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# A STUDY ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AWARENESS[1]

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**Abstract**

Developing effective instructional strategies to enhance students' language skills requires an understanding of their language awareness levels and how these levels vary across different variables. However, research comprehensively examining language awareness among middle school students in the context of Turkish as a first language remains limited. This study aims to investigate middle school students' language awareness across five dimensions—phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness—and to examine the relationship between their perceived self-efficacy and actual performance. A quantitative research approach incorporating descriptive and correlational survey designs was employed. The study involved 562 middle school students attending schools in İzmir, Türkiye. Data were collected using a perception questionnaire and an achievement test developed by the researcher. The findings revealed that students obtained a mean overall achievement score of 70.37 out of 109. The highest levels of achievement were observed in semantic and phonological awareness, whereas the lowest performance levels were found in syntactic and pragmatic awareness. A statistically significant, moderate positive correlation was identified between students' perceived language awareness and their actual achievement. Furthermore, eighth-grade students outperformed seventh-grade students, while students with higher academic grade averages demonstrated greater achievement than those with lower averages. These findings highlight the need to strengthen the explicit instruction of pragmatic and syntactic awareness in Turkish language education.

**Keywords:** language awareness, Turkish language education, secondary school students

## INTRODUCTION

Language awareness plays a central role in both first-language education and foreign language learning. Developing and assessing language awareness is important not only for supporting fundamental language skills but also for enabling individuals to develop a conscious understanding of the phonological structure of language, word meanings, and grammatical rules.

Language awareness has been defined as "conscious attention to properties of language" (Fairclough, 1992), offering significant implications for language education. Hawkins (1984) emphasized that this approach enhances students' ability to ask questions about language, encourages them to gather information from the world beyond the classroom, and provides insights into the processes through which language constructs meaning. Following Hawkins' proposal, various approaches have been developed that recognize students' linguistic backgrounds as valuable resources for learning.

Within this framework, an "approach" is regarded as a pedagogical framework grounded in theoretical principles that guides educational settings and facilitates learning practices (Brodie & Irving, 2007).

[1] This article was derived from the first author's doctoral dissertation entitled "A Study on Secondary School Students' Language Awareness.

Language awareness similarly refers to instructional practices that emphasize the potential benefits of systematic reflection on language and seek to incorporate students' entire linguistic repertoires into the learning environment. According to Duarte and Günther von der Meij (2018), this approach is based on individuals' capacity to reflect on and make visible their attitudes and motivations toward languages.

Language awareness also encompasses a conscious sensitivity to the accurate and effective use of one's first language. In this context, it is conceptualized as a domain of competence involving individuals' ability to monitor and regulate their spoken and written language use in relation to lexical choice, morphological and syntactic accuracy, semantic coherence, spelling and punctuation, and the organization and communication of ideas (Gnutzmann, 1997; Little, 1997).

The literature indicates that language awareness is a multidimensional construct. Andrade, Araújo, and Melo (2003) conceptualized this construct in terms of four dimensions: the socio-affective dimension, which involves individuals' capacity to reflect on their attitudes, motivations, and awareness concerning language and languages; the management of linguistic and communicative repertoires, which concerns the ability to manage experiences in new interactional situations; the interactional dimension, which involves reflecting on interactive processes in contexts of language contact; and the learning (cognitive) dimension, which encompasses the capacity to manage learning and acquisition processes.

Language awareness serves as an overarching concept encompassing sensitivity to various components of language. Within this framework, phonological awareness focuses on the sound-related properties of language; semantic awareness concerns word meanings; syntactic awareness addresses sentence structure; and morphological awareness focuses on word structure. Accordingly, language awareness can be understood as a multidimensional construct incorporating morphological, syntactic, phonological, and semantic subcomponents (Varışoğlu, 2018).

The primary aim of this study is to examine the language awareness of middle school students within a multidimensional framework and to investigate the relationship between their perceptions of language awareness and their actual achievement in language-awareness-related tasks. Specifically, the study seeks to determine students' levels of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness.

In line with this purpose, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What are middle school students' perceptions of their language awareness?
- What are middle school students' levels of achievement in phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness?
- What is the relationship between middle school students' perceived language awareness and their language awareness achievement?
- How do middle school students' perceptions of language awareness and their language awareness achievement differ according to demographic variables?

