
ВІТЧИЗНЯНИЙ І ЗАРУБІЖНИЙ ДОСВІД

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A MODERNIZATION PROPOSAL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS IN TURKIYE

This article is based on the findings of two research articles conducted by the author and his colleague (Önal, 2023; Önal & Özdemir, 2024) and investigates English language teaching (ELT) as well as teacher training practices in Türkiye, emphasizing the efficiency of undergraduate ELT programs in terms of preparing teachers for teaching at different school levels. Türkiye's monolingual status and limited exposure to English present certain challenges, with most high school graduates achieving only A1+ or A2 proficiency on the CEFR scale. ELT teacher training processes follow a structured pathway, beginning with a centralized university entrance exam focused on reading skills, leading to a four-year undergraduate program, and concluding with a public personnel selection exam for state school employment. Despite these structured pathways, findings suggest significant gaps in preparing teachers for various educational levels, particularly pre-primary and university levels.

Quantitative and qualitative data collected from 76 in-service teachers and 192 pre-service teachers revealed mixed perceptions. While training for teaching at primary and secondary levels is deemed satisfactory, preparation for teaching at pre-primary, high school, and university levels remains inadequate. A slight majority of pre-service teachers opposed restructuring undergraduate programs into specialized tracks for young learners versus teenagers/adults, citing overall satisfaction with the current form of training. However, in-service teachers largely supported this reform, arguing that specialization aligns better with the unique needs of different learner age groups and enhances pedagogical effectiveness.

The two studies highlight the incongruence between theoretical and practical training in teacher training programs. The present study underscores the need for reforms to address the varying requirements of teaching different age groups. Additionally, a significant majority of in-service teachers advocated for targeted in-service training (INSET) when transitioning to new school levels, emphasizing its role in reducing adaptation challenges and fostering professional growth. To sum up, the findings call for periodic revisions to the structure and content of ELT teacher training programs in Türkiye, adopting age-appropriate methodologies and aligning with Ministry of National Education standards to ensure more effective preparation for diverse educational contexts.

***Key words:** modernization in teacher training, educational reform, teacher training programs, teaching English to diverse age groups*

Вступ

1. English language teaching & teacher training practices in Türkiye

Türkiye is officially a monolingual country and English is a foreign language in the context of Türkiye. In other words, a great majority of students do not have the chance to get exposed to or use English in their daily lives. In this respect, English is taught as a regular school subject starting from grade 2 to 12 throughout K-12. As a personal observation based on almost 15 years of professional experience, a majority of students can attain only A1+ or A2 level (in line with CEFR) when they finish high school. In support of this, the low level of efficiency in terms of foreign language teaching and teacher training processes in Türkiye has been highlighted by previous research (Altmisdort, 2016; Erdoğan & Savaş, 2022; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019).

As for the students who want to become English language teachers, a centralized 'University Entrance Exam' is conducted every year and the exam consists of multiple-choice test questions. The exam results in negative washback since it only assesses reading skills of the students. Listening, speaking and writing skills of the students are not tested and, as can be expected, students do not improve their oral and productive skills. When they start university, they take an exemption exam that assesses their overall language proficiency and if they fail, they have to take one-year intensive English preparatory class. Following this, they can start their 4-year undergraduate English language teaching program. By the way, graduates of such programs as 'English Language and Literature', 'Translation' and 'English Linguistics' are also entitled to become English language teachers on condition that they complete 'pedagogical formation program'.

Pre-service English language teachers are required to take 'Public Personnel Selection Examination' (again consisting of multiple-choice test questions) and succeed in the job interview to become English language teachers at state schools after they finish their undergraduate teacher training program. If they are employed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), they can be assigned to state schools at any level (from pre-primary to high school).

2. International English language teacher training practices

It is believed that an analysis of international English language teacher training practices would be informative at this point. The review of teacher training policies of many countries shows that teacher training periods vary between 3 to 5 years (Enever, 2014). European Union member states integrate documents such as CEFR, ELP and EPOSTL into their training practices with the aim of achieving harmony (Enever, 2014; Ries et al., 2016; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008). In the USA, despite variations among different states, a subject-specific bachelor's degree, and then, a teaching certificate should be earned by the teachers (Ries et al., 2016). To sum up, many countries offer training in accordance with the specific age group teachers are to teach, which can be interpreted as a good practice.

Теоретичне обґрунтування проблеми

3. Statement of the problem

As has been pointed out by many researchers (Bland, 2019; Cameron, 2001; Johnstone, 2019; Mirici, 1999; Rich, 2014; 2019; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2019), teaching English to (very) young learners is quite different from teaching English to teenagers/adults and requires distinct skills and knowledge-base on the part of the teachers. Moving from this kind of reasoning, as opposed to many other developed countries, English language teachers in Türkiye are entitled to teach at all levels (from pre-primary to tertiary). However;

a) to what extent do English Language Teaching undergraduate programs, from the perspectives of pre-/in-service English language teachers, prepare them for teaching at different school levels?

b) should English Language Teaching undergraduate programs be reformed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults'?

