

Do Prospective Classroom Teachers Perceive Themselves as Effective and Willing to Teach Young Learners English?

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the perceived efficacy and willingness levels of prospective classroom teachers to teach English at the primary level. The study was designed as a baseline descriptive survey, followed by complementary correlational and ex post facto models. Participants were 251 prospective classroom teachers. Data was collected with "The Perceived Efficacy and Willingness Scales for Teaching Young Learners English." Prospective classroom teachers, particularly females, were found willing to teach young learners English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, participants, particularly males, perceived themselves as ineffective at performing critical classroom activities for teaching English. Freshmen felt more effective than seniors at teaching young learners EFL. Also prospective classroom teachers of all grades from 1st to 4th years were similarly willing to teach young learners English. Path analysis revealed significant positive associations among perceived efficacy (PE), willingness (WILL), and perceived level of English proficiency (PEP). PEP was found directly responsible for about half ($R^2 = .48$) the variance in PE. PEP indirectly and positively affected WILL through PE's full mediation effect. Lastly, PE directly and positively predicted WILL, with an R^2 of 0.16.

Keywords: Prospective classroom teachers • Teaching English to young learners • Perceived efficacy • Willingness to teach English

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Teaching foreign languages to young learners has become critical worldwide (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2004; Cameron, 2001; Doyé & Hurrell, 1997; Edelenbos, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ytreberg, 1997). Since the Council of Europe's 1997 publication of a report recommending foreign language integration into primary education, almost all European countries have experienced huge, rapid development in foreign language teaching at primary schools (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008). According to statistics (Eurydice, 2012a, pp. 145–153) compulsory foreign language learning starts at age 3 in Belgium (BE de); 5 in Malta; 6 in Italy, Cyprus, Spain, Croatia, Norway, Austria, Luxembourg, and Liechtenstein; 7 in France and Poland; 8 in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia; 9 in Denmark, Hungary, Island, Latvia, Slovenia, and Turkey; 7–9 in Estonia and Finland; 10 in Belgium (BE fr), Belgium (BE nl), and Germany; 6–10 in Portugal; 6–12 in the Netherlands; 7–16 in Sweden; 11 in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, and Northern Ireland). The beginning age has even decreased to 7–8 in Turkey, with compulsory foreign language lessons beginning in 2nd grade at state primary schools. Driscoll (2005) justified this interest in primary modern foreign languages as a reflection of “growing realization that pupils need to be equipped with the competences, attitudes, and skills to cope successfully with the social and economic changes which are transforming life in Europe” (p. 9). From a cognitive-developmental perspective, an early start guarantees better learning, as claimed by supporters of critical period hypothesis [CPH] (Brewster et al., 2004). First proposed by Lennenberg, CPH suggests that children's innate language acquisition capacity develops only at a certain period, that is, the critical period; experts believe that this period is critical for second language acquisition as well (Gordon, 2007). Madrid (2001) noted, “Pupils who begin the L2 in the kindergarten or in the first phase of Primary Education normally obtain better results in later stages and overcome those who start in the obligatory phase (grade 3, age 8)” (p. 146). In terms of language learning context, compared with adults, early learners are more enthusiastic and lively (Cameron, 2001), more open to conversational interactions as they are risk takers, and feel less anxious or foolish in case of mistakes (King & Mackey, 2007; Komorowska, 1997). Moreover, successful early language learning helps learners develop an open-minded, tolerant, and rich worldview, and awareness of cultural and linguistic diversities, thus contributing to world

peace (Aslan, 2008; Council of Europe, 2009; Doyé & Hurrell, 1997; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Ellis, 2004).

Considering these advantages and recent trends, the quality of successful early foreign language learning has become an issue. In fact, an early foreign language program's success depends mainly on carefully considering the cognitive, affective, physical, and social developmental characteristics and meeting the specific age group's learning needs (Agullo, 2006; Cameron, 2001; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Şad, 2011; Tost Planet, 1997). Otherwise, an early start may even bring negative consequences because learners' attitudes and judgments are constructed when they first meet the foreign language and are also decisive for their future learning experiences (Djigunovic, 2009; Egel, 2009; Katsuyama, Nishigaki, & Wang, 2008; Schindler, 2006). Thus, “How to teach?” and “Who should teach?” questions become very critical.