In this respect, the study aims to provide significant findings that may contribute to Turkish language education by promoting an understanding of students not merely as language users but also as individuals who consciously recognize the structures, functions, and patterns of language use.

## METHOD

This section presents the research design and model, research questions, population and sample, data collection instruments, validity and reliability procedures, data collection process and data analysis.

**Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive research design to determine middle school students' levels of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness by examining the existing situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). Within the framework of quantitative research, a correlational survey design was also adopted to investigate the strength and direction of relationships among variables. Accordingly, the relationships between students' perceptions of language awareness and their achievement across the different dimensions of language awareness were examined.

**Population and Sample**

The target population consisted of 186,717 middle school students enrolled in public schools in İzmir, Türkiye, during the 2024–2025 academic year. The study sample was determined based on three districts representing different settlement characteristics: urban (İzmir city center), semi-urban (Ödemiş), and rural (Kiraz). Using simple random sampling, a total of 562 seventh- and eighth-grade students were selected to participate in the study. Although the minimum required sample size was calculated as 384 students, the final sample of 562 students was considered sufficiently large to represent the target population.

**Data Collection Instruments**

Three data collection instruments were employed in the study: (1) a Demographic Information Form, (2) a Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire, and (3) a Language Awareness Achievement Test. The items were developed in accordance with the learning outcomes specified in the curriculum of the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2024). The Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire was designed to assess students' perceptions of their self-efficacy regarding language awareness. It consisted of 25 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The Language Awareness Achievement Test comprised task-based questions designed to assess students' actual performance across five subtests: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness.

The Phonological Awareness Test was developed based on previous studies examining phonological awareness, drawing on the dimensions and examples presented in the relevant literature (Høien, Lundberg, Stanovich, & Bjaalid, 1995; Beyret, 2015; Kazanoğlu, 2017; Kalaycı, 2023).

The development of the Syntactic Awareness Test was informed by previous research on syntactic awareness, particularly the dimensions and sample tasks addressed in these studies (Holsgrove & Garton, 2006; Mokhtari & Thompson, 2006; Genç, 2013; Beyret, 2015; Brimo et al., 2017; Siu & Ho, 2020).

The Semantic Awareness Test was developed based on existing research on semantic awareness (Beyret, 2015; Choi & Chung, 2016; Wu & Hoffman, 2022). Questions were constructed in accordance with the subdimensions of the semantic awareness assessment instrument developed by Beyret (2015) for middle school students.

The Morphological Awareness Test consisted of two parts. The first part assessed students' awareness of inflectional suffixes and their functions, whereas the second part examined their awareness of derivational suffixes and their functions. Consistent with similar studies, students were provided with word roots and asked to complete sentences by adding appropriate suffixes and writing the correctly inflected forms of the words.

The Pragmatic Awareness Test was developed based on speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and approaches to assessing pragmatic competence in language education (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Roever, 2005). The dialogue example included in the assessment instrument drew on Aksu-Raffard and Kerimoğlu (2021), who provided examples of explicit instruction in pragmatic skills. The construction of the dialogues was also informed by the studies conducted by Taguchi (2007) and Çetinavcı and Öztürk (2017).

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### Validity and Reliability

The Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire and the Language Awareness Achievement Test were initially administered in a pilot study involving 100 seventh- and eighth-grade middle school students representing low, moderate, and high levels of academic achievement in Turkish language courses. Based on the achievement test results, the opinions of five professors and associate professors specializing in Turkish language education were obtained to establish the content validity of the tests. Necessary revisions were subsequently made to the achievement test.

Expert opinions were also sought to evaluate the content validity of the achievement test. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the internal consistency of the measurement instruments. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Reliability Analysis Results

| Instruments | Number of items (N) | Cronbach's alfa |
|---|---|---|
| Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire | 25 | 0,929 |
| Language Awareness Achievement Test | 13 | 0,908 |

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Parametric statistical tests were selected because the kurtosis and skewness values fell within the range of −1 to +1.

