Reforming English Language Teaching Undergraduate Programs for Age Divisions in Türkiye: Perspectives of In-Service English Language Teachers

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Abstract: As opposed to their counterparts in many other countries (such as the USA, Poland, Finland, South Korea, China, Japan, etc.) and many other subject teachers (such as Science, Turkish Language, Mathematics, etc.), in-service English language teachers in Türkiye are entitled to teach at all levels of schools. However, teaching English to young learners is quite different from teaching English to teenagers/adults (Shin, 2000; Yıldız, 2015). In this respect, the aim of the study is to; a) shed light on the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares in-service English language teachers for the school levels they work at, and b) reveal whether in-service English language teachers think that English Language Teaching (ELT) undergraduate programs should be reformed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults' by employing a mixed methods research design. The study's findings make it evident that a considerable majority of English language teachers do not feel adequately prepared, competent, or inclined to teach at pre-primary and primary school levels. In addition, it has been concluded that from the perspectives of in-service English language teachers, ELT undergraduate programs in Turkish context need to be reformed in line with the school levels specified by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

Keywords: *in-service English language teachers, ELT undergraduate programs, reform, English language teacher training, ELT curriculum.*

INTRODUCTION

Total quality of any educational undertaking is closely linked to the quality of the teachers (Aslan, 2003; Enever, 2014; Karahan, 2008; Kavcar, 2002; Üstüner, 2004; Yıldız, 2015) and despite its efforts to update foreign language teacher training processes, it was argued that Türkiye failed to keep pace with the latest global trends (Altmisdort, 2016; Erdoğan & Savaş, 2022; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). As a result, greater importance has been attached to teacher training (for pre-service teachers) and teacher development (for in-service teachers) in recent years (Abazaoğlu et al., 2016). In this respect, the structure and content of teacher training institutions in Türkiye have been regularly modified and updated in the last four decades with the aim of improving the quality of pre-service teachers.

With the establishment of the Higher Education Council (HEC) in 1982, major reforms were implemented in the process of teacher training (Abazaoğlu et al., 2016; Kavcar, 2002; Mahalingappa

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& Polat, 2013). To be more precise, universities were assigned to teacher training with the aim of achieving standardization and institutionalization. Accordingly, starting in 1989, educational high schools were transformed into faculties of education and the duration of teacher training was extended to 4 years (HEC, 1998a; Kızılçaoğlu, 2006; Üstüner, 2004). As a result of the Pre-service Teacher Training Project that lasted from 1994 to 1998 and was conducted by the HEC in cooperation with the World Bank, faculties of education were restructured with the aim of keeping up with the requirements of the age and fixing the defects of the previous program (HEC, 1998a). Some programs were closed down or merged and some other programs were opened up; hence, the structural modifications in the teacher training programs of the faculties of education aimed to be aligned with the school structure in the national education system (Abazaoğlu et al., 2016; Aydın, 1998; HEC, 1998a; Kızılçaoğlu, 2006). In accordance with this reform, teachers of many subjects were required to complete an MA program to work at high schools until 2014 (HEC, 1998a; 1998b; 2018); however, as Karahan (2008) noted, completing an MA program should be regarded as an indication of expertise rather than becoming eligible for the profession of teaching. Moreover, it was argued that while teachers of some subjects (such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, etc.) at high schools were required to hold an MA degree, teachers of some other subjects (such as English, music, physical education, and sports, etc.) at the same school level did not have to obtain a postgraduate degree, which was reported to result in controversies and injustice among high school teachers (Akdemir, 2013; Aslan, 2003; Aydın, 1998; Dönmez, 1998; Kavcar, 2002). In the course of time, HEC implemented another update in the teacher training system in 2006 by allowing faculties of education more flexibility in terms of their curriculum and aiming to train intellectual teachers who can solve problems rather than becoming teaching technicians (HEC, 2007).

Pre-service English language teachers at faculties of education are required to follow the centralized curriculum prescribed by the HEC and the courses are divided into three categories. The first category of courses covers content knowledge courses (constituting 48% of the whole curriculum), the second category of courses involves pedagogical knowledge courses (constituting 34% of the whole curriculum) and the third category of courses encompasses general culture courses (constituting 18% of the whole curriculum). Upon graduation, English language teachers in Türkiye, as in many other countries, are entitled to teach at any level (from kindergarten to university) and any age group, which is regarded as problematic by many researchers (Bland, 2019; Enever, 2014; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008).