How to Teach

That language learning is a lifelong endeavor, which cannot be reduced to attainment of a given and hurried proficiency level, is well accepted (Council of Europe, 2009). Thus, early learning's aim is regarded as psychological, linguistic, and cultural preparation (Brewster et al., 2004). Rather than teaching the target language's basic structural patterns, which goes against young learners' developmental characteristics (Komorowska, 1997; Moon, 2000; Nikolov, 2009; Ytreberg, 1997), functional communicative skills are mostly prioritized (Nikolov, 2000). However, individuals' inborn, motivated quest for cognitive growth requires a stimulating, innovative, and communicative environment (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Thus, affective goals are as important as cognitive ones. Even the literature on early language learning favors affective objectives, such as positive attitudes toward learning foreign language(s) and learning about foreigners and their cultures (Brewster et al., 2004; Council of Europe, 2009; Edelenbos, 1997; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Ellis, 2004; Henry & Apelgren, 2008; Komorowska, 1997; Tost Planet, 1997); motivating students to learn language (Brewster et al., 2004; Edelenbos, 1997; Edelenbos et al., 2006); and building confidence in learners while preventing potential language learning anxiety (Edelenbos et al., 2006; Gordon, 2007; Komorowska, 1997; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Scott & Ytreberg, 2001). And now, many believe that although young learners generally have positive affective reactions to foreign language learning (Atli, 2008; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Elkılıç & Akça, 2008; Sertçetin, 2006; Şad, 2011), the key factor for maintaining favorable affective behaviors

is to implement a curriculum involving proper materials, classroom settings, strategies, methods, and techniques (Dörnyei, 2005; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Kormos & Csizer, 2008; Moon, 2000; Şad, 2011; Wu, 2003). Indeed, Şad (2011) reported that pupils' highly positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language in general and toward foreign language lessons in particular mainly result from the pleasant and enjoyable nature of language learning, and pleasant and enjoyable activities in lessons. For example, videos, listening tasks, games, pair and group work, tasks involving creativity, and physical movement are listed among young learners' most liked activities (Nikolov, 2009). Elkılıç and Akça (2008) reported that playing language games, acting out stories, and reading illustrated stories most motivated young learners to learn English. Erdoğan (2005) found that young learners like learning English through listening and speaking, playing games, and singing and dramatizing. Liao (2004) concluded that 7- to 12-year-old Chinese students' motivation to learn English could be maintained by using varied, challenging, and interesting materials applied by enthusiastic teachers through interesting instructional methods in a lively classroom climate. Young language learners need a safe, entertaining, and educational environment that makes them feel competent and confident (Dörnyei, 2007; Schindler, 2006; Scott & Ytreberg, 2001). It is also vital to plan short, engaging activities to help children extend their personal identity through acquiring a foreign or second language (Enever, 2011).

Who Should Teach?

Well-trained teachers are a key factor in achieving excellence in foreign language education (Pufahl, Rhodes, & Christian, 2000). Today, foreign language teachers are expected to possess some general characteristics, including adequate proficiency in the target language; understanding of the target language's structure and its culture(s); knowledge of second language acquisition and learner development; and pedagogical skills (Ingold & Wang, 2010). As the language learning age becomes lower, however, some new principles have been introduced to distinguish the primary from the secondary foreign language classroom (Edelenbos et al., 2006). Since age does matter in language learning, primary language teaching is not regarded as teaching a language to students in general. Teaching young learners a foreign language requires knowing both primary education and foreign language pedagogy (Doyé & Hurrell, 1997; Rokita-Jaskow, 2008). Teachers need "a combination of FL expertise and age-appropriate teacherly skill ...

in addition to a broad educational base related to child development and the psychology of learning" (Enever, 2011, p. 25). Therefore, training specialist teachers to teach young learners foreign languages is difficult (Rokita-Jaskow, 2008).

The shortage of foreign language teachers in primary education has led to a number of ameliorative measures across Europe, including programs upgrading generalist teachers' qualifications and revising initial teacher education's content for prospective primary education teachers (Eurydice, 2012a). Today, assigning classroom teachers to foreign language instruction (i.e., generalist model) is the most common model in primary schools across Europe (Eurydice, 2012a). In Poland, generalist teachers may teach only the first three grades of primary school; to teach a foreign language, they must obtain additional qualifications (Eurydice, 2012a). Although Australia has shown increasing interest in employing specialist teachers in primary schools, commonly, generalist teachers are expected to deliver a diverse range of subject matter (Ardzejewska, McMaugh, & Coutts, 2010).

While generalist classroom teachers' most apparent advantage stems from their expertise and experience in primary pedagogy and from strong relationships with their students, experienced English language teachers benefit more from their linguistic expertise (Şevik, 2009). Generalist teachers are more knowledgeable about pupils' cognitive development, their attainment in a range of subjects, their personalities, and their patterns of behavior; difficulties they may encounter on the learning curve and how to work with those difficulties; the vicissitudes of school life and local conditions. Furthermore, Sharpe argues that pupils' relationships with their classroom teachers are better than with specialist teachers as outsiders (as cited in Şevik, 2009). However, specialists' superiority comes from their proficiency and the quality of their pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and range of language (Driscoll, 2005). From a motivational perspective, Rumley (2005) argued that classroom teachers with interest and enthusiasm for language learning are tailor-made role models for stimulating and engendering positive attitudes. In contrast, classroom teachers are already busy with an overloaded curriculum. Since teachers approaching all subjects with the same competence level is unlikely (Ardzejewska et al., 2010), finding qualified classroom teachers with adequate skills to teach a foreign language is difficult (Johnstone, 2008).

