

FIELD STUDY REPORT

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO ZAZAKI (KIRMANJKI)

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Diyarbakir – 2024

INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of field visits conducted in Diyarbakır between October 15 and November 15, 2023 to identify the problems faced by children from Zazaki (Kirmanckî) speaking families while learning or developing their mother tongue and to identify solution proposals.

Some associations, media outlets and institutions providing language education in the field of Zazaki in Diyarbakır were interviewed and extensive information on the subject was obtained.

The first part of the report provides a general overview of the discrimination faced by Kurdish elements in Turkey and the position of Zazaki in recent years. In the second part, the content of the interviews conducted with Ma Müzik, Zarok TV, MED-DER, Ferzad Kemanger Primary School, ZimZim Kindergarten, Language, Art and Culture Association are presented, and the problems children face in accessing Zazaki and their solution suggestions are detailed.

PART ONE

Overview

As is known, Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey reads as follows: “The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law; bearing in mind the concepts of public peace, national solidarity and justice; respecting human rights; loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the Preamble.”¹ Following this article, Article 3 formulates the character of the state as follows: “The State of Turkey, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish...”² Based on both articles, it is considered that there is a contradiction. Article 2 formulates "respect for human rights" while Article 3 states that the official language is Turkish. In other words, the idea that the right to education in one's mother tongue is not recognized on legal grounds is acknowledged. The Republic of Turkey is defined as a centralist and unitary state. In terms of this character, the Republic of Turkey is defined as a centralist and unitary state. Concepts such as equal citizenship and decentralization are perceived as a threat to the unitary state structure.

Kurds are one of the ethnic elements subjected to the violence perpetrated by the centralized unitary state in the fields of education, culture and administration. One of the most important demands of the Kurdish ethnicity struggling against the centuries-old apartheid regime is the right to education in their mother tongue. In Turkey, where millions of Kurds live, two Kurdish languages are spoken: Kirmanjki (Zazaki) and Kurmanji.

Among these languages, Kirmanjki, also known as Zazaki, is generally spoken in provinces such as Diyarbakir (Amed), Elazig (Xarpêt), Adiyaman (Semsûr), Bingol (Çewlîg), Urfa (Riha), Mus, Bitlis (Bedlîs), Dersim and Erzincan (Erzingan).³ It is called by a different name from region to region. For example, in Dersim, "Kirmanjki", in Diyarbakir "Kirdki", in Elazig "Zazaki" and in Urfa " Dimili". The words Zazaki or Kirmanjki are generally preferred to represent the four different definitions.

¹ TBMM Kanunlar ve Kararlar Başkanlığı, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası ve Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi İçtüzüğü (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the Rules of Procedure of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey)*, TBMM Basımevi, Ankara 1920, s. 19.

² A.g.e., s. 19.

³ *Edebîyatê Kirmanckî ra Nimûneyî*, Amadekarî: Kadri Yıldırım, İbrahim Bingöl, Roşan Lezgîn, Mardin Artuklu Üniversitesi, Mardin 2012, ss. 11-12.



Source: <https://www.indytrk.com/node/448181/haber/alt%C4%B1-kentte-zazac-ara%C5%9Ft%C4%B1rmas%C4%B1-yok-oluyor>, Release Date: 15.01.2024.

As is known, Zazaki is included in UNESCO's "endangered languages" category. It is spoken less and less in the family, on the street and in social relations, and its use by new generations is declining year by year. There has been some research in recent years on the position of this language in society and the problems it faces. One of the existing surveys was conducted by the Migration and Humanitarian Relief Foundation (GIYAV) in 2021. The research covers Center, Lice (Licê), Hani, Eğil (Gêl), Dicle (Pîran), Kulp (Pasûr), Çermik districts and villages in Diyarbakir; Center, Genç (Dara Hênî) district and villages in Bingol; Siverek (Sêwrege) in Urfa, Varto (Gimjim) district and villages in Muş, Dersim city center, villages and Erzincan villages.⁴ GIYAV's analysis by gender, age groups and settlement unit reveals the following statistics:

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<https://www.indytrk.com/node/448181/haber/alt%C4%B1-kentte-zazac-ara%C5%9Ft%C4%B1rmas%C4%B1-yok-oluyor>, Release Date: 15.01.2024.

