Status of English speaking skills in Turkish ELT departments: A nationwide survey

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Abstract

The situation of spoken English in both formal and informal settings in Turkey seems to be far from satisfactory. Additionally, the legal arrangements devoted to ameliorate this predicament have proven unsuccessful as far as an acceptable level of competence is concerned. The present study aimed to investigate the situation of English speaking skills at the English Language Teaching (ELT) departments in Turkey, in attempts to attain a descriptive outline for the problems, perceptions, needs, and solutions proposed by lecturers and pre-service teachers. To achieve this, a questionnaire and semi-structured interview were administered to the lecturers and pre-service teachers at seven ELT departments across Turkey, with one department from each of the seven geographical regions. The results indicated that although they had been studying English for more than 6 years, a great majority of the participants could not speak English as proficiently as they were supposed to do. It was also revealed that the participants had difficulty achieving fluency and maintaining confidence when speaking English mainly because they had no appropriate contexts that would allow them to master English speaking skills. On the other hand, an extensive policy change in foreign language education was the most commonly proposed solution.

Keywords: English; speaking skill; Turkey; ELT

1. Introduction

Proficiency in speaking a foreign language is an important prerequisite for numerous processes, such as advancing in an academic career, facilitating personal development, gaining professional promotion, attaining prestige and so on (Richards, 2008, p. 19). More importantly, proficiency in speaking English, the language learned as the most common second language in the world (Brown, 2001; Cook, 2003; Crystal, 2003), provides numerous opportunities for its speakers, thus widening their horizon in every phase of the modern world. Accordingly, speakers of English, regardless of their nativeness, are granted with a global power to disseminate their feelings and thereby

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 http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911454

materialize their innate need of communication by using English within social discourses—something that would be otherwise challenging particularly for the native speakers of other languages (Wierzbicka, 2006). Additionally, mastery in communicating in English is likely to have positive contributions to a country's economic development by significantly augmenting its capacity (Phillipson, 2012; TEPAV, 2013). This, in turn, renders English as a potent instrument by which its speakers—along with their nations—can go beyond communication and get involved in multifaceted transactions to attain cross-border achievements in their professional activities.

1.1. Status of Spoken English in Turkey

In Turkey, English became the most common second language in the 1950s, mostly due to the increasing impact of the economic and military power exerted by the USA. Eventually, English became more prevalent and crucially essential beginning from the 1980s owing to Turkey's growing need for establishing international affairs to keep up with the globalisation processes as well as technological advancements in the world. Nevertheless, rather than becoming a second language (i.e. English as a second language [ESL]), English has since remained as a foreign language (i.e. English as a foreign language [EFL]), in the sense that it has never been adopted as an official language or the primary medium of instruction at a national scale (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998; Acar, 2004).

As for the importance of English—particularly spoken English—in the teaching and learning contexts, English has become a major medium of instruction at tertiary level in Turkey, particularly in private universities, and has gradually become prominent in line with the policy changes aligned with the globalization efforts of Turkey (Alptekin and Tatar, 2011; Arık and Arık, 2018; Köksal and Ulum, 2020). In the remaining Turkish-medium universities and tertiary programs, English is delivered as a required course or as a one-year preparatory class program. In lower levels (i.e. primary and secondary education), however, English instruction is commenced in early primary school grades and is decisively continued through the end of the secondary education (i.e. high school), and in a similar way to tertiary education, English is designated as the medium of instruction particularly in private schools both in primary and secondary levels (Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe, 2005). However, the specific emphasis placed on spoken English within the primary and secondary education systems in Turkey (i.e. K-12) embraces both short- and long-term goals. The immediate goals are to raise learners' awareness and motivation towards learning English and also to help them develop positive attitudes towards English while long-term goals are to help learners to develop appropriate strategies for achieving effective speaking in English (Kırkgöz, 2007).

1.2. Competence in spoken English in Turkey

Proficiency in spoken English, despite the nationwide popularity of this language among Turkish nationals, has been reported to be far from satisfactory by an extensive body of literature (see TEPAV, 2013; Solak and Bayar, 2015; Kara, Demir-Ayaz, and

Dündar, 2017). In all these studies, it has been emphasised that the governmental attempts aimed to improve the competence of Turkish learners in spoken English have provided unsuccessful outcomes, as far as an appropriate level of competence is concerned. This low accomplishment, according to some scholars (e.g. Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe, 2005; Kırkgöz, 2007; Zok, 2010), is believed to result from the confinement of the learning of English to formal education settings rather than to the social environments where English is naturally acquired, i.e. in ESL context. What is also noted in these studies is that English is provided as a required course in most educational levels in Turkey, hence rendered as a course to be achieved to meet the graduation criteria rather than a target language to be learned (Demir-Ayaz, Özkardaş, and Özturan, 2019). As a corollary, the Turkish education system fails to encourage learners to improve their English speaking skills due to several factors such as insufficient public funding and lack of quality textbooks to be used in English courses (Koru and Akesson, 2011). This failure, in turn, decreases students' progress in English speaking skills over the short term and depletes their self-confidence and willingness to participate in discussions or lengthy conversations in the long term (TEPAV, 2015). In the same vein, the learning of English speaking skills in Turkish English Language Teaching (ELT) departments has also been shown to be defective as far as the curricular targets of ELT education are concerned (Kırkgöz, 2009; Akdoğan, 2010).