Although the generalist model is the most common across Europe, in Turkey (along with Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Slovakia), official recommendations posit that in primary education, foreign language is taught by subject specialists (i.e., teachers qualified to teach foreign language) (Eurydice, 2012a). However, training specialist foreign language teachers has always been a problem in Turkey. According to the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, in Turkey (along with Germany and the Netherlands), teaching is mainly hindered by lack of qualified teachers not only for core subjects like language instruction, mathematics, and science, but also for other school subjects (Eurydice, 2012b). As a matter of fact, specialist teachers may not meet curricular and theoretical requirements in terms of objectives, content, learning-teaching experiences, and evaluation for teaching young learners English (Şad, 2010a). The need for specialized foreign language teachers in Turkey, especially in the primary level at state schools, further increased because a new primary EFL program for young learners (4th and 5th grades) was launched in 1997–1998 (Demirezen, 2003; Kırkgöz, 2007). And now, the need for language teachers has increased even more because foreign language education starts even earlier, in 2nd grade at state schools.

So far, several temporary measures have helped meet the need, including provision of short-term certificate programs for graduates of British/American language and literature programs, translation and interpretation programs, or even graduates of universities whose medium of instruction is English (Aslan, 2008). Nevertheless, due to the resistive shortage of foreign language specialists, sometimes generalist teachers do teach foreign language in primary schools (Eurydice, 2012a; Genç & Kaya, 2011; Karcı & Akar Vural, 2011; Öztürk, 2006; Şad & Karaova, 2014, 2015; Şevik, 2009). The Turkish Ministry of National Education [MoNE] (2014) also stipulates in preschool and primary education regulation (Article 43/3) that in case the need for specialist English teachers cannot be met, generalist classroom teachers can substitute for specialists. In fact, Öztürk (2006) reported that 187 (71.9%) of 260 teachers who participated in a study on problems of elementary ELT implementation were classroom teachers, and only 37 (14.2%) were specialists. Likely then, classroom teachers will also teach primary foreign language in the foreseeable future. In Turkey, literature about prospective or in-service classroom teachers' competencies, views, attitudes,

or motivations for teaching young learners a foreign language is limited. Exceptionally, Genç and Kaya (2011) found that although prospective classroom teachers do not have negative attitudes toward English courses, they are not competent enough to teach English at the elementary level. Şevik (2007) found that a good number of classroom teacher-participants knew considerable English because they had graduated from high schools with condensed English programs. Şevik (2011) concluded in his case study on one primary unified-classroom that generalist primary school teachers can be integrated into English teaching with appropriate in-service training. Şad (2010b) reported that senior prospective classroom teachers perceived themselves less than moderately efficient to teach English, but significantly more willing to do so, and their willingness level was associated with their perceived efficacy and English proficiency. Thus, whether prospective classroom teachers feel themselves able and willing to teach young learners English, with regard to variables including perceived level of English proficiency, gender, and grade level, is worth investigating.

Purpose of the Study

In terms of perceived efficacy and willingness, this study aimed to understand prospective classroom teachers' potential to teach young learners English. More specifically, it aimed to describe and compare prospective classroom teachers' perceived efficacy and willingness levels to teach young learners English. Furthermore, relationships among perceived efficacy, willingness, and perceived level of English proficiency were tested through structural equation modeling. Finally, perceived efficacy and willingness scores were compared across variables of gender and grade level.

Method

Design

This study was structured on a baseline descriptive survey design, followed by complementary correlational and *ex post facto* (or causal-comparative) designs in accord with research purposes. These designs are generally used to determine the relevant population's specific characteristics and to determine possible causes for differences and associations between variables (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Thus, the present study aimed to understand prospective classroom teachers' perceived efficacy and willingness levels to teach young learners English

(baseline descriptive survey design), to investigate the relationship among perceived efficacy, willingness to teach young learners English and perceived level of English proficiency (correlational design), and finally to compare efficacy and willingness scores across gender and grade variables (*ex post facto*).

Research Group

Data were collected from students at the elementary education department of a medium-scale university in the southeastern part of Turkey, during the 2011–2012 academic year. Though it was tried to make the research instruments available to all students registered in the program from freshmen to seniors ($n = 713$), only 325 were completed and returned (about 46%). However, after defective and considerably uncompleted forms were discarded, only 251 were involved in the research. Table 1 presents participants' demographics.

Table 1
Demographics of Participating Prospective Classroom Teachers, 2011–2012

Variables		F	%
Gender	Female	123	49,0
	Male	128	51,0
	Total	251	100
Grade level	Freshmen	36	14,3
	Sophomores	81	32,3
	Juniors	51	20,3
	Seniors	83	33,1
	Total	251	100

As shown in table 1, 49% of participants were female, and 51% were male. As for level, 14.3% of participants were freshmen, 32.3% were sophomores, 20.3% were juniors, and 33.1% were seniors.

