

Revitalizing the Local Laz Language Under Threat Through Education: A Qualitative Analysis

Nermin Karabacak¹

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Faculty of Education, Rize, Türkiye

Şenol Sezer

Ordu University, Faculty of Education, Ordu, Türkiye

Abstract: This study examines the survival of the Laz language through education from the perspective of Laz language educators. This research was conducted in a qualitative research design and case study model. Data was collected via a semi-structured interview form and analyzed by using a content analysis method. The study group consisted of six teachers of Lazi. The findings revealed that the Laz language is under threat due to limited class hours and course materials. School administrators provide insufficient support for language education, pre-service and in-service training for Laz language teachers remains inadequate, and younger generations show little preference for speaking Laz. In addition, participants suggested that the language should be included as an elective course in the secondary school curriculum, that more projects and research on Laz should be undertaken, and that in-service training opportunities should be expanded. While participants expressed satisfaction with the state's local language policies, they emphasized that stronger institutional and political support is necessary to enhance social acceptance, ensure survival through education, and promote sustainability.

Keywords: Local language, Lazi, language under threat, education, sustainability.

Türkiye has a very rich linguistic and dialectal diversity. Although Turkish is the official language, other languages such as Abkhazian, Adyghe, Laz language, Zazaki, Abaza, Hemsin language, Hertevin, Ladino, Pomak, Pontic Greek, Romanian, and Syriac languages and dialects are at risk of extinction because of neglect and declining use. According to UNESCO data (Haznedar, 2018; Kutscher, 2008; Moseley, 2010).

Literature Review

The Laz language is one of the South Caucasian languages spoken in some cities in the Eastern Black Sea region of Türkiye, Batumi in Georgia and small settlements like Sarpi, Kvartati, and Gonia near the Turkish border (Benninghaus, 1989; Karimova & Deverell, 2001; Lacroix, 2007). It is the only Caucasian language spoken in Türkiye (Kutscher, 2008). The Laz people, who speak this language, are an ethnic group living in the Eastern Black Sea region of Türkiye and in areas near the Turkish-Georgian border. The homeland of the Laz community is the eastern coast of the Black Sea region. Today, Laz populations are concentrated mainly in

¹ Corresponding Author: Assoc. Prof., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Faculty of Education, Department of Education Sciences, Rize, Turkey. E-Mail: nermin.karabacak@erdogan.edu.tr

two provinces: the districts of Pazar, Ardeşen, Çamlıhemşin and Fındıklı in Rize and the districts of Arhavi, Borçka, Kemalpaşa and Hopa in Artvin (Serdar, 2015). Although there is not much detailed information about the history of the Laz society in the Eastern Black Sea, they are well known as a community by the local population (Eminov, 2001). When the Ottoman Empire conquered the Empire of Trebizond in 1461, the Laz people of the region came under Ottoman rule. Following the Ottoman-Russian War of 1878-1879, many Laz migrated from the Batumi region to the Marmara region, settling in cities such as Istanbul, Adapazarı, Akçakoca, Bolu, Düzce, Yalova, Karamürsel, Sapanca, and Balıkesir (Aksoylu, 2009).

With the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, a new era began for the communities that had long inhabited Anatolia. Armenians, Greeks, and Jews were given ‘minority’ status, which included the right to establish and administer their own educational institutions (Çolak, 2004). These minority schools were reserved for officially recognized non-Muslim groups and were classified into three categories: Armenian schools, Greek schools, and Jewish schools (Andrews, 1992).

In the 1924 Constitution, Turkish was established as the sole official language of the Republic of Türkiye. The linguistic rights granted to Armenians, Jews, and Greeks to speak their own language were not extended to other ethnic communities, including the Laz, living within the borders of the state (Özgün, 1996). Between 1940 and 1959, the original Laz names of settlements in the Eastern Black Sea region were replaced with Turkish ones (Tunçel, 2000). According to the 1961 Constitution, the use of all languages other than Turkish was prohibited (Nişanyan, 2011). In the 1982 Constitution, Turkish was defined as the ‘language of the Turkish state’ and the use of other languages in education and civil institutions was banned (Haznedar, 2018). In 2001, as part of efforts to meet the conditions for European Union membership, legal regulations were introduced allowing children to be given names in minority languages, permitting the establishment of special courses to learn local languages, and guaranteeing the freedom to publish in these languages (Bayir, 2013). Although these reforms reflected a more moderate approach to minority policy in the Republic of Türkiye, the Laz language, despite having its own alphabet, continued to be transmitted only within families that already spoke it (Gökdağ, 2011). One of the main difficulties experienced in the survival of the Laz language as a living language is that families generally tend to use Turkish, the official language of the state, due to concerns that speaking Laz might hinder the academic success of their school-age children (Taşkın, 2011). Despite such negativities that hinder the vitality of the Laz language, since 2012, it has been widely accepted as state policy to offer different languages and dialects as elective courses to preserve and sustain them (Yaman, 2019).

