

**ELT TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS FOR
TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS¹**

Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde İngilizce Öğretmeni

Yeterlilikleri

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Abstract

The recent changes in the ELT primary curriculum in Turkey as a result of the 4+4+4 education system have raised many issues concerning teacher development and led to discussions regarding teacher qualifications for teaching English at the primary schools. In the European Union primary school language teacher qualifications are identified by the Goethe Institute in the Nuremberg Recommendations in Early Language Learning. Considering Turkey's attempts to enter the EU, the European standards for teacher preparation and qualifications stand as criteria for Turkey to improve the teacher development process and helping prospective teachers gain the required competencies to teach young learners. From this perspective the current study aims at investigating prospective teachers self-conceptions about primary school language teacher qualifications. Quantitative and qualitative data for the study was collected from 100 fourth year prospective teachers at a large state university in Turkey, via a questionnaire. The instrument was prepared by taking Nuremberg Recommendations and MNE special field competencies for teacher qualifications into consideration. The participants were asked to self-assess themselves on a five-point scale, which indicates the degree of agreement with the given items. The instrument was found reliable with a .888 alpha value. The results showed that the participants are least comfortable with their language fluency and knowledge about the target language culture. However, belief in lifelong learning and knowledge about the methodological aspects of teaching children were accepted more. The findings of the research have implications for language teacher preparation for the primary school.

Keywords: *ELT teacher qualifications, primary ELT, teaching English to young learners, teacher development, prospective teachers.*

Özet

4+4+4 eğitim sisteminin sonucunda İngilizce Dil Öğretim Programında yapılan değişiklikler öğretmen gelişimine yönelik birçok konuyu gündeme getirmekle kalmamış ilköğretimde İngilizce öğretiminde öğretmen yeterlilikleri konusunda da tartışmalara yol açmıştır. Avrupa Birliğinde ilköğretim yabancı dil öğretmeni yeterlilikleri Goethe Enstitüsünün "Erken Dil Öğretiminde Nuremberg Önerileri" raporunda belirlenmiştir. Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliğine girme çabaları göz önüne alındığında öğretmen yetiştirme Avrupa standartları Türkiye'de öğretmen eğitimini geliştirmek için ve öğretmen adaylarına çocuklara yabancı bir dil öğretmek için öngörülen yeterlilikleri kazandırmak için birer kriter olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu açıdan bu çalışma öğretmen adaylarının ilköğretim yabancı dil öğretmen yeterlilikleri konusundaki öz-algılarını incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Türkiye'deki büyük bir devlet üniversitesinde son sınıfta okuyan 100 öğretmen adayından nicel ve nitel veriler bir anket yardımıyla toplanmıştır. Anket Nuremberg Önerilerini ve Milli Eğitim Özel Alan yeterliliklerini dikkate alarak hazırlanmıştır. Katılımcılardan verilen maddelere ne derece katıldıklarını beşli bir ölçek üzerinde işaretleyerek kendilerini

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değerlendirmeleri istenmiştir. Ölçek .888'lik bir alfa değeriyle güvenilir bulunmuştur. Sonuçlar katılımcıların kendilerini en az dili akıcı kullanmak ve hedef dilin kültürü hakkında bilgi sahibi olmak konularında yeterli hissettiklerini göstermiştir. Ancak, yaşam boyu öğrenmenin önemine inanmak ve çocuklara yabancı dil öğretimindeki yöntemsel bilgilere sahip olmak öğretmen adayları tarafından daha fazla kabul edilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonuçlarının ilköğretimde dil öğretmeni yetiştirme konusuna etkileri bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce öğretmeni yeterlilikleri, ilköğretimde İngilizce, çocuklara yabancı dil öğretimi, öğretmen gelişimi, öğretmen adayları.

Introduction

The global demand for foreign language learning with an emphasis on the need for communication skills have pressured countries to lower the starting age for learning foreign languages (FL) (Cameron, 2003; Emery, 2012; Enever & Moon, 2009; Garton, Copland & Burns, 2011). The changes in the curricula were also triggered by the idea that “younger is better” in learning languages and also the dissatisfaction of policy makers in achieving foreign language goals (Cameron, 2003). In addition to the downward pressure of global economic need for individuals communicating in various FLs, the upward pressure caused by parents cannot be underestimated to teach FLs at a younger age (Cameron, 2003; Emery, 2012; Enever, 2011; Enever & Moon, 2009). As the outcomes of learning foreign languages are associated with social and economic benefits (Enever & Moon, 2009; Kapur, 2009; Lee, 2009), many parents seek ways to introduce FLs to their children earlier than ever by sending them to private schools or English lessons, and/or after school programs etc. (Garton, Copland & Burns, 2011; Hsu & Austin, 2012).

