines, books translated from Western literature, literary works, some social platforms establishing a bridge

with Western world (Chamber of Translation, Privy Council, writers, unions etc.) all together gave rise to the process of Westernization and they also nourished New Literature intellectually [1].

The literary reflection of administrative and political changes took place in the 1860s and through the translations from West, France in particular, new pieces of literature reflecting Western Literature came to surface. In that sense Ybrahim Şinasi is acknowledged as the first gate opened from Ottoman world to the West [2]. From that date on, a Western style of thought arose in Turkish history of ideas and culture; however there was also the coexistence of both traditional and modern. While the effects of traditional literature were still dominant, there were also new texts reflecting the Western way of thought. On that account it became a necessity to present the literature of this period as a separate section from the history of general Turkish Literature since Westernization gave birth to a totally different generation from the Ottoman till Republic age and this new generation accomplished great transformations in Turkish political,

social, cultural and literary fields. Literature of this period includes in itself all the social problems Ottoman State went through since its fall until the establishment and development process of Modern Turkey.

Until 1939, in all Turkish universities, Turkish Literature courses were offered as a compact course without any periodic classification yet as of 1939 “*New Turkish Literature*” course found a new place as required course. To honor the 100th anniversary of Tanzimat, the Board of Education resolved to open a professorship in Istanbul University, Faculty of Education under the title “19th Century Turkish Literature” and in 1941 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpýnar was appointed as the first New Turkish Literature professor to that office [3].

“*New Turkish Literature*” is the literature of a period where the new and old styles existed under one roof. The “old” hereby includes a classical literature of roughly five hundred years and Orient effects (Arabic and Farsi) embellished abundantly with Islamic motifs. In this sense “New Turkish Literature” course also requires a powerful background of Orient Literature as well culture. It is obvious that starting from Arabic stylism to modern literary theories, the course requires theoretic, philosophical and practical applications.

It has been one hundred seventy-one years since the proclamation of Tanzimat. Turkish Youth, just as it happened in the past, is still going through the conflict of East-West which is best described with the term ‘dualism’ created for the concept of Westernization; modernization in other terms. This dualism described by Tanpýnar as “we all live in a more acute sense of ‘to be or not to be’ than Hamlet himself [4] finds quite an evident position in the attitudes of students towards “*New Turkish Literature*” course. The transformation in social/cultural identity determines this attitude and this transformation brings with itself the kind of uneasiness introduced because of being both an Oriental and a Westerner [5]. Tanpýnar also comments on this huge fact Turkish society faces: “Modern Turkish Literature launches out upon a crisis of civilization” [6].

Children of low-income families and social sects in particular experience difficulty in grasping the concepts like Renaissance, Reform, rationalism, positivism, humanist philosophy, rise of bourgeoisie, relativity etc. that all constitute the intellectual background of “*New Turkish Literature*”. They interpret the metaphysical anxiety in the texts as “shaking of the faith” which is undoubtedly bound to religious traces and traditional beliefs. Additionally it is an undeniable fact that these

children have received an education disregarding philosophy or reducing it to a few philosophers from Antique Greece.

The intellectual conflict, dualism or between’s Turkish intellectuals have faced since the past till present day constituted certain problems in not only students but also in the identification and contextual interpretation of the course as well. “*New Turkish Literature*” period has been perceived by some field researchers as a period when the impact of traditional literature was ignored and Western copying was dominant [7]. Furthermore there is also a lack of consensus regarding the common title describing the Literature of this period. The literature of this term has received different names such as *Modern Turkish Literature*, *Turkish Poetry under the Influence of Western World*, *19th Century Turkish Literature*, *Turkish Literature in an Age of Quest*, *Tanzimat Literature*, *Literature of Transformation Period*, *Turkish Literature of the Last Age*, *Contemporary Turkish Literature*. Birol Emil describes that the literature in that age was still “nameless and ambiguous” [8]. However in modern day New Turkish Literature term has been a common concept describing our literature of the last one hundred and fifty years.

Another attribution of this course is that unlike classical literature, it conveys the political, social and cultural problems of the age to the society through texts. Ottoman modernization is at the same the fall process of the Ottoman State and modernization was originally valued as a means to stop this collapse. Hence starting from the pioneers of Tanzimat (*Şinasi*, *Namýk Kemal*, *Ziya Pasha*, *Sadullah Pasha* etc.) till present day, a new generation who can think, question, analyze and seek for cause and effect relation has been raised and this kind of perspective has found a place in the literary works. As opposed to more abstract, imaginary or metaphoric world of classical literature, a new literature full of life has been created.

“*New Turkish Literature*”, is structurally a course intermingled with the lesson of social history. Indeed history of literature is also a live branch of history demonstrating the progress of society in every field from the background of literary works [9]. Unfortunately in Turkey, history courses in secondary education grade in particular lack such context which naturally demolishes students’ ability to analyze historical events’ effects from the past till present day through an analogy. Hereby the adverse effects of test-centered university entrance exam are also noticeable. On that account the student who

lacks the required knowledge of history demanded by “*New Turkish Literature*” course is in a condition not fulfilling course objective, target and acquisitions.

