

## A Study on Primary School English Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs\*

### İlköğretim İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Özyeterlik İnançları Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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#### *Abstract*

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not primary school English language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs changed according to the variables of (a) the department graduated, (b) taking a course about teaching English to children, (c) taking an in-service training, and (d) experience. The descriptive study was conducted with 266 English language teachers working for the public primary schools in the villages and the city center of Mersin in Turkey in 2004. Two data collection instruments used were a questionnaire consisting of 15 items which sought demographic and educational information about the teachers and a 34-item Likert-type scale titled Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence. The findings revealed that primary school English language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs changed according to the department graduated, and taking a course about teaching English to children. The teachers who had taken a course about teaching English to children perceived themselves more efficacious than the teachers who had not. Furthermore, the teachers who graduates of English Language Teaching, and English/American Language and Literature, and Linguistics departments perceived themselves more efficacious than the teachers who were graduated from the departments other than English teaching. On the other hand, the study indicated that the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs did not change according to taking an in-service training. Finally, the outcome of the research implied the interplay between training regarding specific content area and efficacy. According to the overall findings of this research, it is concluded that English teachers' perception of their teaching competencies has very much to do with their educational background. For this reason, especially primary school English teachers should be equipped with specific teaching methods, techniques and materials for teaching English to young children.

*Keywords:* Primary school English language teachers, experience, in-service training, self-efficacy belief

#### *Öz*

Bu çalışma, ilköğretim 1. kademedeki görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin özyeterlik inançlarının (a) mezun oldukları bölüme, (b) çocuklara dil öğretimine yönelik ders alıp almamalarına, (c) hizmetiçi eğitime katılıp katılmamalarına ve (d) mesleki deneyimlerine göre değişip değişmediğini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Betimsel nitelik taşıyan bu araştırmaya, Mersin il merkezinde ve bağlı köylerde 2004 yılında görev yapan toplam 266 Türk İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Araştırmada, öğretmenlerin demografik özelliklerini belirlemek üzere 15 maddeden oluşan bir anket kullanılmıştır. Güven (2005) tarafından geliştirilen Öğretmen Mesleki Yeterlik Algısı Ölçeği ise katılımcı öğretmenlerin özyeterlik inançlarına yönelik veri toplamak için kullanılmıştır. (Araştırma sonuçları, ilköğretim birinci kademedeki görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin özyeterlik inançlarının mezun oldukları bölüme ve çocuklara dil öğretimine yönelik ders alıp almadıklarına göre değiştiğini; çocuklara dil öğretimi dersi alan öğretmenlerin özyeterlik algılarının, almayanlara göre anlamlı farklılık gösterdiğini, İngilizce Öğretmenliği, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı ve İngiliz Dilbilimi mezunu olan öğretmenlerin özyeterlik algılarının, eğitim dili İngilizce ve farklı bölümlerden mezun olan öğretmenlerden daha yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ancak hizmetiçi eğitim değişkeni özyeterlik inancında bir farklılık

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yaratmamıştır. Araştırmada, eğitim özgeçmişinin ve çocuklara dil öğretimine yönelik alınan derslerin ilköğretim 1. kademe İngilizce öğretmenlerinin özyeterlik inancını etkileyen önemli birer değişken olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* İlkokul İngilizce öğretmenleri, deneyim, hizmetiçi eğitim, özyeterlik inancı.

## Introduction

Teachers' sense of efficacy has been related to positive teaching behaviors and student outcomes (Henson, Kogan & Vacha-Haase, 2001), and teachers with high teacher efficacy beliefs tend to implement new teaching ideas and techniques (Ross, 1992). As Bandura (1995: 19) points out 'the task of creating environments conducive to learning rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers.' Since teachers' efficacy may lead to students' efficacy and the improvement of educational practices, it is considered salient in the teaching and learning process.

As Zimmerman (1995) indicates, perceived self-competence is associated with self-efficacy. Hoy & Spero (2005:344) state that 'efficacy is a future-oriented judgment that has to do with perceptions of competence rather than actual level of competence.' Teachers who perceive themselves successful have great expectations for success regardless of the accuracy of their judgment (Ross & Bruce, 2005).