Additionally, this nationwide problem has been addressed in some previous studies as well. TEPAV (2013), for instance, administered a nationwide survey to examine the status quo of the teaching and learning of English within the K-12 grades in Turkey, in attempts to elicit an insight into the competence of the students in spoken English and their attitudes towards English speaking skills. The study surveyed a total of 19,380 students at grades 5-12 from 13 cities and a total of 1,394 parents from 12 cities across Turkey. The survey did not only probe participants' attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English but also their socioeconomic status and students' perceived competence levels in English. The study concluded that the situation is far worse than what is actually being perceived as rather optimistic and that there is an urgent need for radical amendments in foreign language teaching policies. Some other studies elicited similar outcomes though they examined the subject matter at a single institution and/or region (e.g. Kondal, 2009; Gökdemir, 2010; Yal, 2011). Kondal (2009) sought to find out why foreign language speaking skills are less developed when compared to other skills and proposed that this phenomenon could be attributed to several factors including the use of inappropriate coursebooks, lack of emphasis on communication, incapacity of the teachers in motivating the students by creating an inviting classroom environment, and lack of positive feedback. Additionally, Yal (2011) argued that despite the huge number of hours and classes and the large investments dedicated to English within the scope of the Turkish education system, proficiency in spoken English remains a serious challenge for Turkish nationals, particularly among the professionals recruited in academic and technology-related sectors. Another study by Gökdemir (2010) evaluated the preparatory class education provided in Turkish universities and contended that the curriculum implemented in these classes was

heavily dependent on theory (e.g. grammatical knowledge) and thus ignored practical or oral development of the students and that the education process was overwhelmingly teacher-centred and thus the students had little or no chance of performing speaking throughout the lessons. On the other hand, drawing upon the low achievement of Turkey on EF EPI, Demirpolat (2015) contended that there are several problems to consider regarding the teaching of English speaking skills in Turkey including inadequate training provided to pre-service English teachers, unbalanced employment of English teachers, physical and technical inadequacies related to the teaching/learning environment, use of non-authentic class materials such as textbooks, and lack of in-service training for English teachers. As made clear by all these studies, speaking English, in a general sense, is a prevailing problem in Turkey that is closely associated with the drawbacks induced by the foreign language education policy embedded in the wider education system implemented in Turkey.

In a related manner, the learning of English speaking skills in Turkish English Language Teaching (ELT) departments has also been shown to be imperfect as far as the curricular targets of ELT education are considered. Nergis (2011) proposed that the ELT departments in Turkey "do not seem to depend on a well-thought and well-formed philosophical basis" both at pre-service and in-service levels (p. 184). In a similar vein, another study focused on the causes of speaking problems among the students at a single ELT department and contended that the causes of speaking problems are associated with insufficient language proficiency, content knowledge, and materials and methods used for teaching English (Güney, 2010). Some other studies (Kırkgöz, 2009; Akdoğan, 2010) also surveyed both students and teachers at ELT departments and indicated that both students and teachers believed that ELT training had major drawbacks that needed to be ameliorated through scientific measures. Furthermore, Arslan (2013) evaluated the learning and teaching of English speaking skills at various ELT departments and concluded that speaking English remains a challenging activity for pre-service teachers and that the participants feel incompetent in speaking English although they have different motivational orientations to improve their competence. This finding is consistent with the findings of Savaşçı (2014), who investigated the reasons as to why the students are reluctant to use L2 in ELT speaking classes and elicited several factors that were found to hinder the communicative competence of the students, including anxiety, fear of being despised, teacher strategy, and culture. Based on the findings of the previous studies exemplified thus far, the present study aimed to shed light on the underlying causes of these problems by eliciting the perceptions of ELT lecturers and pre-service teachers in seven state universities in Turkey and their suggested solutions, in attempts to provide a nationwide portrayal for the problems in question.

1.3. Purpose and research questions

In accordance with the notions above, the present study was designed to investigate the perceptions of pre-service teachers and lecturers studying/working at Turkish ELT departments on the learning/teaching processes of English speaking skills at these departments, in attempts to provide an exhaustive account of the problems,

perceptions, needs, and participants' solutions regarding English speaking skills. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding;
   a) English speaking skills?
   b) the problems they encounter (if any) when speaking English?
   c) their suggested solutions to the problems?

2. What are the perceptions of lecturers regarding;
   a) English speaking skills?
   b) the problems they encounter (if any) when speaking English?
   c) their suggested solutions to the problems?

2. Method

2.1. Research design and participants

The present study was designed as a mixed-methods study, in which quantitative data were collected via a questionnaire and qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interview developed by the researchers. Immediately after the questionnaire sessions, the interviews were conducted with volunteering participants. Table 1 presents the data collection tools used in the study and their linkage with research questions as well as the total numbers of participants for each tool:

Table 1. Data collection instruments and their linkage to research questions

Procedures & Instruments	Research questions addressed	Number of participants
Questionnaire	1 (a & b)	361 pre-service teachers
	2 (a & b)	34 lecturers
Semi-structured interview	1 (a, b, & c)	48 pre-service teachers
	2 (a, b, & c)	38 lecturers

Criterion sampling was used for both the research site (i.e. layer 1) and the participants (i.e. layer 2), respectively (Bryman, 2012). Sampling of the ELT departments was based on a key criterion: 'selecting the most well-established ELT department in each of the seven geographical regions in Turkey'. To fulfil this criterion, the most well-established ELT department in each of the seven geographical regions in Turkey was determined on the basis of minimum university entrance exam (i.e. ÖSYS) scores of the students enrolled in the ELT departments in the preceding year. Of the 42 ELT departments denoted by the guideline, seven ELT departments with the highest minimum scores were sampled, with one department sampled for each of the seven geographical regions in Turkey. Table 2 presents the universities to which the sampled ELT departments were affiliated and their corresponding geographical regions:

Table 2. Universities of the ELT departments sampled

University	Geographical region
Boğaziçi University	Marmara
Dokuz Eylül University	Aegean
Çukurova University	Mediterranean
Ondokuz Mayıs University	Black Sea Region
Middle East Technical University	Central Anatolia
Ataturk University	Eastern Anatolia
Gaziantep University	South-eastern Anatolia

Similarly, the participants were also selected via criterion sampling, whereby the criterion was 'selecting the lecturers and the final-year ELT students (i.e. pre-service teachers) in the universities sampled'. Accordingly, all the lecturers and pre-service teachers in all seven ELT departments constituted the universe of the study. Of these, the lecturers and pre-service teachers that volunteered to participate in the questionnaire and/or interview sessions were included in the study.