This demand on early FL education found body in policy changes in many countries including Turkey. However, the rapid policy changes in most cases have outrun the planning necessary for successful implementation (Enever & Moon, 2009; Garton, Copland & Burns, 2011; Gimenez, 2009; Lee, 2009). One of the most important requirements for a successful change is teacher qualifications to teach at the primary level. Unfortunately, to cope with the demand for more FL teachers for young learners, countries relied on teachers who lack TEYL training such as homeroom teachers (teachers who teach the entire curriculum), secondary school ELT teachers, or in some cases non-ELT teachers with some proficiency in English (Brumen & Fojkar, 2012; Emery, 2012; Enever & Moon, 2009; Garton, Copland & Burns, 2011; Kirkgöz, 2009). Due to the placement of unqualified teachers several problems were identified such as the inability to solve problems regarding the teaching context, inadequate language proficiency of teachers, and employers' low standards in employing TEYL teachers (Brumen & Fojkar, 2012). These problems came from obscurity in the ELLiE (Early Language Learning in Europe) project (Enever, 2011). According to the data gathered from teachers in seven different European countries in the project, it is found out that teachers prefer traditional teaching and teacher-centered classrooms, they over use L1, they are anxious about their language competency (which might also be related to their concerns about classroom management), and lack the ability to produce interactive tasks to enhance language production (Enever, 2014). This situation and somewhat similar conditions around the globe drew attention to pre- and in-service education of primary ELT teachers. Although there are variations (in some countries these courses are voluntary in others they are compulsory) regarding the courses offered for pre-service education, language proficiency expected from a TEYL teacher of prospective teacher is B2 level in most European countries (Enever, 2014; Enever, 2011).

While there are limited studies describing TEYL teacher qualifications (Brumen & Fojkar, 2012) the document named “Nuremberg Recommendations on Early Foreign Language Learning” (hereafter NR) (Goethe-Institut, 2010) has identified the required qualifications in detail. Originally published in 1996 by the Goethe Institut, NR was produced as a collaborative work of the experts from 22 different countries. Due to economic and societal demands, technological developments, new media experiences and new expectations regarding early language learning the report was revised and published in 2010 so that these changes and demands are reflected in it. NR covers a variety of factors affecting early FL learning and aims to display the potential as well as the needs of 4-10 year-old children. Having a broader perspective the document addresses the policy makers, teacher trainers, prospective teachers, principals, and practitioners.

Within the content of the document not only the standards of early FL teaching but also the conditions to implement effective TEYL are identified. A great deal of importance is addressed to identify qualified TEYL teachers in NR. In addition to knowledge about target language and culture, both methodological and pedagogical competences are required from the TEYL teacher (Goethe-Institut, 2010). According to the NR, the expected requirement for the language proficiency of TEYL teachers at the nursery and primary level is B2 to C1 of the European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in order to display an error-free and authentic language use as much as possible. According to the results of the ELLiE study, this level seems to be accepted and put into practice in all EU countries that contributed to the study. NR also advises that the L2 is the working language in the classroom.

Intercultural awareness is another issue stressed in NR, in which both the target culture and the source culture is given attention to. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers of YLs have knowledge about the target language culture away from the stereotypical information in order to help children appreciate cultural differences. Regarding the training of pre-service teachers and practitioners NR suggests that the program involve specific courses geared to TEYL. Moreover, the content of the courses should be competence-oriented and comprehensive to cover theoretical principles and foster practical competencies, also make room for analytical group discussions. During the training the students should be acquainted with the language policy developments and be involved in discussions of language policies among themselves. Finally, it is advised that the training should propose residence abroad as an option or as an integral part of the curriculum.

NR (2010) also underlines “transferable knowledge and experience-based qualifications” (p.16) which include;

- Natural enjoyment of communication
- Capacity and desire for intercultural communication
- Capacity for analytical, problem-oriented thought
- Competence in identifying, mediating and implementing learning strategies
- Endorsement of lifelong learning as a principle for oneself and all learners
- Ability to inspire openness to new ways of thinking and learning
- Ability to cooperate as harmoniously and productively with colleagues as with children

- Constant upgrading of own media competence
- Self-confident and intelligently purposive approach in fulfilment of own professional role and responsibilities together with maintenance of critical perspective
- Unfailing readiness to cooperate with all involved in upbringing of children and in education. (NR, 2010, p. 16).