**Table 2.** Kurtosis and Skewness Statistics for the Questionnaire and Achievement Test

| Instruments | Kurtosis | Skewness |
|---|---|---|
| Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire | 0,934 | -0,747 |
| Language Awareness Achievement Test | -0,483 | -0,393 |
| Phonological Awareness | -0,472 | -0,321 |
| Morphological Awareness | -0,380 | -0,556 |
| Syntactic Awareness | -0,668 | -0,147 |
| Semantic Awareness | -0,133 | -0,610 |
| Pragmatic Awareness | -0,577 | -0,220 |

Kurtosis and skewness values ranging between −1 and +1 indicate that the data exhibit an approximately normal distribution (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2004; Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2005). Furthermore, more recent sources suggest that values between −1.5 and +1.5 can also be considered acceptable for satisfying the assumption of normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2020). Accordingly, the distributional characteristics of the data were considered appropriate for conducting parametric statistical analyses, including analysis of variance (ANOVA), independent-samples t-tests, and Pearson product–moment correlation analyses.

## RESULTS

**Table 3**. Descriptive Findings on Students' Responses to the Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire

| Items | Always | | Often | | Sometimes | | Rarely | | Never | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| 1. I can segment a sentence into individual words. | 410 | 73,0 | 75 | 13,3 | 53 | 9,4 | 15 | 2,7 | 9 | 1,6 |
| 2. I can divide words into syllables. | 432 | 76,9 | 71 | 12,6 | 36 | 6,4 | 16 | 2,8 | 7 | 1,2 |
| 3. I can combine sounds presented in a jumbled order to form meaningful words. | 280 | 49,8 | 147 | 26,2 | 97 | 17,3 | 25 | 4,4 | 13 | 2,3 |

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**Table 3 (Continued).** Descriptive Findings on Students' Responses to the Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire

| Items | Always | | Often | | Sometimes | | Rarely | | Never | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| 4. I can identify common sounds in words. | 254 | 45,2 | 127 | 22,6 | 112 | 19,9 | 45 | 8,0 | 24 | 4,3 |
| 5. I can form new meaningful words by removing certain sounds from words. | 225 | 40,0 | 153 | 27,2 | 110 | 19,6 | 51 | 9,1 | 23 | 4,1 |
| 6. I reflect on the roots of words in my daily life. | 191 | 34,0 | 157 | 27,9 | 128 | 22,8 | 60 | 10,7 | 26 | 4,6 |
| 7. I can use inflectional suffixes in ways that are appropriate to the meaning of a sentence. | 197 | 35,1 | 170 | 30,2 | 124 | 22,1 | 49 | 8,7 | 22 | 3,9 |
| 8. I can use derivational suffixes in ways that are appropriate to the meaning of a sentence. | 201 | 35,8 | 143 | 25,4 | 135 | 24,0 | 55 | 9,8 | 28 | 5,0 |
| 9. I can distinguish between derivational and inflectional suffixes. | 183 | 32,6 | 121 | 21,5 | 151 | 26,9 | 57 | 10,1 | 50 | 8,9 |
| 10. I reflect on the changes in meaning that suffixes introduce to a sentence. | 283 | 50,4 | 125 | 22,2 | 77 | 13,77 | 48 | 8,5 | 29 | 5,2 |
| 11. I can recognize whether a sentence follows the standard word order or has an inverted word order. | 336 | 59,8 | 118 | 21,0 | 64 | 11,4 | 32 | 5,7 | 12 | 2,1 |
| 12. I can form a meaningful sentence from words presented in a jumbled order. | 268 | 47,7 | 147 | 26,2 | 86 | 15,3 | 38 | 6,8 | 23 | 4,1 |
| 13.I can recognize errors in my own language use during communication. | 229 | 40,7 | 147 | 26,2 | 118 | 21,0 | 38 | 6,8 | 30 | 5,3 |
| 14. I can recognize errors in the language use of the person I am communicating with. | 224 | 39,9 | 165 | 29,4 | 109 | 19,4 | 43 | 7,7 | 21 | 3,7 |
| 15. I can correct errors in sentence construction. | 241 | 42,9 | 166 | 29,5 | 103 | 18,3 | 33 | 5,9 | 19 | 3,4 |
| 16.I can infer the meanings of unfamiliar words from the context of a text. | 302 | 53,7 | 148 | 26,3 | 75 | 13,3 | 21 | 3,7 | 16 | 2,8 |
| 17. I can group words according to their antonyms. | 279 | 49,6 | 146 | 26,0 | 81 | 14,4 | 37 | 6,6 | 19 | 3,4 |
| 18. I can group words according to their synonyms. | 320 | 56,9 | 143 | 25,4 | 60 | 10,7 | 23 | 4,1 | 16 | 2,8 |
| 19. I can use words in sentences according to their meanings. | 281 | 50,0 | 147 | 26,2 | 71 | 12,6 | 47 | 8,4 | 16 | 2,8 |
| 20. I have sufficient vocabulary to engage in everyday conversations. | 227 | 40,4 | 176 | 31,3 | 107 | 19,0 | 37 | 6,6 | 15 | 2,7 |
| 21. I can correctly interpret the intended message of a text. | 242 | 43,1 | 127 | 22,6 | 114 | 20,3 | 59 | 10,5 | 20 | 3,6 |
| 22. . I can recognize how expressions of probability contribute to the meaning of a text. | 269 | 47,9 | 131 | 23,3 | 91 | 16,2 | 47 | 8,4 | 24 | 4,3 |
| 23. I can recognize how expressions of certainty contribute to the meaning of a text. | 204 | 36,3 | 167 | 29,7 | 109 | 19,4 | 46 | 8,2 | 36 | 6,4 |
| 24. I can recognize implicit meanings in a text. | 279 | 49,6 | 123 | 21,9 | 80 | 14,2 | 33 | 5,9 | 47 | 8,4 |
| 25. I reflect on how our personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, place of residence, and occupation) influence our communication. | | | | | | | | | | |