In Türkiye, Abkhazian, Adyghe, Georgian, Kurmanji, Lazi, Zazaki, Albanian, and Bosnian have been offered as elective courses at the secondary school level since the 2012-2013 academic year within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects course included in the Elective Course Directive published by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in 2012. The responsibility for preparing the Laz language curriculum and textbooks was assigned to the Laz Institute in cooperation with the MoNE. The Laz Institute has prepared a Living Languages and Dialects Curriculum for 5th-8th grades of secondary schools (Bakay, 2020). Although the introduction of the Living Languages and Dialects elective course created an opportunity to teach minority languages and dialects, infrastructure problems have emerged in the teaching of the Laz language. The most important of these problems is the scarcity of teachers qualified to teach minority languages and dialects or the problem of assigning teachers to these courses (Bayrak, 2022). The MoNE assigned 59 teachers for Kurdish lessons within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects course from September 2013 to September 2019. In 2023, a total of 50 teachers were appointed for Kurdish lessons, with 35 assigned to Kurmanji and 15 to Zazaki. Within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects course, the MoNE has appointed teachers for Kurdish courses, but no teachers have been appointed for languages other than Kurdish (Kavgacı, 2021). In higher education institutions that train teachers in

Türkiye, only teacher candidates who will teach Kurdish are trained for the Living Languages and Dialects course (Eren & Taşkan, 2023). The Kurdish Language and Literature department operates as an active academic unit in six universities. If no graduates from the Living Languages and Dialects undergraduate program are available, teachers who claim proficiency in the relevant language may be assigned to teach it. In this context, teachers of Living Languages and Dialects elective courses in secondary schools may be required by school administrators to demonstrate their proficiency in the relevant language (Bakay, 2020). Due to the lack of a higher education program in teaching the Laz language in Türkiye, one of the most important problems encountered in teaching the Laz language courses in public schools is the lack of teachers trained in this field (Bayrak, 2022).

In public middle schools, at least 10 students must choose the lesson to be able to open the Living Languages and Dialects elective lesson (Kavgacı, 2021). Students indicate their preferences through petitions submitted to the school administration. The elective course requests submitted to the school administration by each student are recorded in the school system by the school administration. If at least 10 students choose the same elective course, a class is created for that course. Lessons are given as two lesson-hours per week (MoNE, 2024). In 2012, when the legal regulation regarding the teaching of Living Languages and Dialects as an elective course came into force, no classes could be opened for the elective Lazi course. In the 2013–2014 academic year, Laz language courses were offered in one or two classes each semester; however, no courses were offered between 2015 and 2021 (Bakay, 2020; Haznedar, 2018). Since the 2022–2023 academic year, elective Laz courses have been available in two secondary schools in the Fındıklı and Ardeşen districts of Rize. One of the main challenges in sustaining these courses is the insufficient number of students choosing them, which often prevents classes from being opened (Bayrak, 2022).

Another problem in offering elective Lazi courses is the inadequacy of course materials. Bakay (2020) reported that this problem stems from the absence of workbooks to accompany Laz language textbooks, unlike in other language courses. Although the existing textbooks were considered generally sufficient for teaching Living Languages and Dialects, the study emphasized that their content should be further improved based on teacher feedback.

Since Laz was among the elective courses within the Living Languages and Dialects program (MoNE, 2013), in-service training was provided to 19 teachers in 2018 in cooperation between the MoNE and the Laz Institute to train teachers who will take part in teaching this language (Bayrak, 2022). In this context, the work to train Laz teachers and prepare textbooks (Lazuri 5, Lazuri 6, Lazuri 7, Lazuri 8) has been started in a planned manner and the work is continuing (Laz Institute, 2017). This research focuses on the difficulties in teaching Laz as an elective course in secondary schools, and the measures required to address these challenges. In this context, the aim of the research is to specify the views of Laz language teachers regarding the efforts to revitalize Laz, a local language under threat, through education. In line with this general purpose, the following questions were answered:

1. What are the views of Laz language teachers on Laz language education?
2. Do parents sufficiently support their children during the Laz education process?
3. What is the level of interest of students in learning the Laz language?
4. What kind of difficulties do Laz language teachers face in planning, implementing and managing learning activities?
5. What are the views of Laz language teachers on the future of the Laz language?
6. What are the Laz language teachers' views on the revival of the Laz language?

Method

Research Pattern

This research was conducted using a qualitative research approach and designed according to the case study model, which is commonly applied in the social sciences and related fields (Punch, 2014). This study addresses a research question that focuses on social problems and the people and groups involved in these problems from a broad global perspective (Creswell, 2013). In this research, the status of the efforts to revive Laz, a local language under threat, through education and the views of Laz language educators on this subject have been tried to be presented in detail within the framework of real life (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). In this research, a descriptive case study model was used to holistically examine the difficulties encountered by Laz language teachers in the process of revitalizing the Laz language through education. Descriptive case studies are used to analyze data on understudied topics or cases and to present findings through detailed interpretation (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Kim et al., 2025; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Study Group

The study group of the research was determined by the criterion sampling method. Criterion sampling involves the principle of selecting participants who meet predetermined criteria on the subject under investigation in the process of investigating a particular situation, event or phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The first criterion for selecting the study group was prior in-service training within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects elective course. The second criterion was at least three years of experience teaching Laz within the Living Languages and Dialects elective course. The third criterion was active participation in the Laz language revitalization project. The fourth criterion was voluntary participation in the study. The study group in the research comprised a total of six Laz educators included in planning Laz teaching and lesson materials and employed in schools in Rize province giving the Living Languages and Dialects Laz lesson since 2013. The reason why the number of participants in the study is six is that the number of educators teaching the Laz language course within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects elective course in Türkiye is quite limited. The research was completed in the 2023-2024 academic year. Since there were no female teachers teaching the Laz language in the region where the research was conducted, the study group consisted entirely of men. The professional experience of participants varied from 10 to 30 years. Two participants were school administrators, while four were employed as teachers. Three of the participants had master's degrees, while all had received in-service training about Laz language education. All participants knew how to read and write in Laz very well and were bilingual in Turkish-Laz at home. Participants in the study group were authoritative people, working on the process of revitalizing Laz over a long period.