It is important to consider how teacher knowledge is conceptualized in the related field so as to understand the relationship between teacher knowledge and teacher efficacy (Fives, 2003). English language teachers are required to have basic skills and knowledge in order to be efficacious. Thomas (1987) points to linguistic and pedagogic aspects of language teaching competence. He stresses that aside from language competence, a language teacher is required to have pedagogic competence, which consists of four components: management, teaching, preparation, and assessment.

Brumfit (1991) emphasizes that primary level language teachers should have the competence that is specific to young learners. He points to the fact that teachers need competence in primary teaching methodology in addition to language competence. According to Brumfit, the teacher should take the role of story, dance, role-play, puppet activity and model making into consideration and the center of teaching should be on topical rather than formal organization. Similarly, Haznedar (2003) indicates that primary level language teachers should choose appropriate methodology where children's interests are paramount. In brief, the primary level teacher should be knowledgeable about the child-centered activities, and specific and general areas of teaching.

It is essential that primary level English language teachers have the command of a range of skills, competencies, and knowledge to meet the needs of the students. Aside from the knowledge and skills they possess, these teachers' beliefs in their capabilities are important. "Results of research on teaching methods in all subjects generally showed that the method was less important than the teacher's competence- which in turn depended very much on the teacher's belief and confidence in what he was doing" (Cilt, 1969: 30, quoted in Lennon, 1988: 3)

Teacher competencies have been discussed and defined in different terms at different times in Turkey. Traditionally, the competencies were divided into three main categories: (1) competence in subject matter, (2) professional (pedagogic) competence, and (3) cultural competence (Alkan, 2000; Demirel, 1989). On the other hand, the Ministry of Turkish National Education (2002) outlined teacher competencies as: (1) competencies about teaching; (1.1) knowledge of students, (1.2) planning the instruction, (1.3) materials development, (1.4) instructional skills, (1.5) management, (1.6) evaluation and measurement, (1.7) providing guidance, (1.8) developing basic skills, (1.9) serving students with special needs, (1.10) educating adults, (1.11) doing activities outside the class, (1.12) self-development, (1.13) improving the school, (1.14) developing community relations in and around the school, (2) general knowledge and skills, and (3) skills and knowledge about the subject area. The competencies that were classified and defined by the Turkish Ministry of

National Education (MNE) were not categorized according to academic discipline or the level of teaching until 2008. However, in 2008, apart from general teaching competencies, MNE also determined specific teaching competencies for different areas: Science Teaching Competencies, English Teaching Competencies, etc.

In this respect, the competencies specific to English language teachers were classified by MNE (MNE, 2008) as:

1. Planning and organizing the instruction for ELT (English Language Teaching)
2. Developing basic language skills in English
3. Formative and summative evaluation of language development
4. Cooperating with school, parents and society
5. Achieving ongoing professional development in ELT.

Today, although the above mentioned teacher competencies are expected from the English language teachers who are taken into service, it is doubtful that the teachers actually possess them. The main cause for this problem is that in Turkey, English language teachers do not form a homogenous group in terms of their educational background. The reason for this variation is the drastic changes that were made in Turkish educational system in 1997. After the extension of compulsory education from 5 to 8 years in 1997 in Turkey, foreign language education has been incorporated into the curricula of the fourth and fifth grade of Turkish public primary schools. During this period, there were severe English language teacher shortages. As a result, not only the graduates of ELT departments and the graduates of American and English Literature, but also the graduates of English medium universities and the graduates of departments other than English teaching were drawn into service to fill the vacancies.

English language teachers working in the field can be categorized under four groups in Turkey: The first group of teachers has backgrounds in ELT. The second group consists the graduates of Linguistics or American/English Language and Literature. Graduates of Linguistics and American/English Language and Literature departments attend certificate programs to receive pedagogical courses, which are parallel with the courses given at conventional ELT departments (MNE, n.d.). In this way, these teachers are exposed to issues pertaining to English language teaching profession as they take courses in Introduction to Teaching Profession, Development and Learning, Planning and Evaluation in Teaching, English Grammar, English Composition, Linguistics, English Teaching Methods and Approaches, Materials Development and Adaptation, and School Experience.

The third group consists of the students of Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty (OEF), Department of ELT who have completed their first two years of training. These teacher candidates can teach English in state primary schools on condition that they are paid by hour (MNE, n.d.). And the final group includes the graduates of the universities where instruction language is English.

