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Research Article

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Early Field Experiences of PTEs in ELT Programme of a State University in Türkiye

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Abstract

Teaching programs in Türkiye consist of a 4-year process. Internship practice takes place in the last year of this process, each in two separate terms. Prospective teachers observe, evaluate, prepare course content, and teach under the guidance of in-service English teachers in public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and with the support of supervisors at the faculties and complete their internship. However, the timing of the process is thought to be too late, which is carried out during the 4-year education period and where prospective teachers will be actively involved in schools/real teaching environments and gain experience. "Early Field Experience" (EFE), which is also found in the world literature and has exemplary applications, has been implemented in some private universities in Türkiye today but has not yet found its place in state universities. This current research studies the subject of "Early field experience". The present study focussed on the effects of "Early Field Experience" practice in a state university in Türkiye. The study analyses the reflections of EFE on prospective teachers' anxiety and makes the voices of prospective teachers heard. In this convergent mixed method study, STAS (Student Teacher Anxiety Scale - Hart, 1987) was used as a quantitative data collection tool, and a semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions was employed for the qualitative part. In the study, prospective teachers of English (PTEs) had an EFE implementation process covering 10 weeks of observation and internship. The results of the quantitative data showed that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores for the level of anxiety of PTEs ($t=4.16$; $p<.05$) in favour of the post-test. Findings of interviews revealed that the prospective teachers' concerns were in the areas of teaching, students' background, classroom management, readiness to teach, and burnout before the EFE; and after the EFE, they experienced improvements in classroom management, appropriate language use, readiness to teach, experience and teaching content.

Key Words

Early-field experience • Teaching anxiety • Prospective teachers of English

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Introduction

Faculties of Education are assigned to prepare prospective teachers for their forthcoming careers both theoretically and in practice. With this purpose, in the context of ELT, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) offers a two-term internship for the practice part of the ELT undergraduate programme as *Teaching Practice 1* and *Teaching Practice 2*. (2018, https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Kurumsal/egitim_ogretim_dairesi/Yeni-Ogretmen-Yetistirme-Lisans_Programlari/Ingilizce_Ogretmenligi_Lisans_Programi.pdf). In the earlier practices of internship programmes of CoHE, PTEs used to take these courses as *School Experience* and *Teaching Practice* (https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Kurumsal/egitim_ogretim_dairesi/OgretmenYetistirme/ingilizce_ogretmenligi.pdf). Nonetheless, the experts' views, similar voices, and longitudinal observation of the PTEs seem to support the necessity for an earlier practicum practice. Here, the *Early Field Experience (EFE) Practice* comes into play.

Practicum practices have long been actively leading prospective teachers in a number of objectives such as meeting theory with practice, introducing teaching environments, and offering opportunities for experience in teaching. To address the requirements and expectations of the prospective teachers, practicum practices are integrated within the ELT programmes in the final year. Early field experience (EFE) practices in the ELT context, as well, is meant to accomplish several goals, such as enhancing PTEs' professional growth and increasing their ability to teach foreign languages in an earlier term, in addition to all these aforementioned objectives.

Early Field Experience (EFE) Practice

The practicum at Türkiye's teacher education faculties is structured to encompass the first and second semesters of the fourth (senior) grade. During both semesters, they are expected to deliver about six hours of lectures each week. However, during the early field experience, students observe for a few weeks after learning about the policies and procedures of the school from their tutors. Following this, PTEs teach for ten weeks at a time for one hour a week under the guidance of their mentors, receiving feedback along the way. In this way, they get ready for their practicum in the fourth (senior) grade by concentrating on their errors and refining their lectures. From this perspective, it can be understood that Dewey's ideas work as a basis and rationale for field experience (Huling, 1998), which can be explained as experiential learning suggesting the idea that people learn by doing/experiencing. The teaching profession, which is totally and entirely focused on learning, takes two sides of the coin: the teacher and the learner. Interacting with both, teaching necessitates theory and practice (Lux et al., 2017) at the same time as early as possible.

Within teacher education programmes, early field experiences (EFEs) are classroom-based occurrences intended to support authentic pedagogical learning (Wilson et al., 2001 as cited in Rodriguez-Arroyo, 2009). Provided by real classroom settings, the PTEs are taking the chances for real teaching. Early Field Experience (EFE) Practice offers a realistic foresight of the teaching, allowing prospective teachers to assess whether they are well-suited for a career in education.

Offered early or late within the frame of the programme, field experiences are meant to (Wilson et al., 2002) provide a preview of the profession, giving insights about classroom management, and chances for practical implications of theory. Nonetheless, there has always been a call for the necessity to "early" implement this

practice into the programmes. Dating even back to the 1970s, early field experiences (EFEs) were suggested to be included within the language teaching programmes by researchers such as [Herold \(1977\)](#), [Jorstard \(1975\)](#), and [Wing \(1975\)](#). Although EFEs were long regarded to be significantly effective, it wasn't until the beginning of this century that only a very limited number of private universities in Türkiye enhanced opportunities for EFE. Dating right before the updated ELT undergraduate programme of CoHE in 2006, a practice might definitely stick to the memories having PTEs taking internship practices both in their 2nd and 4th years. Unfortunately, currently, no early field experiences are available within the context of ELT departments of State Universities. Although many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of EFE practices ([Evans, 1986](#); [Fleener, 1998](#); [Huling, 1998](#); [Freeman, 2010](#); [Lux et. al, 2017](#); [Cirillo et al., 2020](#)), also with the voices of PTEs unheard on the challenges brought forward because of having the practicum practices late, EFE practices are yet to be implemented.