2.2. Data collection

The questionnaire used in the study was adapted from a nationwide survey that was constructed and administered in Finland in 2007, titled "National Survey on the English Language in Finland: Uses, Meanings and Attitudes (2011)" (Leppänen et al., 2010). The survey originally consisted of 50 items, which were respectively reduced to 27 and 24 items for the lecturers' and pre-service teachers' versions following piloting. Table 3 presents the characteristics of the participants that undertook the questionnaire:

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of questionnaire participants

Variable	Category	Title	N	%
	Ataturk	Lecturer PT	8 18	23.5 5.0
	Boğaziçi	Lecturer PT	3 56	8.8 15.5
	Çukurova	Lecturer PT	5 59	14.7 16.3
University	Dokuz Eylül	Lecturer PT	5 79	14.7 21.9
	Gaziantep	Lecturer PT	4 34	11.8 9.4
	METU	Lecturer PT	7 50	20.6 13.9
	Ondokuz Mayıs	Lecturer PT	2 65	5.9 18.0
Gender	Male	Lecturer PT	12 81	35.3 22.4

	Female	Lecturer PT	22 280	64.7 77.6
Age	20-30	Lecturer PT	8 354	23.5 98.6
	31–40	Lecturer PT	13 4	38.2 1.1
	41 or older	Lecturer PT	13 1	38.2 0.3

Notes. PT = Pre-service teacher; Total number of lecturers = 34; Total number of pre-service teachers = 361

The semi-structured interview was administered on a voluntary basis to the participants who completed the questionnaire. The primary aim in adding the interview to the study was to gain a deeper insight into the participants' quantitative responses that were elicited via the questionnaire. The interview forms for lecturers and pre-service teachers involved a total of 5 and 4 questions in both Turkish and English versions, respectively. The interviews were conducted either in Turkish or English language, as per the request of each interviewee. Of the 395 participants who completed the questionnaire, a total of 86 participants volunteered to undertake semi-structured interview. Table 4 presents the characteristics of the participants that undertook the interview:

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of interview participants

Variable	Category	Title	N	%
University	Ataturk	Lecturer PT	6 4	15.8 8.3
	Boğaziçi	Lecturer PT	5 9	13.2 18.8
	Çukurova	Lecturer PT	7 10	18.4 20.8
	Dokuz Eylül	Lecturer PT	4 7	10.5 14.6
	Gaziantep	Lecturer PT	5 5	13.2 10.4
	METU	Lecturer PT	7 5	18.4 10.4
	Ondokuz Mayıs	Lecturer PT	4 8	10.5 16.7
Gender	Male	Lecturer PT	11 6	28.9 12.5
	Female	Lecturer PT	27 42	71.1 87.5

Notes. PT = Pre-service teacher; Total number of lecturers = 38; Total number of pre-service teachers = 48

As seen in Table 4, the total number of pre-service teachers participating in the interview (n=48) was higher than that of lecturers (n=38), as opposed to the questionnaire participants (Table 4). Additionally, the participants had a female preponderance (69 *vs.* 17). On the other hand, Çukurova University had the highest participation rate (19.8%) when compared to other universities.

2.3. Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS version 19.0 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.). Descriptive statistics were elicited using SPSS modules including *Frequencies*, *Descriptives*, and *Crosstabs*. All the comparisons between the lecturers and pre-service teachers were performed using the Mann-Whitney U test, which is the nonparametric equivalent of the independent t-test, since the number of variables in the comparison was 2 (George and Mallery, 2016). Qualitative data analysis was performed using content analysis on the transcripts of the recorded interviews. All the transcripts were coded separately and then the themes and categories elicited via the analysis were defined operationally. After completing both quantitative and qualitative data analyses, the outcomes were amalgamated using technique known as 'triangulation' (Mackey and Gass, 2005, p. 181).

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative results

Quantitative findings were obtained from the questionnaire data and were classified into two themes in parallel with the research questions: *(I) Perceptions regarding English speaking skills* and *(II) Problems related to English speaking skills*.

3.1.1. Perceptions regarding English speaking skills

To attain their perceptions regarding English speaking skills, participants were initially asked to indicate how often they used spoken English in their free time (Table 5):

Table 5. Frequencies of free-time English speaking activities among participants

	Lecturers			Pre-service teachers		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
With your non-Turkish-speaking friends	34	3.50	1.21	356	3.08	1.26
With yourself (monologue)	34	3.18	1.66	358	3.62	1.48
When expressing positive feelings (such as love)	32	2.72	1.65	358	2.97	1.48
With tourists in Turkey	33	2.55	1.03	358	2.34	.89
With your Turkish-speaking friends	33	2.33	1.43	359	2.57	1.39
When expressing negative feelings (such as swearing)	32	2.28	1.37	358	2.92	1.56
With your family members	34	2.21	1.45	358	1.47	.94

As clearly seen in Table 5, both lecturers and pre-service teachers indicated using spoken English occasionally in their free time, and even when they spoke, they mostly communicated in English with their non-Turkish-speaking friends and to speak with themselves and express their positive or negative feelings. However, pre-service teachers were found to use spoken English less frequently for interacting with their Turkish-speaking friends and their family members compared to lecturers (Table 5).