Ministry of National Education in Turkey has also identified teacher qualifications for teachers of YLs. Specific field competencies of TEYL teachers are described in five broad categories: planning and organizing language teaching process, developing language skills of learners, monitoring and evaluating the development of language skills, cooperation with the school, family and the society, and continuing professional development in English Language Teaching (MEB, 2008). Although these qualifications cover most of the methodological and pedagogical competencies as also mentioned in NR, they don't clearly identify the required L2 proficiency of teachers nor emphasize the intercultural knowledge and awareness. In addition, the qualifications mostly identify how the teacher should develop/monitor the language skills of learners, organize the teaching process etc. but the document fail to state which skills, what pedagogical and/or methodological knowledge is required to be able to perform these actions. In Turkey graduation from the Education Faculties and receiving the required score from the "Public Personnel Selection Examination" (KPSS) is considered to be adequate to be qualified as teachers. Even though the exam has certain sections that assess subject-matter knowledge and the language proficiency along with general knowledge and world knowledge, the test does not identify language level of participants according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In addition as the test is designed to assess only the reading skill, grammar and vocabulary the test score does not provide any information regarding the prospective teachers' proficiency in oral skills although both fluency and accuracy is regarded as important in NR and MNE's special field competencies.

As a result of the world-wide effect of globalization in the European Union and elsewhere, intercultural awareness is regarded as having prime importance in understanding diverse cultures necessary for intercultural communication. In the Turkish context, the researchers frequently argued about the limited representation of L2 culture as well as other cultures in L2 course books and lessons (Çakır, 2010; Türkan & Çelik, 2007) indicating a need for integrating cultural content in the FL classroom. However, MNE does not require intercultural communication and awareness as a criterion for language teacher competencies. As the needs of the language learners change in the globalized world, intercultural understanding and communication requires attention to meet those needs. In order to integrate cultural information into language lessons, it is necessary for teachers to have such cultural knowledge. Thus, a global perspective in the identification of national standards would contribute to the teacher education and development process. To this end, the current research aims to shed some light into TEYL teacher qualifications by projecting on prospective ELT teachers' perspectives as they will be the new teaching force to reach at national and global standards in language education.

Methodology

The current research aims at investigating prospective teachers' perceptions regarding TEYL teacher qualifications. The following research questions were investigated within the study:

1. What are prospective teachers' self-perceptions regarding TEYL teacher qualifications they possess?
2. What should be some additional features of a TEYL teacher according to prospective teachers?

Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data for the study is collected via a questionnaire prepared by the researcher according to the NR and MNE specific field teacher competencies. Descriptive analysis was implemented on the closed-ended items and a content analysis was implemented on the open-ended question by identifying and grouping the themes that occurred in the answers.

Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended questions organized as a five-point Likert scale and an open-ended question at the end to which the participants can state their ideas about additional TEYL teacher qualifications and characteristics in addition to those stated in the instrument. The survey required prospective teachers' perceptions on language skills and proficiency (1, 4, 5, 6, 12), methodological knowledge (7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16), pedagogical knowledge (3, 10), knowledge on L2 culture and intercultural communication (2, 13), personal/professional aims and abilities, ability for cooperation with others (19, 20). The reliability of the instrument was found to be high with a .888 alpha value.

Participants

Data is collected from 100 4th year prospective teachers in the ELT Department of a large state university in Turkey. All of the participants had taken "Teaching English to Young Learners" course during which methodological and pedagogical knowledge and skills development is aimed at. Designed as a competence-oriented course, as stated in the NR requirements, it aims to cover theoretical principles, foster practical competencies and incorporates analytical group discussions both in theory and practice lessons. Moreover, prospective teachers are introduced to the recent English Language Teaching Program (2013) and given the opportunity to implement policy requirements in micro-teaching lessons.

Results

The results indicate that with a scale mean of 79.72, the prospective teachers agree to a great extent that they possess the required TEYL teacher qualifications; however, there are also certain areas that the participants somewhat agree with (table 1). The prospective teachers agreed the most with the importance of lifelong learning for themselves and others (93%) and the least with their language fluency (49%). In accordance with fluency, they are also insecure about their phonological ability (51%) and appropriate use of tone and intonation (66%). These findings are interesting because most of the participants

(82%) also agreed that they enjoy communicating in L2 and they have adequate knowledge of the English language (79%).