To solve the problem, in-service training (INSET) courses are usually offered by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. However, Demirel (1992), Doğuelli (1992) and Koç (1992) share a common point of view that INSET courses offered in Turkey are hardly sufficient both in terms of frequency and duration. Therefore, a large number of teachers are not given opportunities to join the INSET courses due to the insufficient frequency. As a matter of fact, not only do teachers need in-service training courses to develop their skills and knowledge but they also need the INSET to adapt to any changes made in education system.

It is obvious that learning opportunities provided by the curriculum play an important role in the development of the teaching competencies. As Bear (1992) points out, in Turkey there is a basic difference between the departments, which are established to train teachers of English language and those, which are established to provide education based on English and American culture and literature and linguistics. Bear (1992) also argues that the differences in the curricula

of these departments do not ensure consistency and reflect the varying professional competencies of staff members. These differences may also give way to differences in teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, which is a very important determinant of successful teaching. Thus, the following research questions will be addressed in the study:

Does primary school English language teachers' self-efficacy belief change according to

1. university department?
2. taking a course about teaching English to children?
3. taking an in-service training?
4. experience?

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants of the study consisted of 266 English language teachers working for public primary schools (teaching to fourth and fifth grades) in both villages within the metropolitan municipality boundary and the city center of Mersin in Turkey. There were 188 (70.7%) females and 78 (29.3%) males. Almost 34% of the participants were between 27-32 years of age and 64.3% of the participants were below the age of 33. Also, 73.3% of the teachers had less than 11 years' of overall teaching experience. 88.3% had less than 11 years' experience of teaching at primary school.

Fifty nine percent of the participants were the graduates of English Language Teaching. This group (1) included the graduates of conventional Education Faculties. Also, 16.2% were the graduates of English/American Language and Literature, and Linguistics; this group (2) consisted of the teachers who graduated from Faculties of Letters and were provided with the certificate of pedagogy. Similarly, 22.6% were the graduates of departments other than English teaching; this group (3) consisted of the teachers with degrees in other disciplines (e. g. food engineering, biology etc.). The teachers in the third group either graduated from universities whose instruction language was English or they were just employed to fill the vacancies even though they had minimal qualifications, and limited language skills. Likewise, 2.2% were at the department of English Language Teaching in Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University; this group (4) included student teachers of distance learning, who completed the two-year face-to-face education successfully. In addition, 47.4% of the participants had taken a course about teaching English to children. Also, 28.2% had participated in one or more in-service training courses.

### *Instruments*

Two data collection instruments were used for the study. The first one was a questionnaire consisted of 15 items which sought demographic and educational background information about the teachers. The second one was a Likert-type scale developed by the first author of this study (2005). The instrument entitled as The Scale of Teacher's Perception of Professional Competence consisted of four sub-scales and 34 items. The scores which could be obtained from the scale ranged from 0 to 136.

For the development of the items in the Teacher's Perception of Professional Competence Scale, related literature was reviewed. In this respect both universal competencies for teaching English to young children and the teacher competencies set forth by Turkish MNE were considered. The scale of measurement ranging from 'totally inappropriate for me' (0) to 'very appropriate for me' (4) was organized with directions requesting the teachers to respond to each item considering the degree of appropriateness. The statements included expressions such as 'I can', 'I know', 'I

have no difficulty'. The instrument was submitted to the experts at Mersin University for their opinion and feedback on items and format prior to the administration.

The initial form of the instrument was given to 286 public primary school English language teachers in Mersin. However, 266 teachers returned the instrument. Each returned instrument was numbered and filed. The data gathered from these teachers were conveyed to the computer. SPSS Windows 11.0 was used to carry out the factor analysis in order to determine the dimensional structure of the scale. In the first analysis, 18 factors were identified. Items with low total test correlations and factor loadings were extracted. The final factor analysis revealed 4 factors (eigenvalues: 14.785, 3.472, 1.554, 1.375).