Evinizin içinde daha çok hangi dili konuşuyorsunuz?	Toplam Katılımcı (%)	Cinsiyete Göre Dağılım (%)		Yaş Gruplarına Göre Dağılım (%)			Yerleşim Birimine Göre Dağılım (%)	
		Kız Çocuk	Oğlan Çocuk	6-9 Yaş	10-13 Yaş	14-17 Yaş	Kır	Kent
Kırmancki/Zazakî	56,1	38,9	70,3	43,8	61,5	55,5	67,40	22,6
Türkçe	43,9	61,1	29,7	56,3	38,5	44,5	32,6	77,4
Toplam	%100	%100	%100	%100	%100	%100	%100	%100

Tablo 9: Evinizin İçinde Daha Çok Hangi Dili Konuşuyorsunuz Sorusu için Çocukların Cevapları

Anadilinizi öğrenmek ve daha iyi konuşmak istiyor musunuz?	Toplam Katılımcı (%)	Cinsiyete Göre Dağılım (%)		Yerleşim Birimine Göre Dağılım (%)	
		Kadın	Erkek	Kır	Kent
Kırmancki/Zazakî	74,8	64,9	77	75,7	66,7
Türkçe	25,2	35,1	23	24,3	33,3
Toplam	%100	%100	%100	%100	%100

Tablo 10 :Evinizin İçinde Daha Çok Hangi Dili Konuşuyorsunuz Sorusu için Ebeveynlerin Cevapları

Source: Göç ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı (GIYAV), *Türkiye’de Zazaca’nın Konuşulduğu Bölgelerde Dil Kullanımı ve Geleceğe Dair Öngörüler Analiz Raporu (Analysis Report on Language Use and Future Predictions in Zazaki-speaking Regions in Turkey)*, Haziran 2021, s. 27.

In GIYAV's survey, 7.9 percent of Zazaki-speaking children answered "I can speak, understand and write" to the question "To what level do you know your mother tongue?", while 8.7 percent of parents gave a similar answer.

A survey on Zazaki conducted by the Center for Socio-Political Research on behalf of the "Children First Association" between January 25 and February 5, 2023 also provides remarkable data. In Diyarbakır, 260 Zazaki and Kurmanji speaking children were interviewed face-to-face and some statistics were compiled. Children were asked which language is spoken more at home and the following data was obtained:

WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU SPEAK MOST AT HOME? *				
GENDER (%)				
		GENDER (%)		TOTAL
		Boy Child	Girl Child	
WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU SPEAK MOST AT HOME?	Kurmanji	28,80%	21,10%	24,60%
	Kirmanjki/Zazaki	10,20%	8,50%	9,20%
	Turkish	61,00%	70,40%	66,20%
TOTAL		100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

Source: Önce Çocuklar Derneği, *Anadili Hakkı İzleme ve Raporlama Çalışması (Mother Language Rights Monitoring and Reporting Study)*, Şubat 2023, s. 11.

In the same survey, a statistic was compiled on the language that children mostly speak on the streets. The responses of boys and girls are categorized as follows:

WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU MOSTLY SPEAK ON THE STREET/WHILE PLAYING? * GENDER (%)		
	GENDER (%)	TOTAL

		Boy Child	Girl Child	
WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU MOSTLY SPEAK ON THE STREET/WHILE PLAYING?	Kurmanji	15,30%	4,20%	9,20%
	Kirmanjki/Zazaki	1,70%		0,80%
	Turkish	83,10%	95,80%	90,00%
TOTAL		100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

Source: Önce Çocuklar Derneği, *Anadili Hakkı İzleme ve Raporlama Çalışması (Mother Language Rights Monitoring and Reporting Study)*, Şubat 2023, s. 22.