A brief account of English language teacher training practices in different countries may be useful at this point. To start with, an analysis of initial primary foreign language teacher education requirements in many European countries shows that the length of teacher training programs ranges between 3 to 5 years, and a great majority of them last for 4 years (Enever, 2014). Generally speaking, European Union member states design their educational policies in the light of their local and national conditions; however, greater policy convergence can be observed following the Lisbon Agreement at the turn of the century with the help of publications such as the European Profiling Grid and the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (Enever, 2014; Ries et al., 2016; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008). In Poland, for instance, English language teachers are trained at Faculties of English Philology for 3 years to be able to work at primary and secondary schools and they need to complete their MA to teach at all levels of schools (Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017). In a similar fashion, both primary and secondary school level teachers in Finland are required to complete their MA, which takes about 5 years, and pre-service teachers improve their content and pedagogical knowledge in the faculties of arts or sciences and faculties of education, respectively (Larzén-Östermark, 2009). In the USA, despite variations among different states, teacher candidates should first obtain a subject-specific bachelor's degree and then earn a teaching certificate to be able to teach at different levels of schools (Ries et al., 2016). On the other hand, in South Korea, teachers are required to obtain a degree (including an MA degree) relevant to the level of school they are to teach at (Jo, 2008). Likewise, Chinese and Japanese teachers of English are trained at universities and/or junior colleges and, as a result, acquire different levels of certificates. To be more precise, in order to be able to teach at lower-secondary schools, a three-year junior college certificate is sufficient whereas a four-year college degree is sought for teaching at the secondary level and high schools (Üstünlüoğlu, 2008). In other words, English

language teachers are trained in accordance with the age group they are to teach in many countries across the globe.

When it comes to teacher training practices in Türkiye, it has been argued that an ongoing problem is the lack of congruence between supply and demand stemming from the lack of coordination between the HEC and the MoNE (Nergis, 2011; Seferoglu, 2004; Yıldız, 2015). Consequently, alternative teacher certification practices had to be implemented and graduates of faculties other than faculties of education were recruited as teachers, which is harshly criticized by many researchers (Akdemir, 2013; Başkan, 2001; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Mahalingappa & Polat, 2013; Nergis, 2011; Seferoglu, 2004). Through such certificate programs, graduates of English-medium undergraduate programs, for example, graduates of undergraduate programs such as English language and literature, English linguistics, and even economics or engineering, received a training of two semesters, became entitled to teach English and were recruited by the MoNE as permanent English language teachers (Nergis, 2011; Seferoglu, 2004; Üstüner, 2004).

Another important point to note here is that in March 2012, the Turkish MoNE implemented a structural reform in its English language teaching policies by arranging the length of primary, secondary, and high schools as 4 years each, and English lessons started at grade 2 (Erdoğan & Savaş, 2022; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Sözen & Çabuk, 2013). Consequently, English language teachers were assigned to primary schools to teach young learners; however, the extent to which they were prepared for this task was questioned since teaching young learners requires distinct skills and knowledge. It should be noted at this point that the term 'young learners' covers a broad range of age groups; thus, children between 7 and 12 are regarded as 'young learners' and those under 7 are labelled as 'very young learners' (Ghosn, 2019; Shin, 2000). Contrary to common belief, teaching English to young learners is a demanding task that, first of all, requires age-appropriate methodology (Bland, 2019). The cognitive, psychological, social, and emotional characteristics of children should be taken into consideration throughout the design and delivery of the instruction (Cameron, 2001; Johnstone, 2019; Mirici, 1999; Rich, 2014; 2019; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2019). More specifically, fun should be an integral component of young learner classrooms, and songs, poems, stories, visuals, games, and physical movement should be incorporated (Shin, 2000). Moreover, a strong understanding of first and second language acquisition theories is essential (Copland et al., 2014). According to Nguyen (2017) and Zein (2019), classroom management is a real challenge with young learners because recognition and appreciation of learners' developmental characteristics play a major role in effective classroom management and great developmental differences exist between primary, secondary, and high school students (Shin, 2000; Yıldız, 2015). Similarly, the design and selection of instructional materials for young learners (Ghosn, 2019) as well as the assessment of their progress and performance (Cameron, 2001; Papp, 2019) need special attention and expertise. On the other hand, in direct contrast with young learners, adults and adolescents; (a) must want to learn, (b) learn only what they feel they need to learn, (c) learn best by doing and problem solving, (d) need guidance and consideration rather than instructions (Hodgson, 2017). Put differently, teachers need to be able to motivate adults and adolescents by convincing them that they really need to learn the content of the lesson. In addition, the methodology employed by the teacher should focus on problem solving activities and learning by doing principles. Likewise, the teacher should guide adult and adolescent learners rather than instructing them what to do. To sum up, young learners generally rely on their teacher whereas adult and/or adolescent learners tend to take on more responsibility and be more independent throughout the learning process (Hodgson, 2017).