Both groups were also queried about the nationwide importance of English speaking skills for the people living in Turkey (Table 6):

Table 6. Participants' views on the importance of speaking English in Turkey

	Lecturers			Pre-service teachers		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Turkish people travelling abroad must be able to speak English.	34	4.47	.79	361	4.40	.80
Young people must be able to speak English.	34	4.38	.92	361	4.48	.70
People of working age must be able to speak English.	34	4.32	.91	360	4.34	.82
English speaking skills are underemphasised in Turkey.	34	4.12	.91	359	3.63	1.27
Elderly people must be able to speak English.	34	3.11	1.25	359	3.16	1.20
Turkish people can be international without being able to speak English.	34	2.50	.79	360	2.86	.99
English speaking skills are overemphasised in Turkey.	34	2.47	.75	360	2.75	.99

As clearly shown in Table 6, both lecturers and the pre-service teachers acknowledged that people living in Turkey, particularly the young (M=4.38 and M=4.48, respectively) and the working people (M=4.32 and M=4.34, respectively), must be able to speak English so as to promote the internationalization processes of the country and they also agreed that English speaking skills are underemphasised (M=4.12 and M=3.63, respectively) (Table 6). Moreover, a statistically significant difference was found between the two groups with regard to 'Turkish people can be international without being able to speak English.' and 'English speaking skills are underemphasised in Turkey.' (p<0.05 for both).

The last point related to the importance of English speaking skills was concerned with the learnability/teachability of pronunciation, which is an important component of speaking skills (Labov, 2010, p. 50; Harmer, 2015, p. 277) (Table 7):

Table 7. Participants' views on the importance and teaching of English pronunciation

	Lecturers			Pre-service teachers		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
There is an age-related limitation on the acquisition of native-like pronunciation.	34	3.59	1.23	357	3.52	1.06
I wish I had more training in pronunciation instruction.	34	3.41	1.10	357	4.16	1.02
Native-like pronunciation can only be achieved in a native country.	34	2.97	.94	357	3.51	1.08
Native-like pronunciation is an obligation for achieving fluency.	34	2.94	.85	356	3.03	.100

Pronunciation instruction does not usually result in permanent changes.	33	2.76	.97	352	2.91	.96
Only native speakers should teach pronunciation.	34	2.68	.77	357	3.10	.99
You cannot teach pronunciation to lower levels.	34	2.53	.83	354	2.69	.73
Pronunciation instruction is boring.	34	2.41	.74	357	2.50	.81

As indicated in Table 7, both lecturers and pre-service teachers agreed that pronunciation instruction has contributory effects on the improvement of English speaking skills (M=2.76 and M=2.91, respectively) and that both groups wished that they had received more training on pronunciation at earlier stages of their educational backgrounds (M=3.41 and M=4.16, respectively). Additionally, it was revealed that both groups believed that pronunciation could be taught at any linguistic level (M=2.53 and M=2.69, respectively) and this training could be given by non-native teachers (i.e., Turkish teachers of English language) as well (M=2.68 and M=3.10, respectively), although the pre-service teachers believed that native-like pronunciation could only be achieved in a native English-speaking country (M=3.51) (Table 7). Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference with regard to 'Only native speakers should teach pronunciation.', 'Native-like pronunciation can only be achieved in a native country.', and 'I wish I had more training in pronunciation instruction.' ($p<0.05$ for all), implicating that pre-service teachers showed stronger support for these beliefs compared to lecturers.

3.1.2. Problems related to speaking English

The second theme elicited from the questionnaire data was concerned with the problems encountered by lecturers and/or pre-service teachers when speaking English. Based on the questionnaire data, these problems were analysed under two subheadings: *(I) speaking-related problems encountered in class* and *(II) speaking-related problems encountered outside class (i.e. in daily life settings)*.

The questionnaire items probing speaking-related problems encountered in class addressed the feelings of participants when speaking English as well as their reflections on the effect of the courses they were being taught (Table 8):

Table 8. Participants' views on speaking-related problems encountered in class

	Lecturers			Pre-service teachers		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Speaking English in class does not sound natural to me.	34	2.83	.60	357	2.90	.97
The courses I teach/take are not focused on improving students' speaking skills.	34	2.68	.81	357	3.28	1.13

I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in my lectures.	34	2.47	.71	357	3.62	.98
I am afraid of being made fun of by my students/classmates when speaking English in my lectures.	34	2.26	.62	356	3.20	.98
I do not feel confident enough to speak English in my lectures.	34	2.26	.48	358	3.27	.97
The courses I teach/take fail to motivate me to focus on English speaking skills.	34	2.24	.50	357	3.14	1.10

As seen in Table 8, both lecturers and pre-service teachers indicated that the courses delivered in their department were mostly focused on improving students' speaking skills (M=2.68 and M=3.28, respectively) and they considered that speaking English in class sounded natural (M=2.83 and M=2.90, respectively), although pre-service teachers stated that they felt afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in class (M=3.62). Both groups also indicated that the courses delivered within the scope of ELT Curriculum tended to have a contributory effect in terms of motivation (M=2.24 and M=3.14, respectively) (Table 8). In a confirmatory manner, statistical analysis indicated a significant difference between lecturers and pre-service teachers in all the items mentioned above, suggesting that the pre-service teachers experienced greater challenge in class compared to lecturers (*p*<0.05).