Among the responses obtained from 562 students, the most favorable response was to the statement "I can divide words into syllables." Of the participants, 76.9% selected "Always" and 12.6% selected "Often," yielding a combined positive response rate of 89.5%. This high proportion indicates that students perceived themselves as highly aware of and competent in syllabification. It also suggests that middle school students believe they have a strong foundation in syllabification skills.

For Item 1, most students also reported being able to segment sentences into words regularly. The combined proportion selecting "Always" (73.0%) and "Often" (13.3%) was 86.3%, suggesting that most students perceived themselves as competent in this skill. Conversely, 13.7% reported that they could perform this task only sometimes, rarely, or never.

Item 12, ". I can form a meaningful sentence from words presented in a jumbled order." assesses the ability to organize words into a meaningful syntactic sequence and establish semantic coherence. A total of 59.8% of participants selected "Always" and 21.0% selected "Often," corresponding to a positive response rate of 80.8%. This finding suggests that a substantial proportion of students believe they can combine disordered linguistic units in accordance with grammatical rules and semantic coherence. Their high perceived awareness may indicate confidence in constructing grammatically well-formed sentences and an internalized understanding of syntactic structure.

However, students also expressed less favorable views on certain items. Item 6, "I reflect on word roots in my daily life," assesses metalinguistic awareness of morphological structure. A total of 17.6% selected "Rarely" and 14.1% selected "Never," amounting to 31.7%. This suggests that a considerable proportion of students do not habitually engage in conscious analysis of word roots during everyday communication.

Item 10, "I reflect on the changes in meaning that suffixes introduce to a sentence." examines students' tendency to critically evaluate the functional and semantic roles of suffixes. Of the participants, 10.1% responded "Rarely" and 8.9% "Never," representing 19.0% combined. Thus, approximately one in five students reported that they did not systematically consider how inflectional and derivational suffixes contribute to sentence meaning and subtle semantic distinctions. This may suggest that language instruction tends to emphasize the formal properties of suffixes without sufficiently addressing their semantic and pragmatic implications.

**Table 4**. Descriptive Statistics for the Language Awareness Perception Questionnaire

| Items | Min. | Maks. | X̄ | SS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phonological 1 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,53 | ,89 |
| Phonological 2 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,61 | ,83 |
| Phonological 3 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,17 | 1,01 |
| Phonological 4 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,96 | 1,16 |
| Phonological 5 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,90 | 1,15 |
| Morphological 1 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,24 | 1,38 |
| Morphological 2 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,76 | 1,16 |
| Morphological 3 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,84 | 1,12 |
| Morphological 4 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,77 | 1,18 |
| Morphological 5 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,59 | 1,28 |
| Syntactic 1 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,04 | 1,20 |
| Syntactic 2 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,31 | 1,02 |
| Syntactic 3 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,06 | 1,12 |
| Syntactic 4 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,90 | 1,17 |
| Syntactic 5 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,94 | 1,11 |
| Semantic 1 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,03 | 1,07 |
| Semantic 2 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,24 | 1,01 |
| Semantic 3 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,12 | 1,09 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Semantic 4 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,29 | 1,00 |
| Semantic 5 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,12 | 1,10 |
| Pragmatic 1 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,00 | 1,05 |
| Pragmatic 2 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,91 | 1,17 |
| Pragmatic 3 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,02 | 1,17 |
| Pragmatic 4 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,81 | 1,19 |
| Pragmatic 5 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,98 | 1,28 |
| PERCEIVED LANGUAGE AWARENESS | 1,00 | 5,00 | 4,01 | ,68 |