Table 1. Combined frequencies of prospective teachers' perspectives on TEYL teacher qualifications

	5+4	3+2	1
	%	%	%
knowledge of the English language	79	21	
knowledge about the L2 culture	56	43	1
knowledge about language pedagogy	56	42	
phonological ability	51	47	2
use of tone and intonation when speaking in L2	66	32	2
fluency in English	49	48	3
methodological knowledge about teaching young learners	70	30	
skills to design/adapt activities according to my students' level	78	22	
creating/finding materials that are of interest to children	85	15	
awareness about how children learn	91	9	
planning lessons according to children's characteristics	83	17	
Enjoyment in communication in L2	82	18	
desire for intercultural communication	81	19	
capacity for analytical, problem-oriented thought	66	34	
competence in identifying learning strategies	65	35	
competence in implementing learning strategies	55	45	
lifelong learning for oneself and others	93	5	
ability to inspire openness to new ways of thinking and learning	81	17	
ability to cooperate productively with colleagues	82	18	
ability to cooperate productively with children	81	19	

Other areas that prospective teachers are not very comfortable with are language pedagogy (56%), L2 culture (56%), competence in identifying (65%) and implementing (55%) learning strategies. Although knowledge about L2 culture is underlined only in NR, knowledge about language pedagogy and the use of language learning strategies are emphasized in both documents. As with the comparison of the certain aspects of their oral skills and desire to communicate, participants claimed that they have a desire for intercultural communication (81%) though they don't possess much knowledge about L2 culture.

It is pleasing that the participants perceive that they have the knowledge about how children learn (91%) and have the skills to create/find materials (84%), design and adapt activities (78%) for children. Moreover, 83% claimed that they can plan lessons according to children's characteristics, which was one of the competencies listed in MNE's special field teacher competencies. However, only 70% think that they have the methodological knowledge about teaching children. Pedagogical and methodological knowledge were one of the requirements of the NR, in that participants seem to believe that they possess certain aspects of it to some degree.

According to the findings a respectively less participants (66%) agreed that they have the capacity for analytical, problem-oriented thought. This was one of the concerns of the 3rd year prospective teachers as well in another study by Gürsoy & Çelik Korkmaz (2015), in which the participants indicated that they were not sure whether they have the critical

thinking skills or not. On the other hand, the participants claimed to have the ability to inspire openness to new ways of thinking and learning (81%).

Finally, the prospective teachers indicated that they have the ability to cooperate productively with colleagues (82%) and children (80%). Cooperation is regarded as an important competency both in NR and Turkey's special field teacher competencies.

In the open-ended part of the questionnaire the participants were asked to add any additional qualifications or features for a primary EFL teacher. Their answers are categorized in two groups. The first group of answers focuses on personality factors (table 2) and the second group emphasizes the knowledge and skills that a TEYL teacher should possess table (table 3). As the other responses were similar to those stated in the closed-ended part of the questionnaire they were not included here.

Table 2. Additional qualifications of a TEYL teacher: Personality factors

Qualifications	n
Patient	10
Creative	8
Enjoyable/cheerful	8
Energetic	3
Self-confident	3

As can be seen from the table 1 the first four qualifications are relevant for those who want to work with young learners. Although mentioned by a few, self-confidence is necessary as a teacher qualification for all branches.

Table 3. Additional qualifications of a TEYL teacher: Knowledge and skills

Qualifications	n
Ability to use body language and gestures	9
Regarding children's characteristics/interests/level/needs	8
Ability to use technology and the internet	5
Staying up-to-date	4
Having classroom management skills	3

These skill and knowledge areas are relevant to those in the closed-ended questionnaire such as having methodological knowledge about children, being aware of how children learn, giving importance to life-long learning etc. The responses also point to an awareness about the learner group intended.

Discussions and Conclusions

The results indicate that nearly half of the participants are uncomfortable about their fluency in L2, phonological ability, and the use of appropriate intonation, but yet they stated that they enjoy communicating in L2. It can be assumed that it is not the desire to communicate but their abilities required for communication seems to be problematic for the prospective teachers.

Fluency, phonological ability, and correct intonation in English, are important criteria considering the fact that the teachers are the main source of input in the classroom and at younger ages language instruction should focus on oral communication skills.