From the PTEs' perspectives about their teaching practices, one of the biggest challenges brought by is the overall teaching anxiety. Teaching anxiety of prospective teachers has long been an issue of concern and defined as an impediment for language learners ([Horwitz, 1988](#); [Young, 1991](#)). PTEs express and are mostly observed to have concerns on teaching English as 'the full-time teacher'. Psychologically speaking, they occasionally have feelings of demotivation, and inadequacy when it comes to expressing themselves in English and incompetence in terms of their teaching abilities. Therefore, anxiety was noted as a common occurrence among pre-service teachers. Lack of opportunities to speak English and insufficient classroom experience to handle the context of young learners are a couple of the causes of this concern. In response, teacher preparation institutions have implemented field experiences to decrease future educators' anxieties about teaching English as a second language. Therefore, a switch from traditional teacher preparation programs to field-based programs ([Houston & Huling, 1998](#) as cited in [Huling, 1998](#)) is expected.

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Kolb's Theory of Experience (2014) guided the theoretical basis of the research providing a model and a framework on the critical interchange among education, work, and personal development emphasising the significance of "learning from experiences". Grasping the significance of the necessity of practicum at the early stages of teaching, and considering the gap in the field- also having no thesis studies conducted available on the CoHE database, and lacking enough number of implementation studies in the context of Türkiye, the researchers aimed to examine the effects of EFE practice on PTEs. To shed light on the impact of EFE, this implementation research study was carried out seeking answers to the following research questions.

Research Questions:

1. What are the anxiety levels of teachers in English Language Teaching Department before and after their Early Field Experience?
2. Is there a significant difference between the pre and post-tests of the anxiety levels of pre-service teachers in English Language Teaching Department?
3. What are the perceptions of ELT Pre-service teachers towards "Early Field Experience"?

Method

Research Design

This study dwells upon a convergent mixed methods research design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were used to have a comprehensive analysis of the case. Aiming at collecting data in a one-phase design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to merge results to be compared (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the quantitative part of the study, the STAS (Student Teacher Anxiety Scale - Hart, 1987) scale was included as a pre-test and post-test. In the qualitative part, semi-structured interviews were employed right before and after the Early Field Experience (EFE) process of PTEs. With a one-phase design, the pre-test and the pre-interview were conducted right before the implementation process. Upon the completion of the implementation process, post-test and post-interview were employed.

Research Sample/Study Group/Participants

The study was conducted on all 3rd year ELT students at a state university, holding the only ELT department in the city, in the Fall and Spring Terms of the 2021-2022 Academic Year. The participants were selected on convenience sampling method considering convenience and availability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Their ages ranged between 20-22. A total number of 90 students (52 female and 38 male) participated in the quantitative part of the study. 9 students (7 females and 2 males) participated in the qualitative part of the study on voluntary basis, the process went on until data saturation was reached with repeated replies. Within the framework of the *Teaching English to Young Learners* course, they're sent to Early Field Experience schools. The EFE schools were selected on voluntary basis. At the time of the research, they had taken one-term-*Teaching English to Young Learners* course without EFE practice, which provided theory and micro-teaching of the concept.

Research Instruments and Processes

In this study, an implementation was envisaged in which the prospective English language teachers studying in the 3rd year have the "Early Field Experience" within the scope of the *Teaching English to Young Learners* course. At the beginning and the end of the implementation, data was collected from prospective teachers voluntarily and evaluated within the scope of the theory. During the implementation phase, two consent forms were used: one for informed consent and the other for voluntary participation, in which the participants granted permission to participate freely. Based on mixed methods research design, the process was handled within three sub-headings:

a. Quantitative Data Collection:

STAS (Student Teacher Anxiety Scale - Hart, 1987) scale was included both as a pre-test and post-test in the present study. The scale consists of 26 items and 4 sub-factors as *Evaluation Anxiety*, *Pupil and Professional Concerns Anxiety*, *Class Control Anxiety*, and *Teaching Practice Requirements Anxiety*. 8 items go for *Evaluation Anxiety*, 7 items go for *Pupil and Professional Concerns Anxiety*, 5 items are related to *Class Control Anxiety*, and 5 for the *Teaching Practice Requirements Anxiety*. The scale was tested again for reliability issues and found to be valid and reliable for the pre- (Cronbach Alpha=.97) and for the post (Cronbach Alpha= .94) application. The pre-test was conducted right before the participants started their Early Field Experience, and the post-test was applied at the end of the Early Field Experience (EFE).

b. Qualitative Data Collection:

In order to have an in-depth understanding of PTEs' perceptions towards EFE, two semi-structured interviews were carried out right before and after the implementation process. Before the EFE, the questions aimed at diagnosing the PTEs' anxieties about their teaching. The post-interview questions focused on the effectiveness of the EFE process. The pre-interview questions were first formulated by the researchers upon the diagnosis of the anxiety and concerns of the prospective teachers on teaching. Then the questions were revised and finalised under the guidance of the field experts. Following the same procedures, post-interview questions were formulated with the aim of identifying the effectiveness of EFE. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the focus group model as six to eight interviewees (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) were accepted as ideal. The interviews were held on voluntary basis and when the saturation was reached with repeated replies the process stopped. The finalised versions (with a final reliability of 0.96 by Miles & Huberman's (1994) formula after the analysis) of the interview questions are presented below:

Questions for the Pre-Interview:

1. Do you have any concerns about the teaching process and what do you think are the reasons for these concerns?
2. What are your expectations about the EFE process?