PART TWO

Access Problems and Solution Proposals

Within the scope of the research, some face-to-face interviews were conducted with officials from MA Music, Zarok TV, MED-DER, ZimZim Kindergarten, Ferzad Kemanger Primary School, Language, Art and Culture Association. Some remarkable findings on children's access to Zazaki, the development and future of the language came to the fore. In these interviews, the problems encountered in access to mother tongue and solution suggestions were noted. The forms regarding the content of the interviews with the relevant institutions are as follows:

Language, Art and Culture Association

FIELD VISIT FORM - 1

Visited Institution

Language, Art and Culture Association
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Visited Place

Diyarbakir

Person Interviewed**Name/Surname****Signature**

SK	X
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Visit Date

17/01/2024

Working Area of the Visited Institution:

To carry out studies for the development and widespread use of the Kurdish language, especially the Zazaki dialect, to support those who work, to organize language courses and to publish publications in order to develop cooperation.

Identified Problems

- 1- The development of children whose mother tongue is Zazaki (Kırmancki) actually depends on the position of the parents. The Zazaki dialect is spoken mainly in rural areas. Every child's language learning process starts in his or her usual place of life. Children who learn Zazaki in rural areas have to adapt to a new model of life when their families migrate to the city. Under the influence of the dominant language in the city, children begin to speak the dominant language.
- 2- In Turkey, Zazaki education is not provided as a public service and is only available privately. Failure to provide education in the mother tongue disconnects families and therefore children from the language and paves the way for assimilation.
- 3- The fact that mother tongue is offered as an elective course in Turkey negatively affects the learning process and the perspective on the language.
- 4- Children have been subjected to auto assimilation. Families are forced to teach or suggest Turkish, the dominant language in the public sphere, to their children.
- 5- In Kurdish-majority areas, civil society organizations and political parties conduct their activities mostly in Kurmanji-Turkish. Very little space is given to Zazaki.

Solution Proposals

- 1- Even though there are some hidden dangers (e.g., to suppress the demand for education in the mother tongue), it is necessary to temporarily turn to the elective language.
- 2- Families must prevent autoassimilation. Institutions working on minority languages should encourage families and make efforts to overcome the barrier of fear.
- 3- Zazaki-speaking intellectuals and writers should use the language frequently in the social and public sphere. In this way they can normalize the speaking and writing of the language and have a positive impact on society and the family.
- 4- The dominant Kurdish politics should soften its stance on elective courses.

5- It is necessary to use the new mass media to teach and encourage Zazaki. In the society of spectacle, children are less likely to read books.

6- In TV programs for children, traditional content should be abandoned and quality and contemporary content should be made accessible to children. Especially artificial intelligence products can be preferred and new applications can be developed.

Zarok TV

FIELD VISIT FORM - 2

Visited Institution

Zarok TV

Visited Place

Diyarbakir

Person Interviewed

Name/Surname

Signature

BDS

X

Visit Date

17/01/2024

Working Area of the Visited Institution:

It broadcasts thematic programs for children in Kurdish languages (Kurmanji, Zazaki and Sorani).

Identified Problems

- 1- There is no education and training in Kurdish languages. These languages do not have a legal status.
- 2- The fact that the dominant language is Turkish puts Kurdish languages under pressure.
- 3- One of the most important problems with Zazaki is the lack of a language institution to ensure standardisation.
- 4- Institutions that provided certain incentives and courses on language were closed down by a decree after 2016.
- 5- As a result of the appointment of trustees to DBP municipalities, all work related to language was stopped.
- 6- In Kurdish languages, there is a need for an in-depth terminology related to different branches of science.

Solution Proposals

- 1- Kurdish languages must have a legal status. The mother tongue must have an institutional and legal basis.
- 2- Local administrations should be strengthened and the use of the language should be popularised.
- 3- Institutional activities should be increased to standardise the language.
- 4- The UN and the Council of Europe should allocate significant funds to private organizations and institutions.
- 5- A terminology study related to different branches of science should be carried out.