Teaching methodologies and techniques with young learners are mostly determined by children's skills, abilities and characteristics that they bring into the classroom. Accordingly, children are better than adults in developing the sound system of the language (Çetintaş, 2012; Olson & Samuels, 1973; Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1977); therefore, oral language input has a considerable impact on children's ability to produce the language. Moreover, by characteristics, children are talkative, and they prefer to communicate via the oral language. Thus, the language presented to them needs to be clear, accurate, fluent, and meaningful. This result suggests that there is a need for the development of speaking skills of the prospective teachers. In Turkey, in order to teach at state schools prospective teachers take the "Public Personnel Selection Examination". The exam involves general knowledge, basic mathematical knowledge and also field knowledge questions. Teacher candidates are placed to schools according to their scores from the exam. However, considering the higher demand on oral communication skills and the EU requirements an oral aspect could be added to the exam in order to better select future teachers.

The results also emphasize a need for explicit L2 cultural information and language learning strategy training during teacher preparation. Only half of the participants stated that they had information about the L2 culture although the results indicate a desire for intercultural communication. The participants' insecurity in cultural knowledge might be due to the limited cultural information they received throughout their language education. The results of studies in the same context (Çakır, 2010; Türkan & Çelik, 2007) and elsewhere (Hinkel, 1999; Yuen 2011) revealed that the cultural content in ELT course books are limited in general, focus on L2 culture only and lack information on other cultures, or focus on source culture. Moreover, Türkan & Çelik, (2007) argue that L2 teachers fail to fill the cultural gap in their classrooms due to several reasons such as their limited/lack of knowledge on cultural issues, limited/lack of training in providing cultural content, heavy curricula, and students' possible reactions to different cultural norms. Similarly, teacher education curriculum does not involve any courses regarding intercultural understanding and communication. However, it is often argued that it is the teacher's responsibility to establish an intercultural understanding by identifying goals and employing strategies within their cultural awareness (Türkan & Çelik, 2007). It is quite doubtful that teachers can implement intercultural content due to their lack of training and knowledge. What's more MNE hasn't regarded intercultural knowledge and communication as a language teacher competency. Thus, the issue raises concerns regarding the integration of intercultural education into foreign language teacher education programs. Embedded within this claim is that MNE specific field teacher competencies needs a revision to employ global demands for communication in a foreign language.

Another issue of consideration in the study is the participants' concern about their capacity for analytical thinking, which can also be an outcome of their previous educational experiences as also mentioned in another study in the same context (Gürsoy & Çelik Korkmaz, 2015). In their study Gürsoy and Çelik Korkmaz (2015) found out that the prospective teachers pointed out their former learning experiences such as rote learning, use of memorization as a language learning strategy etc. as reasons for inadequate critical thinking skills. The issue raises questions about teacher preparation process. Earlier studies conducted in the same context have conflicting results. In their qualitative study Çelik and Arıkan (2012) claim that BA programs are inadequate in preparing prospective teachers for the classroom in regard to 25 English teachers working in different parts of Turkey. Whereas, in her quantitative study with 4th year prospective teachers Aydın (2009) found out that the participants were content from the methodology

courses they took throughout their education at a state university in Turkey. The issue clearly requires further investigation of the teacher preparation process in Turkey as perceived opinions about the self, as in the current study, and knowledge, as in Aydın's (2009) study is subject to change when faced with real classroom environments.

Another self-perception of the prospective teachers is that only some of them feel competent in identifying and implementing language learning strategies, which are accounted as basic competencies both by NR and MNE. The result is supported by Gürsoy and Çelik Korkmaz (2015) in that the prospective teachers in their study claimed to use memorization as a dominant learning strategy. The findings draw attention to the issue of autonomy and strategy training. It is important that teachers are aware of effective strategies to facilitate learning and to promote autonomy. Thus, teacher training process needs to involve explicit as well as integrated strategy training for the prospective teachers to develop their strategies as well as the skills to teach them.

All in all, research results are promising in that the participants consider most of TEYL teacher qualifications and competencies as identified in both documents to exist in them. However, further research with the practicing teachers is necessary to support the findings. Moreover, in identifying TEYL teacher qualifications language use (fluency and accuracy) needs to be emphasized and become a criterion for job placement. Subsequently, European standard for language proficiency (B2 level the least) can be stated as a goal for prospective teachers, the government and the private sector. In addition, an oral component can be added to university placement that can be conducted by the faculty and to the "Public Personnel Selection Examination" before the placement of the teachers. The pedagogical courses in the university curricula should be organized so that they require analytical thinking and promote problem-oriented thought. To prevent the use of ineffective strategies the assessment of the courses can involve the implementation of the knowledge so that it encourages the use of critical thinking skills.

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