Questions for the Post-Interview:

1. How far do you think EFE was effective in terms of your teaching?
2. Have you experienced any significant differences in your concerns and expectations after the EFE?

c. Implementation Process:

Early Field Experience Model (EFE) aims to provide practicum and real teaching chances for the prospective teachers in the early period. With this aim in mind, the researchers planned a two-term practice of EFE. The early field experience (EFE) practice of this present study aimed to improve PTEs' teaching skills before their internship in their final years at the faculty. The research consisted of 2 terms of their 3rd (junior) year. In the fall term, after 8 weeks of theoretical information was given to prospective teachers in the content of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) course, a micro-teaching practice was carried out for 6 weeks. In this way, each student had the chance to apply the stages of a sample lesson practically by giving a 25-minute micro-lesson. Within the framework of the research, during the EFE practice in the spring term, PTEs were given a total of 4 hours of theory about the early field experience: 2 hours by the supervisor at the ELT department and 2 hours by the mentor teacher at the public primary school. The supervisor informed PTEs on topics such as how to address children, how to choose appropriate methods, how to give the most appropriate instructions, and how to ensure classroom control. The mentor teacher at the public-school covered topics such as the functioning of the school, the rules to be followed, the places at school such as library, canteen, staff room, and the background of the students in the classes. In the spring term, a fixed class was assigned for each student in the public primary school and they taught one hour a week for 10 weeks. In this way, PTEs were able to get involved in the EFE practice within the framework of TEYL long before their practicum practices in their final years.

Data Analysis

Based on mixed-methods research design, data were collected in terms of qualitative and quantitative methods for the present study. Before the analysis, data set was checked for any missing data. Ready for the process, quantitative data were analysed through SPSS 17 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistical programme. Data were analysed with dependent and independent t-test, which are included in parametric statistics, since the N was 50 and above, and the groups showed homogeneous distribution as a result of Levene's test, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) goodness of fit showed normal distribution, and the arithmetic mean and standard deviation scores of the groups were calculated and compared. The significance level was taken as $\alpha=0.05$ in the comparisons and the differences were interpreted. The levels of anxiety were calculated as (26 being the lowest, and 130 being the highest score) 26-52 Very Low, 52-78 Low, 78-104 Medium, 104-130 High.

As for the qualitative data analyses, 12 students participated in the pre-interview, being on voluntary basis, 3 of the participants chose not to participate and 9 students took part in the post-interview. Missing data were checked and not included within the analysis. Therefore, a total number of interview data from 9 participants were analysed. First, the two researchers coded the meticulously transcribed interview data before having content analysis. The researchers chose the initial codes and identified the units of meaning in the data by going over the transcribed information considering the research questions, and the quantitative data collection scale. After independently reviewing the data, necessary changes or revisions that should be made to the preliminary codes were jointly discussed. The researchers ultimately arrived at agreed-upon codes and categories. Two outside/external researchers were also included within the analysis process at this stage for reliability concerns, and the final reliability was calculated as 0.96 by Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula. The researchers finished the content analysis and identified 5 themes for the pre-interview and 2 themes one of which has 5 sub-themes for the post interview- 7 in total that would aid in addressing the research questions through focused coding.

Results

Quantitative Findings

To study the anxiety levels of the PTEs, STAS (Student Teacher Anxiety Scale- Hart, 1987) was applied as a pre-test and post-test. First, the findings were presented to show the difference between the pre and post-tests in terms of sub-factors (See Table 1).

Table 1

Dependent t-test results of anxiety levels of 3rd year English Language Teaching students according to sub-factors

Sub-factors		N	X	SD	t	p
Evaluation	Pre-Test	90	27.88	9.26	3.94	.000
	Post Test	90	24.35	7.79		
Pupil and professional concerns	Pre-Test	90	22.20	7.44	2.93	.004
	Post Test	90	20.19	6.22		
Class control	Pre-Test	90	15.20	4.57	3.89	.000
	Post Test	90	13.42	3.80		
Teaching practice requirements	Pre-Test	90	15.73	5.42	2.62	.010
	Post Test	90	14.32	4.18		

* $p < .05$

According to Table 1, "Evaluation anxiety" mean scores of the pre-test and post-test were found to be (X=27.88) and (X=24.35) respectively. When the table was analysed, it was noted that there was a significant difference between pre and post-test findings for "Evaluation anxiety" of pre-service English teachers' anxiety levels (t=3.94; $p < .05$) in favour of the post-test. As for the "Pupil and professional concerns anxiety", the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test were found to be (X=22.20) and (X=20.19) respectively. The results showed that there was a significant difference between pre and post-test findings for "Pupil and professional concerns anxiety" of pre-service English teachers' anxiety levels (t=2.93; $p < .05$) in favour of the post-test. "Class control anxiety" mean scores of the pre-test and post-test were found to be (X=15.20) and (X=13.42) respectively. It was found out that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test for "Class control anxiety" of pre-service English teachers' anxiety levels (t=3.89; $p < .05$) in favour of the post-test. In relation to "Teaching practice requirements anxiety", the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test were found to be (X=15.73) and (X=14.32) respectively. It was seen that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test for "Teaching practice requirements anxiety" of pre-service English teachers' anxiety levels (t=2.62; $p < .05$) in favour of the post-test.