Методологія та методи

4. Research design

The studies on which this paper is based (Önal, 2023 and Önal & Özdemir, 2024) have employed an explanatory sequential mixed method design (see Figure 1).

Explanatory design

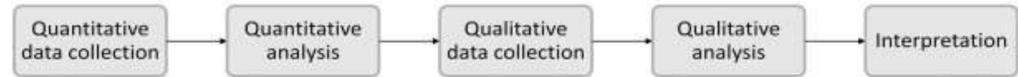


Figure 1. Explanatory sequential design

5. Study group

76 in-service English language teachers who work or have worked at different levels of schools across Türkiye participated in the study and 9 of them also participated in the focus group interview (Önal & Özdemir, 2024). 192 senior (4th grade) PSTs who take practicum courses and study at the English Language Teaching (ELT) programs of 14 different state and private universities in Turkey participated in the study. All the PSTs answered open-ended items (Önal, 2023).

6. Data analysis

For the analysis of quantitative data, means and standard deviations have been computed and presented in tables. For the qualitative data collected through the online survey form and the focus group interview, the technique of content analysis in accordance with qualitative methodology has been employed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yin, 1984).

Результати та дискусії

7. Main Findings

a) to what extent do English Language Teaching undergraduate programs, from the perspectives of pre-/in-service English language teachers, prepare them for teaching at different school levels?

The findings of the analyses have been presented in tables.

Table 1. Perceived efficiency of ELT undergraduate programs in preparing for different school levels

School Levels	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Pre-primary	3,29	1,42	1	5
Primary	3,56	1,25	1	5
Secondary	4,08	1,01	1	5
High School	3,88	1,21	1	5
University	3,75	1,34	1	5

Table 2. PSTs' Perceived Self-efficacy and Readiness to Teach at Different School Levels.

School Levels	Mean	Score Category			Max
		Breakdown	Std. Deviation	Min	
Pre-primary	2,90	average	1,12	1	5
Primary	3,89	satisfactory	1,23	1	5
Secondary	3,93	satisfactory	1,11	1	5
High School	3,33	average	1,05	1	5
University	2,44	unsatisfactory	1,28	1	5

Table 3. Perceived Efficiency of ELT Undergraduate Programs in Preparing PSTs for Different School Levels

School Levels	Mean	Score Category		Min	Max
		Breakdown*	Std. Deviation		
Pre-primary	3,36	average	1,02	1	5
Primary	4,06	satisfactory	1,21	1	5
Secondary	3,98	satisfactory	1,01	1	5
High School	3,21	average	1,11	1	5
University	2,57	unsatisfactory	1,24	1	5

* Score category breakdown has been computed as: 1,00-1,80: very unsatisfactory; 1,81-2,60: unsatisfactory; 2,61-3,40: average; 3,41-4,20: satisfactory; 4,21-5,00: very satisfactory.

Table 4. Perceived self-efficacy and readiness to teach at different school levels.

School Levels	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Pre-primary	2,90	1,68	1	5
Primary	3,48	1,75	1	5
Secondary	4,35	1,25	1	5
High School	4,03	1,21	1	5
University	3,55	1,55	1	5

As can be understood from the findings presented in the tables, English language teacher training programs in Türkiye, from the perspectives of both pre-service (Tables 1 and 2) and in-service teachers (Tables 3 and 4), prepare them satisfactorily for teaching at primary and secondary level schools. However, for teaching at pre-primary, high school and university levels, English language teacher training programs in Türkiye are viewed as not so efficient.

b) should English Language Teaching undergraduate programs be reformed as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’?

A slight majority of the PSTs (52%; N=100) disagreed with the statement whereas the remaining PSTs (48%; N=92) believed that ELT undergraduate programs should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’. Their reasons include:

- the quality of training offered by their teacher training programs is satisfactory enough to prepare them to teach at different levels.
- rather than reconstruction, the curriculum of the program needs to be updated with a specific view to practice opportunities (referring to the imbalance between theory and practice).

However, as can be inferred from the results of the quantitative data, PSTs seem to contradict themselves since they assumed that their undergraduate training prepared them *unsatisfactorily* for university level, *averagely* for pre-primary and high school levels and *satisfactorily* only for primary and secondary levels. On the other hand, the main argument of the PSTs that support the suggested reform is that both *what you teach* and *how you teach* differ according to the level of school and age of learners; thus, specializing in one level would produce much better results.

As for the in-service English language teachers, a good majority of the in-service teachers (72%; N=55) agreed with this statement, pointing to the differences between (very) young and teenager/adult learners. They claimed that:

- similar to the teachers of other subjects (such as Mathematics, Social Sciences [Geography & History], Science [Physics, Biology, Chemistry] and Turkish Language),

English language teachers should also be trained in accordance with the school level they are to work at.

-teachers would be better able to specialize in planning lessons, designing materials, delivering instruction, managing classroom, establishing good rapport, providing feedback and implementing assessment targeting a certain learner group.