Data Collection Tools

Since the study required data collection through a semi-structured interview technique, ethics committee approval was obtained from the Recep Tayyip University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Decision No. 2024/324, dated 11.09.2024). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This technique is considered one of the most appropriate data collection methods to understand people's emotions and unobservable behaviors (Merriam, 2013). The semi-structured interview questions for this study were developed by the researchers based on a review of the relevant literature. In preparing the interview questions, attention was given to the socio-cultural characteristics of students receiving Laz language

education and their parents, the extent of parental support for teaching Laz, strategies for increasing such support, the experiences of Laz language teachers, and the broader dimensions of revitalizing local languages under threat. A detailed literature review was conducted to determine interview questions to put out participants' views on the teaching and revitalization of local languages that are under threat in both local and global contexts. The opinions of experts in the field and education science experts were obtained related to the scope and linguistic validity of the prepared questions. Opinions of two field experts and two language experts were taken to guarantee the validity of the scope and language of the prepared questions. Necessary revisions were made according to expert feedback and a preliminary form comprising the semi-structured interview questions was prepared. This preliminary form was applied to two Laz language teachers within the scope of the pilot study, and the interview questions were finalized by evaluating the results obtained. The questions included in the interview form are given below:

1. Can you express your positive and negative views about the adequacy of the Laz language courses?
2. What are your views on family support during the Laz language education process?
3. What are your views on students' interest in learning the Laz language?
4. What difficulties do you encounter in planning, implementing, and managing in Laz language teaching?
5. What do you think about the future of the Laz language?
6. Could you share with us what needs to be done to revive the Laz language?

Data Collection

The data collection process of the research was carried out in four stages. In the first stage, approval was obtained from the social sciences ethics committee of the university where the first author is employed. In the second stage, the research permit was obtained from the Ministry of National Education by the second researcher. In the third stage, the participants were given the necessary information about the research before the interviews. They were assured that their identities would remain confidential, that personal information and responses would be used solely for scientific purposes, and that the interviews would be audio-recorded. In the fourth stage, data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants. The most appropriate meeting time and day for the participants was determined and face-to-face interviews were completed at appropriate times. Each interview lasted around 35-50 minutes. With the consent of participants, interviews were recorded with a voice recording device. Voice recordings were later transferred to a computer environment by the researcher. The data collection process of the research was completed between December 2023 and March 2024. Raw data from the voice recordings were transcribed into written documents with computer assistance using the qualitative data analysis program NVivo 14.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by the researchers using qualitative content analysis techniques. Content analysis is a qualitative data analysis method involving reading a range of data and identifying patterns of meaning to find themes (Patton, 2015). It is an active and reflexive process in which the researcher's subjective experience plays a central role in interpreting the data (Creswell, 2015). In content analysis, based on participant interviews, these themes, subthemes and codes related to the researched case are determined by creating units of meaning. In content analysis, transcripts of individual and focus group interviews, documents and observation notes are analyzed by categorizing them into themes, subthemes, and categories

within their contextual framework (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In this research, the seven-step data-processing method of Rossman and Sharon (2017) was adopted. This process involved organizing, performing deep interpretation, creating themes and categories, coding, writing analytical notes, presenting comments, and searching for potential meanings. In the organizing stage, the transcripts were read and re-read to gain a holistic understanding of the data, that is, to capture the overall meaning of the participants' accounts. In the deep interpretation phase, the main points or ideas were examined in detail to grasp the ideas that the participants were really expressing. In the creating themes and categories stage, the text was divided into smaller parts, namely, meaning units. In the coding phase, the meaning units were labelled by formulating codes and then grouping these codes into categories. In addition, the analytical notes were written in data processing (Mayring, 2014). Writing analytical notes was considered a critical aspect of effectively analyzing qualitative data. These notes formed the foundation of the analysis and ultimately contributed to the final report. In addition, quotations from as many participants as possible were included to demonstrate the connection between the results and the data, as well as to highlight the richness of the dataset (Elo et al., 2014). Subthemes related to the main themes were created in the NVivo 14 program. Direct quotes reflecting the participants' views were included so that readers can better understand the context. The presentation of findings was completed with the approach of presenting data according to themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are the two most important criteria used to ensure the credibility of results from qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2016). Validity and reliability in qualitative research are related to the processes of data collection, data analysis, careful conceptualization, and the interpretation of findings (Merriam, 2013). In qualitative research, validity and reliability are ensured by credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reliability concerns whether the findings and interpretations regarding the research topic reflect reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2015). In this study, the development of the qualitative design and data collection tools, the selection of the participant group constituting the research sample, the number of participants and information about the participants are explained in detail. Particular care was taken to select participants with in-depth knowledge and experience of the subject under investigation. To enhance reliability, participant approval was obtained, and efforts were made to gather rich and comprehensive data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In qualitative research, reliability is very important in terms of the credibility of the research results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is the transfer of raw data to the reader by rearranging it according to the concepts and themes that emerge, without making any comments, while remaining true to the nature of the data. In this study, to ensure transferability, participant views were presented in the form of direct quotes and themes were supported by direct quotes from the data. In the study, there are codes just below the quote to indicate which participant the direct quote belongs to. Due to the principle of privacy, the real names of participants were not used; instead, codenames were given. The transcribed interview data, together with the coding generated during the analysis process, were stored electronically to allow for later examination (Akar, 2016; Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Confirmation is the consensus among coders regarding codes, themes, and subthemes produced by more than one coder during the analysis of transcribed data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2005). To objectively reveal the statements directly related to the purpose of the research and to make the comments clearer and more understandable, two different researchers who are experts in qualitative data analysis were consulted on the appropriateness