Additionally, the participants were also asked to denote the frequencies of the problems they encountered when speaking English in daily life settings (i.e. outside class) (Table 9):

Table 9. Participants' views on speaking-related problems encountered in daily life situations

	Lecturers			Pre-service teachers		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
I find it hard to speak English because I have difficulty with English idioms.	34	1.62	.60	361	2.16	.83
I do not feel confident enough to speak English.	34	1.53	.75	361	2.46	.97
I feel anxious when speaking English.	34	1.50	.62	355	2.39	.96
I feel that learning the structure of English is more important than learning speaking English.	34	1.47	.83	360	1.49	.77
I find it hard to formulate the feelings and thoughts in my mind into a "speakable" format.	34	1.41	.56	361	2.18	.85
I avoid speaking English when I fail to achieve fluency.	34	1.41	.61	360	2.24	.98
I avoid speaking English when I fail to maintain an intelligible pronunciation.	34	1.32	.64	360	2.05	.88
I prefer to remain silent to taking a risk by speaking English.	34	1.26	.45	360	2.10	.98
I feel as if nobody would understand me when speaking English.	34	1.09	.29	360	1.51	.77

As shown in Table 9, the lecturers indicated that they never had the feelings abovementioned (M=1.0-1.75 for all), whereas the pre-service teachers declared that they rarely experienced most of the feelings abovementioned (M=1.76-2.50 for all) while they never felt that learning the structure of English is more important than learning speaking English (M=1.49) and as if nobody would understand them when speaking English (M=1.51) (Table 9). In a similar way, statistical analysis showed a significant difference in all of the items abovementioned ($p<0.05$) except for the item 'I feel that learning the structure of English is more important than learning speaking English', thus implicating that pre-service teachers experienced greater difficulty when speaking English outside class when compared to lecturers ($p>0.05$).

3.2. Qualitative results

Qualitative data were based on the interview findings that were divided into four themes: *(i) perceived importance of speaking English, (ii) problems related to speaking English in class, iii) problems related to speaking English outside class, and (iv) suggested solutions*.

3.2.1. Perceived importance of speaking English

Almost all the lecturers (36 out of 38) and pre-service teachers (45 out of 48) mentioned that being able to speak English is highly important for them and that it is the quintessential requirement of the ELT department. This importance, according to both groups, was related to the fact that English is the language of world and thus required for communicating with the outer world. Additionally, almost all the lecturers (35 out of 38) also emphasised that speaking English is equally highly important for their ELT students, basing their argument on the ground that ELT students are prospective teachers of English.

3.2.2. Problems related to speaking English in class

When mentioning these problems, both lecturers and pre-service teachers mostly referred to the fact that Turkey is an EFL context and thus they could speak English in their daily life. The speaking-related problems mentioned by both groups were clustered into four categories based on their overlapping features, as shown in Table 10:

Table 10. Frequencies of the categories derived from the theme 'speaking-related problems encountered in class'

	Mentioned by			
Categories	Ls (n=38)		PTs (n=48)	
	n	%	*n*	%
No problems in class	36	94.7	15	31.3

Switching to L1	28	73.7	16	33.3
Vocabulary choice	12	33.3	25	52.1
Pronunciation	22	57.9	5	10.4

Notes. L = Lecturer, PT = Pre-service teacher

A great majority of lecturers (94.7%) indicated that they had no serious problems when speaking English in class and diverted the attention to the notion that the speaking-problems encountered in class were on the students' side, rather than their own side. The lecturers also emphasised that the students had noticeable problems both when speaking and listening in English in class and also noted that these problems were most salient in the first year of the ELT programme and gradually became less noticeable as the students' level and experience increased, as depicted in the following excerpt:

R: Do you encounter any problems when speaking English in class?

L-05: Well, personally, as it is our field of study, I do not feel any problems, but when eliciting answers from the students, they have remarkable difficulty, particularly at the first and second grades, they try to switch to Turkish, of course we do not allow them to do. However, over time, they learn to express themselves in line with the increase in their knowledge base.

(R: Researcher, L: Lecturer)

As a second problem, a great majority of the lecturers (73.7%) and one-third of pre-service teachers (33.3%) indicated that the students, particularly first-year students, converted to Turkish and tried to express their thoughts/feelings or to provide a response to a question probed by the lecturer and/or classmate. Some lecturers contended that they tried to prevent students from converting to L1 to promote the usage of English in class.

About the third problem, one-third of lecturers (33.3%) and more than half of pre-service teachers (52.1%) stated that the students had difficulty finding the correct word/phrase mostly when trying to verbalise their thoughts/emotions in English as comfortably as they would do in Turkish. Both groups also indicated that these problems sometimes led to a breakdown in students' fluency and emphasised that these words/expressions were both technical words/expressions that were rarely used in everyday conversations and even sometimes were simple words/expressions that were used relatively more frequently in daily life.

For the final problem, more than half of lecturers (57.9%) and a small number of pre-service teachers (10.4%) mentioned that the students had pronunciation-related problems when performing speaking in class. The pre-service teachers contended that although they knew the meaning and structures of words/phrases, they had difficulty in articulating their correct pronunciation.

Both lecturers and pre-service teachers, when presenting their perceptions regarding the speaking-related problems encountered in class, also referred to the causes of those problems even before being asked to do so, mostly to support their propositions.