Ma Muzik

FIELD VISIT FORM - 3

Visited Institution

Ma Muzik

Visited Place

Diyarbakir

Person Interviewed

Name/Surname

Signature

ŞK

X

Visit Date

18/01/2024

Working Area of the Visited Institution:

As an academy, it operates in Kurdish languages (Kurmanji, Zazaki and Sorani). It mainly provides music education to children between the ages of 04-17. It contributes to the popularisation of Kurdish music, conducts research, especially in villages, and collects information/material on Kurdish languages.

Identified Problems

- 1- The lack of education and training in Kurdish languages is one of the most fundamental problems.
- 2- Zazaki (Kirmanjki) is a minority compared to the Kurmanji dialect. Zazaki speakers suffer the disadvantage of being in the minority. This situation also has an effect on children. Just as Turkish exerts pressure on Kurdish languages, Kurmanji exerts pressure on Zazaki.
- 3- The use of Zazaki in certain branches is quite inadequate. Institutions operating in Kurdish languages mainly work in Kurmanji.
- 4- Institutions do not insist on the use of the language.
- 5- Families do not teach their children their mother tongue. This is undoubtedly a consequence of assimilation.
- 6- There are hardly any day-care centres offering language services. Currently, there is only one kindergarten in Diyarbakır that provides education in Kurdish languages.
- 7- The political power allocates all its incentives to the opening of Koran courses etc. In Diyarbakır, 251 Qur'anic courses were opened.

Solution Proposals

- 1- Kurdish languages must be granted a legal status.
- 2- Language and culture must be protected despite legal obstacles.
- 3- Story and music houses for children in their mother tongue should be established in many neighbourhoods.
- 4- The number of kindergartens providing education in Kurdish languages should be increased.
- 5- Kurdish languages should be actively used by all politicians. Popular co-chairs should speak their mother tongue in all visits and statements to organisations and parties.
- 6- Incentives should be given to promote the use of the mother tongue. The language must be given prestige.
- 7- Kurdish languages should be approached with a sense of mobilisation. In this direction, cinema screenings in Zazaki and Kurmanji languages and music concerts should be made widespread. Didactic content should be placed on billboards, social media should be actively used and awareness should be raised.

Mesopotamian Language and Culture Research Association (MED-DER)

FIELD VISIT FORM - 4

Visited Institution

Mesopotamian Language and Culture Research Association (MED-DER)

Visited Place

Diyarbakir

Person Interviewed

Name/Surname

Signature

MRA	X
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Visit Date

05/02/2024

Working Area of the Visited Institution:

Organising language, education and translation workshops, preparing materials for these workshops; holding panels and symposiums on language, culture and education in mother tongue, providing multilingual announcement services at book fairs.

Identified Problems

- 1- The lack of official recognition of education in the mother tongue is a major problem. All communities speaking Kurdish languages demand education in their mother tongue.
- 2- Not only the position of Kurdish languages, but also Kurdish culture and history are being assimilated.
- 3- Children are deprived of education in their mother tongue. Therefore, they speak Turkish, the dominant language, on the street, at home and in all areas of society. Compared to previous years, the proportion of children talking to their parents has decreased.
- 4- A language cannot survive if it is not the official language and is not learnt by children.
- 5- There are bigger problems in Zazaki than in Kurmanji. This Kurdish language is more isolated. It is little spoken of in the market and in many areas. Zazaki is almost extinct.
- 6- In Kurdish provinces, communication is either in Turkish or Kurmanji. Zazaki remains in the background.

Solution Proposals

- 1- The right to education in mother tongue must be recognized. All prohibitions on language must be removed.
- 2- Families should definitely communicate with their children at home in Kurdish languages.
- 3- It is not possible to protect the language against assimilation or to save the language only through associations and language courses.
- 4- Particular emphasis should be placed on Zazaki. It should be used more in all institutions, diplomacy and politics.
- 5- Zazaki-speaking families should have language awareness and direct their children to at least kindergartens and language courses.