The three items with the highest mean scores were "I can divide words into syllables" (M = 4.61), "I can divide a sentence into words" (M = 4.53), and "I can construct a meaningful sentence from words presented in a mixed order" (M = 4.31). These results indicate that students reported high perceived competence in fundamental phonological skills.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics for the Language Awareness Achievement Test

| **Test Dimensions** | **Min.** | **Maks.** | **X̄** | **SS** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rhyme | ,00 | 10,00 | 5,81 | 3,27 |
| Syllable | ,00 | 14,00 | 10,47 | 3,99 |
| Phoneme | ,00 | 13,00 | 7,18 | 3,52 |
| Phonological Awareness | 1,00 | 37,00 | 23,45 | 8,51 |
| Word | ,00 | 4,00 | 2,81 | 1,56 |
| Inflectional suffix | ,00 | 5,00 | 3,50 | 1,43 |
| Derivational suffix | ,00 | 5,00 | 3,07 | 1,36 |
| Word structure | ,00 | 6,00 | 3,84 | 1,96 |
| Morphological Awareness | ,00 | 20,00 | 13,23 | 4,62 |
| Sentence order | ,00 | 5,00 | 3,59 | 1,32 |
| Grammar correction | ,00 | 5,00 | 2,09 | 1,64 |
| Syntactic Awareness | ,00 | 10,00 | 5,68 | 2,48 |
| Polysemy | ,00 | 3,00 | 2,17 | 1,00 |
| Semantic relationship | ,00 | 11,00 | 6,65 | 3,10 |
| Literal, figurative, and technical meaning | ,00 | 18,00 | 13,43 | 3,80 |
| Semantic Awareness | ,00 | 32,00 | 22,25 | 6,92 |
| Pragmatic Awareness | ,00 | 10,00 | 5,76 | 2,67 |
| LANGUAGE AWARENESS ACHIEVEMENT | 14,00 | 109,00 | 70,37 | 21,57 |

The students' mean total score on the Language Awareness Achievement Test was 70.37 ± 21.57 out of a possible 109 points. This result indicates a moderate-to-high level of performance. The relatively large standard deviation suggests considerable variation in achievement across students and a heterogeneous distribution of scores.

Phonological awareness scores ranged from 1 to 37, with a mean of 23.45 ± 8.51, indicating generally moderate-to-high performance. Morphological awareness scores ranged from 0 to 20, with a mean of 13.23 ± 4.62, suggesting above-moderate achievement. Syntactic awareness scores ranged from 0 to 10, with a mean of 5.68 ± 2.48, indicating moderate performance. Semantic awareness scores ranged from 0 to 32, with a mean of 22.25 ± 6.92, reflecting relatively strong performance in meaning-related skills. Pragmatic awareness scores ranged from 0 to 10, with a mean of 5.76 ± 2.67, indicating moderate performance in skills requiring context-dependent interpretation. Overall, achievement was highest in semantic and phonological awareness and lowest in syntactic and pragmatic awareness.

**Table 6.** Language Awareness Perceptions and Achievement by Grade Level

| Dimensions | Grade | N | X̄ | SD | Levene Testi | | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | F | p | | |
| Perceived Language Awareness | Grade 7 | 353 | 3,94 | 0,68 | 0,836 | 0,361 | -2,696 | 0,007 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 4,10 | 0,67 | | | | |
| Language Awareness Achievement | Grade 7 | 353 | 67,71 | 21,64 | 0,472 | 0,492 | -3,842 | 0,000 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 74,85 | 20,73 | | | | |
| Phonological Awareness | Grade 7 | 353 | 22,33 | 8,47 | 0,026 | 0,873 | -4,111 | 0,000 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 25,34 | 8,26 | | | | |
| Morphological Awareness | Grade 7 | 353 | 12,79 | 4,75 | 2,943 | 0,087 | -2,875 | 0,004 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 13,95 | 4,31 | | | | |
| Syntactic Awareness | Grade 7 | 353 | 5,49 | 2,52 | 0,195 | 0,659 | -2,311 | 0,021 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 5,99 | 2,40 | | | | |
| Semantic Awareness | Grade 7 | 353 | 21,49 | 7,15 | 5,319 | 0,021 | -3,470 | 0,001 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 23,51 | 6,33 | | | | |
| Pragmatic Awareness | Grade 7 | 353 | 5,58 | 2,63 | 0,146 | 0,703 | -2,009 | 0,045 |
| | Grade 8 | 209 | 6,05 | 2,69 | | | | |

Statistically significant differences were found between seventh- and eighth-grade students in perceived language awareness, overall language awareness achievement, and all subtest scores ($p < .05$). All differences favored eighth-grade students.