Accordingly, all the causes of speaking-related problems encountered in class that were elicited from the transcripts were clustered into three categories (Table 10):

Table 11. Frequencies of categories derived from the theme 'causes of the problems encountered in class'

| Categories | Mentioned by | | | |
| | Ls (n=38) | | PTs (n=48) | |
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Education/testing system	32	84.2	30	62.5
Lack of authentic contexts	26	68.4	16	33.3
Affective filter	25	65.8	33	68.8

Notes. L = Lecturer, PT = Pre-service teacher

As seen in Table 11, the majority of the lecturers (84.2%) and more than half of pre-service teachers (62.5%) mentioned that the prior education (i.e., the education received by the students prior to the ELT training) and the foreign language testing system in Turkey were a cause of speaking-related problems encountered in class, particularly of the problems encountered by the ELT students, mainly because both the education and testing system were overwhelmingly dependent on the learning and teaching of grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills and overlooked other skills, particularly including speaking and listening, as shown in the following excerpt:

R: What are the causes of these problems?

PT-17: . . . I noticed that I couldn't even read the coursebooks when I was in the first grade because their level was so high. The lecturers were speaking in English and I was looking at them in the eye, thinking "What are they talking about?", although we were so-called students who studied the foreign language department at high school.

(R: Researcher, PT: Pre-service teacher)

As a second factor, more than two-thirds of the lecturers (68.4%) and one-third of pre-service teachers (33.3%) mentioned that there was a lack of authentic contexts in the ELT department/school, which was an obstruction for the improvement of ELT students' English speaking skills. However, while the lecturers specifically attributed this lack of authentic contexts to the insufficiency of speaking courses in terms of weekly duration, the pre-service teachers ascribed it to the absence of native speakers in the department/school.

Finally, almost two-thirds of both lecturers and pre-service teachers (65.8% and 68.8%, respectively) claimed that the speaking problems faced by ELT students were related to students' personal factors, particularly, affective filter (i.e. a learner's attitudes that affect the relative success of second language acquisition, e.g. lack of motivation and self-confidence) was a barrier for their improvement in spoken English [Gass and Selinker, 2008]). As an explanation to this claim, both groups contended that

the ELT students, due to their affective filter, felt considerably shy when asked to produce a response in English, which could also indicate their lack of self-confidence.

3.2.3. Problems related to speaking English outside class

The speaking-related problems encountered by lecturers and pre-service teachers outside class (i.e. in daily life settings) were clustered into two categories (Table 12):

Table 12. Frequencies of categories derived from the theme 'speaking-related problems encountered outside class'

Categories	Mentioned by			
	Ls (n=38)		PTs (n=48)	
	n	%	*n*	%
No problems outside class	10	26.3	29	60.4
Vocabulary choice	15	39.5	9	18.8

Notes. L = Lecturer, PT = Pre-service teacher

Almost one-quarter of lecturers (26.3%) and more than half of pre-service teachers (60.4%) indicated that they had no problems when speaking English in their daily life settings. These rates, when compared to those indicated for speaking-related problems in class, implicate that lecturers felt more competent when speaking English in academic settings compared to non-academic settings, while pre-service teachers felt more competent when speaking English in non-academic settings compared to academic settings.

On the other hand, more than one-third of lecturers (39.5%) and almost one-fifth of pre-service teachers (18.8%) claimed that they had difficulty in choosing correct word/phrase when speaking English in daily life settings, particularly in casual conversations. Of note, both lecturers and pre-service teachers stated that these words were mostly technical words that required the knowledge of specialist fields such as Maths, Medicine, and so on.

The lecturers and pre-service teachers also explained the causes of the problems they encountered when speaking English in daily life settings. These causes were clustered into two categories (Table 13):

Table 13. Frequencies of the categories derived from the theme 'causes of the problems encountered in daily life settings'

Categories	Mentioned by	
	Ls (n=38)	PTs (n=48)

	n	%	*n*	%
Lack of authentic contexts	35	92.1	40	83.3
Affective filter			15	31.3

Notes. L = Lecturer, PT = Pre-service teacher

The lack of authentic contexts was revealed as the major cause of speaking problems encountered by lecturers (92.1%) and pre-service teachers (83.3%) when speaking English outside class. Both groups also contended that this scarcity led to limited exposure to spoken English for both lecturers and pre-service teachers and ultimately led to lack of practice in English speaking skills, mainly because most of the people they interacted with in their daily life settings were Turkish-speaking people.

As a second cause, in a similar way to the causes mentioned regarding the problems encountered in class, only pre-service teachers (31.3%) stated that affective filter was a barrier for their improvement in spoken English.

3.2.4. Suggested solutions

During the interviews, both the lecturers and pre-service teachers proposed several solutions regarding the speaking problems encountered in both in and outside class. These solution proposals were clustered into three categories (Table 14):

Table 14. Frequencies of categories derived from the theme 'solutions suggested for speaking problems'

	Mentioned by			
	Ls (n=38)		PTs (n=48)	
Categories	*n*	%	*n*	%
Education / testing system	35	92.1	46	95.8
Authentic contexts	20	52.6	26	54.2
Continuous practice	12	31.6	15	31.3

Notes. L = Lecturer, PT = Pre-service teacher

Almost all the lecturers (92.1%) and pre-service teachers (95.8%) proposed that the education/testing system (i.e., pre-ELT education/testing) should undergo a bottom-up amendment, in such a way to support the teaching and learning of English speaking skills. For this amendment, both groups specifically emphasised that the education/testing system should integrate all four skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, writing) and the two subskills (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) so as to dispense them equally into all the teaching and learning processes.