Second, the findings were presented to show the difference between the pre and post-test overall scores.

Table 2 presents the dependent t-test results according to anxiety levels of 3rd year English Language Teaching Students.

Table 2

Dependent t-test results according to anxiety levels of 3rd year English Language Teaching Students

Anxiety		N	X	SD	t	P
Total	Pre-test	90	81.00	24.03	4.16	.000
	Post Test	90	72.29	18.80		

* $p < .05$

Considering the findings of Table 1, it was indicated that the mean scores on the pre- and post-tests were, respectively, X=81.00 (Medium) and X=72.29 (Low). The results also showed that there was a significant

difference between pre-test and post-test scores for the level of anxiety of PTEs ($t=4.16$; $p<.05$) in favour of the post-test.

Qualitative Findings

To study the perceptions of the PTEs towards EFE, two semi-structured interviews were carried out right before and after the implementation process. Table 3 presents the themes and their frequencies of the first and second set of interviews before and after the implementation.

As seen in Table 3, the results of the interviews are separated into two categories: those obtained from the interviews conducted prior to the study and those obtained from the interviews conducted with PTEs following the implementation. Relevant findings from these two PTE interviews can be divided into the categories shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and their frequencies of the first and second set of interviews before and after the implementation

Interview (Pre-phase)	Themes (Concerns about...)	Frequency	Sample excerpts
	Teaching practice concern	6	<p>PTE 1: "Especially the fear of not being enough for my students. I mean, how will I teach, how will I continue, will they understand me, will I understand them? I am a little anxious about competence."</p> <p>PTE3: "One of them is about time management, because what I thought at first was, will I be able to teach for 40 minutes? Because we started with 20-minute presentations and now we will apply it twice as much, will I be able to teach the lesson within this time? Will I be able to finish it? What will I do if there is too much time left?"</p>
	Ss' background LI interference	3	<p>PTE 6: "Second graders do not even know how to read and write."</p> <p>PTE5: "I will speak English and they won't understand, that's it!"</p>
	Classroom management	7	<p>PTE7: "I am actually concerned about the issue.... I think the classes in Türkiye are too crowded for language teaching.....I think we spend so much time on noise, and personal interaction so we don't have time to focus on language, or teaching..... when the classes are so crowded I won't be able to control the classroom and can't keep up with the lesson plan or would like to give individual feedback but can't share enough time for each student."</p> <p>PTE9: "The crowded classes make me a little nervous. While I'm busy with materials, for example, because of the crowded class, the students may hurt each other at a moment that I cannot notice. This sometimes gives me nightmares."</p>
	Identity concern: Readiness to teach	3	<p>PTE5: "I don't have a close relationship with the students. Especially for the young age, because I'm not a kind of a person who gets on well with kids. I'd like to have some fun activities with them but that's not really my thing."</p> <p>PTE2: "I can personally say that I get on well with the kids. In this way, students want to take part- and they do- they love the teacher and this has an impact on learning. That's why we- as teachers- need to get on well with the kids. And is there any way to solve this? Now, I think there is. Spending time with children, being in the classroom environment and observing children would help."</p>
	Possible future risk of burnout	2	<p>PTE5: "After a year or two, I'm afraid to keep the lesson going in Turkish through the coursebook like traditional teachers."</p> <p>PTE1: "the fear of becoming 'a traditional teacher'"</p>
Interview (Post-phase)	Themes (Improvement in...)		
	Classroom management	5	<p>PTE2: "Classroom management. Most of the time, children used to stand up and come to us. This was a problem. It changed and was better towards the end. It depends on your authority. I still need to keep going but I've improved a lot. When I did this, it contributed to my classroom management. For example, a student was</p>