ZimZim Kreş

FIELD VISIT FORM - 5

Visited Institution

ZimZim Kreş

Visited Place

Diyarbakir

Person Interviewed

Name/Surname **Signature**

ŞA	X
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Visit Date

05/02/2024

Working Area of the Visited Institution:

To provide 2 to 6 year old children with language education, to contribute to their social and cultural development, to organize activities, and to help them develop a creative personality based on an education model intertwined with nature.

Identified Problems

1- There are legal problems in front of us. We cannot easily provide mother tongue education. We cannot carry out our activities at the desired level. We can't even advertise ourselves.

2- Since mother tongue education is not legally recognized, we have to struggle with many difficulties.

3- Students are inclined to the popular language, i.e. Turkish.

4- It is difficult to open classes in Zazaki. Because families are not interested. They do not protect their mother tongue.

5- Families are afraid. Because Kurdish languages are constantly criminalized by the power centers.

6- Zazaki-speaking families do not use their mother tongue at home compared to the past. If this continues, the language will die out.

Solution Proposals

1- As stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, any child who reaches the age of 6 should speak their mother tongue.

2- Legal amendments must be made urgently and the issue of mother tongue must be resolved immediately in the public sphere.

3- All bans and pressures on mother tongue education must be lifted.

4- The climate of fear experienced by families must be overcome.

5- Mother tongue education starts in the family. At home, parents should communicate strictly in their mother tongue.

6- The prestige of Kurdish languages in the public sphere must be raised. The language hierarchy must be eliminated.

FIELD VISIT FORM - 6

Visited Institution

Ferzad Kemanger Primary School

Visited Place

Diyarbakir

Person Interviewed

Name/Surname **Signature**

BO

X

Visit Date

10/02/2024

Working Area of the Visited Institution:

In 2014, it was opened in three provinces. He was only able to teach for two years. In 2016, it was shut down by a decree law. Today, it continues to provide education under the name

of a cooperative. The school has around 30 students. Courses are offered from the 1st class of primary school to the 2nd class of high school.

Identified Problems

- 1- The Turkish education system has an oppressive character.
- 2- The Turkish language is imposed on all ethnic identities in Turkey.
- 3- The current education system threatens the existence of different ethnic identities and deprives them of their fundamental rights.
- 4- Kurdish education is perceived as a major threat by the state.
- 5- The trustee system jeopardizes the future of Kurdish languages.
- 6- Centrist education policy negatively affects children's access to their mother tongue.

Solution Proposals

- 1- The education system should be transformed into a multilingual model.
- 2- Education in mother tongue should not be perceived as a threat and democratic steps should be taken as soon as possible.
- 3- Kurdish languages should not be suppressed. Both Kurmanji and Zazaki must be paved the way.
- 4- The despotic and centralist education model must be abandoned. A modern education model must be built.

CONCLUSION

Just as a Kyrgyz proverb says, "the fate of a people is the same as the fate of a language." Among Kurdish languages, Zazaki or Kirmanjki is in danger of extinction. If these languages disappear, it is highly likely that the people will also disappear. The future of Zazaki, which has been subjected to a very sharp policy of "homogenization" for a century, worries the community speaking this language.

Interviews with institutions operating in Diyarbakir have provided noteworthy warnings about the position and fate of the Zazaki language. The main demand of all institutions is "the right to education in one's mother tongue". It is considered impossible for Kurdish languages to survive without gaining a status in the public sphere. In the interviewed institutions, there is

a dominant view that the monist policy of the nation-state has made Turkish "dominant" and criminalized other minority languages.

Relevant institutions share that children have difficulty in accessing the language, that they do not have mother tongue awareness, that families act out of fear, and that Zazaki is rarely spoken at home and on the street. In this respect, he warns that families should insist on their mother tongue and be determined despite all kinds of assimilationist policies.