

Do Pre-Service Generalist Teachers Believe that they can Teach English to Young Learners?¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of the Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) course on pre-service generalist teachers' belief sets. To achieve the aim of the study, a sequential explanatory mixed method was conducted as a research design. In the quantitative phase, a one-group pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design was implemented on 75 senior pre-service generalist teachers at a Turkish state university via a questionnaire on beliefs about teaching English to young learners. The findings elicited from descriptive scores as means and inferential statistics as Mann-Whitney U 4 Wilcoxon Signed Ranks statistics showed that no difference was observed between the tests, but relatively high mean scores in beliefs about children's English development and mediocre mean scores in self-efficacy were found. The unexpected results in the first phase led to a more qualitative investigation by consulting the same participants through reflective reports. Content analysis supplemented the quantitative findings with the emerged themes at the level of the educational system deciphered with causal codes. The emergent codes and themes included a shortage of enjoyable learning environments, the negative impact of teachers, curriculum, national exams, compulsory TEYL course, online basic English course, and workload of generalist teachers; and individual attributions coded in lack of self-confidence in English proficiency, dislike of English, speaking anxiety, and worry about making mistakes. On the grounds of the findings, several educational implications were also proposed.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es explorar el efecto del curso de Enseñanza de Inglés a Jóvenes Aprendices (TEYL) en las creencias de futuros docentes generalistas. Para lograr este objetivo, se empleó un método mixto explicativo secuencial como diseño de investigación. En la fase cuantitativa, se implementó un diseño cuasiexperimental pre-test/post-test de un solo grupo con 75 futuros docentes generalistas de último año en una universidad estatal turca, mediante un cuestionario sobre creencias acerca de la enseñanza de inglés a jóvenes aprendices. Los resultados obtenidos a partir de puntuaciones descriptivas como medias y estadísticas inferenciales como la prueba U de Mann-Whitney y la prueba de rangos con signo de Wilcoxon mostraron que no se observaron diferencias entre las pruebas, pero se encontraron puntuaciones medias relativamente altas en creencias sobre el desarrollo del inglés en niños y puntuaciones medias mediocres en autoeficacia. Los resultados inesperados de la primera fase llevaron a una investigación más cualitativa mediante la consulta a los mismos participantes a través de informes reflexivos. El análisis de contenido complementó los hallazgos cuantitativos con los temas emergentes a nivel del sistema educativo, descifrados con códigos causales. Los códigos y temas emergentes incluyeron la escasez de entornos de aprendizaje agradables, el impacto negativo de los docentes, el currículo, los exámenes nacionales, el curso obligatorio de inglés para jóvenes, el curso básico de inglés en línea y la carga de trabajo de los docentes generalistas; y atribuciones individuales codificadas como falta de confianza en el dominio del inglés, aversión al idioma, ansiedad al hablar y preocupación por cometer errores. A partir de los hallazgos, también se propusieron varias implicaciones educativas.

Introduction

There is an ongoing trend to lower the age of foreign language instruction worldwide as suggested many academic communities (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission: Eurostat and Eurydice, 2012) and implemented by major educational policies as in Italy, Spain, France, etc. (Şad, 2015). There are two reasons behind this trend. One is the global need to learn English for political, economic, and educational requirements rationalized by both governments and families. The other is teaching English to young learners (TEYL) which is a different branch of English language teaching (ELT) with a different theoretical background which practical skills and children's developmental, linguistic, and psychological characteristics could drastically change the approach to teaching English when the age of students alters.

The first time TEYL is usually presented is during teacher education programs which include classroom teaching and ELT programs. In these programs, pre-service teachers receive training about children's developmental features and the required theoretical knowledge and practical skills taught with authentic activities including songs, games, and visuals (Sevik, 2012, Shin, 2006). In Turkey, generalist teachers³ mostly are trained in ELT beginning in their first year until they graduate. They teach almost every subject

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³Teachers who cover all academic subjects in the primary classroom and are not specialized in foreign language teaching, for example.

in their classes, which creates a big burden. Therefore, the responsibility of teaching TEYL is generally falls on the shoulders of English teachers who study in teacher education programs.

If an English teacher is not chosen to teach in a school, frequently the case in some regions and towns in Turkey, generalist teachers who teach basic subjects during the first four years are supposed to teach English as well. However, there are reports of a lack of expert teachers in TEYL (Enever & Moon, 2009) even though the course Teaching English to Young Learners is a compulsory course provided in the faculties of education in Turkey. Graduates of these departments are thought to be able to teach English in their real classroom practices. This requires pre-service teachers to have favourable beliefs about TEYL, which may be incompatible with natural teaching practices. Therefore, teachers' beliefs cannot be underestimated in shaping their practice. Teachers' beliefs are formed in their learning phase, reformed in their pre-service teacher training and their actual teaching practice in real classrooms. Teachers also consciously or subconsciously transfer their beliefs, values, or worldviews to their students through their hidden personal curricula. Although much research has been done on the beliefs of TEYL in ELT programs, there is a paucity of research on pre-service generalist teachers (PSGT) which the current study aims to fill this gap.

Theoretical background

The suggestion and implementation of teaching English to young learners in the earlier years of schooling around the globe, including Turkey, are based on the critical period hypothesis (CPH) (Lenneberg, 1967) which is based on the widely-held presumption that young learners are better than adult learners since the former ones learn or acquire a foreign language quicker and better (Krashen, 1982) though there are some ongoing discussions and versions of the CPH in the literature. There are four interpretations of CPH: multiple critical periods for specific linguistic domains, a sensitive critical period, a declining critical period, and no critical period or more critical periods for the acquisition of second and first language (Abello-Contesse, 2009). Therefore, following the global trend to lower the age of foreign language learning, Turkey ushered in a new epoch in 2013 by introducing 4+4+4 educational reform and set the age of foreign language learning to seven years old, that is 2nd grade in a primary schools with more focus on meaningful, skills-integrated, and authentic communicative environment and two communicative skills as listening and speaking (Ministry of National Education, 2013).