		<p>getting up, coming or causing a disturbance. He was talking to his friend. You know, he wanted attention or he was bored, so I understood him, I picked him up and brought him near me, for example. I was doing something related to the subject. For another 15 or 20 minutes, the child started to listen to the lesson in a more focused way.”</p> <p>PTE 6: “They used to put their hands on my shoulder, and say “What’s up?” I was shocked. Unfortunately they saw me as a friend, not as a teacher. ‘Will they ever listen to me?’ ‘Will they ever see me like this?’ I wondered if they would see me as a ‘teacher’ ‘an authority’. Then I realised that it’s a matter of patience. Only in this way I would make a good teacher. And I overcame this. They used to walk around the class with their friends pretending they’re putting the rubbish in the dustbin. I decided to use reward and punishment.”</p>
Appropriate language use	6	<p>DG (PTE9): “At first, I gave the instructions in Turkish. Later, Turkish first and English later. In the following 4 weeks, I used English first and Turkish later. I think this is working. I mean, I didn’t speak English the whole time, to be honest, because they insisted me a lot. They insisted that you speak English very well, but we really don’t understand anything.”</p> <p>GNV (PTE1): “...And when I spoke English in class more, I felt better. I said “I’m done 😊! Im a teacher”. I felt silly speaking Turkish in class. Speaking Turkish makes no sense in an English class. I used to defend the idea but 😞, no. It’s so ridiculous that you’re an English teacher speaking Turkish. What’s the deal? ...It goes slowly, gradually with simple sentences.”</p>
Motivation/Readiness to teach (Self-awareness to be a teacher)	6	<p>DG(PTE4): “So I was even thinking of doing a different profession. But from the moment I started, I realised that it was very easy, there was nothing much. There was nothing to force me. I didn’t want to be a teacher at first, now I want to be a teacher.”</p> <p>AŞ(PTE7): “At first I wanted to teach in a high school when I was appointed. Because I had a very big fear. Anxiety and prejudice against children, but now I would love to be a primary school English teacher.”</p> <p>ATV(PTE3): “I think it’s getting better in terms of motivation....When I talk to some of my friends, there are many people who think that they are afraid of the English teaching profession at first, that they cannot do it, but now they have changed their minds or vice versa. So what I see as important here is that PTEs realise whether they can be a teacher or not. Because teaching is in my opinion, a really important profession for me. I mean, it raised awareness of what it’s like to be a teacher.”</p>
Experience	4	<p>DG (PTE4): “First of all, I actually thought that teaching was much more difficult. I mean, I thought that it would be very difficult to deal with children and so on, so I was even thinking of doing a different profession. But from the moment I started, I realised that it was very easy, there was nothing much. They had nothing to force me. I mean, when we look at it from other professions, it is actually easier than other professions I have done so far. Therefore, first of all, it helped me in that regard.”</p> <p>ATV(PTE3): I can say that I was trembling with excitement when I entered in the class in the first week. I was excited more than scared. Because for the first time, I was really in a face-to-face experience with children. And considering the point I have reached now, I think I feel really comfortable. I start the lessons with ease.</p> <p>TK(PTE6): I told my friends at other universities about the EFE they had pity for me and said: “Was it really necessary? Just because you’re going to do it next year.” So I was worried. You know, whether it would really be like that or not, but it was very useful. I mean, I really had fears about the 4th grade, I mean, how it would be, or if I would be able to do this internship, but now it feels so easy that I am not afraid at all. It was also very useful. I think it was a great experience.</p>
Teaching content	2	<p>CY(PTE9): I actually realised the importance of getting preparations before the lesson.</p> <p>ATV(PTE3): I know what to do, I prepare the activities, I can give instructions in English like “we are going to do now”. At first I was only speaking Turkish because they didn’t understand, then I realised that after I gradually turned to English, they also did it as well.</p>
Effectiveness	9	<p>CK(PTE2): I think it’s very, very, very useful. I mean, it’s really incredibly useful. It’s going to be much, much more intense in the 4th grade. It was very good that it was once a week. It wasn’t tiring for us too much, but it was very useful. I experienced the environment, the children, their levels. I think it can even be taken in the first semester of the 3rd grade.</p> <p>DG(PTE4): You know, I have no worries left. the sooner I overcome the anxiety.....</p> <p>ATV(PTE3): I really think it was very useful. We started our internship in the third year. I think the timing was pretty fine.</p>

TK(PTE6): It was also fine for me. We could have started in the first term of the 3rd year.

As seen in Table 3, the themes were separately studied and grouped for the pre- interview phase and the post-interview phase. The themes were identified as “Concerns” for the pre-interview phase in respect to the statements of the students to be inclined to be worried and insecure about their teaching practices. The themes for the post-interview phase were identified as “Improvements” right after the EFE process as the concerns seemed to be resolved thus the themes were named accordingly.

As for the pre-interview phase, the voices mostly pile up around *Classroom management concerns* and *teaching practice concerns* themes with a frequency of 7 and 6 respectively. They’re followed by *students’ background concerns* and *identity concerns* ($f=2$ for each). The last theme *Possible future risk of burnout* represents the least frequency ($f=2$).

As for the post-interview phase, *Improvement in Effectiveness* theme reflects the voices of all the PTEs ($f=9$). The same percentage of voices of PTEs ($f=6$) revolve around *improvement in appropriate language use* and *improvement in motivation*. *Improvement in classroom management* and *experience* themes represent the statements of PTEs with frequencies of $f=5$ and $f=4$ respectively. The least represented theme was *improvement in teaching content* ($p=2$).

Discussion, Conclusion

The findings of the study, which represent the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, are thoroughly examined and discussed in detail below in order to address all of the research questions posed by the current study. To find answers to RQ 1 “What are the anxiety levels of pre-service teachers in English Language Teaching Department before and after their Early Field Experience?”, the data gained by the quantitative data tool STAS (Student Teacher Anxiety Scale) were analysed and thoroughly reviewed. The average total score was found to be medium ($X= 81.00$) before the EFE, and low ($x=72.29$) (see Table 2) after the EFE. This finding indicates a decline in the anxiety levels of the PTEs, which might be counted as positive as anxiety being a negative term. That might well be interpreted as positive effects of EFE on PTEs’ teaching anxiety, which implies that the EFE was efficient in fighting against PTEs’ teaching anxieties.