Considering the differences between teaching young learners and teenagers/adults, it has been hypothesized by the researchers that in-service English language teachers may not welcome the idea of having to teach at different school levels and different age groups. Thus, the study aims to answer the following two research questions:
a) to what extent do English Language Teaching undergraduate programs, from the perspectives of in-service English language teachers, prepare them for teaching at different school levels?

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

METHODOLOGY

The study aims to a) shed light on the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares in-service English language teachers for the school levels they work at and b) reveal whether in-service English language teachers think that English Language Teaching undergraduate programs should be reformed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults' by employing a mixed methods research design with the aim of gathering more accurate and consistent results from the data collected at the end of the process. Mixed methods research involves collecting, analyzing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Put differently, quantitative and qualitative research methods are mixed in order to combine and integrate the strong aspects of both research designs in a meaningful and homogeneous way. More specifically, an explanatory sequential mixed method design has been adopted in this study (See Figure 1).

Explanatory design

Figure 1. Explanatory sequential mixed method design (Creswell, 2009, p. 193)

Study Group

The maximum diversity sampling method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011) was employed for the collection of quantitative data within the study. To be more precise, in accordance with the aim of the study, working with a study group that would reveal wide-ranging situations and significant common patterns in order for the researcher(s) to discern the differences (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2005) was essential. The main focus of the study is to determine the views of in-service English language teachers about the efficiency of their undergraduate education in terms of preparing them to work at different levels of schools. For this reason, the study group for the online survey involves a total of 76 in-service English language teachers who work or have worked at different levels of schools.

Table 1. Demographics of the study group

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	53	70
	Male	23	30
Department*	ELT	63	82,8
	ELL	5	6,5
	EL	2	2,6
	ACL	2	2,6
	TI	1	1,3
	O	3	3,9
Level of Education	BA	59	77,6
	MA	14	18,4
	PhD	3	3,9
Professional Experience	0-5 years	13	17,1
	6-10 years	7	9,2

	11-15 years	17	22,3
	16-20 years	23	30,2
	21 + years	16	21
Type of School	State	73	96
	Private	3	3,9
Level of School	Pre-primary	5	6,5
	Primary	6	7,8
	Secondary	30	39,4
	High School	20	26,3
	University	15	19,7
Number of Different School Level Experiences	1	21	27,6
	2	25	32,8
	3	24	31,5
	4	4	5,2
	5	2	2,6

*Departments - ELT: English Language Teaching, ELL: English Language and Literature, EL: English Linguistics, ACL: American Culture and Literature, TI: Translation and Interpreting, O: Other

Table 1 indicates that 53 female and 23 male in-service English language teachers participated in the study. As has been aforementioned, graduates of other faculties/departments than English language teaching are entitled to become English language teachers. In this regard, a great majority of the participants graduated from ELT departments (n=63) and 10 of them graduated from other English language-related departments. On the other hand, 3 of the participants are graduates of other departments. As to the educational level of the participants, it can be concluded that 59 of the participants possess undergraduate degrees whereas 17 of them have postgraduate degrees. Furthermore, the study group consists of in-service English language teachers with 0-5 years of experience (n=13), 6-10 years of experience (n=7), 11-15 years of experience (n=17), 16-20 years of experience (n=23) and more than 21 years of experience (n=16). The number of in-service English language teachers working for state schools (n=73) far outnumber those working for private schools (n=3). As stated previously, English language teachers in Türkiye are entitled to work at all levels of schools. In this regard, 5 of the participants work at pre-primary level schools, 6 of them work at primary schools, 30 of them work at secondary schools, 20 of them work at high schools and 15 of them work at universities. Likewise, an English language teacher working for the MoNE may be transferred to a different level of school; thus, s/he may work at different school levels throughout his/her professional life. In line with this, of the 76 in-service English language teachers who participated in this study, 21 have only 1 school level experience, 25 have 2 different school levels experience, 24 have 3 different school levels experience, 4 have 4 different school levels experience and 2 have 5 different school levels experience.

Secondly, for the collection of qualitative data, a focus group interview was conducted with the aim of shedding light on the in-depth understanding of the participants as well as the reasons behind their perceptions. The convenience sampling technique (Dörnyei, 2007; Nunan, 1992) was employed for the selection of the study group because only those in-service English language teachers who volunteered to participate were included in the focus group interview. In this respect, 9 in-service English language teachers were interviewed and they all had experience in teaching at different school levels. More specifically, 1 of them worked at primary school level, 2 of them worked at secondary school level, 3 of them worked at high school level and 3 of them worked at tertiary level.

Data Collection Tool(s)

Two separate data collection tools were designed by the researchers with the aim of collecting the relevant data. The first of these was prepared as a survey form and the second one is the interview form prepared for the focus group interview. In this respect, the study was carried out in two progressive stages. Following the administration of the survey in the first stage, a focus group

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interview form was prepared in order to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the data obtained from the survey. The steps in Figure 2 were followed in the design of the survey form (Büyüköztürk, 2005).