Instruments

Research data was collected with "The Perceived Efficacy and Willingness Scales for Teaching Young Learners English." Şad (2010b) originally developed these instruments to measure the senses of perceived efficacy and willingness to conduct 19 critical classroom activities for teaching young learners English (see Appendix A). These critical activities, ranging from playing English games to doing English role-plays and dramas, are advocated by much of the literature as favorable for primary EFL (see Brewster et al., 2004; Cameron, 2001; Dörnyei, 2005; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Elkılıç & Akça, 2008; Gordon, 2007; Kormos & Csizer, 2008;

Moon, 2000; Nikolov, 2009; Scott & Ytreberg, 2001; Şad, 2011; Wu, 2003). The first scale asks prospective classroom teachers to what extent they perceive themselves effective in teaching young learners English (responses ranging from 5-Highly effective to 1-Highly ineffective), and the second scale queries their level of willingness to learn and do so (responses ranging 5-Highly willing to 1-Highly unwilling).

With exploratory factor analysis using the principal components method, Şad (2010b) tested the two scales' construct validity separately. Both *perceived efficacy* and *willingness* scales had single-factor structures with variance extraction rates of 76.57 and 74.08, respectively. Factor loadings for the *perceived efficacy* scale ranged from .936 to .714, while factor loadings for the *willingness* scale ranged from .921 to .779. The original scale development study yielded Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients of .983 for the *perceived efficacy* scale and .980 for the *willingness* scale. Item-total correlations of 19 items ranged from .925 to .821 for the *perceived efficacy* scale and from .910 to .755 for the *willingness* scale. Repeated Cronbach's alpha internal consistency analysis on the data set ($n = 251$) obtained in the present study yielded coefficients of .974 for the *perceived efficacy* scale and .977 for the *willingness* scale.

The measurement model's construct validity was further tested through confirmatory factor analysis using the data obtained from 251 students participating in the present study. The single-structure model of the *perceived efficacy* scale yielded standardized factor loadings ranging from .67 to .86, with significant t values at .05. Average variance extracted was calculated at .66, which indicates convergent validity (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006), explaining about 66% of the amount of variance in the measured construct. Moreover, composite reliability was estimated at .95, again indicating adequate convergence or internal consistency (Hair et al., 2006). Other model fit indices were also estimated after error covariances were added between the 13th–15th and 18th–19th variables based on modification suggestions, which yielded acceptable results: $X^2/df = 95.29/42 = 2.26$, $p = .000$, $RMSEA = .071$, $RMR = .071$, $GFI = .94$, $AGFI = .90$, $NFI = .96$, $CFI = .98$, $IFI = .98$. The mean score and standard deviation for the dataset were 48.19 and 21.99, respectively.

The single-structure model of the *willingness* scale yielded standardized factor loadings ranging from

.68 to .88 with significant t values at the .05 level. Average variance extracted was calculated at .68, indicating convergent validity (Hair et al., 2006) and explaining about 68% of the amount of variance in the measured construct. Moreover, composite reliability was estimated at .95, again indicating adequate convergence or internal consistency (Hair et al., 2006). Other model fit indices were also estimated after error covariance was added to the 9th and 10th observed variables based on modification suggestions, which yielded acceptable results: $X^2/df = 153.06/64 = 2.39$, $p = .000$, $RMSEA = .075$, $RMR = .048$, $GFI = .91$, $AGFI = .88$, $NFI = .95$, $CFI = .97$, $IFI = .97$. The mean score and standard deviation for the dataset were 67.03 and 21.59, respectively.

As mentioned previously, items were prepared as Likert type, with five points ranging from *highly effective* (5 points) to *highly ineffective* (1 point) for the *perceived efficacy scale*, while they ranged from *highly willing* (5 points) to *highly unwilling* (1 point) for the *willingness scale*. The minimum and maximum scores on both scales are 19 and 95, respectively. Higher scores on the first scale indicate higher perceived efficacy in performing critical classroom activities for teaching young learners English, while higher scores from the willingness scale indicate higher levels of willingness to learn and perform critical classroom activities for teaching young learners English in the future.

The perceived level of English proficiency (PEP) was measured using a three-point (i.e., poor, average, and good) Likert-type item. Although this variable is not continuous in nature, it has been considered to have equal intervals and was coded from 1 to 3 for path analysis as a predictor of Perceived Efficacy and Willingness to teach young learners English. The mean score and standard deviation for the dataset were 1.77 and 0.77, respectively.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviations), paired and independent samples t tests, and one-way ANOVA (or Brown-Forsythe when homogeneity of variances was not assumed), Post Hoc test of Bonferroni (or Dunnett's C when homogeneity of variances was not assumed) via SPSS software. In particular, correlational analyses were conducted based on structural equation modeling (SEM) through path analysis using AMOS software. SEM is "a comprehensive statistical approach used in testing hypotheses about 'casual' relationships

among measured and latent variables" (Sümer, 2000, p. 49). In inferential analysis, the significance level was set at $p < .05$. Before the SEM analysis three variables were controlled for univariate and multivariate normality. For univariate normality, skewness (asymmetry) and kurtosis values must range between ± 2 (Bayram, 2010, p. 109). The skewness and kurtosis values for all three data sets were calculated between these thresholds: *perceived efficacy* (skewness = -0.055 and kurtosis = -1.066); *willingness* (skewness = -0.795 and kurtosis = -0.06), and *perceived English proficiency* (skewness = 0.414 and kurtosis = -1.202). Moreover, the critical ratio for kurtosis for multivariate normality was estimated 1.734, which must be under 1.96 for multivariate normality (Bayram, 2010, p. 109). Based on univariate and multivariate normality assumption the analysis was done using maximum likelihood estimation method.