The overall objective of this course is to enable grasping the basic elements that paved the way for Turkish Literature which changed and developed under Western effect, to introduce the stages of formation and to monitor the Modernization process of Turkish Literature through the noteworthy names and works of the age. Regardless of the fact that a literary work is a personal work reflecting a specific writer, it also bears the quality of mirroring social and cultural changes of a specific society. In that aspect every single literary text is at the same time a work of idea and culture. The lives, dreams, existence, past and present of Turkish people are hidden in these works of literature. On these accounts “*New Turkish Literature*” is a required course in higher education curriculum.

In addition to the function of reflecting Turkish people and social life, “*New Turkish Literature*” course has another mission as establishing a significant connection with modern world literatures and philosophies. By taking this course it is possible to gain knowledge on modern literary theories developed within the light of various philosophical eoles, aesthetics, text analysis and research methods and comparative literature. In that sense this is a course that synthesizes Western and Orient. Particularly in the studies relevant of comparative literature it is feasible to trace the common motifs of humanity. In this modern age where globalization is at its peak, diverging from the way literary discipline borrowed from the West would also be responsible for the cover hiding the eternal treasures of the Orient.

The objective of current study is to explore the views and expectations of Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature department students on “*New Turkish Literature*” course. It is considered that identification of the views and suggestions of students on “*New Turkish Literature*” course would be contributory to detecting the current status and practical problems of “*New Turkish Literature*” course and render suggestions on improving its quality and effectiveness. Parallel to this overall objective, problem statement and sub-problems of the research are formed as below:

Problem Statement: What are the views of Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature department students on “*New Turkish Literature*” course?

Sub Problems:

- What are the popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course in the eyes of Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature department students?
- What are the unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course in the eyes of Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature department students?
- What are the views of Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature department students on the way “*New Turkish Literature*” course should be taught?

Method: *Qualitative research* method has been employed in present research. Qualitative research can be explained as the research method where qualitative data gathering methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are employed and a qualitative process is followed to exhibit the perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic format in their natural setting [10].

Collectively 33 students receiving education during 2010–2011 academic year in Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department have been included within the scope of research.

Three open-ended questions have been directed to these students which are: (1) What aspects do you like about “*New Turkish Literature*” course? (2) What aspects do you dislike about “*New Turkish Literature*” course? (3) How would you prefer “*New Turkish Literature*” course to be taught?

Collected data from the students were then evaluated via *context data analysis technique* of *phenomenographic* analysis method. In this analysis, as a requirement of the first step, all the answers given to open-ended questions were read quite fast in one session only. Subsequently, the same answers were read quickly for the second and third time again. At the end of third reading a set of temporary pre-categories were outlined and these pre-categories constituted the base for further readings. These categories were in a way tested against students’ answers. Even further readings were utilized in the verification of categories and similar answers were placed within specific categories.

In short, during the process of analyzing, obtained data in written format have been put into numbers after following certain stages and qualitative data have then

been quantified. In the subsequent stage frequency analysis has been conducted for the statements coded and placed into relevant categories.

Findings: Three open-ended questions in written format (1. The popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” amongst students, 2. The unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” amongst students, 3. The kind of qualities students would like to see in “*New Turkish Literature*” courses) have been answered by participating university students in total 90 statements. Below are demonstrated the findings relevant of these three categories.

Findings Relevant of the Popular Aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” Course: Participant students from Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department used total 34 statements in explaining the popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” in their eyes. In Table 1, students’ statements regarding the popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course are demonstrated.

As demonstrated in Table 1, participant students from Karabük University Faculty of Education Turkish Language and Literature Department expressed the popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course as; poetry analysis, the format of the course as presentation and appeal of the course to their ideals.

Findings Relevant of the Unpopular Aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” Course: students from Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department used total 26 statements in explaining the unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” in their eyes. In Table 2, students’ statements regarding the unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course are demonstrated.

As demonstrated in Table 2, participant students from Karabük University Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department expressed the unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course as; difficulty of course topics, the scattered topics throughout the lesson, the relevance of the topics with history course and excessive numbers of terms.

Findings Relevant of the Expectations of Students from “*New Turkish Literature*” Course: Participant students from Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department used total 30 statements in explaining their expectations from “*New Turkish Literature*” course. In Table 3 students’ expectations from “*New Turkish Literature*” course are demonstrated. As demonstrated in Table 3, participant students from Karabük University Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department expressed their expectations from “*New Turkish Literature*” course

Table 1: Popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course

Statements	Frequency (f)
The interconnection between the course and history	3
Its address to modern issues	9
Course topics	2
Knowing better the writers and poets of whose names only we heard about before, finding out the kind of social atmosphere they produced their works is delightful.	1
“ <i>New Turkish Literature</i> ” course appeals to my ideals.	2
There is an opportunity of making a comparison between the Orient and the West	1
It is multi-dimensional	1
It is presented comparatively from the Old and New Literatures	1
Visual aids are employed in course presentation	1
Knowing better the atmosphere writers and poets lived and analyzing the poems are fun	3
The course is fun	2
It helps me to understand better the literature of our recent history	1
It helps us to have a more systematic view of literature	1
The course supports my development	1
The attitude of course instructor	1
Literary work analyses	1
Learning the lesson through presentations	3
Total	34