of the codes, themes and subthemes. Consensus was sought between coders in the context of the similarity rate being important for the coded data set. The coded raw data, themes and subthemes were analyzed by ranking (Saldana, 2012). To determine the reliability of the coding, Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula of $[\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Dissidence}) \times 100]$ was used. As a result, the agreement between the coders was found to be .92.

Consistency refers to the transparent and detailed reporting of the stages followed in a study and whether similar results would be obtained if the research were conducted in a comparable context (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2015). In this study, the research method and implementation stages were explained clearly and comprehensively in the methodology section. The procedures for conducting the interviews, recording the data, analyzing the documents, and combining and presenting the results were also described in detail (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2005).

Results

Main Theme: Laz Language Education

Three sub-themes were determined regarding the main theme of Laz language education. These sub-themes are background, cultural richness, competence, willingness, and school environment.

Background

The implementation of Living Languages and Dialects elective courses in Türkiye began in 2013. Teachers stated that they had been teaching this course since 2013, but did not offer it in the 2019-2020 academic year because students did not choose these courses. One of the Laz language teachers stated that he had taught this course for the first time in the 2020-2021 academic year; the other stated that he had been teaching it for three years, starting from the 2021-2022 academic year. Below are direct quotes related to the sub-theme of **background**:

(Murat): Optional Laz language teaching started for the first time in the 2019-2020 academic year. The courses continued in an entertaining way and with the interest and the attention of the students.

(Davut): Optional Laz language courses have been taught in our school for three years, starting from the 2021-2022 academic year.

(Dursun): I have been teaching the optional Laz language since the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year. In the 2019-2020 academic year, I did not teach this course for a year because students did not choose it.

Cultural richness

Laz language teachers expressed their great excitement for the inclusion of Laz language courses in the curriculum. Students said that they chose this course without knowing any Laz language in the first year of the course. Students stated that these courses would be a tool to spread Laz culture among the younger generations since they did not know Laz culture well enough and emphasized the necessity of spreading Laz courses. Laz language teachers have a positive view on the inclusion of Laz language courses in the secondary school curriculum. Below are direct quotes related to the sub-theme of **cultural richness**:

(Murat): Language is a tool, not a goal. It is wrong to see language as a political viewpoint or as the yoke of a group. Knowing a language adds a lot to a person. Two languages,

two people. Developing over a very long process, if the language has succeeded in reaching the present day, it's necessary to keep it alive. Because it is a part of culture.

(Davut): No one knew the Laz language. Due to my Laz lessons, they learned that the Laz language was not a Black Sea accent but a language.

(Ender): At the beginning, the students did not know anything about Lazi. They only had vague information about the Laz culture. People should not think that this course is only about teaching the language. This course is about Laz culture. It should be taught more widely, especially so that the younger generation does not forget the culture and language.

(Kemal): I think that everyone living in the region, whether Laz or not, should learn this language to learn the culture. In Fact, Lazi is a difficult language to teach. In the first years I taught this course, I felt inadequate as a teacher.

Competence

Participants stated that they learned their mother tongue, Laz, within the family. In bilingual families, language teaching can traditionally take place in the family environment from father to son. While teachers who teach the Laz language learned their mother tongue, Laz, through oral transmission within the family, they learned the written language of Laz through their own efforts or by receiving training from people and institutions who knew the written Laz language. Below are direct quotes related to the sub-theme of **competence**:

(Murat): I know Lazi very well. Because family elders generally spoke Lazi to each other in a friendly atmosphere. Since Lazi was spoken by both my mother's and father's families, I learned Lazi by hearing and living it in the city where I lived.

(Davut): My elders know Lazi very well. I learned it from my family. I also know Lazi very well. My siblings understand it well, but they cannot speak it well.

(Kemal): I learned Lazi by hearing it from my family and people around me. All my siblings in my family know it. Among my nieces and nephews, those whose mothers and fathers are Laz know it, but where I live, the majority do not know Lazi.

(Dursun): My whole family knows Lazi. I learned it from my family. I know Lazi very well. I learned to read and write Lazi with the help of a relative who could read and write Lazi. Later, I attended courses offered by the MoNE.

Willingness

Laz language teachers had a great desire to make the spoken Laz language more popular and to ensure its survival as a written language, since their native language, Laz, had been banned by the state for many years. Laz language teachers stated that they took on this task voluntarily. Direct quotes on the **willingness** sub-theme are given below:

(Murat): Languages and dialects should live. For humanity and culture.