**Table 7.** Language Awareness Perceptions and Achievement by Gender

| Dimensions | Gender | N | X̄ | SD | Levene Testi | | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | F | p | | |
| Perceived Language Awareness | Female | 317 | 4,08 | 0,63 | 8,761 | 0,003 | 3,032 | 0,003 |
| | Male | 245 | 3,90 | 0,73 | | | | |
| Language Awareness Achievement | Female | 317 | 73,55 | 20,53 | 2,214 | 0,137 | 4,034 | 0,000 |
| | Male | 245 | 66,25 | 22,21 | | | | |
| Phonological Awareness | Female | 317 | 24,47 | 8,42 | 0,055 | 0,814 | 3,272 | 0,001 |
| | Male | 245 | 22,13 | 8,46 | | | | |
| Morphological Awareness | Female | 317 | 13,74 | 4,45 | 2,444 | 0,119 | 3,016 | 0,003 |
| | Male | 245 | 12,56 | 4,77 | | | | |
| Syntactic Awareness | Female | 317 | 6,02 | 2,41 | 0,672 | 0,413 | 3,773 | 0,000 |
| | Male | 245 | 5,24 | 2,52 | | | | |
| Semantic Awareness | Female | 317 | 23,22 | 6,60 | 1,968 | 0,161 | 3,826 | 0,000 |
| | Male | 245 | 20,99 | 7,13 | | | | |
| Pragmatic Awareness | Female | 317 | 6,09 | 2,50 | 3,224 | 0,073 | 3,386 | 0,001 |
| | Male | 245 | 5,33 | 2,81 | | | | |

Significant gender differences were identified in perceived language awareness, overall achievement, and all subtest scores ($p < .05$), with female students scoring higher than male students.

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**Table 8.** Language Awareness Perceptions and Achievement by District

| Dimensions | District | N | X̄ | SD | Levene Testi F | Levene Testi p | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Language Awareness | Central İzmir | 202 | 4,19 | 0,71 | 0,364 | 0,695 | 15,175 | 0,000 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 3,97 | 0,61 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 3,83 | 0,65 | | | | |
| Language Awareness Achievement | Central İzmir | 202 | 74,07 | 20,38 | 30,591 | 0,000 | 8,338 | 0,000 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 71,50 | 15,61 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 65,50 | 25,96 | | | | |
| Phonological Awareness | Central İzmir | 202 | 24,75 | 8,50 | 17,326 | 0,000 | 3,842 | 0,002 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 22,96 | 6,61 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 22,51 | 9,76 | | | | |
| Morphological Awareness | Central İzmir | 202 | 14,06 | 4,50 | 23,345 | 0,000 | 8,017 | 0,000 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 13,35 | 3,44 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 12,23 | 5,41 | | | | |
| Syntactic Awareness | Central İzmir | 202 | 6,05 | 2,57 | 8,583 | 0,000 | 7,196 | 0,001 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 5,84 | 2,03 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 5,15 | 2,65 | | | | |
| Semantic Awareness | Central İzmir | 202 | 23,23 | 6,98 | 31,584 | 0,000 | 10,002 | 0,000 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 23,10 | 4,75 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 20,47 | 8,03 | | | | |
| Pragmatic Awareness | Central İzmir | 202 | 5,96 | 2,82 | 11,475 | 0,000 | 8,982 | 0,000 |
| | Ödemiş | 167 | 6,24 | 1,98 | | | | |
| | Kiraz | 193 | 5,12 | 2,89 | | | | |

According to the Tukey HSD test, students living in central İzmir (urban) reported significantly higher perceived language awareness than students in Ödemiş (semi-urban) and Kiraz (rural) ($p < .05$). According to the Games–Howell test, students in Kiraz scored significantly lower in overall achievement and in morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness than students in Ödemiş and central İzmir ($p < .05$). For phonological awareness, a significant difference was found only between central İzmir and Kiraz, favoring central İzmir ($p < .05$).