Table 2: Unpopular aspects of "New Turkish Literature" course

Statements	Frequency (f)
Difficulty of course topics	6
Difficulty of memorizing the works of literature	1
Narration format of the course	1
Detailed structure of the course	1
Presentations shown in class	2
The scattered topics throughout the lesson	8
Multi-dimensionality of the course	1
Excessive numbers of terms	2
Translations in the lesson	1
Poetry analysis	1
The relevance of the topics with history	2
Total	26

Table 3: Students' expectations from "New Turkish Literature" course.

Statements	Frequency (f)
Discussion method should be employed during lesson hour	9
The works of the writers and poets in curriculum should be available in library	1
Teacher should be more active in class	3
Course topics should not be rambled.	2
Presentations should occupy less place during lessons	2
The course needs to be simplified.	1
During class poems and melodies addressing the topic should be listened.	1
The lesson should be more attractive through anecdotes given from studied poets and writers.	1
Samples from poets should be shared in class.	1
The course should be more lively, less monotonous	2
More breaks should be given when we are bored.	2
The course should be more fun and comprehensible	3
Students should participate more actively to the lesson	1
Learning the topics more elaborately	2
Total	30

as; wider application of discussion method during lesson hour, more active involvement of both the instructor and students and more fun received from the lesson.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In present study three open-ended questions in written format have been directed to Karabük University, Faculty of Literature, Turkish Language and Literature Department students on the aspects they like, dislike about "New Turkish Literature" course as well as their expectations and demands from the course. The answers provided by participant students have been evaluated via context analysis method.

As the distribution of these answers within these three main categories is examined it has been detected that the largest number of statements was used in explaining the popular aspects and the reason of popularity of "New Turkish Literature" course. The views of students explaining the unpopular aspects and the reason of unpopularity of "New Turkish Literature" course (33%) are less in number than the views of students explaining the popular aspects and the reason of popularity of "New Turkish Literature" course (38%) which clearly indicates the fact that a great majority of students possess positive attitude towards "New Turkish Literature" course. On the other hand the high ratio of (29%) students' views on their expectations and demands from "New Turkish Literature" course points to

the fact that “New Turkish Literature” course in its current form is not fully capable of meeting students’ expectations.

Participant students from Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department expressed the popular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course as; poetry analysis, the format of the course as presentation and appeal of the course to their ideals. These responses indicate that students possess a positive attitude towards this course. The popularity of this course shall rise even higher once the teacher manages to draw students into class atmosphere more actively and directs them for further studies and researches.

Participant students from Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department expressed the unpopular aspects of “*New Turkish Literature*” course as; difficulty of course topics, the scattered topics throughout the lesson, the relevance of the topics with history course and excessive numbers of terms.

Students’ answers to open-ended questions have also dug out certain results. Some students are supporting the presentation format and group work of the course whereas there are some who consider that teacher-centered lesson is better. The course instructor explained this situation this way; “The students had an educational process in high school that totally lacked group consciousness, cooperation and project development approach. Student ignores his or her place within the group, abstains from demonstrating his/her personal skill within the group, denies being a group member and even prefers individual work to team work.”

One of the reasons accounting for the negative attitude towards “New Turkish Literature” course is the excessive numbers of terms and concepts students believe to exist in course context. Course instructor explains this complaint: “The terms and concepts students believe that are hard to learn in ‘New Turkish Literature’ course are in fact common phrases amongst local people but due to the change of generation and culture the young population deems it hard. These are mostly words from Ottoman Turkish”.

Participant students from Karabük University, Faculty of Education, Turkish Language and Literature Department expressed their expectations from “*New Turkish Literature*” course as; wider application of discussion method during lesson hour, more active involvement of both the instructor and students and more fun received from the lesson.

One of the greatest problems encountered in teaching “*New Turkish Literature*” course is that the teaching process follows traditional teacher-centered method, technique and strategies. With his or her own personal attempts and sensibility, “*New Turkish Literature*” course instructor is expected to select the most appropriate for the class, offer the topics in a better and more delightful manner and make use of technological facilities in class hour. Elevating the attention level of students in “*New Turkish Literature*” and helping them to develop positive attitudes shall directly affect their success in this course. Putting student into center in “New Turkish Literature” course and enabling active participation, valuing students’ views and providing a learning and teaching environment where knowledge is unified with real life to gain meaning shall contribute students’ positive attitude towards “*New Turkish Literature*” course.

The only way for “*New Turkish Literature*” course to gain desired qualities to students and to emerge student motivation shall only be feasible through a more realistic and practical teaching of “New Turkish Literature” course. In “*New Turkish Literature*” course; putting student into center, assuring active participation and creating a teaching and learning environment where knowledge and real life are united shall be assistant in reaching the preset objectives of this course.

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