Figure 2. Stages followed in the design of the survey form.

1. Identification of the Problem

The aim of this study is to identify the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares in-service English language teachers for the school levels they work at. Therefore, the survey form needed to be designed in such a way as to provide the answer to this question. In line with this aim, the researchers targeted at preparing questions to determine the opinions of English language teachers about the relationship and correlation between their undergraduate training and their perceived competencies for teaching at different school levels.

2. Designing the Survey Items

In this step, first of all, the relevant literature was scanned in line with the purpose of the study. As a result, the researchers did not encounter any studies that focused on the main aim of the present study even though the problem was pointed out by many previous studies (Bland, 2019; Enever, 2014; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008) and the reconstruction of English language teaching undergraduate programs was recommended as a solution for the problems experienced (Kızılçaoğlu, 2006; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Rich, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008). In the writing of the items in the survey form, open-ended questions were preferred in order to enable participants to respond freely, and thus; to have more extensive and detailed insight and information about the topic. A total of sixteen questions were included in the form. In the first six questions, various demographic variables of the participants (such as gender, level of education, professional experience, etc.) were gathered. In the seventh item, the participants were requested to indicate the school levels they worked at and year(s) of experience gained at each level. The eighth item was designed in a five-point Likert scale format (1: very unsatisfactory; 2: unsatisfactory; 3: average; 4: satisfactory; 5: very satisfactory) and targeted at identifying the perceptions of the in-service English language teachers as to the extent to which their undergraduate training prepared them for the school levels they worked at. In addition, the participants were encouraged to explain the reasons behind their specific ratings and perceptions through an open-ended question. In the ninth item, the names of the courses offered by English language teaching undergraduate programs were provided as a reminder and the participants were requested to write the names of the courses that they perceive to be important and relevant to be able to teach at each school level. The tenth item was also

designed in a five-point Likert scale format and asked the participants about their perceived self-efficacy and readiness to teach at different school levels. The participants were, for a second time, encouraged to explain the reasons behind their specific ratings and perceptions through an open-ended question. In the eleventh item, the participants were requested to express their reactions and feelings if they were transferred to a different school level than the one they currently worked at. In a similar fashion, in the twelfth item, the participants were asked to state their preferences as to the school level they would like to work at if they had the chance to choose any level by giving reasons for their preferences. Accordingly, in the thirteenth item, the opinions of the participants on whether there is a need for a specific preparatory in-service training (INSET) program for in-service English language teachers that are assigned to a different school level than the one they work at were sought for. In the fourteenth item, the participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "English Language Teaching undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be reconstructed as 'ELT for Young Learners' and 'ELT for Teenagers & Adults'" by supporting their responses with reasons. Similarly, in the fifteenth item, the participants were requested to state which undergraduate program they would prefer if ELT undergraduate programs were reconstructed. Finally, in the sixteenth item, the participants who volunteered for the focus group interview were asked to provide their contact details. Thus, the second stage of the study proceeded with the in-service English language teachers who volunteered in the first stage.

3. Getting Expert Opinion

In order to ensure that the items in the survey form served the aim of the study in a valid and reliable fashion without causing any misunderstandings, opinions of three experts who majored in the fields of English language education, Turkish language education and measurement and evaluation, respectively, were taken. After the suggested revisions were implemented and the final draft of the survey form was approved by the experts, the final stage was initiated.

4. Piloting and Finalizing the Survey Form

At this stage, the final draft of the survey form was administered to 4 in-service English language teachers working at four different school levels (primary, secondary, high school and university) and, as they did not offer any revisions, the final form was attained without making any further revisions. As a result of the procedures implemented, it would be justified to argue that a valid and reliable data collection tool was obtained (Mertens, 1998; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1984).

Additionally, in order to deepen and confirm the data obtained from the survey form employed in the first stage of the study, a focus group interview was conducted with the in-service English language teachers who participated in the first stage and volunteered to take part in the interview. The questions used in the focus group interview were prepared by the researchers by focusing on the themes that needed to be deepened during the analysis of the data collected from the survey form. The questions employed within the focus group interview are:

•Do you perceive yourself equally sufficient for teaching at different school levels? Why (not)?
•Do you think that your undergraduate program prepared you sufficiently for teaching at different school levels? Why (not)?
•Do you agree that English Language Teaching undergraduate programs should be reformed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults'? Why (not)?