As for the RQ2 “Is there a significant difference between the pre and post-tests of the anxiety levels of pre-service teachers in English Language Teaching Department?”, there found to be a significant difference in terms of all sub-factors ($p=.000$ for *Evaluation*, $.004$ for *Pupil and Professional Concerns*, $.000$ for *Class Control*, $.010$ for *Teaching Practice Requirements* $<.05$) (See Table 1) and in total ($p=.000 < .05$) (See Table 2). Considering the findings of Table 1 and Table 2, it can be suggested that there exists a positive effect of EFE on the anxiety levels of the PTEs. These findings go in line with the answers given to the RQ1, which show an improvement in the treatment of anxiety levels after EFE. This finding is also supported by Jorstard (1975) suggesting that the inclusion of EFE helps relieve the anxiety of prospective teachers which goes in line with the above-mentioned findings.

The qualitative findings of the present study hold forth answers to RQ3 “What are the perceptions of ELT pre-service teachers towards ‘Early Field Experience?’”. Considering the themes created according to the data gained within the pre-phase of the interviews, the concerns of the PTEs revolve around *teaching practice*

concerns, students' background, classroom management, identity concerns: readiness to teach, and possible future risk of burnout.

Given the theoretical background only and lack of actual teaching experience yet, it's not surprising to anticipate feelings of inadequacy in terms of *teaching practice*. The voices of PTEs were commonly towards this aspect in terms of their concerns. The main issues raised were uncertainty and a lack of confidence in oneself.

(PTE1) *"Especially the fear of not being enough for my students. I mean, how will I teach, how will I continue, will they understand me, will I understand them? I am a little anxious about competence."*

(PTE3): *"One of them is about time management, because what I thought at first was, will I be able to teach for 40 minutes? Because we started with 25-minute presentations and now we will apply it twice as much, will I be able to teach within this time? Will I be able to finish it? What will I do if there is too much time left?"*

(PTE5): *"You know, will I be able to prepare my teaching properly or will I be able to convey the content to them, will I be able to attract their attention?"*

They still continued to have faith that attending class would be beneficial and held out hope that the experience would change things for the better, therefore what they expect to have more is *"experience"*. Hos (2019) stated that in her study, some of the participants think that despite being demanding and exhausting, this experience helped them become more knowledgeable, experienced, and conscious.

(PTE3): *"...I think this is due to inexperience and lack of preparation and experience....what I expect is 'experience'"*

(PTE2) *I would not say I have very big fears. Improving yourself will take time, in class. Having a reading activity, we will need to give feedback. Personal feedback will take time. For the first time, for example, if I cannot make it on time, I will for the second time. Everyone else did it in the same way. That's why I don't take it as a pressure.....lack of experience matters.....experience will solve most of, no even nearly all of the problems and anxieties we have discussed here. That's why my only expectation is that I want to experience everything. For example, it will challenge me about classroom management. This will add experience and I will be able to control the class that I can control them. I mean, I believe that it will add experience for those who will have difficulties in this way.*

Another concern was related to *students' background*. Lacking experience, the PTEs were uncertain about the target audience. The students' lack of L2 was one of the concerns stated. PTEs were uncomfortable with the lack of a means to communicate. They didn't know how to use the language.

(PTE1): *Children do not know English well, we try to teach English to the child by speaking English even though the child does not speak English. I'm a little worried about that, I mean, if they don't understand me, I can do something with gestures, or mimes. What can I do if they don't get it again? I am a little worried about that.*

(PTE6) : *Second graders do not even know how to read and write.*

(PTE5): *I will speak English and they won't understand, that's it!*

Related to *students' background*, the expectation about EFE was to be able to use appropriate language.

(PTE6) “.....adjusting my language to an appropriate one so that they (students) will be able to understand me.

PTEs frequently voiced concerns about *classroom management*, citing their inability to exert control over the students mostly because of the crowded classrooms.

(PTE7): *I am actually concerned about the issue.... I think the classes in Türkiye are too crowded for language teaching.....I think we spend so much time on noise, and personal interaction so we don't have time to focus on language, or teaching..... when the classes are so crowded, I won't be able to control the classroom and can't keep up with the lesson plan or would like to give individual feedback but can't share enough time for each student.*

(PTE9): *The crowded classes make me a little nervous. While I'm busy with materials, for example, because of the crowded class, the students may hurt each other at a moment that I cannot notice. This sometimes gives me nightmares.*

There were also accounts of identity concerns: *readiness to teach*, and in the search for solutions, EFE was perceived as a remedy because it offered opportunities for experience.

(PTE5): *“I don't have a close relationship with the students. Especially for the young age, because I'm not a kind of a person who gets on well with kids. I'd like to have some fun activities with them but that's not really my thing.”*

(PTE9): *“I don't really get on well with the children. For the early field experience, how far can I get sincere with the children? I would appreciate, if experience would help.”*

(PTE2): *I can personally say that I get on well with the kids. In this way, students want to take part- and they do- they love the teacher and this has an impact on learning. That's why we- as teachers- need to get on well with the kids. And is there any way to solve this? Now, I think there is. Spending time with children, being in the classroom environment and observing children would help.*

Possible future risk of *burnout* or the fear of becoming one of “those teachers” was reported as a concern upon their forthcoming teaching careers.

(PTE 5): *“After a year or two, I'm afraid to keep the lesson going in Turkish through the coursebook like traditional teachers.”*

The PTEs also provided opinions regarding the EFE's timing just prior to its implementation. The schedule and timing were approved by all PTEs, who also emphasized the importance of having this kind of procedure much earlier.