(Davut): Support of the Living Languages and Dialects Laz lessons by the state is very good work. I want this work to continue and increase.

(Dursun): I was scared it would be extinct after several generations; I developed myself and gave education with the aim of popularizing Laz. I want this education to increase.

School environment

The schools in Türkiye where the Living Languages and Dialects Laz lessons are given are two public middle schools linked to Ardeşen and Fındıklı counties in Rize province. One of these schools is in the village center and the other is in the district center. In these schools, there is a multicultural school environment consisting of Turkish children, Kurdish children, Laz children, Syrian children, and children of nomadic families from different cultures. Direct quotes on **school environment** sub-theme are given below:

(Murat): There are 700 students studying at this school. I can say that we have students from every culture. We have Kurdish students from Ağrı (a city in the Eastern Anatolia Region), from we have Syrian students, we have Laz students, we have Turkish students. They all study in the same classes. In other words, we have students from different cultural environments.

(Ender): I work in a school where there are students from nomadic families. The students' motivation for success is low. Academic success is not at the expected level. We have a young teaching staff. Teacher circulation is very slow.

(Dursun): The number of students of Laz origin at the school is low. A significant portion of the students are not Laz. The majority are children of families working in nomadic tea farming. The students' academic success and social skills are quite low.

Main Theme: Family Support

Living Languages and Dialect Laz language courses are taught in schools where family participation and support are insufficient. Two sub-themes were identified regarding the main theme of family support: low education level and insufficient.

Low education level

Nomadic families represent families who came to Rize as seasonal agricultural tea workers. One of the general characteristics of these families is their low level of education. Direct quotes on the ***low education level*** sub-theme are given below:

(Murat): Unfortunately, there is a profile of parents with low education levels who are not very interested in their children's education.

(Ender): We have a parental profile whose education levels are below our expectations.

Insufficient support

In schools where Living Languages and Dialect Laz lessons are given, the success of Laz language teaching is generally not at the desired level since parents do not take sufficient interest in their children's education. Direct quotes on the ***insufficient support*** sub-theme are given below:

(Dursun): The parents of the students are families who have migrated to the school area as seasonal workers. They do not know Lazi. That's why they can't support their children's language development.

(Murat): They cannot pay attention to the education process of the students because they cannot pay attention to their children and because they work hard.

(Ender): I can say that we have a parent profile that does not support their children academically and does not attach importance to education.

Main Theme: Student Interest

It is observed that the academic success of the students in schools where Laz language education is given within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects optional courses is low and they are not interested enough in the lessons. Two sub-themes were identified regarding the main theme of student interest: low academic success and unfamiliarity with the Laz language.

Low academic success

Participants stated that students have low achievement levels but high motivation. Direct quotes on the ***low academic success*** sub-theme are given below:

(Murat): Academically the level is very low but socially their needs are very high, and we are trying to raise this in school.

(Davut): The students are at a medium level in terms of academic success, but I can say that they are more curious and hard-working when they are given close attention.

(Salih): I can say that the students are individuals with intermediate level language skills and respect for differences.

Unfamiliarity with the Laz language

One of the most striking findings of the study is that most of the students who choose elective Laz courses are not Laz. Direct quotes on ***unfamiliarity with the Laz language*** sub-theme were given below:

(Salih): Our students are generally not Laz. However, we have a few Laz students, they don't know much.

(Kemal): They understand but they cannot speak. Our aim in the lesson is to ensure they can adapt to the place where they live, to their neighbors.

Main Theme: Difficulties in the Teaching Process

Within the scope of the Living Languages and Dialects optional courses, the following sub-themes were determined regarding the main theme of difficulties experienced in the teaching of Laz language: material shortage, inadequate in-service training, and inadequate support from school administration.

Material shortage

Participants reported that the MoNE's support for materials to be used in Laz lessons was inadequate. It was stated that there were problems in strengthening supplementary resources for Laz. It was stated that more supplementary resources were needed for students to be able to study at home. Teachers said that they tried to solve this problem with their personal efforts. Below are some direct statements regarding the sub-theme of ***material shortage***:

(Murat): The biggest problem is the lack of materials. The Ministry does not send books, it did not send them last year, it did not send them this year. There is a resource problem, but I manage this problem through the Laz Institute.

(Ender): Insufficient resources for children to read on their own. For example, the lack of course content on the Education Information Network is a significant problem. It is not possible to learn a language with just a course book. There are no workbooks. We need additional resources. Materials are insufficient. We use books approved by the MoNE; we have a dictionary.

(Dursun): There is a significant resource problem. There is not enough material on the internet for teaching the Laz language. The teacher must plan everything needed for language teaching (reading, listening, speaking, and writing). There are currently no easily available materials.

(Salih): In addition to textbooks, there should also be reading books that students can study to ensure their language development. There is also a need for resources for writing. There is no material that the child can use to put what they have learned into practice.