The new regulation also produced some challenges for teachers and their education and employment. One of the key agents to enable success in TEYL is well-equipped English teachers who are required to know young learner pedagogy and foreign language education (Rokita-Jaskow, 2008). Supplying English teachers with this broad range of knowledge is quite demanding and this has led to a decrease in the number of such qualified teachers. Therefore, some programs were actualized to meet the needs of English teachers. A generalist program that employs generalist teachers as English teachers in primary schools is common in Europe (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission: Eurostat and Eurydice, 2012) due to the pedagogical knowledge and experience generalist teachers hold. However, Turkey and some other countries such as Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Slovakia have assigned specialist English teachers in the primary schools to teach English because of their linguistic superiority (Driscoll, 2005) and generalist teachers' avoidance due to their heavy workload and perceived lack of self-efficacy and expertise. Nonetheless, generalist teachers are often employed to teach English at primary schools (Şad & Karaova, 2014, 2015; Şevik 2009) on the grounds of the regulation issued by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (2014, 43/3).

Academia has also endeavoured to research the reasons, situations, and consequences of this regulation. Since then, a great number of studies have been administered to young language learners (Asmalı, 2017), in-service teachers and pre-service teachers from ELT programs, and teacher educators (Damar et al., 2013) along with their belief sets (Caner et al., 2010; Çelik & Arkan, 2012; Gürsoy & Eken, 2018; Gürsoy et al., 2013; Millán Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020), efficacies (Wyatt, 2013), competencies (Uztosun, 2018), challenges (Copland et al., 2014; Garton, 2014), and assessment practices (Tanyer & Susoy, 2018). Most of the studies were done with professionals affiliated with the ELT programs. Few studies have been conducted on generalist teachers' beliefs, competencies, and efficacy of TEYL. Of the topics above, generalist teachers' belief sets will be the focus of the current study.

Language teachers' educational beliefs are greatly shaped by their prior experiences as language learners, teacher candidates, and ongoing teaching practice (Johnson, 1992; Richards, 1998). Therefore, the location of the current study was chosen as a faculty of education in general, specifically, a classroom teaching program where a mandatory course is provided on TEYL. The beliefs involving attitudes, values systems, expectations, theoretical postulations about language, language education, students, and teachers'

consciousness influence their awareness, methods and techniques of language teaching/learning, management of instructional settings, organization of lessons, and eventually learners' linguistic development (Horwitz, 1987). Beliefs can also be categorized into four areas: assumptions regarding child development, generic beliefs about language learning, specific belief sets about TEYL, and self-efficacy and expectations (Yang, 2000). Of these areas, the focus of the study and thereby the items of the questionnaire are on these four areas of TEYL. Studies conducted on this issue after 2013 were reviewed below because 2012-2013 was the starting academic year of new regulation of TEYL lowering the age of foreign language learning. The studies conducted on the TEYL at the time of pre-primary schooling and with teacher educators, very young language learners, and in-service teachers were also excluded from the review process and scope of the study.

Literature Review

Studies on TEYL

The first crucial issue in teaching English to young learners is related to the starting age. In a research project, Gürsoy et al. (2017) consulted 870 pre-service teachers' views from six universities in Turkey via a questionnaire regarding the starting age for TEYL and appropriate methodologies. Pre-service teachers also agreed with the other shareholders on the early start of FL learning as early as first grade. Following the suggestion of lowering the starting age of TEYL, ELT programs where English teachers get their first training regarding TEYL have the most influencing role in affecting EL teachers' views. The following studies investigated TEYL through 21st-century teacher qualifications, metaphors, and metacognitive perspective.

The first study, Çakır and Güngör (2017), examined the views of 283 third-and fourth-grade pre-service ELT teachers from five state universities about the teaching practises for young learners in terms of 21st-century teacher qualifications using a mixed-method including using semi-structured interviews and a content analysis of the course syllabi . The main finding was that the TEYL course was not effective enough in improving teachers' skills in the 21st century. The pre-service ELT teachers attributed this inefficiency to the following factors: managing, integrating, and reconstructing new information, classroom management skills, promoting learning skills in the 21st century, harnessing technology and assessment, and qualities of young learners.

Another study (Yaman, 2019), with 83 fourth-year ELT students at a Turkish university explored their perspectives regarding the phenomenon of TEYL using metaphors. Students were asked to complete the statement "Teaching English to young learners is ... because ..." with appropriate words or phrases. The content analysis of 31 different metaphors showed that the most frequent metaphors were *fun* and *turning-point* followed by *joy*, *challenge*, *difficulty*, and *hard work*. Those metaphors were also categorized into processes. The leading metaphorical process for TEYL was found to be "an enjoyable process" followed by "a demanding process", "an important process", "creative process", and "an easy process" successively.

Su-Bergil (2020) investigated TEYL from a metacognitive perspective. The Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) (Schraw & Dennison, 1994) was used to identify pre-service 3rd- and 4th-year 68 English language teachers' metacognitive awareness levels and their relational effect on micro-teaching sessions in the course. It was found that participants held average metacognitive awareness levels, which had a favourable effect on their micro-teaching skills in the course. As regards the sub-components of metacognition, pre-service teachers' metacognitive knowledge was significant in procedural knowledge, planning, information management strategies, comprehension monitoring and evaluation, though no significance was found in declarative knowledge, conditional knowledge, and debugging strategies.

The other defining factor in TEYL is related to the discrepancy between the ELT program and real classroom settings. In an action research study (Gungor, 2016) to identify the distance between the theoretical suppositions and realities of teaching in real classrooms had 20 third grade ELT pre-service teachers monitor and evaluate themselves through reflective practice with the aid of video-recorded microteaching sessions, reflective journals, and lesson plans increased the pre-service teachers' levels of awareness and preparedness to TEYL by closing the gap between theory and practice via reflective practice.

Camlibel-Acar (2016) investigated ELT pre-service teachers' beliefs before and after observation or mentorship in young learner classrooms at primary schools, arguing that analysing their beliefs at the beginning and end of the mentorship process could yield more realistic insights. Data were collected from 110 third-year ELT pre-service teachers via questionnaires and reflective papers. It was found out that almost all the pre-service teachers reported the benefits of real teaching acts in the classrooms to not only

scaffold the course, but also to mention their positive belief sets and awareness levels in the theoretical backgrounds provided in the course.