Lastly, total scores from perceived efficacy and willingness scales were interpreted using the following equal intervals:

19.00–34.20 = Highly Ineffective/ Highly Unwilling

34.21–49.40 = Ineffective/ Unwilling

49.41–64.60 = Moderately Effective/ Moderately Willing

64.61–79.80 = Effective/ Willing

79.81–95.00 = Highly Effective/ Highly Willing

Results

Prospective Classroom Teachers' Levels of Perceived Efficacy and Willingness to Teach Young Learners English

The baseline descriptive analysis revealed that although participating prospective classroom teachers perceived themselves as *ineffective* ($\bar{X} = 48.19$; $s = 21.99$), they were *willing* ($\bar{X} = 67.03$; $s = 21.59$) to teach young learners English (see table 2). More specifically, participants perceived themselves as relatively most effective in terms of "*Furnishing the classroom walls with visuals like English posters, pictures, boards, etc.*" (Item 9) and "*Promoting positive attitudes in children towards different cultures*" (Item 15) and as relatively least effective in terms of *Using English games in class* (Item 1); *Conducting English dialogs, role-plays, and drama activities* (Item 6); *Teaching learners English poems and tongue twisters* (Item 2); and *having learners do handcraft activities (origami, collage, painting, cutting-pasting, ornamenting, etc.) using English* (Item 5).

Participants' scores for willingness to perform any of the individual critical classroom activities were higher than their perceived efficacy scores obtained from any of the items. They were relatively most willing to learn how to *promote positive attitudes in children towards learning foreign languages* (Item 14) and to conduct *English activities that would release anxiety and discomfort among learners* (Item 16). In contrast, participants were found relatively least willing to *conduct English dialogs, role-plays, and drama activities* (Item 6), *have children prepare English portfolios* (Item 12), and *have learners do handcraft activities (origami, collage, painting, cutting-pasting, ornamenting, etc.) using English* (Item 5).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Efficacy and Willingness Scores for the Participating Prospective Classroom Teachers

Perceived Efficacy (PE)	\bar{X}	Std. Deviation	Willingness (W)	\bar{X}	Std. Deviation
PE9	2.94	1.50	W14	3.77	1.32
PE15	2.92	1.45	W16	3.76	1.30
PE14	2.82	1.44	W13	3.69	1.33
PE7	2.80	1.42	W15	3.68	1.35
PE3	2.80	1.48	W9	3.64	1.28
PE13	2.75	1.49	W17	3.62	1.39
PE16	2.71	1.43	W3	3.61	1.34
PE18	2.70	1.46	W19	3.57	1.36
PE11	2.60	1.42	W18	3.54	1.34
PE10	2.54	1.41	W7	3.53	1.33
PE8	2.47	1.41	W10	3.50	1.38
PE19	2.41	1.40	W1	3.49	1.35
PE17	2.39	1.40	W11	3.49	1.36
PE4	2.38	1.39	W4	3.45	1.37
PE12	2.29	1.36	W8	3.43	1.29
PE5	2.20	1.29	W2	3.40	1.41
PE2	2.20	1.28	W5	3.29	1.36
PE1	2.18	1.31	W12	3.29	1.40
PE6	2.10	1.28	W6	3.29	1.37
Total	48.19	21.99	Total	67.03	21.59

Comparison of Efficacy and Willingness Scores

The paired samples *t*-test comparing students' perceived efficacy and willingness scores for teaching young learners English revealed a statistically significant difference in favor of willingness scores, $t(250) = 12.549, p < .05, d = .87$, indicating strong effect size (see table 3). On average, students felt *willing* to teach young learners English ($\bar{X} = 67.04, S_e = 1.38$), but they perceived themselves as *ineffective* at doing so ($\bar{X} = 48.19, S_e = 1.36$).

Table 3
Result of Paired Samples *t* test Comparing the Perceived Efficacy and Willingness Scores of the Participating Prospective Classroom Teachers

	\bar{X}	N	s	df	t	p	Cohen's d
Perceived Efficacy	48.19	251	21.98	250	12.549	.000	.87
Willingness	67.04	251	21.58				

Relationship among Perceived Efficacy, Willingness, and Perceived English Proficiency: Path Analysis

For testing relationships between perceived efficacy (PE) and willingness (WILL) to teach young learners English and perceived level of English proficiency (PEP), a hypothetical research model was developed, in which PEP was assumed to affect WILL both directly and indirectly via the mediation of PE, and PE was assumed to predict WILL. In a previous study conducted with senior prospective classroom teachers, Şad (2010b) found that the level of willingness to teach young learners English was associated with their perceived efficacy and sense of proficiency in English. The proposed research model is given below.