Inadequate in-service training

Participants state that there are not enough teachers trained to teach the Laz language. They state that in-service training for elective Laz language courses is provided to teachers in

Türkiye in general, not to teachers in the region where Laz language is spoken and therefore does not serve its purpose. They state that the number of in-service training courses opened to train Laz language teachers should be increased. Below are some direct statements regarding the sub-theme of ***inadequate in-service training***:

(Murat): *There are problems in teaching the Laz language due to the lack of sufficient classrooms and teachers in schools.*

(Davut): *The number of Laz teachers who will teach lessons is very low. That is one of our biggest problems.*

(Ender): *The training of Laz language teachers is done through in-service training. Teachers who know the Laz language must attend these courses. The Ministry takes people who know Laz language at an intermediate level into training. They are selected by the MoNE regardless of whether they know the Laz language or not.*

(Dursun): *The certificate programs are inadequate. To date, we've been able to do three in-service training courses. This number is very low. These in-service training courses are inadequate for the MoNE, for teachers, and for the Laz culture. These numbers need to be increased, this again will happen with a lot more work.*

(Salih): *The biggest problem with the in-service training programs provided by the Ministry is that teachers who are suitable for the purpose cannot be ensured to attend the courses.*

Inadequate support from the school administration

Participants express the view that although school administrators have positive attitudes towards opening and ensuring the continuity of the optional Laz language course, the courses are not open due to the negative attitudes of school administrators in local areas where Lazi is spoken towards learning the language.

(Ender): *I know that there are requests for optional Laz language courses in a few schools, but these requests are not met due to the reluctant attitude of the school principal. If the school principal provides this opportunity, it is impossible not to offer Laz language courses in the school.*

(Kemal): *The answer to the question of why it is not offered in other schools is entirely related to the school administration. If the school administrations remove these obstacles, I am sure that elective languages will be offered in all public schools, especially in every school in our region.*

(Dursun): *School administrators focused on academic success do not want to open Laz language as an optional course because it is not an academic course.*

Main Theme: Future of Lazi

Three sub-themes were determined regarding the main theme of the future of Laz language: risk of extinction, language courses, and responsibilities.

The Laz language is among the languages considered to be under threat by UNESCO, and the participants expressed that they accept that the Laz language is in danger of extinction. Direct quotes on the ***risk of extinction*** sub-theme are given below:

Risk of extinction

(Kemal): *The Laz language is spoken very little. I accept that it is under threat. It is at risk because it is not spoken in families as much as it used to be. In fact, I can hear things in Laz from my elders, but even if the young people know it, they do not prefer to speak it.*

(Dursun): *Lazi is under serious threat and the number of speakers is decreasing day by day. Efforts can make Lazi permanent, but I believe that there will come a day when no one speaks Lazi. Unfortunately, Lazi is among the languages that will be forgotten, like many other languages. Whether the efforts will be sufficient or whether they will be limited to academic studies, time will tell.*

Participants stated that they were pleased that the Laz language was accepted as an optional course by the Ministry and that it was taught as an optional course. Direct quotes on the **language course** sub-theme are given below:

Language course

(Murat): *Every language has a living space. There is no danger of Kurdish becoming extinct for living languages, there are lands where Kurds live. There is a geography where Circassians live. Among these, Laz seems to be the most endangered. Laz language courses were opened in Türkiye in 2013. Therefore, the opening of this course was a great gain for the Laz language.*

(Davut): *The Laz language is in danger of extinction. However, it will not disappear with the increase in written works, in-service training activities, and courses to be opened. The Laz language will not die, the Laz language will live.*

Participants saw the in-service training organized by the MoNE as a way and a future for reviving the Laz language, emphasizing the importance of preserving local languages in the state's cultural policies and that local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be willing to support the Laz language. They also expressed that they were pleased with the efforts of Laz artists to revive the Laz language, academic projects and research. Direct quotes on the **responsibilities** sub-theme are given below:

Responsibilities

(Ender): *Local non-governmental organizations should support the Laz language. Courses should be opened; the Laz language should be used in daily life or local celebration days should be organized.*

(Kemal): *Laz artists have a great responsibility because they are the representatives of art who carry the culture from generation to generation.*

Main Theme: Revival of Lazi

Two sub-themes were determined regarding the main theme of keeping the Laz language alive: undergraduate-level education and awareness raising.

Laz language teachers state that the struggle to revive Lazi involves multifaceted efforts such as work to include Lazi in undergraduate education in higher education programs and academic and artistic studies on Lazi. Direct quotes on the **undergraduate education** sub-theme are given below:

Undergraduate education

(Murat): *In Türkiye, there are university departments related to Circassian, Bosnian, Kurdish, Georgian; there is undergraduate education. There is no department in universities related to the Laz language. There is no undergraduate education. For the Laz language, applications were made to a university in Rize at one time. The reply was that it's not a language with literature. It's a language, in the end. This language should have undergraduate education. The value given to a language should not just be about whether there are written*

resources from the past. If it's not included at the undergraduate level, let there be work for those who want to do master's degrees in the Laz language.

(Salih): *Cultivating Laz teachers should not just be through in-service training opened by the ministry. It is necessary to insert the Laz language into the academy.*

Participants expressed their views on teaching Lazi as an elective course in state secondary schools to raise awareness, increasing the number of students taking Lazi by popularizing Lazi among students and the public through personal efforts and social media, providing voluntary consultancy on the teaching of Lazi courses, and conducting publications in the media (newspapers, magazines, TV channels, YouTube).