Studies on ELT and generalist teachers

As the work of teaching English can be carried out by either English teachers or generalist teachers, there might be some differences between these two departments. To identify pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to young learners through a questionnaire with 100 participants, Shinde and Karekatti (2012) found that pre-service teachers who were trained either in English-medium or Marathi⁴ medium instruction anticipated to have close and coherent beliefs regarding young learners' development in English, English teaching methods and techniques, quality of teacher talk, and a strong feeling of self-efficacy all of which might influence their teaching acts and students' learning performance. While there is a plethora of studies conducted on ELT programs (Çakır & Güngör, 2017; Camlibel-Acar, 2016; Güngör, 2016; Gürsoy et al., 2017; Su-Bergil, 2020; Yaman, 2019), there is a scarcity of research conducted on generalist teaching. Only a few studies were detected in the literature to explore generalist teachers' belief systems. Dagarin-Fojkar et al. (2022) examined 100 teachers' self-assessments regarding linguistic, subject-didactic, and intercultural competencies in Slovenia through a quantitative survey. While 76 of the teachers were graduates of the primary education programme, 24 of them graduated from the ELT program. The results showed that pedagogic competence about TEYL is the most developed competence that teachers assessed for themselves. However, they did not assess themselves as proficient in intercultural competence. Genç and Kaya (2011) in a correlational study with 151 fourth-grade pre-service generalist teachers in Turkey found positive attitudes towards English courses, however they held low competence to teach English. Şad (2010) found that higher-grade PSGTs conceived themselves to be less proficient, yet more willing to teach English to young learners. In another study, Şad (2015) inquired about the perceived efficacy and willingness of 251 pre-service generalist teachers to teach English to young learners via a baseline descriptive survey and later complementary correlational and existing models. Female pre-service teachers were found to be more willing and effective in TEYL. Although students of all grades felt more willing to teach TEYL, only first grade pre-service teachers perceived themselves to be more effective. Findings showed positive relationships among perceived efficacy in TEYL, willingness to study to teach TEYL, and perceived English proficiency. English proficiency strongly predicted perceived efficacy, while perceived efficacy increased willingness. English proficiency also affected willingness indirectly through perceived efficacy.

However, the limited number of studies on classroom generalist teachers is insufficient to reach a broadly shared conclusion. Therefore, greater attention should be paid to classroom teaching programs alongside TEYL courses with more classroom-based research.

The rationale of the current study

The course Foreign Language Teaching in Primary School or TEYL is compulsory in classroom teaching program during the seventh semester in the fourth year, which means that PSGTs would be supplied with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach English to young learners by the end of the course. However, anecdotal evidence including informal conversations with the PSGTs shows that generalist teachers preferred to hand the opportunity off to the specialized English language teachers due to their own insufficient expertise. Therefore, most TEYL research has focused on the beliefs of practising teachers or pre-service teachers in ELT programs. However, PSGTs' beliefs or attitudes somehow do not seem important, even though they are sometimes required to teach young learners when they get chosen by the National Education system in Turkey.

Even though there is a perception of low efficacy for TEYL, the PSGTs' beliefs which lay behind efficacy or inefficacy need investigating. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to analyse PSGTs' mindsets about TEYL before they start teaching English to young learners since there is a generally accepted argument in the ELT research area that says that teachers impart English classes in the same way as they learnt it. It is highly important to look into the belief sets of PSGTs and try to equip them with the necessary information and change their fixed mindsets about the issue. The secondary, practical cause of the study derives from and aims to solve the problematic conditions of the researchers' immediate instructional setting in the TEYL course in which they have faced reluctant and incompetent PSGTs. This rationale above justifies the current study which proposes to find out the existent belief sets of PSGTs before the course of TEYL and any change

⁴ Marathi is one of the official languages of India

of beliefs after the course which could serve to increase PSGT their efficacy levels on TEYL. To this effect, this research was conducted to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. Does the course "Teaching English to Young Learners" change the PSGTs' belief sets about teaching English to young learners?
2. Do the students' belief sets change towards the course with regard to the four subcomponents of the questionnaire?
3. What are the reasons behind the PSGTs' belief sets after the course?

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and to enhance the validity of the findings (Dörnyei, 2007). The term mixed-methods refers to the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). In a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study is conducted in two consecutive phases. The design is considered sequential because the qualitative phase is implemented after the quantitative phase and is shaped by the initial quantitative findings. It is labelled explanatory because the qualitative data are used to explain, elaborate on, and interpret the quantitative results, particularly unexpected or insufficiently clarified findings. In the first phase of the study, the questionnaire was administered to quantify general patterns and outcomes. The questionnaire was given to one group before the treatment and again after it (Fraenkel et al., 2012) to determine whether any statistically significant changes occurred. Following the quantitative phase, several unexpected or insufficiently explained findings emerged. Therefore, a qualitative phase was carried out by collecting reflective reports from the participants. These reflective reports aimed to provide a deeper interpretive understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and reactions to TEYL, as reflected in their questionnaire responses. In this way, the qualitative data helped explain, elaborate on, and contextualise the quantitative findings, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive interpretation of the research results.

Setting and participants

TEYL courses are compulsory for one semester in the fourth year of the classroom teaching program when observation and practice of teaching take place at schools as well. The general population of the study consisted of 91 senior students. However, as voluntary participation was prioritized, the sample ended up having 75 voluntary pre-service senior students at a Turkish state university during the 2021-2022 academic year. All the participants had finished a 15-week TEYL course given by two different teachers appointed from the ELT program and were acquainted with the basic theoretical principles of TEYL, updated knowledge about some teaching methods, course book designs, characteristics of young learners and so on. Both classes followed the same curriculum and the same coursebook *İlkokulda Yabancı Dil Öğretimi* [Teaching foreign language at primary schools) (Bekleyen, 2016).