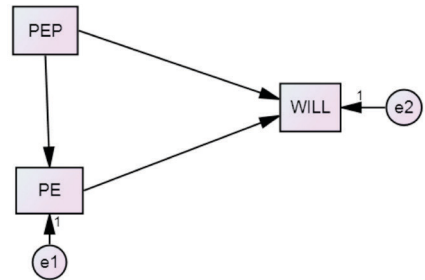


Figure 1: Research model with proposed paths among variables

An initial path analysis was conducted through the maximum likelihood estimation method to test whether the research model fitted the data well. This initial model identifying all suggested paths among all three variables yielded an untestable model with fit indices of $X^2 = .000$ and $df = 0$. After regression weights for the initial model were analyzed (see table 4), only regression weights for paths between Perceived English Proficiency (PEP) and Perceived Efficacy (PE) and between Perceived Efficacy (PE) and Willingness (WILL) were significant ($p < .05$). However, the path from PEP to WILL was not significant ($p > .05$). Thus, this insignificant path was deleted from the model, and the model was re-tested.

The test of alternative structural model (figure 2) after deleting the insignificant path from PEP to WILL provided a good model fit ($X^2/df = 1.125/1 = 1.125, p = .289, RMSEA = .022, GFI = .99, AGFI$

= .98, NFI = .99, CFI = .99, IFI = .99, NNFI/TLI = .99, AIC = 11.125 (< Saturated model = 12, and < Independence model = 216.145), ECVI = .044 (Saturated model = .048 and < Independence model = .867) and CAIC = 33.752 (< Saturated model = 39.153 and < Independence model = 229.721).

Table 4
Regression Weights for the Initial Model for Path Analysis of Relationships among Perceived English Proficiency, Perceived Efficacy, and Willingness

Paths	B	β	S.E.	C.R.	p
PE <--- PEP	19.873	.694	1.303	15.254	.000*
WILL <--- PE	.339	.345	.079	4.299	.000*
WILL <--- PEP	2.393	.085	2.254	1.062	.288

* p < .05.

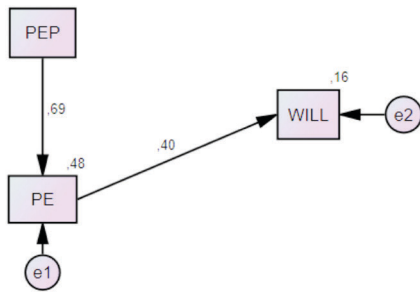


Figure 2: Final structural equation model with standardized regression weights and squared correlations

Regression weights for the final model also proved significant (see table 5). According to the final model, Perceived English Proficiency (PEP) has a direct, positive effect on Perceived Efficacy (PE), with an R² of .48, indicating that PEP explains 48% of the variance in PE. Perceived English Proficiency (PEP) also has an indirect, positive effect on Willingness (WILL) through the full mediation effect of PE. Furthermore, Perceived Efficacy (PE) directly and positively predicts Willingness (WILL) with an R² of .16. This means Perceived Efficacy (PE) accounts for 16% of the variance in Willingness (WILL).

Table 5
Regression Weights for the Final Model

Paths	B	β	S.E.	C.R.	p	R ²
PE <--- PEP	19.873	.694	1.303	15.254	.000*	0.48
WILL <--- PE	.397	.404	.057	6.983	.000*	0.16

* p < .05.

Table 6
Results of Independent Samples t-test Comparing Perceived Efficacy and Willingness Scores by Gender

	Gender	N	X	S	df	t	p	Cohen's d
Perceived Efficacy	Female	123	52.33	23.11	241.518	2.962	.003	.38
	Male	128	44.21	20.15				
Willingness	Female	123	71.38	19.92	249	3.179	.002	.40
	Male	128	62.86	22.37				

Comparison of Efficacy and Willingness Scores by Gender

Results of independent samples t-test (see table 6) revealed a statistically significant difference between the perceived efficacy scores of male and female prospective elementary teachers for teaching young learners English, $t(241.518) = 2.962, p < .05, d = .38$, indicating small effect size. Mean scores (see Figure 3) suggested that female students perceived themselves *moderately effective* for teaching young learners English ($\bar{X} = 52.33; S_e = 2.08$); this is significantly higher than male students who perceived themselves *ineffective* ($\bar{X} = 44.21; S_e = 1.78$).

Likewise, a statistically significant difference was found between willingness scores of male and female prospective elementary teachers for teaching young learners English, $t(249) = 3.179, p < .05, d = .40$, indicating small effect size. Mean scores (see Figure 3) suggested that female students were *willing* to teach young learners English ($\bar{X} = 71.38; S_e = 1.79$); this was significantly higher than male students who were just *moderately willing* ($\bar{X} = 62.86; S_e = 1.97$).