Raising awareness

(Davut): *I increased awareness by making announcements on social media and through teacher friends. I increase the rate of selection and open more classes by introducing the elective Laz lessons to my own students. In the long term, I think about activity lesson plans and preparing materials. I will ensure popularization by opening courses through Public Education.*

(Ender): *Language means culture; remembering, learning and not forgetting a language reflects culture. This is a wonderful thing, I'm very satisfied. In fact, since I got that news, I've been working to do things for Laz lessons and for the Laz language. I'm the coordinator for optional Lazi lessons. I follow them as much as I can, I make announcements to my teachers. Additionally, I support teachers in an academic sense, in terms of books.*

(Kemal): *Previously for adults' journals were printed, newspapers were printed, we have a little channel in Ardeşen for TV broadcasts (Gelişim TV), programs were prepared. Our principal did work as a school administration. There are Laz videos, films, etc., contributions to voiceovers published on YouTube. In this way, work is being done. Thus, there are channels, but we couldn't include them in schools, we can't work on them. Our teachers mention these in lessons, probably, but these channels can't enter our service in a full sense. There are YouTube channels, magazines, and radio channels, however, they don't work in a full sense.*

(Dursun): *Some of our friends write Laz poetry, Laz essays. We have magazines. I think there should be Laz-themed projects after this in e-twinning and Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TUBITAK) projects.*

Discussion

In this research, which focuses on the survival of Laz, one of the local languages in danger of extinction from the perspective of Laz language educators, through education, it has been concluded that the devoted efforts to keep Laz alive are not sufficient and that a more comprehensive and sensitive process needs to be initiated in this regard. The results revealed that the elective Laz language courses started with the participation of a limited number of teachers and students with the publication of the Living Languages and Dialects elective courses regulation in secondary schools by the MoNE. The limited preference for the elective Laz language course in its early years may be attributed to the long-standing state ban on speaking this local language, which led many members of the Laz community in certain districts of Rize to discontinue using Lazi as a spoken language. Haznedar (2018) found that none of the students of Laz origin enrolled in Laz language courses knew Laz language, and only 6% of the younger generation (under 25 years old) preferred to speak it. The results revealed that Laz language teachers come from families of Laz origin, that they want to teach Laz with great enthusiasm, and that learning and teaching Lazi within the scope of Living Languages and Dialects elective courses will ensure the preservation and survival of cultural richness. Research

by Garai-Artetxe et al. (2025) has shown that although there is a clear desire to pass on Basque to future generations, as speaker preferences can significantly influence the creation of a language brand, proactive behaviors to promote the language, such as attempts by younger generations to learn the language and use it in daily life, are lagging behind. Active participation and increased use, especially among passive and non-speakers, will be crucial for the existence and vitality of the Basque language. As a matter of fact, Acevedo and Solorzano (2023) state that the best way to preserve the cultural richness of a society is to protect the local languages living in that society. The results also reveal that there are students from different cultures in schools where elective Laz courses are offered. These results can be seen as valuable in terms of revealing the importance of preserving cultural wealth in ensuring social peace. In their research, Smoker and Groff (1996) stated that the best way to maintain social peace is to protect local cultural wealth. In this context, Gay (2015) and Ladson-Billings (1995a; 1995b) emphasized the need for educational institutions to provide students with the opportunity to learn about other cultures in addition to developing academic knowledge and skills.

The results revealed that family support was insufficient in schools where the elective Laz course was taught, and that families were generally not sufficiently involved in their children's education due to their low level of education. It may be said that this is because the parents of the students in the schools where the research was conducted are mostly nomadic families and families who migrate as seasonal workers. It can be thought that these poor families, who have a heavy workload, cannot spare enough time for their children and their educational opportunities are limited. Similarly, Sengupta and Guchhait (2022) reported that socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are more likely to engage in seasonal migration, which creates significant challenges. In such circumstances, survival becomes the primary concern, while education assumes a secondary or even tertiary role. Researchers argued that it was determined that parents were not sufficiently informed about the course during the student selection process for the Living Languages and Dialects course (Kaya & Aydin, 2013; zfidan & Demir, 2014). Bakay (2020) found that although students and teachers generally have positive attitudes towards elective Laz courses, the attitudes of parents are varied. It was also revealed that while some parents supported Laz courses and found them useful, others displayed negative attitudes toward them. On the contrary, Karagöz (2016) identified that parents generally held positive attitudes toward the Living Languages and Dialects Kurdish elective lessons.

The results revealed that students in schools where Laz language education is offered within the scope of Living Languages and Dialects elective courses demonstrate relatively low overall academic achievement and limited interest in their lessons. This outcome may be partly attributed to the fact that many of these students come from nomadic families. In addition, it was found that the students' motivation in Laz lessons was high, and they were interested in the lessons. Similar findings were also revealed in the research conducted by Bakay (2020), and it was observed that students of non-Laz origin also preferred Laz courses. Their preference was largely due to their interest and enthusiasm, the enjoyment they derived from the classes, and their success in learning.