Data collection instruments

The questionnaire was originally formulated by Shinde and Karekatti (2012) and permission for its use was received via e-mail. The questionnaire was chosen because of the similar contextual particularities of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and English teachers from two different departments. It was employed in its original form in the current study so that PSGTs' belief sets could be analysed more systematically (Appendix 1). The five-point Likert-type questionnaire included 48 items classified into four sub-components. Items 1-3, 6, 16-17, 19, 26-30, and 39-41) involved the nature of children's English development (NCED). Teaching methods and techniques (TMT) were dealt with in items 7-10, 14, 20-23, 31- 34, 36, 42- 44, and 46. Beliefs about teacher talk (TT) were also addressed in items 4-5, 11, 15, 18, 25, 35, 38, and 47. Items 12-13, 24, 37, 45, and 48 concerned self-efficacy as an English teacher (SE).

The overall reliability of the questionnaire was found to be .87 for the pre-test and .92 for the post-test as a result of Cronbach's alpha analysis amounting to a rather reliable value. As for the pre-test for the subcomponents of the questionnaire, the reliability value of Cronbach's alpha was found to be; .68 for NCED, .57 for TMT, .41 for beliefs about TT, and .78 for SE, which are at an unacceptable level, except for beliefs about self-efficacy. On the other hand, the reliability value of Cronbach's alpha in the post-test was found to be .89 for the NCED, .74 for the TMT, .60 for the TT, and .86 for the self-efficacy, all of which denote a

reliable value with some concerns for the reliability of teacher talk. Eventually, the post-test reliability was enough to describe and interpret the statistical outcomes.

Following the quantitative phase, qualitative data were collected through the reflective reports. At the end of the course, out of the 75 voluntary participants selected through convenience sampling, 41 participants voluntarily answered to structured open-ended questions in the reflective reports where responses ranged from one sentence to one page (Appendix 2). The reports were written in Turkish to allow the participants to express their ideas more comfortably and in greater depth. The excerpts were translated into English by a language specialist and the researcher. Minor grammatical and stylistic adjustments were made during translation to improve readability while preserving the original meanings of the participants' statements.

Data collection and analysis

Official permission was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the state university with document no: 2507 to conduct the research. The participants were asked to sign a consent form which was included on the first page of the questionnaire and all the participants gave their assent (Appendix 3). The questionnaire was given at the beginning of the course and during the last two weeks, the same questionnaire was given again to the same participants to see the effect of the course. In the last week, reflective reports were requested from the participants to collect the qualitative data of the study.

The collected data from the questionnaire was computed with SPSS (21st version). The data in the (Skewness: -2.059; Kurtosis: 8.968) and post-test of the questionnaire (Skewness: -2.230; Kurtosis: 7.295) did not show a normal distribution as they were not between +/-1.5 values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Therefore, a non-parametric test was needed to analyse the data. To this end, Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank analyses along with descriptive statistics were used to analyze the research questions.

As the study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the quantitative data and their interpretation guided the collection and analysis of qualitative data obtained from the reflective reports. The qualitative data from these reports were analysed by finding themes and codes emerging from the answers as an outcome of content analysis. The reflective reports consisted of structured open-ended questions related to TEYL, the contribution of the TEYL course, participants' future willingness to teach English to young learners, and their self-perceived competence and motivation. The triangulation of the data was achieved by employing the questionnaire and reflective reports and triangulation was ensured by interpreting the data of the reflective reports with the help of the input of two researchers, the author and an additional expert.

Findings

Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated and analyzed to explore the answer to the first research question to find out whether and to what extent the course of "Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools" changed PSGTs' beliefs about teaching English to young learners.

	N	Means	Std. Deviation	t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	75	3.8073	.28758					
Post-test	75	3.8316	.52696	-.350	148	-.02424	.06932	.727

Table 1: The significance level of the pre-test and post-test of the questionnaire

Table 1 shows the results of the Paired-Samples T-Test and the results do not point to a statistically significant difference between before and after the course ($p = .727$, $p < .001$). The close mean scores of the pre-test (Mean: 3.80) and post-test (Mean: 3.83) which had a level of indecisive beliefs also corroborate the above T-test score. These results contradict the objective of the course and the hypothesis of the researchers that the course would alter PSGTs' overall belief sets. However, as expressed in the literature review and formulated in four subcomponents of the questionnaire, a possible change in the four subcomponents between the pre-test and post-test needed be investigated. To this end and to answer the second research question in this sense, descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test were used.

	Tests	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon	Sig. (2-tailed)
NCED	Pre-test	75	70.11	5258.00	2408.000	5258.000	.128
	Post-test	75	80.89	6067.00			
	Total	150					
TMT	Pre-test	75	71.29	5347.00	2497.000	5347.000	.235
	Post-test	75	79.71	5978.00			
	Total	150					
TT	Pre-test	75	73.68	5526.00	2676.000	5526.000	.606
	Post-test	75	77.32	5799.00			
	Total	150					
SS	Pre-test	75	69.45	5209.00	2359.000	5209.000	.087
	Post-test	75	81.55	6116.00			
	Total	150					

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the questionnaire subcomponents

Table 2 illustrates the outcomes of the significance levels of the pre-test and post-test of the subcomponents of the belief sets and questionnaire and teacher candidates' beliefs regarding the nature of children's development of English, teaching methods and techniques, teacher talk, and self-efficacy as English teachers. According to significance levels analysed in the Wilcoxon test, the pre-test and post-test of participants' belief sets about the nature of children's English development ($p=.128$, $p<.001$), teaching methods and techniques ($p=.235$, $p<.001$), teacher talk ($p=.606$, $p<.001$), and self-efficacy ($p=.087$, $p<.001$) were found to be not significantly different pointing to the fact that the course did not have any effect on four subcomponents of the questionnaire. To put it another way, the course did not change pre-service teachers' beliefs in terms of their predispositions regarding the nature of children's development, teaching methods and techniques, teacher talk, and self-efficacy.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
NCED	Pre-test	75	4.0851	.38923	2.40	5.80
	Post-test	75	4.0848	.66712	3.83	5.83
TMT	Pre-test	75	3.7447	.31853	3.00	5.67
	Post-test	75	3.7461	.50550	2.80	5.60
TT	Pre-test	75	3.6404	.36087	2.50	5.50
	Post-test	75	3.6601	.54784	3.25	6.00
SS	Pre-test	75	3.5510	.63698	2.00	5.67
	Post-test	75	3.7119	.84088	1.67	5.67