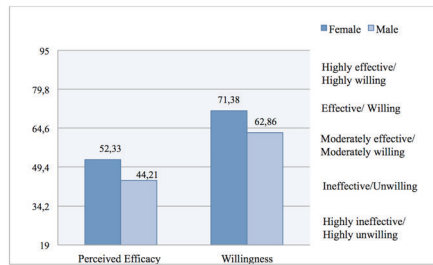


Figure 3: Perceived efficacy and willingness scores across genders

Comparison of Efficacy and Willingness Scores by Grade Level

Results of one-way ANOVA (see table 7) revealed a statistically significant difference between prospective elementary teachers' perceived efficacy scores across different grades for teaching young learners English, $F(3; 247) = 6.126, p < .05, \eta^2 = .065$, indicating moderate effect size. The Post Hoc Bonferroni and Dunnett's C tests indicated that (see Figure 4) freshmen perceived themselves

Table 7
Results of one-way ANOVA comparing the perceived efficacy and willingness scores by grade level

Scales	Grade	N	\bar{X}	S	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Post Hoc tests (Bonferroni/Dunnnett's C)	η^2	
Perceived Efficacy	Freshmen	36	57.78	17.27	Between Groups	7879.09	3	2626.36	6.126	.001	1 st > 4 th	.065
	Sophomores	81	49.42	21.15	Within Groups	112968.67	247	457.36				
	Juniors	51	50.89	21.69	Total	120847.75	250					
	Seniors	83	41.18	22.96								
	Total	251	48.19	21.99								
Willingness	Freshmen	36	71.57	17.87	Between Groups	1020.77	3	340.26	.728	.536		.008
	Sophomores	81	67.25	22.65	Within Groups	115464.80	247	467.47				
	Juniors	51	65.05	23.39	Total	116485.58	250					
	Seniors	83	66.08	20.92								
	Total	251	67.03	21.59								

moderately effective at teaching young learners English ($\bar{X} = 57.78$; $S_e = 2.88$); this was significantly higher than seniors, who perceived themselves ineffective at doing so ($\bar{X} = 41.18$; $S_e = 2.52$).

However, years of study among prospective teachers made no statistically significant difference in willingness to teach young learners English, $F(3; 247) = .728$; $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .008$, indicating trivial effect size. Mean scores (see Figure 4) suggested that students from freshmen to seniors were similarly willing to teach young learners English.

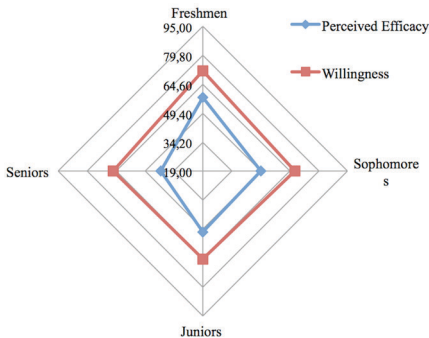


Figure 4: Perceived efficacy and willingness scores across grades

Discussion

As a result of the shortage of specialist teachers and of teacher employment policies (Şevik, 2009), classroom teachers are likely to be officially expected to teach foreign languages in Turkey, as in most European countries. Today, in fact, English is introduced in the 2nd grade in state schools, two years earlier than the previous policy. Thus, the need for the present

study was directly associated with the question of whether prospective classroom teachers feel efficient and are willing to teach young learners English in the future because, actually, they seem the best substitutes for specialist English teachers. As a matter of fact, classroom teachers are experienced in primary pedagogy, have strong relationships with their students (Şevik, 2009), and are more knowledgeable about pupils' cognitive, academic, personal, and behavioral characteristics (Driscoll, 2005).

These research findings have both good and bad implications. That prospective classroom teachers, particularly females, are willing to learn and perform primary EFL is promising. Despite their willingness, however, prospective teachers, particularly males, perceived themselves ineffective at performing critical classroom activities for teaching young learners English. Furthermore, their perceived efficacy scores were significantly lower than their willingness scores, both in statistical and practical terms. Freshmen felt moderately more effective than seniors about teaching young learners English. As discussed below, this may be because during freshman year, students have 3-hour English lessons in their curriculum. Thus, one recommendation is that prospective classroom teachers should continue to learn English in either selective or obligatory courses during successive years.

Findings on relationships among perceived efficacy (PE), willingness (WILL), and perceived level of English proficiency (PEP) suggested that PEP is directly responsible for about half of the variance in PE ($R^2 = .48$). PEP also indirectly and positively affected WILL through the full mediation effect of PE. Finally, PE directly and positively predicted WILL, with an R^2 of .16. Thus, prospective