More than half of lecturers and pre-service teachers (52.6% and 54.2%, respectively) proposed that there was an ample need for authentic contexts in which the ELT students as well as lecturers could feel in a natural environment, which then would

contribute to the improvement of their English speaking skills. These authentic contexts, as proposed by both groups, could be established in Turkey, for example, by importing native English teachers or promoting attendance to academic organizations such as conferences, symposia, or outside Turkey, for example, by promoting students and lecturers to stay abroad for a certain period of time, particularly in an English as a native language (ENL) country such as UK or USA.

Finally, almost one-third of both lecturers and pre-service teachers (31.6% and 31.3%, respectively) proposed that the ELT students themselves needed to take some actions to eliminate the problems they encountered when speaking English—actions that would specifically focus on the improvement of their attitudes towards enhancing their English speaking skills. In clearer terms, both groups proposed that the ELT students should try harder and practise more and more to achieve automaticity in speaking English even when they faced challenges such as lack of authentic contexts.

4. Discussion

4.1. Perceptions of pre-service teachers and lecturers regarding English speaking skills

The foremost perception queried in the semi-structured interview was the importance adhered to English, particularly to spoken English, by the lecturers and pre-service teachers and it was revealed that both groups attributed remarkable importance to speaking and also considered that speaking English is a crucial asset both for themselves and for Turkish young people, people of working age, elderly people, and people travelling abroad. In a similar fashion, Dinçer and Yeşilyurt (2013) investigated pre-service English teachers' perceptions on the importance they attributed to English speaking skills and found that the participants regarded speaking as the most important skill among all four language skills. Additionally, Baturlar (2020) evaluated EFL lecturers' views and also suggested that the participants perceived the speaking skill as the most important language skill that needed to be improved by the learners. Taken together, these perceptions seem highly plausible due to the fact that English has become a global language that has been well integrated into numerous realms in the world such as culture, lifestyle, economy, technology, social media, and so on (Garcia, 2010, p. 409; Nunan, 2013, pp. 152-154).

Another finding drawn from the quantitative and qualitative findings was that both pre-service teachers and lecturers spoke English predominantly in academic settings (e.g. at school, conferences), while pre-service teachers spoke English in daily life situations (i.e. with friends and themselves and when expressing negative feelings) less frequently than lecturers did. This divergence of preferences could be ascribed to the notion of 'speech styles' devised by Labov (1970, as cited in Ellis, 2009, p. 98), who contended that the speech styles of a language speaker may vary depending on the degree of attention paid by the speaker to his/her speech. Based on this attention, according to Labov, the speech style of the speaker can vary on a continuum of two ends

including *vernacular style* (i.e. informal language) and *careful style* (formal language) (ibid). Accordingly, it appears that the speech style of pre-service teachers is more inclined towards the careful style (i.e. the language spoken in classroom) rather than the vernacular style (i.e. the language spoken in daily life settings).

4.2. Perceptions of pre-service teachers and lecturers regarding the problems encountered when speaking English

Almost three-quarter of lecturers and one-third of pre-service teachers declared that the students switched to L1 (i.e. Turkish) when trying to verbalise their thoughts/emotions in English. Both groups also noted that the students were challenged in terms of maintaining intelligible pronunciation and fluency. These findings were consistent with those of a study conducted in Omani context by Hosni (2014), who, in a similar way to our study, evaluated the difficulties experienced by EFL students when speaking English and found that the most common problems were students' switching to L1 and failure to maintain fluency. Along similar lines, Thornbury (2005) maintained that despite undergoing the same linguistic processes with L1 while speaking in L2 (e.g. conceptualizing, formulating, and finally articulating), speakers feel less comfortable and are relatively less fluent in L2 compared to L1, which at times can lead to frustration or embarrassment on the speakers' side since the speakers are burdened with the process of formulating the utterance initially in L1 and then interpreting it into L2 (p. 27).

As an additional problem, both quantitative and qualitative analyses also indicated that pre-service teachers were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in class. In a similar way, Savaşçı (2014) evaluated the cause of reluctance among first-year ELT students in speaking English in oral communication classes and found that fear of being despised was a significant factor contributing to students' reluctance. In a confirmatory manner, Vural (2017) found that the affective filter, as a personality trait, is closely tied to the anxiety and self-efficacy of learners, which at times may cause learners to remain silent in situations where they would be supposed to perform speaking in a foreign language. Meaningfully, this sense of fear could be a corollary of pre-service teachers' affective filter. Accordingly, literature indicates that if the affective filter of a learner, particularly of an L2 learner, is excessively high, then the speaker is challenged to digest the linguistic input provided to him/her; therefore, affective filter should be appropriately low for the input to be received by the learner (Gass and Selinker, 2008; Krashen, 2009). To overcome such problems, Dewi, Kultsum, and Armadi (2016) proposed the use of communicative games in EFL classes and the authors found that the use of these games had a positive effect on the both the teaching and learning processes and also improved the learners' participation, confidence, and fluency.

4.3. Perceptions of pre-service teachers and lecturers regarding their suggested solutions to speaking-related problems

Almost all the lecturers and pre-service teachers claimed that the education system (i.e., pre-ELT education) should undergo a comprehensive revision that would involve the integration of all four skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, writing) and the two subskills (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) into all the teaching/learning processes. If achieved, this integration would form a sound basis for the teaching/learning of these skills and subskills in real-life settings for establishing authentic and fluent communications. In a similar way, Kara et al. (2017) and Gan (2012) also concluded that the curriculum should be revised to include all language skills in tandem. On this notion, Brown (2001) proposed that the integration of all skills is high essential for the teaching of communicative skills since the productive and receptive skills are 'two sides of the same coin' and thus cannot be split and that the skills integrated to each other in a given context do not hamper the progress of one another, rather they reinforce the learnability of one another since each skill has a unique richness (p. 234). Drawing upon this essential notion, Mart (2020) investigated the perceptions of a group of EFL learners regarding the integration of language skills and concluded that the integration of listening and speaking skills led to an improvement in the learners' listening skills, which in turn resulted in a significant contribution to their speaking skills.