Table 3: Descriptive statistics regarding subcomponents of the questionnaire

The similar mean scores in the pre-test and post-test in each subcomponent also supported the low significance levels as shown in Table 3. The nature of children's development (pre-test $M=4.08$, post-test $M=4.08$), teaching methods and techniques (pre-test $M=3.74$, post-test $M=3.74$), teacher talk (pre-test $M=3.64$, post-test $M=3.66$), and self-efficacy (pre-test $M=3.55$, post-test $M=3.71$) did not show any difference in terms of pre-service teachers' belief sets between pre-tests and post-tests. The highest mean score was found to be on beliefs about the nature of children's English development (Mean: 4.08), which supports the existence of the participants' primary education pedagogy that had been provided for four years. On the other hand, the lowest scores were found on the self-efficacy subcomponent (Mean: 3.55 in the pre-test and 3.71 in the post-test), which indicates the deficiency of linguistic pedagogy. These results led the researchers to inquire about the phenomenon with a more qualitative and in-depth explanation to answer the third RQ for which a set of reflective reports with voluntary participants were completed.

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Schools and system-related	Secondary education	Lack of enjoyable learning environments <u>Negative impact of teachers</u>
	University education	Demotivation Grading through tests Talking mostly in Turkish Curriculum PPSE exam Compulsory course Online education for only 2 terms at university Too much workload on generalist teachers
Individual attributions		Lack of self-confidence Dislike of English Speaking anxiety Worry about making mistakes

Table 4: Themes extracted from reflective reports

The participants in the study were asked to write a reflective report on the course they had taken and mention their attributions in terms of their possible lack of self-efficacy beliefs and positive attitudes towards both the English language and the teaching of the language to children. As can be seen in Table 4, the participants' answers were categorized into themes, subthemes and codes emerging by means of content analysis. The main themes were schools and system-related and individual attributions. The first main theme had two subthemes, the secondary education period and the university period. For the secondary education period, the participants expressed some negative attributes such as their English learning environments lacking enjoyable atmospheres, some negative attitudes toward teachers, demotivation, excessive grading with tests, and speaking mostly in Turkish. Moreover, there were some curriculum-related problems they witnessed in their secondary education life, such as too much focus on high school and university entrance exams and English language learning was seen as a secondary issue after so many exam-related courses. These issues can be seen in the following extracts.

Our English teachers were always speaking in Turkish and they were giving too many tests related to High School Entrance Exam (HSEE) as they said it was compulsory for them to prepare us for such an exam. (S5)

Sometimes we were demotivated by our teachers by being given too many tests. Our projects for the English language were rarely paid enough attention by them. (S10)

I think English books and curriculum were unnecessarily full of listening and grammar. We used to focus on too much grammar and this was sometimes very boring. I really did not have much fun learning English. (S2)

There were also some negative attitudes towards the English language and the teaching of the languages created at university life. The participants expressed that they were in the fourth year at university and had a very important exam called Public Personnel Selection Exam (PPSE) to be appointed as a teacher at state schools. This was a very heavy burden for them so they did not want to waste their time and energy away from the preparation of that exam. Moreover, some of them expressed the incompatibility between their English course at university and a compulsory course, teaching English to Young Learners at university. Generalist teachers received online English instruction for only two hours per week for the whole academic year. They also had to pass an online midterm and final exam. However, they emphasized their lack of English proficiency when they had to take a compulsory course during the fourth year. Before becoming proficient and efficient enough in the language, it seems it was too difficult for them to teach a language for which they felt incompetent

How do they expect us to teach a language which we do not have enough skills and knowledge of? (S23)

We have already a very important exam PPSE in front and I really do not have any time for extra courses or lessons, I have to pass this exam to be appointed at state schools. I have no other options. (S30)

They also had some fixed mindsets about primary school teachers who they said had too much a workload at school. Primary teachers are generally expected to teach how to read and write in Turkish plus social sciences, maths, science, social studies and so on. English language teaching was seen as an extra burden by some of them;

Primary school teachers already have got a lot of burden at schools so why are we supposed to teach English as well as all other courses. (S13)

There were also some individual attributions of the participants for their lack of self-efficacy beliefs in terms of English language teaching to young learners. The codes found for individual attributions were their lack

of self-confidence in English, dislike of foreign language learning, speaking anxiety and worry about making mistakes in front of the students. These attributions seem to feed on each other.

I am worried about making mistakes in front of the students and I generally cannot speak English fluently. How am I supposed to teach a language I can't speak. (S28)

I have never liked English at all maybe because of me or the general attitudes of our English teachers in the past. Whatever the reason I have never understood why we have to learn the language. (S16)

As seen from the comments of the participants, some internal or external factors appear to have played a very important role in their attitudes towards the English language and teaching of the language which altogether might have caused a very negative reflection towards the course itself.

Discussion

Teaching English to young learners could be done by either generalist teachers or English language teachers because both groups receive similar courses in the teacher training programs. The paucity of studies with generalist teachers led the researchers to conduct the current study to investigate pre-service generalist teachers' (PSGTs') belief systems and the underlying rationale behind the beliefs. The results derived from both quantitative and qualitative methods could be attributed to the two defining themes; the education system including the role of the course and individual attributions involving the PSTCs' proficiency level in English and pedagogical competency to teach English.