classroom teachers' level of target language proficiency (based on self-report in this study) does seem to matter in their perceived efficacy and, in turn, their willingness to teach young learners English. These results almost repeated findings of previous research by Şad (2010b), conducted in the same context with a limited sample of 88 senior elementary education students. Previous research has also suggested that lack of subject knowledge (either the pedagogy of how to teach or command of target language) is a major burden on classroom teachers for teaching a foreign language in primary education. Karcı and Akar Vural (2011), for example, found that classroom teachers had difficulty teaching young learners English in multi-graded classrooms, especially because they did not specialize in teaching a foreign language. Similarly, Legg (2013) found that subject knowledge is a concern among classroom teachers and suggested that lack of confidence is an important factor in classroom teachers' reluctance to teach modern foreign languages. McLachlan (2009) reported that not all teachers are willing to deliver modern languages at the primary level and that equipping, especially, beginning teachers with baseline subject knowledge is a major concern. In a qualitative case study, Şad and Karaova (2015) found the participating classroom teacher, who also teaches his 2nd graders English, cannot provide them with adequate level of comprehensible input and has poor knowledge and competences about how to teach young learners English. More specifically, Barton, Bragg, and Serratrice (2009) stated that participating classroom teachers are somewhat apprehensive about teaching a language of which they know little or nothing. These researchers also reported that teachers may have special difficulty providing an accurate pronunciation model. Admittedly, proficiency in the target language is critical, especially pronunciation: This is based on Piaget's research on child language development, i.e., that early years are ideal for learners of a new language if they are expected to attain fluency and natural pronunciation (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Thus, a classroom teacher with poor pronunciation may prove counterproductive. Feeling comfortable using the target language is important, and fluent classroom teachers can more confidently act as a language model and informant (Rixon, 2005). However, some simple games and activities for primary language teaching "lead naturally to opportunities for sustained use of the language even for the least confident teacher because they rely on simple repetition, often with only minimal

variation" (Rumley, 2005, p. 116). Still unconfident teachers may prefer to act more as orchestrators of learning, using more audiovisuals to present pupils authentic native speaker models (Rixon, 2005).

Besides lack of confidence or competence, there are other obstacles that future classroom teachers may face. As in Legg (2013), teachers can be concerned about curriculum overload. Many teachers believe that the primary curriculum is already overcrowded, and teaching English involves many new initiatives within limited time (McLachlan, 2009). More critically, investment in training, supporting, and equipping teachers with basic subject knowledge, that is, how to teach a foreign language to young learners, is an important concern (Legg, 2013; McLachlan, 2009). Although using generalist classroom teachers to teach a foreign language is the most common model in primary education across Europe (Eurydice, 2012a, p. 85), this is not accomplished without programs to upgrade generalist teachers' qualifications or without revision of initial teacher education content for prospective primary teachers (Eurydice, 2012a, p. 85). In Turkey, similar actions can be taken to make it possible for voluntary future classroom teachers to teach a foreign language. A second recommendation is for prospective classroom teachers to attend certain courses in English language teaching departments by doing a minor or a double major. One course directly related to teaching a foreign language in primary schools is Teaching English to Young Learners I-II, a three-credit course with two practical and two theoretical lesson hours, offered during the fifth and sixth semesters in the English Language Teaching Department (Board of Higher Education, 2007). Those prospective classroom teachers who attain a certain level of English proficiency can be specially encouraged to take this course.

Conclusion

This study's results suggest that although participating prospective classroom teachers feel themselves ineffective at teaching young learners English, they are willing to learn and teach EFL in the future. Their level of willingness seems associated with their sense of efficacy, which in turn seems related to their perceived level of English proficiency. As discussed previously, teaching a foreign language at the primary level requires both primary school pedagogy and language teaching pedagogy (Rokita-Jaskow, 2008). Thus, specialists' superiority comes mainly from their proficiency, the quality of their pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and range of language use as the major resource (Driscoll, 2005), but generalist

classroom teachers have the main advantage of knowing primary school pedagogy. Considering the shortage of specialist primary language teachers, the best substitute seems to be generalist classroom teachers trained to teach a foreign language. Indeed, this is the most common model in primary

education across Europe (Eurydice, 2012a). Thus, it can be effective to revise the prospective classroom teacher training curriculum to include a fair amount of English proficiency, especially pronunciation, and also to include methods and strategies for teaching English to young learners.

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Appendix A

Critical Classroom Activities for Teaching Young Learners English

1. Using English games in class.
2. Teaching learners English poems and tongue twisters.
3. Giving English commands that learners would respond to with whole-body actions (total physical response)
4. Teaching children English songs for kids
5. Having learners do handcraft activities (origami, collage, painting, cutting-pasting, ornamenting etc.) using English.
6. Conducting English dialogs, role-plays, and drama activities.
7. Conducting English listening-watching activities through cassette player, TV, video, or computers.
8. Reading and questioning from English stories using picture cards, flashcards etc.
9. Furnishing the classroom walls with visuals like English posters, pictures, boards etc.
10. Using jests and mimes to speak more comprehensibly.
11. Preparing illustrated English worksheets for the children.
12. Having children prepare English portfolios.
13. Preparing enjoyable activities for kids in English lessons.
14. Promoting positive attitudes in children towards learning foreign languages
15. Promoting positive attitudes in children towards different cultures.
16. Doing English activities that would release anxiety and discomfort among learners.
17. Being a good model in terms of pronunciation.
18. Using routine classroom language in English.
19. Helping children benefit from other curriculum areas such as maths, science, art etc.