Conversely, in-service English language teachers (28%; N=21) who disagreed with the statement believed that the profession of English language teaching should be viewed in a *holistic* manner and English language teachers should be trained in such a way to render them qualified for teaching any age group studying at any school level. They believed that becoming entitled to work at any school level provided them with greater flexibility and freedom in that they could switch to another school level when they experienced burnout.

Considering that in-service English language teachers may be transferred to a school at a different level than they work at, the opinions of the participants on whether there is a need for a specific preparatory INSET program for in-service English language teachers that are assigned to a different school level than the one they work at were also sought for. Consequently, an overwhelming majority of the in-service English language teachers agreed on the need for such INSETs, believing that such subject-specific INSETs would enable them to refresh and retrieve their pedagogical knowledge, keep up with the latest trends in the field of English language teaching, contribute to their professional development and reduce the duration of the adaptation period for the new instructional context.

ВИСНОВКИ

8. Conclusion/Suggestions

Both the structure and the content of the teacher training programs need to be revised at regular intervals to keep up with the requirements of the changing world and society (Kızılcıoğlu, 2006). At the end of a historical overview of foreign language teacher training processes in Türkiye, Nergis (2011) concluded that transient political tendencies rather than a consistent philosophy shape foreign language teacher training policies in Türkiye. In this respect, the findings of the study clearly demonstrate that from the perspectives of both pre-service and in-service English language teachers, ELT undergraduate programs in the Turkish context need to be reformed in line with the school levels specified by the MoNE.

Adopting age-appropriate methodology is a must in foreign language teaching (Bland, 2019) because age is a significant variable in the process of language acquisition and learning. Consequently, almost all aspects of foreign language teaching including materials development, lesson planning, organization and delivery of lessons, classroom management and testing bear great differences among (very) young, teenager and adult learners. A significant implication that can be drawn from the findings of both stakeholders is that ELT teacher training programs in Türkiye, in their current state, prepare pre-/in-service English language teachers more efficiently to teach adults and/or teenagers than young learners. This clearly signals the urgent need for reforming ELT undergraduate programs for age divisions in Türkiye from the perspectives of pre-/in-service English language teachers.

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ПЕРСПЕКТИВНІ НАПРЯМИ МОДЕРНІЗАЦІЇ ПРОГРАМ ПІДГОТОВКИ ВЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В ТУРЕЧЧИНІ

Стаття ґрунтується на результатах двох наукових досліджень, проведених автором та його колегою (Önal, 2023; Önal & Özdemir, 2024), і присвячена аналізу викладання англійської мови (АМ) та практик підготовки вчителів у Туреччині, наголошуючи на ефективності бакалаврських програм вивчення англійської мови з точки зору підготовки вчителів до викладання на різних рівнях шкільної освіти.

Одномовний статус Туреччини та обмежений вплив англійської мови створюють певні проблеми, оскільки більшість випускників середніх шкіл досягають лише рівня A1+ або A2 за шкалою Загальноєвропейських рекомендацій з мовної освіти. Процес підготовки вчителів англійської мови професійного спрямування має певну структуру, починаючи з централізованого вступного іспиту до університету, що зосереджується на навичках читання, і закінчуючи чотирирічною програмою бакалаврату та державним іспитом з відбору кадрів для роботи в державних школах. Незважаючи на ці структуровані шляхи, результати дослідження свідчать про значні прогалини в підготовці вчителів для різних освітніх рівнів, особливо дошкільного та університетського.

Кількісні та якісні дані, отримані від 76 практикуючих вчителів та 192 майбутніх вчителів, виявили неоднозначну картину. Якщо підготовка до викладання на початковому та середньому рівнях вважається задовільною, то підготовка до викладання на дошкільному, шкільному та університетському рівнях залишається недостатньою. Незначна більшість учителів, які готуються до викладання, виступили проти реструктуризації бакалаврських програм на спеціалізовані напрями для молодших учнів, а не для підлітків/дорослих, посилячись на загальне задоволення нинішньою формою навчання. Однак практикуючі вчителі здебільшого підтримали цю реформу, стверджуючи, що спеціалізація краще відповідає унікальним потребам різних вікових груп учнів і підвищує педагогічну ефективність. Обидва дослідження підкреслюють невідповідність між теоретичною та практичною підготовкою в програмах підготовки вчителів. Дослідження підкреслює необхідність реформ, спрямованих на врахування різних вимог до викладання для різних вікових груп. Крім того, значна більшість практикуючих вчителів виступають за цільову підготовку майбутніх учителів (INSET) при переході на нові шкільні рівні, підкреслюючи її роль у зменшенні адаптаційних проблем і сприянні професійному зростанню. Підсумовуючи, результати дослідження закликають до періодичного перегляду структури та змісту програм підготовки вчителів англійської мови в Туреччині, прийняття методологій, адаптованих до віку, та узгодження зі стандартами Міністерства національної освіти, щоб забезпечити більш ефективну підготовку до різноманітних освітніх контекстів.

Ключові слова: модернізація підготовки вчителів, освітня реформа, програми підготовки вчителів, викладання англійської мови для різних вікових груп