To start with the macro-conditions at the level of state and the course, if PSGTs' stable belief sets result from the course, similar results have also been encountered by Çakır and Güngör (2017) explaining the reasons behind the ineffectiveness of the compulsory course to the ability to manage, integrate, and construct new knowledge, learning skills, the utilization of technology and assessment, and reflection. The above skills are not thought to be needed by the PSGTs because they received instruction about the English language online only for two terms and have to study for the PPSE exam as stated in the reflective reports. The moderate levels of generalist teachers' beliefs are similar to the average degrees of metacognitive awareness that Su-Bergil (2020) found in pre-service ELT teachers. Even though the English proficiency of the students from these two departments is quite different, their belief systems are not so divergent, which was also found by Gökmen (2019) who discovered negative attitudes towards the English language in the generalist teaching program. The results that this course did not change students' indecisive beliefs to a more positive level could be explained by the unawareness of the English language and how to teach it, not to mention that they are not as knowledgeable about the real classroom conditions. A lack of practice in real-life conditions could have affected students' belief sets as confirmed by a study conducted by Çakır and Güngör (2017) and Camlibel-Acar (2016) who found that pre-service teachers highlighted the advantages of real classroom conditions in changing their beliefs. They did micro-teachings and had a basic perception of their teaching abilities, but not the real classroom conditions even though they had observed real-life classrooms in the practicum during the fourth year. The results explain the negative effect of insufficient teaching practice in real-life classrooms including students' levels in the classroom and classroom management skills. Therefore, this deficiency of experience in young learner classrooms has led to unchanging beliefs since pre-service teachers could not go beyond their assumptive beliefs. Those assumptions regarding real classroom conditions could even harm belief sets as illustrated by the codes used in the reflective reports such as lack of enjoyable learning environments, negative impact on teachers, and too much workload on generalist teachers. To describe one of these, the participants revealed that the course was compulsory but they thought that there was a low possibility that they would ever teach a course in TEYL as they stated they already had limited time due to their preparation for the PPSE exam not to mention that they stated they would be overloaded with other lessons, which was also stated as a concern by Legg (2013). However, the duty of TEYL was within their legal responsibilities due to the paucity of specialist teachers and policies in teacher employment (Şevik, 2009). In addition, many European states commonly employ generalist teachers to teach English (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission: Eurostat and Eurydice, 2012) because generalist teachers are well-versed in primary education pedagogy since they are more familiar with young learners' cognitive, academic, personal, social, and behavioural features (Driscoll, 2005). However, employing generalist teachers in TEYL requires either promoting generalist teachers' qualities by revising the syllabus of the TEYL course or making some changes to the primary education curriculum with the aid of PSGTs (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission: Eurostat and Eurydice, 2012). Overall, it could be inferred that the state-level context of TEYL, unchanged negative beliefs, and real classroom conditions all have reciprocal impacts on each other.

The second emerging theme is related to individual attributions such as lack of self-confidence, dislike of English, low command of English, and fear of making mistakes in front of students. This qualitative finding was also substantiated by Rixon (2005) who mentioned that generalist teachers would be more effective if they were comfortable and confident enough with their intelligible pronunciation and fluent speaking. The findings in the questionnaire that participants' English efficacy was not enough for TEYL was also corroborated by a statement of lack of self-confidence in the reflective reports which was the key factor behind the unwilling posture of generalist teachers as also found in Legg (2013). Interestingly, the indecisive belief sets of PSGTs in the current study were not found to be consistent with the study conducted with the same questionnaire by Shinde and Karekatti (2012) who found coherent and favourable belief sets for TEYL. PSGTs' indecisive belief sets could also be explained by their pedagogical competence. Therefore, the course was not successful in providing pedagogical competence to the participants which led to the indecisive belief sets. The result is quite contradictory to a recent work conducted by Dagarin-Fojkar et al. (2022) who found subject didactic competence to be the most developed competence. The moderate level low scores of the belief sets in the self-efficacy subcomponent (mean: 3.55 in the pre-test; 3.71 in the post-test) found in the current study are in line with the moderate level of self-efficacy and willingness to develop in TEYL found in Şad (2010). Even though a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the subcomponent of self-efficacy was not found ($p=.087$, $p<.001$), the degree of change (pre-test mean: 3.55; post-test mean: 3.71) was much better than other subcomponents, indicating a very slight level of contribution of the course to the self-efficacy level. If the contribution of the course could be increased, this might affect PSGTs' belief systems in other subcomponents. Similar results were also found by Şad (2010, 2015) postulating that an improvement in self-efficacy in to TEYL would increase pre-service teachers' motivation to develop themselves in TEYL as the positive correlation suggested in his studies. In addition, the low self-efficacy levels found in this study were long before foreseen as a challenge by teacher trainers when the age of TEYL was lowered to 2nd grade since well-qualified teachers at both primary education and teaching of a foreign language would be quite demanding for both existing teacher trainers and teachers (Damar et al., 2013). This requirement for teachers to have to two specialities might not be achievable as illustrated by the high mean scores in NCED (mean: 4.08) and low mean scores in SS (mean: 3.55) in this study.

Conclusion

The age of beginning to teach English to young learners (TEYL) has been lowered to the second grade in Turkey. Graduates of either English language teaching or generalist primary school teaching theoretically be assigned to teach English at this level. Of these teacher groups, generalist teachers avoid undertaking these assignments even though they have been trained in TEYL in a teacher training course. To this end, researchers investigated preservice generalist teachers (PSGTs) at a state university before and after the course to see its possible effect on PSGT their belief sets. The results showed that PSGT their belief sets did not change after the course, but they felt moderately more efficacious in terms of the knowledge of children's English development, but moderately less in the teaching methods and techniques, teacher talk, and self-efficacy. The reasons behind the results were also investigated using reflective reports. Researchers found two supporting themes: national education and individual attributions. National education was included themes such as a lack of enjoyable learning environments, the negative impact of teachers, curriculum, PPSE exam, compulsory courses, online basic English courses, and the teachers' workload. On the other hand, individual attributions included a lack of self-confidence, a dislike of English, insufficiency in speaking ability, and fear of making mistakes. The results showed that these teachers' belief sets both reflected some other factors at the level of national education and individual attributions. These were a deficiency of real classroom practice and linguistic proficiency. As suggested by Rokita-Jaskow (2008), generalist teachers should be supported with linguistic pedagogy beyond primary education pedagogy.