(PTE 2): *“It's really efficient to have the EFE before the 4th grade. The question is that is it too late to be in the 4th grade or just the time, I think it's better to be in the 3rd grade. What's more, we need to have it for both terms in the 3rd grade.”*

(PTE4): *“I think it is the right time.”*

(PTE5): *“I basically agree on the idea that the practicum needs to be taken to an earlier grade. Either in the 2nd grade or towards the end of the second term of the 1st grade for a week or two....at least we might have an idea about the issue. For me, it’s better in the 3rd grade. Earlier grades make it more efficient.”*

(PTE8): *I definitely think that it should be before the 4th grade. It becomes more serious then.*

As for the themes gained within the post-phase of the interview, it can be accepted that a significant improvement has been observed and identified. The voices of the PTEs supporting the improvement vary among *classroom management, appropriate language use, motivation and readiness to teach, experience, and teaching content*. The themes of concerns within the pre-phase show consistency with the themes of improvement within the post-phase. Following the application, concerns raised earlier were resolved.

The first concern related to *teaching practice* was addressed and resolved under the themes of *teaching content* and *experience* in the post-interview phase. The PTEs were concerned about lack of experience and how to deal with tasks, how to teach, and plan the flow of the lesson. After the EFE, in line with their expectations of having experience, the PTEs stated their actual teaching performances were effective, which is also seen as a chance for preparing themselves for teaching (Evans,1986). The longitudinal impacts of EFEs were also visible from the eyes of the principals as they observed teachers having a field-based programme background perform better as if they’re more experienced even in their novice teaching years (Huling, 1998).

(PTE3): *“I know what to do now. I prepare the activities, I can give instructions in English like “we are going to do now”. At first, I was only speaking Turkish because they didn't understand, then I realised that after I gradually turned to English, they also did it as well.”*

(PTE 4): *“First of all, I actually thought that teaching was much more difficult. I mean, I thought that it would be very difficult to deal with children and so on, so I was even thinking of doing a different profession. But from the moment I started, I realised that it was very easy, there was nothing much. Therefore, first of all, it helped me in that regard.”*

(PTE3): *“I can say that I was trembling with excitement when I entered in the class in the first week. I was excited more than scared. Because for the first time, I was really in a face-to-face experience with children. And considering the point I have reached now, I think I feel really comfortable. I start the lessons with ease.”*

(PTE 6): *When I told my friends at other universities about the EFE, they had pity for me and said: “Was it really necessary? Just because you're going to do it next year.” So I was worried. You know, whether it would really be like that or not, but it was very useful. I mean, I really had fears about the 4th grade, I mean, how it would be, or if I would be able to do this internship, but now it feels so easy that I am not afraid at all. It was also very useful. I think it was a great experience.*

Another concern was related to *“Students’ background/Appropriate language use”*. This problem of PTEs’ having an inclination to turn to L1 when they get overwhelmed was resolved through experience gradually again as stated by the PTEs. PTEs expressed that they learned to simplify and adjust their language accordingly in time with the real classroom experience.

(PTE2): *“As for simplification, I mean, I really need to use it in a very simple way. I realised that. They need to like English to understand. They need a lot of games.... If you make it fun... I made it that way and the result was good. The simpler the language I use, the easier they learn. They understand me better.”*

(PTE3): *At first I used L1 more. In my first lesson, they didn't even understand me. As they didn't understand, I used 70 to 80% Turkish, the remaining 20% was English. But as the weeks passed by, I started to change this ratio. 80% to 70% and to 60% gradually. Then it dropped to 50% and 40%. Now, I started to speak English more in general. Now, I use Turkish only when they don't really pay attention to me, I use it as “Children, please listen!” in Turkish. When I give instructions, I may direct them in Turkish. They already understand when I explain in English after I demonstrate them. I've figured it out.*

(PTE6): *I was concerned about simplifying my language. At first, I greeted the class with “Good Morning” in vain. The children didn't even have a response for this simple thing, they asked each other what was going on. I was shocked. I managed it this way: First, I spoke in English, and then translated it into Turkish. I mean I used them both. In time, gradually, we ended up only in English. I mean, they understood what I was saying shortly. It ended up in target language use.*

(PTE9): *At first, I gave the instructions in Turkish. Later, Turkish first and English later. In the following 4 weeks, I used English first and Turkish later. I think this is working*

The most striking example was PTE1 who regarded speaking English in class really difficult as the students would not understand, and revolved into a real supporter of using target language in class.

(PTE1): *...And when I spoke English in class more, I felt better. I said “I'm done! Im a teacher”. I felt silly speaking Turkish in class. Speaking Turkish makes no sense in an English class. I used to defend the idea but, no. It's so ridiculous that you're an English teacher speaking Turkish, like Maths teacher not using any numbers at all. What's the deal?It goes slowly, gradually with simple sentences.*

One of the most highlighted concern was *Classroom management* within the Pre-phase. Resolutions related to this theme were classified under the same name within the post-phase. PTEs figured it out through patience, experience (Lux et. al, 2017), trial and error, and reward and punishment.