**Table 9.** Correlations between Perceived Language Awareness and Language Awareness Achievement

| Variable | PLA | LAA | PA | MA | SyA | SeA | PrA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLA | 1 | | | | | | |
| LAA | 0,574** | 1 | | | | | |
| PA | 0,500** | ,898** | 1 | | | | |
| MA | 0,500** | ,851** | ,685** | 1 | | | |
| SyA | 0,477** | ,788** | ,626** | ,688** | 1 | | |
| SeA | 0,522** | ,890** | ,686** | ,685** | ,666** | 1 | |
| PrA | 0,382** | ,699** | ,519** | ,541** | ,518** | ,608** | 1 |

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A statistically significant, moderate positive correlation was found between perceived language awareness (PLA) and language awareness achievement (LAA) ($r = .574$, $p < .01$).

Overall language awareness achievement was strongly associated with its subdimensions. The strongest correlations were with phonological awareness ($r = .898$) and semantic awareness ($r = .890$), followed by morphological awareness ($r = .851$), syntactic awareness ($r = .788$), and pragmatic awareness ($r = .699$).

**Table 10**. Language Awareness Perceptions and Achievement by Academic Grade Average

| Dimensions | Grade average | N | X̄ | SD | Levene Testi F | Levene Testi p | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Language Awareness | 1-2 | 29 | 3,41 | 0,58 | 3,154 | 0,025 | 58,779 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 3,45 | 0,64 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 3,93 | 0,64 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 4,31 | 0,54 | | | | |
| Language Awareness Achievement | 1-2 | 29 | 33,00 | 13,89 | 0,867 | 0,458 | 165,983 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 51,14 | 15,66 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 66,60 | 16,81 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 83,84 | 15,10 | | | | |
| Phonological Awareness | 1-2 | 29 | 11,24 | 7,08 | 0,352 | 0,788 | 102,687 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 16,65 | 6,44 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 22,08 | 6,92 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 28,13 | 6,91 | | | | |
| Morphological Awareness | 1-2 | 29 | 6,24 | 3,49 | 4,462 | 0,004 | 109,183 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 9,84 | 4,26 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 12,23 | 3,92 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 15,88 | 3,28 | | | | |
| Syntactic Awareness | 1-2 | 29 | 2,55 | 1,40 | 3,168 | 0,024 | 60,450 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 4,04 | 2,17 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 5,41 | 2,15 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 6,78 | 2,23 | | | | |
| Semantic Awareness | 1-2 | 29 | 10,58 | 5,08 | 2,770 | 0,041 | 131,455 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 16,38 | 5,55 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 21,40 | 6,03 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 26,17 | 4,66 | | | | |
| Pragmatic Awareness | 1-2 | 29 | 2,37 | 1,82 | 1,316 | 0,268 | 52,667 | 0,000 |
| | 3 | 89 | 4,22 | 2,37 | | | | |
| | 4 | 185 | 5,46 | 2,47 | | | | |
| | 5 | 259 | 6,87 | 2,32 | | | | |

Because the numbers of students with grade averages of 1 and 2 were considerably smaller than those in the other groups, these categories were combined and the analysis repeated. Significant differences were found across academic grade-average groups in perceived language awareness, overall achievement, and all subtest scores ($p < .05$). Post hoc comparisons were conducted to identify the groups responsible for these differences. Because Levene's test indicated unequal variances for perceived language awareness and morphological, syntactic, and semantic awareness, the Games–Howell test was used for these variables. The Tukey HSD test was used for overall achievement, phonological awareness, and pragmatic awareness, for which homogeneity of variance was satisfied.

According to the Games–Howell test, perceived language awareness did not differ significantly between students with low and moderate grade averages. However, students with higher averages had significantly higher perceived language awareness than those with low and moderate averages ($p < .05$). Students in the highest achievement group also scored significantly higher than each of the other three groups ($p < .05$). The Games–Howell test further indicated significant differences in morphological, syntactic, and semantic awareness across grade-average groups ($p < .05$). Students with the lowest grade averages obtained the lowest awareness scores, and achievement increased as grade averages increased; differences between groups were statistically significant.