As for the pedagogical implications, if the problem lies in the course, the contents of the course could be readapted generalist teachers. However, if these pre-service teachers did not have the needed qualities to teach English to young learners, their qualities need to be increased for 21st-century education (Hişmanoglu, 2012). Their self-efficacy levels could be raised by providing basic linguistic instruction which could be sufficient for TEYL for the PSGTs who are already receiving primary education pedagogy. As students stated that they are not knowledgeable enough in English, let alone TEYL, the course could include a certain level of instruction in the English language. As a complementary suggestion, based on the low moderate self-efficacy levels in the senior pre-service teachers in this study and according to Şad (2015) who also found that freshmen perceived themselves as more efficacious than senior students, which was explained with compulsory English lessons in the first year of the bachelor degree, this compulsory or optional English

course could be spread over the four years of teaching curriculum since the three hour a week course provided in the last year might not be adequate to instruct on both linguistic structures and methodology for teaching English. For those who could not attain the required English proficiency, they could organize young learners' classrooms by presenting audio-visual materials to extensively expose the pupils to authentic comprehensible input which is the purpose of TEYL (Gökmen, 2021; Rixon, 2005; Şad & Karaova, 2015).

Regarding suggestions for further research, since non-parametric tests require fewer assumptions about population distribution, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and not overgeneralized. (Fraenkel et al., 2012), further research could be conducted through tests of parametric tests if the normal distribution is achieved to generalize the results to the population and if the low reliability scores for sub-dimensions of the questionnaire are fixed to be more reliable by amending the related items and testing them again in a pilot study until reaching an acceptable value. As the problem may lie in the course, the teaching style or methodology could be researched more and other methods or materials could be used. As the scope and purpose of the current research was to explore the overall effect of the course on pre-service teachers' belief sets via a questionnaire, the data were analysed as a whole; therefore, the effect of the course on questionnaire items could also be analysed in detail. As the most striking result was found on the low and unchanged scores in self-efficacy, further research needs to be conducted within this context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

İlkokul Düzeyinde İngilizce Öğretimine Yönelik Öğretmen Adayı İnançları Anketi Değerli öğretmen adayları, Bu anket İlkokul öğretmen adaylarının "İlkokul öğrencilerine İngilizce öğretimi" dersine yönelik algılarını ölçmek amacıyla Shinde ve Karekatti (2012) tarafından hazırlanmış ve bu çalışmanın araştırmacısı tarafından Türkçe'ye çevrilmiştir. Tüm sorular ilkokul öğrencilerine İngilizce öğretimi ile ilgilidir. Vereceğiniz yanıtlar değerli olmakla beraber, samimi bir şekilde cevaplamanızı rica ederim. Sunacağınız yanıtlar ve sonuçlar bu araştırma özelinde gizli tutulacaktır. Dr. Muhammed Fatih Gökmen Katılımcı adı soyadı: İmza: Tercihinize uygun seçeneği aşağıda işaretleyiniz.		1. Kesinlikle katılmıyorum	2. Katılmıyorum	3. Kararsızım	4. Katılıyorum	5. Kesinlikle katılıyorum
1.	Her çocuk İngilizceyi iyi bir şekilde öğrenebilir.					
2.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretimi birinci sınıftan başlaması gerekir.					
3.	İlkokul çocuklarına İngilizce dinleme ve konuşma becerileri öğretilmesi önemlidir.					
4.	İlkokul öğretmeni iyi bir masal anlatıcısı olması gerekir.					
5.	İngilizce sınıflarında öğretmen daima konuşmalı, öğrenciler ise dinlemelidir.					
6.	Her öğrenci İngilizceyi farklı öğrenme stilleri ile öğrenir.					
7.	İngilizce yoluyla İngilizce öğretimi ana dil (Türkçe) kullanılarak İngilizce öğretiminden daha etkilidir.					
8.	Çocuklara sınıfta hareket etme fırsatı verildiğinde İngilizceyi daha iyi öğrenirler.					
9.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde en önemli bileşen sözlü iletişimdir.					
10.	İngilizce telaffuz, kelime ve dil bilgisi beraber verilmesi gerekir.					
11.	Öğretmenler çocuklara daha fazla dil girdisi sağlamak için İngilizce konuşmaları gerekir.					
12.	İngilizceyi iyi öğretebileceğimden eminim.					
13.	İngilizce öğretimi İlkokulda benim için çok kolaydır.					
14.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretirken Türkçe kullanılması gerekir.					
15.	İlkokul öğretmenleri İngilizce konuşarak çocuklara iyi bir İngilizce girdisi sağlayabilirler.					
16.	Çocuklar İngilizceyi etkinliklere dahil olduklarında daha kolay edinirler.					
17.	Çocukların ana dili kullanma tarzı İngilizce öğrenme yeteneklerini etkiler.					
18.	Çocuklar İngilizce anlamadıklarında, Türkçe kullanılması gerekir.					
19.	Çocuklar dersin içeriğini tam anladıklarında İngilizce öğrenebilirler.					
20.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde en önemli bileşen kelime bilgisidir.					
21.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde multimedya araçlarından yararlanılması önemlidir.					
22.	Çocuklar İngilizce öğrenme aşamasında hata yaptıklarında cezalandırılmamaları gerekir.					
23.	Çocuklar konuşup eylemde bulunmaları için daha fazla fırsat almaları gerekir.					
24.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde yeterli olduğumu düşünüyorum.					
25.	İngilizce öğretimi Türkçe öğretiminden daha zordur.					
26.	Çocuklar İngilizceyi yetişkinlerden daha hızlı öğrenir.					
27.	Ne kadar erken yaşta İngilizce öğretilirse bir o kadar iyi sonuçlar alınır.					
28.	Çocuklar İngilizceyi düzenli çalışma olmadan öğrenemezler.					
29.	Çocukların bilişsel gelişiminde bireysel farklılıklar vardır.					
30.	Çocuklar İngilizceyi diğer öğrenciler ile iletişime geçtiklerinde öğrenirler.					