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the survey form were analyzed using descriptive statistics involving mean scores and standard deviation values. On the other hand, the data collected through the focus group interview were analyzed employing the technique of content analysis in accordance with the

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qualitative methodology (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Straus & Corbin, 1990; Yin, 1984). To be more precise, first of all, the responses provided by the in-service English language teachers who participated in the first and second stages of the study were combined in a single form. The participants were not asked to provide their names and identities in the survey form to ensure confidentiality; thus, their responses were tagged (such as *T1* for the first teacher) and potential concepts and themes were coded. The coding was sometimes conducted on the basis of words and sometimes on the basis of sentences or even paragraphs as a whole, and was implemented on the basis of main concepts and themes, as a result of which, the preliminary list of codes was obtained after re-codings and reductions were administered (Merriam, 2001). The code lists were formed separately and independently by the two researchers and the similarities and differences in the codes were identified. The differences in the code lists were reviewed and, when needed, a third expert's opinion was requested in order to accurately construe the responses. The responses of the study group were reviewed and reconsidered in line with the final list of codes, and after it was concluded that the obtained codes fully represented the responses, the frequencies were ascertained. The process of content analysis was concluded by classifying the codes in the final code list, which was assumed to represent the data, and grouping them under certain categories (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2005). It should not go without saying that the reliability of content analysis was ensured in two ways. Firstly, the data collected in the study were coded independently by the two researchers and the two separate code lists created by the two researchers were compared and finalized by re-evaluating the conflicting interpretations between the researchers. The reliability of this procedure was calculated using the formula "(Agreement) / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100" offered by Miles and Huberman (1994). The inter-rater reliability level between the coders was found to be 87% in the first round, and 100% in the second round. Secondly, the list consisting of categories and codes, which was formed after the two separate analyses were compared and revised, was examined by a third expert, who did not participate in the research, in order to verify the process via the triangulation method (Denzin, 1978).

FINDINGS

The aim of this study is to find out the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares in-service English language teachers for the school levels they work at. In line with this, the study also aims to investigate whether ELT undergraduate programs need to be reformed. Thus, the findings of the survey (quantitative data) and focus group interview (qualitative data) are presented in a collective approach under the titles of each related research question. In addition, the presentation of the findings has been supported with quotations of the participants, who have been labelled as '*T1', 'T2*', *'T3*', etc. for anonymity.

To what extent do ELT undergraduate programs, from the perspectives of in-service English language teachers, prepare them for teaching at different school levels?

In response to the first research question, the participants were first asked to indicate their perceptions as to the extent to which their undergraduate education prepared them for the school levels they worked at by rating a five-point Likert scale (1: very unsatisfactory; 5: very satisfactory) item and descriptive statistics for the findings are given in Table 2.

**Table 2. Perceived efficiency of ELT undergraduate programs in preparing for different school levels**

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

As can be observed in Table 2, in-service English language teachers believed that their undergraduate training prepared them most satisfactorily for the secondary school level (M=4,08) and least satisfactorily for pre-primary school level (M=3,29). In support of these findings, in-service English language teachers stated in the focus group interview that they did not receive any training for teaching at pre-primary level (*T2: I did not take any courses related to teaching English to very young learners*) and they were offered only one course that was directly related to teaching English to young learners (*T4: We only took 'Teaching English to Young Learners' course for two semesters and it was far from enough because it only had theoretical components*). They further reported that the course did not correspond to the realities of young learner classrooms in that particular challenges likely to be encountered in such classrooms were not covered by the course (*T1: When you work with young learners, you should first be a nanny and then a teacher*). In a similar vein, in-service English language teachers thought that their undergraduate training did not prepare them for teaching at the university level as satisfactorily as it did for secondary or high school levels and their perceived lack of self-efficacy in their content knowledge emerged as the chief reason for this (*T9: I was not even able to speak English fluently and confidently when I graduated, and I believe that a teacher should be highly knowledgeable to teach at university level*). On the other hand, in-service English language teachers concurred that most of the courses they were offered at their undergraduate training satisfactorily prepared them to teach at secondary or high school levels (*T7: Almost all of our microteachings were for secondary school students. / T5: We did our practicum at a high school and we mostly planned and conducted lessons at high school level*).