(PTE2): *Classroom management. Most of the time, children used to stand up and come to us. This was a problem. It changed and was better towards the end. It depends on your authority. I still need to keep going but I've improved a lot. When I did this, it contributed to my classroom management. For example, a student was getting up, coming or causing a disturbance. He was talking to his friend. You know, he wanted attention or he was bored, so I understood him, I picked him up and brought him near me, for example. I was doing something related to the subject. For another 15 or 20 minutes, the child started to listen to me in a more focused way.*

(PTE6): *They used to put their hands on my shoulder, and say “What's up?” I was shocked . Unfortunately, they saw me as a friend, not as a teacher. ‘Will they ever listen to me?’ “Will they ever see me like this?” I wondered if they would see me as a ‘teacher’ ‘an authority’. Then I realised that it's a matter of patience. Only in this way I would make a good teacher. And I overcame this. They used to walk around the class with their friends pretending they're putting the rubbish in the dustbin. I decided to use reward and punishment.*

(PTE8): I tried something like changing the seats of the misbehaving student, for example, or for the activities, I was choosing the uneasy students and in that way, my prejudices were a little bit more gone gradually.

Readiness to teach concern within the pre-phase was resolved and transformed into *readiness to teach* and *self-awareness to be a teacher*. As Jorstad (1975) suggested EFE would provide chances for PTEs to reflect on their ideas to be a teacher by observing the classroom environment. PTEs reported a decrease in anxiety about becoming a teacher and a complete change of mind through experience. This might also be associated with *possible future risk of burnout concern*.

(PTE4): *So I was even thinking of doing a different profession. But from the moment I started, I realised that it was very easy, there was nothing much. There was nothing to force me. I didn't want to be a teacher at first, now I want to be a teacher.*

(PTE1): *I didn't want to be an English teacher until 8 weeks ago. I wanted to be a teacher, but not English. But I realised that the students were so sweet. My skills helped to motivate the students. It was a lot of fun to prepare activities. The children loved me, I could have fun with the children, and we played a lot of games. Every time I came, they asked what we were going to do, what we were going to play, I was very happy, so it was good, it motivated me, it really motivated me, you know, I wanted to study another teaching profession before, now I want to be an English teacher, so I want to be an English teacher, the early field experience process motivated me.*

(PTE7): *At first I wanted to teach in a high school when I was assigned. Because I had a very big fear, anxiety and prejudice against children, but now I would love to be a primary school English teacher.*

(PTE5): *You know, I was thinking that I would not be able to attract the attention of the children when I entered the classroom.... Afterwards, my communication with the children changed to be good.... I don't have worries about the children anymore.*

One of the PTEs suggested that not only for becoming a teacher but also to get to know oneself, EFE was shedding light on the idea of how teaching looks like before it's too late. Herold (1977) also suggested the same by stating that earlier practices would save time and money by providing PTEs chances to see whether the teaching is well-suited for them or not.

(PTE3): *I think it's getting better in terms of motivation for me....When I talk to some of my friends, many people think that they were afraid of the English teaching profession at first, that they could not do it, but now they have changed their minds or vice versa. So what I see as important here is that PTEs realise whether they can be a teacher or not. I mean, it raised awareness of what it's like to be a teacher.*

Another PTE supported this view and gave chances to getting to know oneself. S/he described EFE as an awareness-raising process.

(PTE): *"At first, I actually came here thinking that teaching was a very easy profession. I said I could do it, I mean we did all kinds of things. Then, when I started the EFE, I realised that this was not the case. So that was the anxiety. I think it has decreased now, but I don't know. I mean, we are more prepared for next year, so we know what we can face, so I am not very worried right now."*

As an overall evaluation, all the PTEs agreed upon the effectiveness of EFE, which goes in line with the findings of the study carried out by Cirillo et. al (2020). The timing was found quite appropriate and it might be taken even earlier and expanded to a-year-period.

(PTE2): *“I think it's very, very, very useful. I mean, it's really incredibly useful. It's going to be much, much more intense in the 4th grade. It was very good that it was once a week. It wasn't tiring for us too much, but it was very useful. I experienced the environment, the children, and their levels. I think it can even be taken to the first semester of the 3rd grade.”*

(PTE4): *You know, I have no worries left. the sooner I overcome the anxiety.....*

(PTE3): *I really think it was very useful. We started our internship in the third year. I think the timing was pretty fine.*

(PTE6): *It was also fine for me. We could have started in the first term of the 3rd year.*

Making a blend of the quantitative and qualitative findings of the present study, it can be concluded that the EFE has positive influences on PTEs' motivation, self-awareness, lowering their anxieties, change of minds in terms of shaping their future careers. Also having limited research conducted in the field that is similar to the present study, it is expected to give insights to the forthcoming studies with its findings and contribute to the field providing a sample for an early field practice.

Suggestions

The present study shed light on the Early Field Experience (EFE) practices providing both qualitative and quantitative findings. As the study was limited to Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) context, further studies could well be conducted with target groups of different levels such as secondary schools, high schools, colleges, and different age as teenagers and young adults. Also, considering the gap in the field and CoHE lacking theses in any of the teacher education fields, more studies on EFE practices should be conducted.

This study provided valuable data in terms of the effectiveness of the EFE practice within a state university ELT context. Regarding the positive reflections of the practice, it might be suggested that EFE be included in the undergraduate ELT programmes by CoHE.

Ethic

This study was ethically approved by the ethics committee of University, with the date and decision number of 08/04/2022 - 2022/126.

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