Besides the education system, both lecturers and pre-service teachers suggested that the testing system (i.e. nationwide English proficiency tests such as YDS, YDT) should also be revised to cover all language skills and subskills rather than focusing exclusively on the assessment of reading, vocabulary, and grammar. This disequilibrium has also been documented by a large body of literature (e.g. Külekçi, 2016; Akın, 2016; Hatipoğlu, 2016; Kılıçkaya, 2016). As a concept, language testing is a crucial part of language teaching and this importance lies at the heart of the impact of a language test on the teaching/learning processes pertaining to that test, an effect which is termed 'washback'. Washback, also known as *backwash*, is simply defined as the effect of testing—particularly language testing—on learning and teaching (Hughes, 2011; Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Fulcher and Davidson, 2007; Luoma, 2009). Additionally, washback can be both *positive* and *negative* depending on its outcome. In simple terms, positive washback occurs when the learning and teaching activities correspond well with the scopes of the test and negative washback occurs when these activities fail to match with the scopes of the test at a reasonably acceptable level (Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Hughes, 2011).

Both lecturers and pre-service teachers also contended that there was need for authentic contexts both in and outside class where learners (i.e. ELT students) could practise their knowledge and skills and in this way could maximise their competence in spoken English. These contexts, according to lecturers and pre-service teachers, could be both in Turkey (e.g. recruiting native teachers in Turkey) or abroad (e.g. travel-abroad opportunities). In a similar study conducted in Saudi Arabia, Ali et al. (2019) reported that the lack of authentic environment along with the lack of interest and

motivation were the most common problems stated by the EFL learners included in the study regarding the teaching and learning of English speaking skills. Considering that Turkey is classified as an EFL country where English is spoken as a foreign language rather than as a second or native language, it seems fair to assert that there are few or no regular authentic contexts across Turkey where L2 learners can perform continuous interaction with native speakers of English. This scarcity has also been documented in several previous studies. In a systematic review, Kırkgöz (2005), maintained that although there have been radical changes in the foreign language education policy in Turkey over the last decade, there is still need for enhancing opportunities for L2 learners of English in Turkey to eliminate the discrepancies between what learners learn in classroom and the English spoken in the real world (p. 167). In a similar way, Tokoz-Göktepe (2014) evaluated the speaking problems encountered by ninth-grade high school Turkish EFL learners and reported that the students had little or no contact with authentic English contexts outside classroom. To solve such problems, according to Koru and Akesson (2011), Turkey can import native teachers of English from ENL countries and recruit them in Turkish schools to create communication opportunities for Turkish learners of English.

As a last solution, speaking-oriented activities that could be performed by the learners in outside-class settings such as watching films, documentaries or listening to radio programmes in English were declared as essential activities, particularly for ELT students. A similar solution was proposed in the study by Nozad (2017), who evaluated the perceptions of Turkish EFL learners and reported that watching films and reading books in English language were the most common proposals declared by the participants regarding the improvement of EFL learners' English speaking skills. Likewise, Hamad, Metwally, and Alfaruque (2019) found that the use of You Tubes and Audio Tracks Imitation (YATI) had a significant contribution to EFL learners' speaking skills. Regarding the utility of technology, another study (Abugohar, Yunus, and Ab Rashid, 2019) evaluated the effectiveness of smartphone applications in the improvement of EFL learners' oral skills and found that these applications did not only improve the learners' speaking skills but also provided them inspiring positive perceptions regarding these skills. In the same vein, Harmer (2007) proposed some other activities that could help L2 students to sustain their oral development outside class, including doing extensive research on the internet about a given subject, talking to oneself in English (i.e. performing monologues), replaying or designing conversations in one's head, getting hold of songs that appeal to the individual's interests, and watching English-language videos on YouTube or other online video portals (p. 105).

5. Conclusions

As a foremost conclusion of the study, it was revealed that both ELT students and lecturers attributed remarkable importance to English speaking skills and considered that speaking English is highly important not only for themselves but also for Turkish nationals aiming to become international. Secondly, it was revealed that pronunciation instruction was also highly important for both pre-service teachers and lecturers and

they also maintained that this instruction resulted in beneficial outcomes for the learners, could be delivered to lower levels as well, and could be more beneficial when delivered at a young age before the end of the critical age. As a third conclusion, both pre-service teachers and lecturers indicated that during the first several weeks of the ELT instruction, the ELT students (i.e. freshmen) underwent a formidable period in which they strived to adapt to the spoken English they were exposed to in class, due to the fact that these freshmen had rarely or never been exposed to spoken English before coming the ELT department. Finally, it was revealed that there were noticeable differences between the lecturers and pre-service teachers with regard to their attitudes, perceptions, and suggested solutions, which could be related to the plausible difference between the ages, experiences, and competence levels of the lecturers and the pre-service teachers. Expectedly, it was clearly understood that the lecturers felt more competent, more confident, more experienced, more proud, and less afraid of making mistakes/errors and spoke English more in school/class and had fewer/less frequent problems when speaking English compared to pre-service teachers.

Acknowledgements

The Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The Conflict of Interest Statement

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