It should not go without saying that the courses offered by ELT undergraduate programs are closely correlated to the extent to which they prepare pre-service and in-service English language teachers for different school levels. Therefore, the participants were requested to provide the names of the courses that they perceived to be important to be able to teach at each school level and their responses have been presented in the form of a word cloud (See Figure 3).
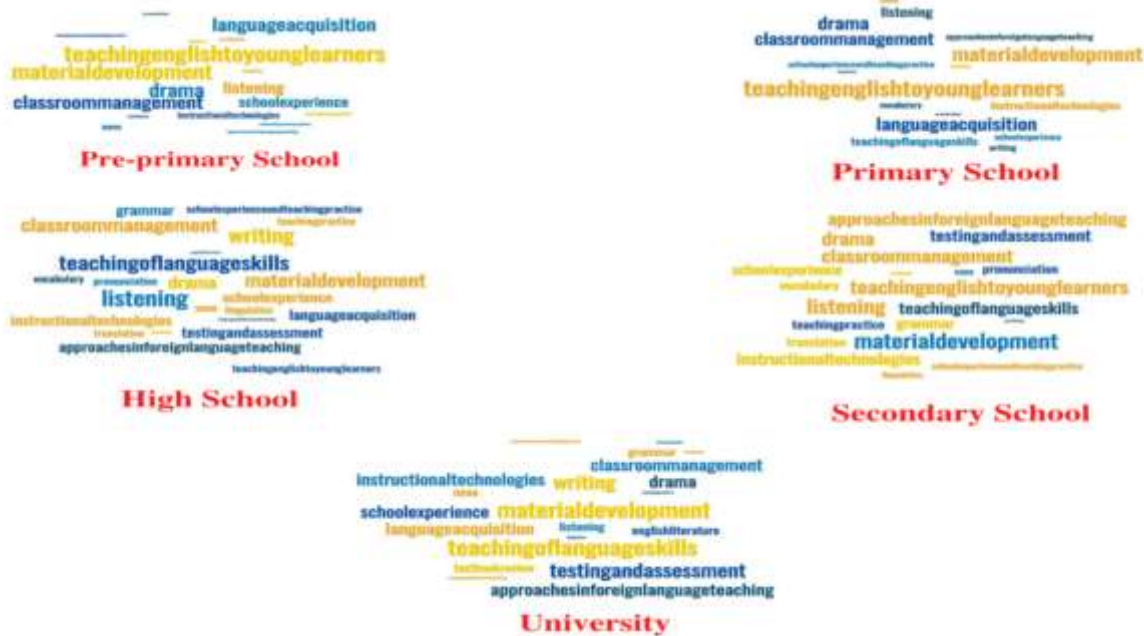
Figure 3. Courses perceived as relevant and important for different school levels (higher frequency=bigger font size).

As can be seen in Figure 3., in-service English language teachers regarded such courses as teaching English to young learners, material development, language acquisition, drama, classroom management, practicum and listening as essential for teaching at *pre-primary* level schools. Similarly,

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teaching English to young learners, material development, language acquisition, drama, classroom management, teaching language skills, instructional technologies, practicum, and listening courses offered by ELT undergraduate programs were perceived as important for teaching at the *primary* school level. As for *secondary* school level, material development, teaching of language skills, testing and assessment, teaching English to young learners, language acquisition, approaches in foreign language teaching, drama, classroom management, instructional technologies, practicum, listening, grammar, vocabulary and translation courses were attached greater relevance and importance by in-service English language teachers. On the other hand, courses such as teaching of language skills, material development, classroom management, drama, listening, writing, grammar, vocabulary, translation, approaches in foreign language teaching, instructional technologies, testing and assessment, language acquisition, practicum, teaching practice, and linguistics were perceived as highly relevant and important for teaching at the *high school* level. Finally, in order to be able to teach effectively at the *university* level, in-service English language teachers believed that courses such as teaching language skills, testing and assessment, material development, approaches in foreign language teaching, instructional technologies, practicum, writing, drama, grammar, listening, English literature, language acquisition and textbook review were central to teaching at this level. These findings overall suggest that courses such as teaching English to young learners become extraneous as the age group of learners increases and courses such as testing and assessment, textbook review, English literature and teaching of language skills gain significance.

The participants were also requested, firstly, to specify their perceived self-efficacy and readiness to teach at different school levels through a five-point Likert scale (1: very insufficient; 5: very sufficient) item, and secondly, to justify the reasons behind their specific ratings and perceptions via an open-ended question.

Table 3. Perceived self-efficacy and readiness to teach at different school levels.

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

Table 3 clearly demonstrates that in-service English language teachers exhibited the highest self-efficacy and readiness to teach at secondary (M=4,35) and high school (M=4,03) levels whereas the lowest self-efficacy and readiness were observed at pre-primary (M=2,9) and primary (M=3,48) level schools. In their understanding, working at a pre-primary or primary school level requires much energy and patience on the part of the teachers and is perceived as too exhausting (*T3: Very young learners are too energetic for me, and a teacher needs to be really patient with them because their classrooms may be too noisy and chaotic*). Moreover, many participants in the focus group interview stated that they may experience problems in adjusting the speed and complexity of their speech on a par with the linguistic, developmental, and cognitive levels of young learners (*T5: I am afraid that I may not be able to adjust my English according to their levels*). On the other hand, in-service English language teachers noted that they felt more ready and confident to teach at secondary and high school levels as they had more experience in teaching at these levels (T3: *So far I have never worked at [pre-] primary level, so I think that I would not be able to teach effectively at these levels*). Therefore, it would be justified to argue for some of the teachers that they tend to build a comfort zone as they get experienced in teaching at a certain level, or even an institution, and may not prefer to teach at other levels or institutions (*T4: I am familiar with my institution and my students, their needs and expectations. I would not like to be transferred to another level of school or institution because I am happy here at my school*). In this respect, when asked about their reactions and feelings if they were transferred to a different school level than the one they currently worked at, a great majority of in-service English language teachers reported that they would feel anxious and unhappy since they would