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) are 0.96 for the scale (referred to as 'Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence'; contained 34 items), 0.96 for the first sub-scale (referred to as 'Teachers' Perception of Competence in Subject-matter'; contained 15 items), 0.89 for the second sub-scale (referred to as 'Teachers' Perception of Competence in the Management of Teaching-learning Process'; contained 11 items), 0.85 for the third sub-scale (referred to as 'Teachers' Perception of Competence in Materials Development'; contained 4 items), 0.83 for the fourth sub-scale (referred to as 'Teachers' Perception of Competence in Planning'; contained 4 items). Some items from the scale are given below:

Item 6. I have no difficulty in understanding the written materials about English Language Teaching.

Item 9. I can speak English quite fluently when communicating.

Item 19. I can easily choose child-centered and authentic activities.

Item 28. I have no difficulty in making materials such as puppets, class mascots, cards, transparencies in order to support communicative activities.

*Data Analysis*

SPSS Windows 11.0 was used for the analysis. The selected level of significance was .05.

Results

The findings related to the first research question are given in Table 1. As shown in the table, there is a significant difference between Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence scale mean score of the participants graduated from different departments.

Table 1.

*The result of the one-way ANOVA applied to 'Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence scale' scores of the participants graduated from different departments*

Variance source	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p	Scheffe Test Results
Between groups	46956.88	3	15652.29			
Within groups	94457.24	262	360.52	43.415	0.00	Group1-Group3 Group2-Group3
Total	141414.1	265				

p<0.05

Findings revealed that  $\bar{X} = 103.1$  for the teachers who are graduates of English Language Teaching (Group 1);  $\bar{X} = 99.49$  for the teachers who are graduates of English/American Language and Literature, and Linguistics (Group 2). The mean score of the teachers who are graduates of departments other than ELT (Group 3) is less than the first two groups ( $\bar{X} = 71.15$ ). Finally,  $\bar{X} = 87.33$  for the student teachers attending the

department of English Language Teaching of OEF of Anadolu University (Group 4). Taking these findings into account, it can be said that the teachers who are graduates of English Language Teaching have the highest mean score of all. Therefore, the results pointed out the fact that teachers' perception of self-efficacy changes according to university department.

To examine the source of the difference between groups, Scheffe test was administered to the data. The results of the Scheffe test indicated that there were differences between groups 1-3 and 2-3. Thus, it can be said that the teachers who are graduates of English Language Teaching perceive themselves more efficacious than the teachers who are graduates of departments other than English teaching. Likewise, the teachers who are graduates of English/ American Language, and Linguistics perceive themselves more efficacious than the teachers who are graduates of departments other than English teaching. That is to say, 60 teachers who are 'out of field' perceive themselves professionally less efficacious than both the graduates of ELT (N=157) and the graduates of departments of English/American Literature, and Linguistics (N=43). This emerges as an important theme and implies that the context in which teachers are trained is crucially important. In this regard, we can comment favorably that the impact of pre-service education programs in ELT is great on the self-efficacy of the primary school English language teachers.

Table 2 reveals the results for the second research question: whether or not primary school English language teachers' perception of self-efficacy changes according to taking a course about teaching English to children.

Table 2.

*The result of the t-test applied to the 'Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence' scale scores of the participants who take a course about teaching English to children or not*

COURSE	N	$\bar{X}$	s	t	p
Yes	126	102.69	18.98	5.224	0.00
No	140	88.56	24.46		

$p < 0.05$

As Table 2 illustrates,  $\bar{X} = 102.69$  for the teachers who have taken a course about teaching English to children. On the other hand  $\bar{X} = 88.56$  for the teachers who have not taken a course about teaching English to children. The t-test result indicates a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, it can be stated that teachers' perception of self-efficacy changes according to taking a course about teaching English to children or not. That is to say, the teachers who have taken a course about teaching English to children perceive themselves more efficacious than the teachers who have not taken one. It would appear from this result that the teachers who have taken a course on teaching English to children feel that they have a mastery of the skills, and knowledge required to teach English to children.

The third research question to be answered is whether or not primary school English teachers' self-efficacy belief changed according to taking an in-service training. Table 3 indicates the findings related to this question.

Table 3.

*The result of the t-test applied to the 'Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence' scale scores of the participants who take INSET or not*

INSET	N	$\bar{X}$	s	t	p
Yes	75	99.27	23.93	1.784	0.07
No	191	93.68	22.63		

$p > 0.05$

As can be seen in Table 3,  $\bar{X} = 99.27$  for the teachers who have taken an in-service

training. On the other hand,  $X = 93.68$  for the teachers who have not taken an in-service training. The result of the t-test indicates that taking an in-service training or not does not make any significant difference in the self-efficacy beliefs of the teachers.