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**CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study comprehensively examined middle school students' language awareness across phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, using both subjective perceptions and objective achievement measures. Although overall language awareness was moderate to high, the findings revealed uneven performance across its dimensions. This supports the view that language awareness is an integrated but unevenly developing multidimensional construct (Ağpak, 2019; Batur & Beyret, 2015; Ünal & Ekinci, 2024; Varışoğlu, 2018).

Students performed relatively well in phonological awareness (syllabification, sound blending, and sound recognition) and semantic awareness (semantic relations, vocabulary, and deriving meaning from texts). By contrast, perceived competence and achievement were relatively lower in morphological, syntactic, and especially pragmatic awareness. This suggests that language teaching emphasizes formal and meaning-based aspects while providing less support for structural complexity and context-dependent language use.

A comparison of these findings with the Turkish Language Curricula of 2006, 2019, and 2024 reveals a notable correspondence. Students' relatively high phonological awareness may reflect the emphasis on phonics-based literacy instruction and sound-awareness activities in curricula implemented since 2006. Students appear confident in the sound and syllable structures most strongly emphasized by the educational system.

By contrast, the lowest perceived competence and achievement in pragmatic (contextual) and syntactic awareness may indicate a curricular gap. In the 2006 and 2019 curricula, language use in social contexts and the teaching of implicit meanings were largely left to implicit learning, with limited explicit and structured outcomes. Although the 2024 Maarif Model emphasizes meaning and context, the participating students were educated under earlier curricula, suggesting a possible curriculum-related explanation for their low pragmatic awareness. These findings underline the need to give the functional (pragmatic) dimensions of language as much attention as its formal (phonological and morphological) dimensions.

Considering perceptions and achievement together, students sometimes perceived themselves as competent even when their actual performance did not support that perception (Carter, 2003; Svalberg, 2009). The particularly marked perception–achievement discrepancy in morphological and pragmatic awareness suggests insufficient metacognitive understanding of the functional consequences of linguistic structures (Apel, 2014; Carlisle, 2010; Taguchi, 2007; Roever, 2005).

The demographic findings indicated significant differences in language awareness according to grade level, gender, academic achievement, residential environment, and grade average (Batur & Beyret, 2015; Byram, 2012, 2021; Şeref & Varışoğlu, 2020; Wu & Hoffman, 2022). Thus, language awareness is not merely an individual cognitive characteristic but also a developmental, environmental, and sociocultural process.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

Turkish language curricula should explicitly structure language awareness not only at phonological and semantic levels but also in syntactic and pragmatic dimensions. Although the 2024 curriculum takes steps in this direction, textbooks should include more concrete, structured, and progressive activities addressing pragmatic skills such as implicit meaning, implication, figurative language, irony, and communicative intentions, including contexts beyond the text itself. Moderate syntactic awareness achievement also suggests that students may not view sentences as constructions. Textbooks should therefore include language workshop activities targeting sentence combining, sentence transformation, and reorganizing sentences that disrupt paragraph coherence, rather than focusing solely on identifying sentence constituents.

Text-based instruction should provide more activities targeting implicit meaning, contextual analysis, and communicative intention.

Theoretical knowledge of language awareness in teacher education should be supported by classroom practice. Teachers' own language awareness is essential for students' development. Studies should therefore examine Turkish language teachers' perceptions and competencies regarding the Language Structures and Deep Reading approaches in the 2024 curriculum and identify in-service training needs.

Support programs that enrich linguistic input should be developed for students in rural and semi-urban areas.

Future research should investigate language awareness in greater depth through qualitative and longitudinal designs. The present doctoral research involved students largely educated under the 2006 and 2019 curricula. Longitudinal studies should compare these findings with the language awareness levels of students educated under the 2024 Turkish Language Curriculum.

Students' high semantic achievement but low pragmatic (contextual and intentional) achievement suggests that text-processing activities may remain superficial. Teachers should enrich reading questions beyond "What happened in the text?" by asking "Why did the author choose this word?", "What did the character actually mean?", and "How would the meaning change if this sentence were structured differently?" Such questions can stimulate metacognitive and critical language awareness.

Students' higher perceived language awareness relative to actual achievement suggests possible metacognitive misjudgment. Teachers should use evidence-based self-assessment forms and encourage students who say "I know this topic" to explain "What evidence shows that you know it?" Process-oriented portfolios should enable students to monitor their development using concrete evidence.

**Ethics Committee Approval**

This study was conducted with the approval of the Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Dokuz Eylül University, Decision No. 1300817, dated February 18, 2025.

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