have to do some extra preparation for the classes and adopt different instructional techniques (*T5: Moving to another city and/or level of school means that you have to get accustomed to the conditions and realities of another city and/or level of school and this adaption process requires a lot of energy and effort*). Conversely, some in-service English language teachers noted that they would welcome such a transfer because teaching at a different school level would enable them to improve their professional competences and experience (*T1: I have the experience of working at 3 different levels – primary, secondary and high school levels – and I think that this positively influenced my career because I can teach at any level / T5: Working at the same level or institution may result in teacher burnout so working at different levels and institutions may be a good idea to overcome burnout*). In addition, referring to their BA degree, they considered themselves qualified for teaching at any level (*T2: In my opinion, the diploma given to us by the government shows that we have the qualifications to teach at any level*).

In-service English language teachers were also requested to state their preferences as to the school level they would like to work at if they had the chance to choose any level by basing their stated preferences on reasons. Only a small minority of the participants (n=5) preferred to work at pre-primary and/or primary level schools and based their preferences on their affection for young children, music, songs, and plays. Likewise, only a small number of in-service English language teachers (n=12) preferred to work at the university level and most of them currently worked at this level. More specifically, they expected to experience fewer classroom management and discipline problems and they favoured working with adults (*T7: I am not patient with young learners or teenagers and I think that it would be harder to manage their classrooms*). A great majority of in-service English language teachers (n=59), on the other hand, preferred to work at secondary school or high school levels since they believed that the level of English they were to teach was neither too simple (as is the case with pre-primary and primary school levels) nor too challenging (as is the case with university level) and they were able to build positive rapport with their secondary and/or high school level students (*T8: I get on well with teenagers and I feel more confident when I have to teach A2/B1 level learners*).

Should ELT undergraduate programs be reformed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults'?

In order to answer the second research question, in-service English language teachers were requested to agree or disagree with the statement "ELT undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be reconstructed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults'" by basing their responses on reasons. Accordingly, a good majority of the participants (n=55) agreed with this statement. Pointing to the differences between young and adult learners, they claimed that not only what they teach but also how they teach it would bear significant differences between the two groups (*T3: Although they seem similar, teaching at primary/secondary levels is very different from teaching at high school level. In fact, you need to make use of different teaching methods*). In addition, some of the participants referred to teachers of other subjects (such as Mathematics, Science and Turkish Language), and argued that English language teachers should also be trained in accordance with the school level they are to work at (*T9: Just as the teachers of other subjects [for example Maths, Geometry, Science, Biology, Physics, Chemistry], English language teachers should be trained according to the level/age of their learners*). It was also noted that, if ELT undergraduate programs were to be reformed, teachers would be better able to specialize in designing materials and instruction targeting a certain learner group (*T6: I have lots of digital materials designed for secondary school students on my PC and it would take a lot of time and effort for me to design/compile such materials for [very] young learners*). Conversely, in-service English language teachers (n=21), who disagreed with the statement, believed that the profession of English language teaching should be viewed in a holistic manner and English language teachers should be trained in such a way to render them qualified for teaching any age group studying at any school level (*T5: If you are a qualified teacher, you should be able to teach your subject to anyone so I think that I can teach English to anyone*). Moreover, for some of them, becoming entitled to work at any school level provided them with greater

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flexibility and freedom in that they could switch to another school level when they experienced burnout.

In a similar vein, the participants were requested to state which program they would prefer if ELT undergraduate programs were reconstructed. Not surprisingly, a great majority of in-service English language teachers (n=57) stated that they would prefer 'ELT for teenagers/adults' while a few of them (n=19) preferred 'ELT for young learners'. The participants in the latter group reported that working with young children is more suitable for their personality and the level of satisfaction they get from working with young learners is higher since young learners tend to be more motivated to learn English (*T1: I like working with young learners and teaching them using pictures, games and songs. / T5: For most students, their first teacher of any subject is very important. They like the subject if they like the teacher. I get on well with young learners and I can easily motivate them to learn English*). On the other hand, the participants who preferred 'ELT for teenagers/adults' program thought that working with adults was more suitable for their personalities as they could communicate more effectively with them. They further referred to the challenges associated with teaching young learners and opted for 'ELT for teenagers/adults' program in order to escape from such difficulties (*T7: You do not need to look after teenagers/adults and they are more aware of their responsibilities and our expectations. In addition, teaching teenagers/adults is less tiring because you do not struggle to manage the classroom*). A significant implication that can be drawn from the findings is that ELT programs, in their current state, prepare pre-service English language teachers more efficiently to teach adults and/or teenagers than young learners.

Considering that in-service English language teachers may be transferred to a school at different level than they work at, the opinions of the participants on whether there is a need for a specific preparatory INSET program for in-service English language teachers that are assigned to a different school level than the one they work at were also sought for. Consequently, an overwhelming majority of the in-service English language teachers (n=52) agreed on the need for such INSETs, believing that such subject-specific INSETs would enable them to refresh and retrieve their pedagogical knowledge, keep up with the latest trends in the field of English language teaching, contribute to their professional development and reduce the duration of the adaptation period for the new context (*T4: Such trainings may enable us to update our knowledge and remember what we learned during our BA. / T9: Getting used to a new institution and level requires time. You need to learn about the inner organization of the institution, your colleagues, students, etc. I think that teachers should be allowed to observe their colleagues' classes and INSETs may make it easier to get accustomed to the new setting*). In contrast, in-service English language teachers (n=24) who opposed to the implementation of INSET programs maintained that they were already qualified for teaching at a given level and they would be able to adapt to the new context in time via *learning by doing* approach (*T2: Such trainings are unnecessary. We already have the qualification to work at any level. Also, our colleagues may help us if we need.*).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As has been noted by Kızılçaoğlu (2006), both the structure and the content of the teacher training programs need to be revised at regular intervals to keep up with the requirements of the changing world and society. However, at the end of a historical overview of foreign language teacher training processes, Nergis (2011) concluded that transient political tendencies rather than a consistent philosophy shape foreign language teacher training policies in Türkiye. In this respect, the findings of the study clearly demonstrate that from the perspectives of in-service English language teachers, ELT undergraduate programs in the Turkish context need to be reformed in line with the school levels specified by the MoNE. As has been aforementioned, adopting age-appropriate methodology is a must in foreign language teaching (Bland, 2019) because age is a significant variable in the process of language acquisition and learning. Consequently, almost all aspects of language teaching including materials development, lesson planning, organization and delivery of lessons, classroom management and testing bear great differences between young and adult learners. In this respect, the findings of the

study confirm that the variety and quantity of the courses offered to pre-service teachers by ELT undergraduate programs in their current arrangement fail to prepare them to be able to teach equally well at all school levels. To be more specific, a great majority of the participants of the study feel neither prepared and/or competent enough for nor willing to teach at pre-primary and primary school levels. This clearly signals the urgent need for reforming ELT undergraduate programs for age divisions in Türkiye from the perspectives of in-service English language teachers. Accordingly, Rich (2019) recognizes the differences that exist between teaching English to young learners and adults and mentions of a global shortage of qualified English language teachers to teach young learners. In support of the findings of the present study, it has frequently been suggested that ELT undergraduate programs of universities should be specialized in teaching English to a specific age group and pre-service teachers should be able to choose the age group they would like to specialize in considering their own personality traits (Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Rich, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008).

Secondly, a good majority of in-service English language teachers agreed on the need for specific preparatory INSET programs for in-service English language teachers that are assigned to a different school level than the one they work at. The need for INSETs on the subject of teaching English to young learners was underlined by Gürsoy et al. (2013) in a previous study. Put differently, a recent study conducted by Uztosun (2018) with the aim of revealing in-service English language teachers' views on INSETs in Turkish context involving a study group of 2476 participants revealed the discontent of in-service English language teachers in terms of the perfunctory nature of the INSETs, inconvenient time and place, the limited number of programs on offer, the lack of qualified trainers, insufficient practical focus and poor lecturing. Furthermore, Yıldız (2015) investigated the problems experienced by primary school teachers that were voluntarily transferred to secondary schools as mathematics teachers and identified their weaknesses as to the content knowledge. It was also revealed that no INSETs were offered to these teachers by the MoNE, leading to further difficulties in adapting to the new teaching context. Consequently, the urgency of INSETs to be offered to English language teachers that are transferred to a different level of school with the aim of requalification and updating of expertise has been echoed by this present study.

As a final note, it should be kept in mind that teaching is a profession that should be practiced only by professionals. In this regard, just knowing English (i.e. having the necessary content knowledge) can hardly be regarded as sufficient to become an English teacher (Barduhn & Johnson, 2009; Ur, 2002). To be more direct, alternative routes of training and/or recruiting English language teachers – still a common practice in the Turkish context – should be abandoned and English language teachers should only be trained by faculties of education in accordance with the school level they are to work at.

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