In order to observe if experience plays an important role on the self-efficacy beliefs of the primary school English teachers or not, ANOVA was conducted and the findings are given in Table 4.

Table 4.

*The result of the one-way ANOVA applied to 'Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence' scale scores in terms of work experience of the participants*

Variance source	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between groups	1246.38	4	311.595		
Within groups	140167.7	261	537.041	0.58	0.68
Total	141414.1	265			

$p > 0.05$

The table indicates that  $\bar{X} = 94.92$  for the teachers who have 0-5 years' teaching experience;  $\bar{X} = 94.02$  for the teachers who have 6-10 years' teaching experience;  $\bar{X} = 94.44$  for the teachers who have 11-15 years' teaching experience. For the teachers who have 16-20 years' teaching experience,  $\bar{X} = 102.95$ ; and finally for the teachers who have 21 or more than 21 years' teaching experience,  $\bar{X} = 94.90$ . Obviously, the teachers having 16-20 years' overall teaching experience have the highest mean score of all. However, as can be seen in Table 4, there is no significant difference between the teachers' mean scores obtained from the scale 'Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence' in terms of their work experience. As no significant differences are found in the mean scores of inexperienced, minimally experienced, quite experienced and very experienced teachers, it can be stated that experience does not make a significant difference in teachers' perception of professional competence.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous research. That is to say, educational backgrounds of the teachers on the job and their self-efficacy beliefs are closely related (Lin & Gorrell, 2001; Murshidi et al, 2007). The present study reveals that there is a significant difference between the self-efficacy belief of the group of teachers who were instructed in English but not educated for being a teacher (group 3) and the graduates of ELT departments (group 1). In the same manner, self-efficacy belief of the group of English teachers who are the graduates of English/American Language and Literature (group 2), and Linguistics is significantly higher than the group 3.

Related literature gives evidence for the fact that both student teaching experiences and the first year experiences of teaching could be critical to long - term development of teacher efficacy (Çakır & Alici, 2009; Mulholland & Wallace, 2001; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005). As Bandura (1977; 1982) states, perceived self-efficacy is the judgment of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations, and among the others the most salient source of efficacy information is mastery experiences. Once self-efficacy beliefs are constructed they are resistant to change (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). For the present study, it can be concluded that among all other groups of English teachers, ELT graduates had the greatest chance for the mastery experiences during their pre-service education, and their self-efficacy belief is high.

However, no significant difference is observed between self efficacy belief of the group

of the teachers who are the graduates of the ELT departments (group 1) and the graduates of English/American Language and Literature (group 2). This may be the result of the certificate programs which equip the teachers with the knowledge of the language teaching profession and the English language theoretically. In this way, the trainees develop their insights into the field of English language teaching in general and specific areas.

The present study also points to the importance of the courses for teaching English to children in the curricula of ELT departments. The teachers who have taken a course about teaching English to children perceive themselves more efficacious than the teachers who have not taken one. Especially, the teachers who hold their degrees in other disciplines (e.g. engineering, biology) seem to lack the competence and confidence to teach English to children, which may be the indication of irrelevant training. The result has implications for providing the primary level English language teachers with courses about teaching English to children, and this raises the issue of priorities within training.

No significant difference is found between the teachers who have taken INSET and those who have not taken one. This result may depend upon the lack of content and analysis in the in-service training offered to teachers. As Sarıçoban (2000: 268) remarks 'the in-service training in Turkey has been applied without doing the necessary researches in language teaching field, determining the qualifications the educators should have, and choosing the applicants on objective measurements.' It can be argued that in-service training programs should be organized with research based content and in accordance with competency standards. As changes are made in education system and there are variations in English language teachers' educational settings, the provision of INSET with higher frequency and longer duration emerges as a more crucial point than anything else.

Finally, present study points that self efficacy belief of the teachers does not change according to their work experience. This finding supports the view that self efficacy belief is resistant to change once constructed. Hence, training relevant to teachers' needs and the demands of the job has a great impact on teachers' sense of efficacy. As Darling-Hammond et al., (2002) emphasize, feelings of preparedness are significantly related to teachers' sense of efficacy and their confidence.

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