The results also revealed that the problems in teaching optional Laz courses included inadequate instructional materials, insufficient in-service training, and a lack of administrative support from school leadership. Even if it is an optional course, rich materials are needed to learn the basic skills of a language (reading, writing, listening, speaking) (Korkmaz & Aybirdi-Tanrıverdi, 2024). In this sense, the lack of materials in elective Laz language teaching emerges as an important problem. Similarly, in the studies conducted by Bakay (2020), Karagöz (2016), Kurt (2020) and Kaya and Aydin (2013), deficiencies were identified in the course materials in the teaching of Living Languages and Dialects elective courses and it was revealed that the books and supplementary course materials for these courses should be developed by the MoNE in accordance with the content of the courses. The results of the research indicate that one of

the major challenges in offering the elective Laz language course is the difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers. This problem largely stems from the lack of sufficient and appropriate in-service training programs. The absence of such training opportunities not only limits the availability of competent instructors but also hinders both the learning and broader dissemination of the Laz language. In the research conducted by Toibazar et al. (2024), it was determined that the creation of teaching materials rich in language and culture should be prioritized, and the accessibility of these materials should be increased and their compatibility with contemporary educational goals should be ensured. Similarly, Bakay (2016) and Karagöz (2016) found that teachers with the necessary qualifications and training to teach the Living Languages and Dialects elective course could not be found, and that the in-service training provided did not enable teachers to attain the qualifications to teach these courses. While there are undergraduate programs in Kurdish, there is no undergraduate program in higher education to train teachers for Laz courses (Karagöz, 2016). The results also revealed that school principals who are positive about teaching the Laz language as part of the Living Languages and Dialects elective courses have a positive view on the selection of this course, but school principals who are focused on academic success are not positive about the selection of the elective Laz language course because it is not an academic course. According to these results, it may be said that the administrative attitude of school administrators is decisive in learning Lazi as an elective course in schools. Bakay (2020) found that while some school administrators supported the selection of Lazi courses, some school administrators displayed a negative attitude towards Lazi courses. On the contrary, Karagöz (2016) determined that school administrators who allow the elective Kurdish course to be taught perceive this practice as a necessity and an indicator of contemporary and democratic education. Similarly, Kurt (2020) revealed that elective Kurdish language lessons were studied more instead of elective religious lessons in Imam-Hatip Secondary Schools (School providing religious and academic education in Türkiye).

The results have shown that the Laz language is in danger of extinction. It is anticipated that the inclusion and teaching of the Laz elective course in the official curriculum of public secondary schools, the efforts of Laz artists to revive the Laz language, academic projects and research will be effective in reducing this danger. Although the MoNE approved the Living Languages and Dialects elective course program in 2013 to ensure the survival and development of local languages, the results are below expectations. In the research conducted by Bakay (2020), it was determined that parents, Laz people in the region, family elders, and the state have responsibilities in the protection and revitalization of the Laz language. In a study conducted by Martinez (2022), 89% of Puerto Rican American citizens agreed that not teaching their children Spanish would deny their Puerto Rican culture and identity. Participants described Spanish as their mother tongue, their roots, and their homeland, while English was the language of work, school, and economic advancement. Çiçek (2013), Hassanpour et al. (1996), and Kurt (2020) state that Kurdish, which is spoken in a very wide area in Türkiye, is not at the desired level in terms of both prestige and sociolinguistics. It has been stated by Bekpenbetova et al. (2025) that language functions not only as a symbolic system but also as a cultural battlefield where identity, memory and values are discussed and protected. Kurt (2020) stated that the future of Kurdish as an academic language will be possible with its integration into the education system.

The results of the research reveal that to keep the Laz language alive, it needs to be taught at the undergraduate level in higher education institutions and awareness needs to be raised. In Türkiye, one of the associations active in revitalizing the Laz language is the Laz Institute, while the other is the Laz Cultural Association. In this context, Bakay (2020) reported that, apart from the Laz Institute, no other NGO has carried out a comprehensive and systematic study on the implementation of the Living Languages and Dialects Laz courses.

Concluding Points

The continuity of a language can be sustained by increasing the number of its speakers and ensuring its transmission to future generations. In this context, sustaining the Laz language and ensuring its transmission to future generations requires raising awareness at both the state and societal levels in Türkiye. The participants of this research emphasized that Laz, as a local language, contributes to the cultural richness of Türkiye and must be preserved. They also expressed a sense of personal responsibility in this regard and reported making the necessary efforts. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that greater effort and more comprehensive initiatives are needed to keep Laz alive and pass it on to future generations. In this regard, important responsibilities fall on NGOs, the written and visual media, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of National Education, universities, and artists. Based on the results of this research, the following recommendations are offered for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers:

The MoNE should increase in-service training for teachers who will teach the Laz language and develop comprehensive course materials. The number of teachers who provide elective Laz language education should be increased. School administrators should support the selection and learning of the Laz language in their schools. The teaching and dissemination of the Laz language should also be supported by local NGOs. Laz language should be included in undergraduate university programs. Researchers can conduct research in different designs for the preservation of local languages and their transfer to new generations as a cultural heritage.

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Notes on Contributor

Nermin Karabacak works as a researcher and lecturer at the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Rize Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University. She continues her research on educational programs, teacher training, professional values of teaching and teacher qualifications, international students, cultural inclusivity studies, and the education of immigrant and refugee children. There are project studies related to cultural inclusivity studies.

Şenol Sezer is a researcher and faculty member at Ordu University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences. Dr. Sezer continues his research on educational administration, teacher training, professional values of teaching and teacher qualifications, international students, school happiness, leadership, classroom management, democratic education, and the education of immigrant and refugee children. Dr. Sezer has studies on inclusive education.

ORCID

Nermin Karabacak, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5231-1730>

Şenol Sezer, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8800-6017>