31.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde ana dil asla kullanılmaması gerekir.					
32.	İlkokul öğrencilerinin İngilizce öğrenirken yaptıkları hatalar öğretmenler tarafından düzeltilmezse, ilerde bu hataların düzeltilmesi zorlaşacaktır.					
33.	Şarkılar ve rol yapma etkinlikleri İngilizce öğretmek için uygun etkinliklerdir.					
34.	Çocuklara dil öğretiminden telaffuz eğitimi önemlidir.					
35.	İlkokul dil öğrencilerinin çocuk olmaları ve tamamen yeni bir dil öğrenmeleri dolayısıyla, öğretmen tekrardan ve sözcük değiştirerek açıklamaktan sıklıkla yararlanması gerekir.					
36.	Öğretmen öğrencinin hatalarını daima düzeltmesi gerekir.					
37.	Çocuklara İngilizce öğretimi benim için eğlenceli olacaktır.					
38.	İngilizce öğretirken, öğretmen dersten önce ve sonra soru sorması gerekir.					
39.	Çocuklar ana dillerini (Türkçe) öğrendikleri gibi İngilizceyi de aynı şekilde öğrenirler.					
40.	İlkokul çocuklarının İngilizce okuyup yazmaları önemlidir.					
41.	İletişim dili İngilizce olan dersteki öğrenciler iletişim dili Türkçe olan dersteki öğrencilerden daha hızlı İngilizce öğrenirler.					
42.	Dil bilgisi (gramer) çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde temel bir bileşendir.					
43.	Çocuklara İngilizce heceleme ve dil bilgisi öğretilmesine başlangıçta gerek yoktur.					
44.	İngilizce öğretimine oyunların konulması çocukların öğrenimini kolaylaştıracaktır.					
45.	İlkokulda İngilizce öğretimi değerli bir derstir.					
46.	Sınıfta sessizlik ve disiplin kurmakta öğretmenler katı olmaları gerekmektedir.					
47.	Öğretmenlerin çocuklara dil öğretiminde etkili bir şekilde konuşabilmeleri için uygun bir eğitim almaları gerekmektedir.					
48.	Mezun olur olmaz, ilkokul çocuklarına İngilizceyi başarılı bir şekilde öğretebilirim.					

The Questionnaire of Primary School Pre-Service English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs		1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Uncertain	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
<p>Dear pre-service teachers, This questionnaire was developed by Shinde and Karekatti (2012) to measure primary school teacher candidates' perceptions of the course "Teaching English to Primary School Students".</p> <p>All questions are about teaching English to primary students. Your answers are valuable. Please be frank in your answers to each question. The collected data will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.</p> <p>Dr. Muhammed Fatih Gökmen Name and surname: Sign:</p> <p>Tick below the alternative of your choice.</p>						
1.	Every child can learn English well.					
2.	It is best for children to learn English from as early as the first grade.					
3.	It is important to teach primary school children English listening and speaking skills.					
4.	A primary teacher should be a good story teller.					
5.	In English classroom teacher should talk all the time and students should only listen.					
6.	Every child learns English with different learning styles in the classroom.					
7.	Teaching English through English is more effective than bilingual method of using both Turkish and English.					
8.	Children learn English better if they are given opportunities to move around in the English classroom.					

9.	The most important element in teaching children English is oral conversation.					
10.	English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar should be taught in an integrative manner, rather than separately.					
11.	Teachers should talk in foreign tone to give appropriate exposure to students.					
12.	I am confident of becoming a good primary school English teacher.					
13.	Teaching English in primary school will be very easy to me.					
14.	Turkish should be used while teaching English to children.					
15.	Primary English teachers can give an excellent English input to students only through their talk/speech.					
16.	Children acquire English easily when they are doing activities.					
17.	How children use their mother tongue would affect their capabilities to learn English.					
18.	Turkish must be used if children do not understand English.					
19.	Children can learn English better if they fully understand the content of the lesson.					
20.	The most important element in teaching English is vocabulary.					
21.	It is important to use multimedia equipment (e.g. audio and video tapes, TV) in teaching children English.					
22.	Children should not be punished for making mistakes while learning English.					
23.	Students should be given more chances to speak and act.					
24.	I believe that I am capable of teaching children English.					
25.	Teaching English is challenging and difficult than teaching Turkish.					
26.	Children learn English faster than adults do.					
27.	The earlier English is taught to children, the better the results.					
28.	Children can't learn English without regular practice.					
29.	Children have individual variations in their cognitive development process.					
30.	Children learn English through interactions with other people.					
31.	Turkish should never be used while teaching English to children					
32.	If primary school students are permitted to make errors in English without teacher's correction, it will be more difficult to correct them later on.					
33.	Singing and role-playing are appropriate English teaching activities.					
34.	The most important element in teaching children English is pronunciation.					
35.	As they are children and English is a totally new language to them, teacher should always make use of repetition and paraphrasing.					
36.	Teacher should always correct the mistakes of the students.					
37.	Teaching English in primary school will be a lot of fun to me.					
38.	While teaching English, teacher should ask questions before and after lesson.					
39.	Children learn English the same way as they learn Turkish.					
40.	It is important for primary school children to read and write in English.					
41.	English medium students are faster in learning English than Turkish medium students.					
42.	The most important element in teaching children English is grammar.					
43.	It is not necessary to teach children English spelling and grammar in the very beginning.					
44.	To include games into English instruction can facilitate children's learning.					
45.	To teach English in primary school is a meaningful job.					
46.	To make children quiet and maintain discipline in classroom, primary teachers should be very strict.					
47.	Teachers should get appropriate training about how to talk effectively while teaching English to younger students.					
48.	I can teach English successfully to primary school students as soon as I complete my degree.					

Appendix 2

Questions inquired in the reflective reports:

1. What do you think about teaching English in Turkey?
2. What do you think about teaching English to young learners?
3. What do you think about the course of TEYL?
4. What do you think about your competence and motivation for TEYL?
5. What do you attribute to the results of the current study?

Appendix 3

Informed Consent Form

Title of the study: Do pre-service generalist teachers believe that they could teach English to young learners?

I am informed of the purpose and content of the study and that I have the liberty to ask questions. I affirm that I voluntarily participated in the study and can draw back without any excuse. I give my consent to join the study.

Name of the participant:

Name of the researcher:

Date:

Date:

Signature:

Signature: