

Capturing pre-service language teachers' social and emotional learning skills: Strengths, challenges, and needs

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ABSTRACT This study aimed to investigate the social and emotional learning (SEL) skills of pre-service language teachers. A sequential explanatory research design was employed, involving 139 participants from two different language programs, English Language Teaching and Turkish Language Teaching, at a university in Turkey. The quantitative data obtained through the SEL scale revealed that participants exhibited strong skills in problem-solving and relationship-building but demonstrated a moderate level of self-awareness. Additionally, their stress management skills were found to be underdeveloped. Qualitative analysis further revealed that essential SEL competencies, such as emotion regulation and anger management, were limited, and participants frequently relied on avoidance strategies for stress management. This study highlights that SEL strategies should be incorporated into teacher education programs to better prepare teacher candidates for the complexities of teaching and learning environments while promoting their overall well-being. The study concludes with recommendations for the inclusion of SEL interventions in teacher training curricula to enhance pre-service teachers' social and emotional competence in their professional lives.

Keywords: Pre-service language teachers, SEL skills, Social emotional learning (SEL), Teacher education

Dil öğretmeni adaylarının sosyal duygusal öğrenme becerilerinin saptanması: Güçlü yönler, zayıflıklar ve ihtiyaçlar

ÖZ Bu çalışmanın amacı, hizmet öncesi dil öğretmen adaylarının sosyal ve duygusal öğrenme (SDÖ) becerilerini incelemektir. Türkiye'deki bir üniversitenin İngilizce Öğretmenliği ve Türkçe Öğretmenliği olmak üzere iki farklı dil programından 139 katılımcının yer aldığı çalışmada sıralı açıklayıcı bir araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. SDÖ ölçeği ile elde edilen nicel veriler, katılımcıların problem çözme ve ilişki kurma alanlarında güçlü becerilere sahip olduklarını, ancak öz farkındalık konusunda orta düzeyde bir yeterlilik sergilediklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, stres becerilerinin yeterince gelişmemiş olduğu görülmüştür. Diğer yandan nitel analiz sonuçları duygu düzenleme ve öfke yönetimi gibi temel SDÖ becerilerinin sınırlı olduğunu ve katılımcıların stres yönetimi için sıklıkla kaçınma stratejilerine başvurduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu çalışma, öğretmen adaylarının karmaşık öğrenme ve öğretme ortamlarında başarılı olmaları ve kendi iyi oluşlarını artırmaları için öğretmen eğitimi programlarına SDÖ stratejilerinin dâhil edilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarına yönelik önerilerde bulunulmuş ve öğretmenlerin mesleki yaşamlarında sosyal ve duygusal yeterlilik için gerekli becerileri kazandırmak amacıyla SDÖ müdahalelerinin öğretmen eğitimi müfredatına dahil edilmesine yönelik önerilerle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Öğretmen adayları, Öğretmen eğitimi, SDÖ becerileri, Sosyal duygusal öğrenme (SDÖ)

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INTRODUCTION

Language teaching is an 'emotionally charged activity' (Richards, 2022) that involves facing vulnerabilities, conflicts, and difficulties. Each educational setting presents its unique set of challenges, which implies that teachers who lack a protective shield may experience general dysfunction, exhaustion, inefficacy, and cynicism. Therefore, it becomes essential for language teachers to develop some form of social-emotional strength to maintain their professional balance and well-being (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). This study will explore how Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills can support language teachers in developing necessary social-emotional strength. To assess the potential efficacy of SEL in this context, we will begin by introducing the origins of SEL before conducting an investigation into its levels in prospective language teachers.

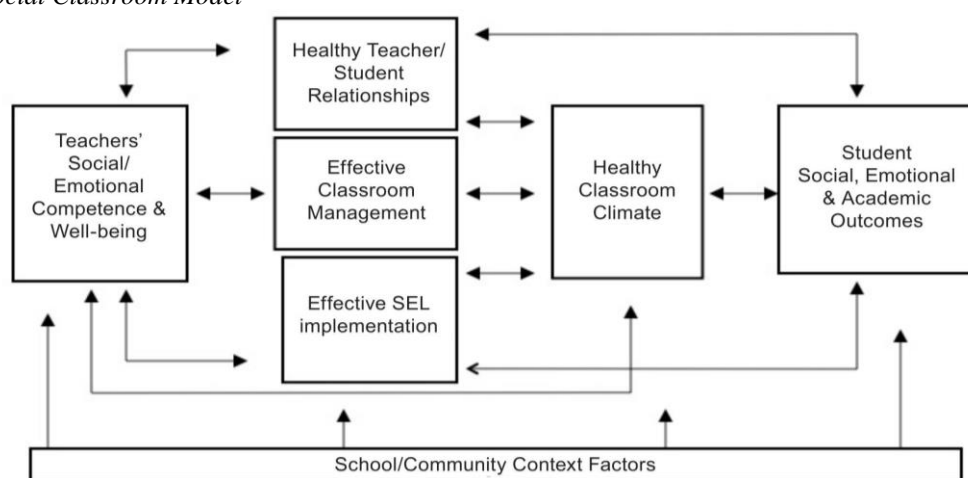
The emergence of SEL as a pedagogical approach can be traced back to the 1960s when the theoretical framework of affective domain theory gained significant attention among educators and psychologists (Krathwohl et al., 1973). This approach to education was later supported by humanist educational psychologists such as Rogers (1979), who highlighted the critical role of emotions and attitudes in the learning process and linked affective-emotional learning to academic performance. In other words, success in life is shaped by more than just cognitive ability and opportunities. It is also significantly affected by social, emotional, and behavioral skills, which include a person's abilities to sustain social relationships, control emotions, and manage behaviors aimed at achieving goals and facilitating learning (Soto et al., 2021). Goleman's (1995) research on emotional intelligence provided further evidence that SEL competencies can enhance cognitive performance. Under the light of SEL, many frameworks have emerged ; however, SEL structure developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) might arguably be the most utilized among many that have arisen. For instance, Dusenbury et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive examination of K-12 SEL learning competencies and standards across 18 states. They found that 12 of these states have SEL frameworks that directly align with CASEL's five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Notably, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania combine some of these competencies into broader goals centered on the individual, relationships, and decision-making. In contrast, six states (Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) use state-specific SEL frameworks that don't fully align with CASEL. However, Kansas, Washington, and Wisconsin still incorporate the CASEL competencies in slightly different ways. For example, Kansas focuses on character, personal, and social development, while Washington includes self-efficacy and social engagement. Indiana, Maine, and West Virginia have more distinct frameworks, though they still reflect elements of CASEL's competencies. Indiana's framework includes seven areas such as sensory motor integration, critical thinking, and mindset. Maine's Guiding Principles cover domains like communication and problem-solving, while West Virginia emphasizes social skills, study habits, career goals, and global citizenship.

CASEL's framework emphasizes five interconnected SEL skills;

1. Self-awareness involves the ability to regulate one's emotions and prevent destructive behavior, ultimately improving self-management skills (Adams & Richie, 2017).
2. Self-management encompasses the ability to proficiently regulate emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses across diverse environmental contexts. This proficiency necessitates the individual's capability to discern patterns and devise effective strategies to sustain self-regulation amidst situations that are stressful, challenging, and disruptive (Zins & Elias, 2007).
3. Social awareness involves engaging with others of different perspectives, ethnicities and backgrounds through ethical, empathetic, and social means (CASEL, 2013)
4. Relationship skills involve creating and sustaining positive relationships with diverse individuals and groups through effective communication, active listening, collaboration, conflict resolution, and seeking support when needed (CASEL, 2013).
5. Responsible decision-making is the capability to make wise judgments about one's own behavior and social interactions considering moral principles, ethical norms, and safety considerations (Elias et al., 1997).

Educators — including school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and pre-service teachers — who are tasked with promoting student development and wellbeing, should exhibit proficiency in social emotional skills (Gimbert et al., 2023). Each student represents a dynamic and complex system that is molded by interactions with various other systems, including family, peers, media, religion, and beyond. The teacher, also, possesses a unique set of personal characteristics and experiences that influence their interactions with students in the classroom. This dynamic between learners and teachers within the larger classroom system is inherently unpredictable and leads to the development of unique learning structures (Finch, 2004). Within this complexity, teachers' social and emotional competence (SEC) and well-being play a crucial role, forming the foundation for healthy teacher-student relationships and effective classroom management. These competencies enable teachers to navigate the complexities of classroom interactions more effectively, fostering a healthy classroom climate. In this vein, Jennings and Greenberg's Prosocial Classroom Model (2009, see Figure 1) depicts how teachers' SEC and wellbeing influence their classroom management skills and relationships with learners.

Figure 1.
The Prosocial Classroom Model



Evidently, teachers are crucial in setting an example for students, giving them resources to build their SEL, and fostering supportive learning environments (Elias et al., 1997). Therefore, teacher education is essential for enhancing teachers' understanding of SEL and their capacity to apply it (Castillo et al., 2013). However, it was found in some studies that teachers' comprehension of what SEL involves and how it may be incorporated into subject curricula and instruction is still insufficient (Aidman & Price, 2018; Kim & Hong, 2019). Studies in this sense have expressed that pre-service teachers are mostly provided with professional training on pedagogical approaches that are directly related to their subject areas, with very little emphasis placed on areas which are also important for a career in teaching, such as communication, emotional control, and classroom management (Blewitt et al., 2020; King & Chen, 2019). Examples include a comparative analysis of novice and expert teachers' undergraduate training which revealed a shared sentiment that both parties found their pre-service education inadequate in preparing them to effectively identify and manage learners' mental health concerns (Koller et al., 2004).

To this extent, we have looked at SEL in the broad context of teacher education. However, when we delve into SEL within the sphere of language learning, it is vital to appreciate the significant part that SEL skills have in the language learning journey. In a study conducted with Hong Kong secondary school EFL students, it was found that students' SEL competence had a significant impact on their English learning achievements. The study revealed a gap between students' awareness and management skills, with self-management playing a crucial mediating role in enhancing learning outcomes (Bai et al., 2021). This underscores how language learning is impacted not only by cognitive abilities and emotional conditions but also by the emotional, social, and cultural dynamics of the learning environment (Henter, 2014). Furthermore, integrating SEL into English language teaching offers many advantages. SEL enhances students' communication, social skills, and overall well-being, while

preparing them for future challenges. Activities like role-playing and group discussions promote empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution, all while improving language proficiency. This approach fosters a supportive classroom environment and holistic student development. Additionally, SEL helps students manage emotions, build resilience, and adopt a growth mindset, equipping them to face academic and personal challenges. Group projects and peer feedback further reinforce communication skills and teamwork, contributing to students' social and emotional growth (Bai et al., 2021). Besides, another study examining Turkish EFL instructors' views on SEL found that 45.4% of the 238 teachers surveyed believed that incorporating SEL in language classrooms supports students in achieving their academic goals. 40.9% of participants stated that SEL helps students develop self-awareness, while 31.8% mentioned that it builds coping skills. Additionally, 77.2% of teachers believed that SEL improves students' interpersonal skills, fostering their overall social competence (Daldal & Tuyan, 2024). However, despite the crucial role of emotions in the experiences of both language instructors and students, their importance is often overlooked due to the focus on cognitive dimensions in language education, rather than affective ones (Richards, 2022). Given the evolving nature of educational policies and teaching methodologies, especially after global and societal changes, focusing on research from the last five years might provide a more current and relevant understanding of the role of SEL in education. The focus areas of SEL studies in the Turkish context have been diverse, covering various aspects of SEL competencies and their applications. Ağırkan and Ergene (2021) conducted both a review and bibliometric analysis of international and national studies, as well as a meta-analysis of SEL interventions in Türkiye (Ağırkan & Ergene, 2022). Şimşek and Mutlu (2021) explored the associations between students' SEL and their perceptions of their social sciences teachers' interpersonal behavior. Using a Turkish adaptation of the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI), data were gathered from 386 fifth- and sixth-grade students. The analysis, conducted through descriptive statistics, Canonical Correlation Analysis, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), revealed that positive teacher behaviors such as leadership, helpfulness, and understanding were positively linked to students' SEL skills. In contrast, negative behaviors like admonishing, dissatisfaction, and strictness were negatively associated with SEL skills. Çelik and Erbay-Çetinkaya (2022) conducted a study to assess SEL needs among students from different majors taking a compulsory English course at a state university in northeastern Türkiye. Contrary to most studies in collectivist cultures like Türkiye, findings showed that Turkish students reported strong SEL capacities in self-regulation, social relations, and responsible decision-making. However, the study suggests that learners could still benefit from collaborative activities that foster a social, learner-centered environment, improving interpersonal skills, communication, motivation, self-confidence, and ultimately academic success. Additionally, it was pinpointed that these activities might help students enhance their self-awareness and self-management. Additionally, Çenberci and Tufan (2023) investigated the impact of music education, based on Music Learning Theory (MLT), on children's developmental music aptitude (DMA) and SEL skills. This study investigated the impact of music education based on Music Learning Theory (MLT) on children's developmental music aptitude (DMA) and SEL skills. Conducted with 92 first-grade students (ages 6-7), the experimental group received MLT-based music education with integrated SEL objectives, while the control group followed the standard curriculum. DMA was measured using the Primary Measures of Music Audiation, and SEL skills were assessed with the Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scale-Teacher Form-Turkish. While the musical aptitude results showed a higher increase in tonal, rhythmic, and composite scores for the experimental group, the differences were not statistically significant. However, the SEL skills of the experimental group showed statistically significant improvement. These findings suggest that MLT-based music education may enhance SEL skills, though further long-term research is recommended. These studies contribute significantly to understanding SEL in different educational and developmental contexts within Türkiye.

Furthermore, some cross-cultural studies were also carried out. The SEL International Research Network (SEL IRN) conducted a broad cross-cultural study to understand the importance and implications of empathy in education, surveying professionals across seven countries, including Türkiye (Kounenou et al., 2021). According to CASEL, empathy is linked to social awareness, which involves understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives, opinions, and values based on differences in background, culture, or context. This ability to take others' viewpoints is key to developing empathy (CASEL, 2015). The studies overviewed above revealed that Turkish educators emphasized the necessity

for developing advanced empathy skills among both teachers and students. This focus is specifically aimed at enhancing adaptability and flexibility in the context of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms, highlighting communication abilities and recognition of diversity (Kounenou et al., 2021).

Examining the pertinent literature on pre-service language teachers' subjective perceptions of SEL, there is a research gap both in the local and international context. Internationally, to the best of authors' knowledge, there is only one study (Megawati et al., 2023) that explored how SEL might impact pre-service language teachers' identity formation. The purpose of this research was to investigate how pre-service English teachers in Indonesia utilized SEL to develop their teacher identities while teaching English. Fifteen pre-service teachers from five teacher education programs participated in this qualitative study, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and self-reflection reports on SEL concepts. The findings show that, throughout their teaching experiences in diverse school environments, these teachers evolved their identities by engaging with various socializing factors and navigating emotional challenges. From the participants' responses, it became evident that emotions experienced during school-based teaching practice, particularly in teaching performance, are often linked to feelings of excitement and nervousness. These emotions contribute to a shift in their beliefs about their teacher identity, both before and after the teaching practice. Initially, most participants expressed positive emotions such as optimism, tolerance, helpfulness, and a balanced approach to teaching, being casual yet focused, strict when necessary, and serving as observers and feedback organizers. However, after completing the practice, many participants expressed a desire to become more experienced teachers. A few participants, feeling insufficient during their practice, developed more pessimistic views and indicated a preference for being stricter and more authoritative in their future teaching roles. These changes in teacher identity can be attributed to various factors. As Buendía-Arias et al. (2020) noted, teacher identity evolves through the intersection of many experiences that pre-service teachers encounter during their practicum, alongside their prior experiences and anticipated future teaching paths. The study highlights that pre-service teachers' identity formation is closely tied to their professional development efforts and understanding SEL equips pre-service teachers with necessary tools to better adapt to new teaching environments—both online and offline—and fosters empathy toward students, mentors, peers, and other stakeholders.

However, the setting of the study is acknowledged as a limitation because it was conducted during the pandemic in Indonesia under an Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) context. Thus, the authors suggest that a face-to-face learning environment would yield more diverse results, enabling pre-service teachers to practice their teaching skills and manage blended or offline classroom activities. The present study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining pre-service language teachers' SEL levels, their views on SEL skills, and suggestions for improvement. The focus group for this exploration consists of prospective English Language Teaching (ELT) and Turkish Language Teaching (TLT) teacher. As language learning is shaped by a multitude of factors such as cognitive and metacognitive capabilities, demographics, emotional states, as well as social and cultural dynamics within the learning environment (Henter, 2014), the substantial influence of SEL skills is crucial to consider for both teachers and teacher educators (McCall et al., 2022). Guided by this understanding, the study is driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the SEL levels of the pre-service language teachers, as measured by the SEL scale?
2. What are the participants' views about their SEL skills, as revealed in the interviews?
3. What do the participants suggest in the interviews to enhance their own SEL skills?

METHODS

Research Design and Participants

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed method design to find out the perceived SEL levels of two groups of pre-service teachers studying in a faculty of education at a state university in Türkiye

(i.e., fourth year students in two language programs). This research design is based upon gathering and analyzing quantitative data in the first phase of research, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase that expands on the findings of the original quantitative results (Creswell, 2009). Using criterion purposeful sampling, we selected participants based on their SEL scale scores, identifying those with the highest, average, and lowest scores from both ELT and TLT preservice teachers. The SEL scale we used measures key competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. By interviewing participants across this spectrum, we aimed to add depth to our investigation of their SEL skills, capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences that reflect varying levels of proficiency in these core competencies. In sum, 12 candidates; 6 from TLT and 6 from ELT programs, agreed to participate in interviews after classes. These participants were assigned pseudonyms ranging from ELT1 and TLT1 to ELT6 and TLT6, with the number indicating the level of their scores on the scale, with 1 being the highest and 6 being the lowest.

In essence, this study had both purposive and convenience sampling because participants of the study were two groups of pre-service teachers studying in ELT ($N = 76$) and TLT ($N = 63$) programs in a faculty of education where the three of the authors were employed. Also, the participants were formed from the fourth-year students of these programs who were about to graduate. Finally, the participants for the interviews were chosen according to their SEL scores.

Data Collection Instruments

The present study utilized a range of data collection instruments, comprising a personal information form, the SEL scale, and semi-structured interviews. Prior to administering the SEL scale, permission was obtained via email from Kabakçı and Korkut Owen (2010). Moreover, ethical approval for both the data collection methods and study content was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the Pamukkale University on May 11, 2022, with approval number of 13.05.2022-E.205227.

Social and Emotional Learning Skills Scale

The Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale, developed by Kabakçı and Korkut Owen (2010), was later used by Kocakulah and Kırtak Ad (2015) to determine its applicability for use with university students. The original form of the scale was maintained and administered to 514 pre-service teachers at a Turkish education faculty. The Cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient for the entire scale was found to be .890. The scale consisted of four factors with a total of 40 statements, which are in line with the components of SEL: problem-solving skills ($N = 11$), self-esteem enhancing skills ($N = 10$), coping with stress skills ($N = 10$), and communication skills ($N = 9$), with reliability coefficients of .683, .810, .615, and .874, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using LISREL 8.8 software to test the factor structure. These results suggest that the scale demonstrates an acceptable level of compliance and can be effectively used with university students.

Besides, similarly in the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated to be .889, indicating it as a reliable tool. The minimum total score achievable on the SEL scale is 40, while the maximum total score is 160. A low score on the scale indicates a deficiency in SEL abilities, while a high score denotes proficiency in SEL skills (Kabakçı & Korkut Owen, 2010). In this study, the pre-service language teachers completed the scale via Google Forms during class time, in approximately 10-15 minutes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After a perusal of the literature on SEL, we formed the interview questions in accordance with the four subdimensions of the SEL scale. We requested expert opinions from several scholars employed in both ELT and TLT programs on the clarity and language use of the questions. Then, we did piloting with one

pre-service teacher, who was not included in the actual study. We recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the piloting interview; thus, this piloting enabled us to determine the coding rules for main categories and this way we tested some anchor samples for each main category and our categorization matrix (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Afterwards, 14 interview questions were given their final shape (See the interview questions in Appendix 1). Two of the researchers from TLT program (the third and the fourth authors), who are familiar with interview preparation and practice, conducted the interviews in their offices in the Turkish language. They did their best to be neutral in interviews to minimize at least some inevitable effects of social desirability bias (Dörnyei, 2007). With the interviewees' permission, every interview was recorded to be transcribed, analyzed, and then translated. While the longest interview took 45 minutes, the shortest was 22, and the average was calculated to be 26 minutes.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered via Google Forms during the 2021-2022 academic year were analyzed via SPSS 26.0. The descriptive statistics and a t-test was used to summarize and describe the quantitative data. Based upon the scores obtained, the pre-service teachers with the highest, average, and lowest scores on the scale ($N = 12$), from both groups were invited for interviews. The purpose was to be able to delve into the details of these pre-service teachers' SEL skills. Following the steps of qualitative content analysis suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Assarroudi et al. (2018), the third and the fourth authors transcribed the interview data verbatim, conducted the initial directed qualitative content analysis. In directed qualitative content analysis, researchers carry out the qualitative analysis using a framework and analyze all the verbal data according to the contents given in or shaped by this framework. Put succinctly, the four subcategories of the SEL scale were used as an existing theory and/or framework, and the analysis were confined to these four components of SEL scale. This way quantitative and qualitative data were easily merged as the basic starting point for both types of data collected was SEL scale components. These components served as a guiding tool providing researchers with help for further clarification of the scale with verbal data collected in interviews. Following the premises of consensus coding and to find the percentage agreement for these two raters, their analyses on one fifth of the verbal data were compared and a strong intercoder reliability with 80% was obtained (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a follow-up step, all the main and generic categories observed in the initial coding were checked, further discussed with the contribution of all five authors in scheduled meetings to strengthen inter-coder reliability and enhance trustworthiness. In the next section, a thorough description and discussion of these categories will be provided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Service Language Teachers' SEL Levels

This study first aimed to determine the participating pre-service language teachers' perceived SEL levels (see Table 1). Participants were able to obtain a minimum score of 40 and a highest score of 160 from the SEL scale implemented and it was seen that a minimum score of 99 and a maximum score of 158 was obtained. The mean SEL score among participants was 131.11 out of a possible 160, indicating a relatively high level of perceived SEL abilities. While this score is above the scale's midpoint, it's important to note that no established norms or comparative studies using the same SEL scale are currently available for pre-service teachers. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether this score adequately reflects the level of SEL preparedness required to meet the emotional demands of teaching.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of SEL Scale

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Total SEL Score	132	99	158	131.11	12.98

However, given the scale's construct validity and the sample consisting of fourth-year pre-service teachers, the high mean score may suggest a positive trajectory in SEL development. As emphasized, teachers who possess high levels of SEL tend to establish effective relationships with their students, demonstrate skillful and efficient classroom management skills, and effectively integrate SEL into their curriculum (Jones et al., 2014). Furthermore, these teachers feel more inclined to cultivate a positive learning environment, demonstrate emotional intelligence, employ effective language, and exert guidance and control over student behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, it is important to recognize that SEL is a multifaceted construct shaped by both formal education and personal experiences. While the program's curriculum likely plays a role in fostering SEL skills, individual factors such as learning styles, emotional intelligence, and personal challenges also significantly contribute to SEL growth (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Megawati et al., 2023).

As can be seen in Table 2 below, no statistically significant difference was found in the SEL scale scores of the participants according to their programs $t(2.57) = .352, p > .05$. However, the perceived SEL level of the ELT participants ($\bar{x} = 133.83, SD = 12.07$) was slightly higher than that of TLT participants ($\bar{x} = 128.13, SD = 13.38$). This might have stemmed from the fact that teaching a foreign language requires being informed about certain issues, such as the impact of culture on language acquisition, and being open and empathetic to other cultures and languages. Since such concerns are inevitable in ELT programs, they are further addressed through specific courses offered within the department. For instance, courses such as World Englishes and Culture, Sociolinguistics and Language Education and Discourse Analysis and Language Education given as field selective courses in ELT programs (Higher Education Council, 2018) enable ELT students to have a deeper awareness of language and culture connectedness, and cross-cultural comparisons. These courses may contribute to the observed slight difference between the SEL scores of participating pre-service teachers of English (i.e., ELT participants) and of Turkish (i.e., TLT participants).

Table 2.

T-Test Results of SEL Scale According to Program

	Program	N	\bar{x}	SD	SEM	T	P
Total SEL Scores	ELT	69	133.83	12.07	1.45	2.57	.352
	TLT	63	128.13	13.38	1.68		

* $p < 0.05$

Furthermore, since there were no significant differences found between programs, further analyses were conducted by treating all participants as a homogeneous group to ensure that the verbal data findings were not biased by any program-related differences that may have been present.

Table 3 illustrates arithmetic means of the participants regarding the sub-components of the SEL scale in a descending order; problem solving skills ($\bar{x} = 3.51, SD = .383$), relationship skills ($\bar{x} = 3.49, SD = .395$), self-awareness skills ($\bar{x} = 3.36, SD = .498$), and stress management skills ($\bar{x} = 2.72, SD = .450$).

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics of SEL Scale Sub-components

SEL sub-components	N	\bar{x}	Std. Deviation
Problem solving skills	132	3.51	.383
Relationship skills	132	3.49	.395
Self-awareness skills	132	3.36	.489
Stress management skills	132	2.72	.450

These findings demonstrate the varying levels of perceived competency in the different components of SEL among pre-service teachers. As the results of the SEL scale sub-components show, while pre-service teachers find themselves skilled at problem-solving and building relationships, they may at the same time struggle with managing their stress. This struggle may stem from a lack of necessary coping strategies to manage stress effectively and adaptability in stressful environments, which could be attributed to insufficient training in SEL skills during their education programs (Aidman & Price, 2018;

Kim & Hong, 2019). This observation is aligned with Cochran and Peters (2023), who explored how brief mindfulness and SEL training could impact pre-service teacher efficacy and empathy. Their mixed-methods study, involving 58 pre-service teachers, showed that participants initially lacked the emotional self-management skills necessary for stress regulation, which likely increased feelings of anxiety and decreased teaching efficacy. Their findings revealed that mindfulness interventions can improve teachers' ability to manage stress and build self-efficacy, suggesting that targeted instruction in these areas could be beneficial for stress management. However, pre-service teachers primarily receive professional training focused on pedagogical methods specific to their subject areas, with minimal attention given to other critical aspects of teaching, such as communication skills, emotional regulation, and classroom management (Blewitt et al., 2020; King & Chen, 2019). Similarly, Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) conducted a national scan analysis of teacher preparation programs across the U.S., identifying a significant gap in training related to self-awareness and self-regulation in teacher training. Their research emphasized that pre-service teachers, while academically prepared, often lack the emotional regulation strategies needed to cope with the demands of teaching and without these skills, pre-service teachers may experience burnout or emotional exhaustion early in their careers. To conclude, the integration of targeted SEL instruction, particularly self-awareness and self-regulation, into teacher training programs may help future educators manage stress more effectively. Unfortunately, the skills necessary for SEL are often not included or receive minimal attention in the curricula followed in teacher training programs (Blewitt et al., 2020; King & Chen, 2019). Thus, it is suggested that SEL be included as an independent component in the curricula so that it can be better practiced and assessed during teacher education. Specific strategies for inclusion could involve dedicated coursework in mindfulness and emotional regulation techniques, as well as practical, experience-based learning opportunities such as student teaching seminars that focus on emotional self-awareness and stress management (Cochran & Peters, 2023; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

Participants' Stated Views Regarding their SEL Skills

The qualitative data collected aimed at providing verbal data regarding the SEL skills of pre-service language teachers within their personal and educational lives. The qualitative findings will be presented and discussed according to the four subdimensions of the scale:

Problem Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills were identified as the highest-rated SEL skills on the scale, based on the quantitative data collected. This result was supported by the interview data. The pre-service teachers provided diverse responses, revealing that almost all of them ($n = 10$) endeavor to solve problems by using different strategies. For instance, seven pre-service teachers assumed the role of an arbitrator and offered their friends feedback on the merits and demerits of their arguments. Meanwhile, nine pre-service teachers attempted to act as intermediaries by facilitating communication between disputing parties with the aim of arriving at a resolution.

"When two people are having an argument, it's usually not a case of one person being completely right and the other being completely wrong. Both sides usually have some valid points. I consider myself to be a fair person, so in a situation like that, I try to acknowledge the valid points of both parties and then try to find a way to bring the two sides together and resolve the conflict. My goal is always to reach a compromise and make sure that both parties feel satisfied with the outcome."
(TLT 3)

Both arbitration and mediation reflect key problem-solving steps: identifying issues, understanding perspectives, generating solutions, and reaching consensus. By practicing these strategies, pre-service teachers enhance their problem-solving abilities and create supportive classroom environments (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). This strategy embodies social awareness and empathy, as pre-service teachers must understand different perspectives and emotional responses. By guiding individuals through conflict with respect and sensitivity, they model essential communication skills for diverse classrooms. The alignment between the qualitative and quantitative data supports the notion that pre-

service teachers place a strong emphasis on developing their problem-solving skills. This finding could be attributed to some common pedagogical and field-specific courses that they take. Especially Introduction to Education, Philosophy of Education, Classroom Management, and Testing and Evaluation might have contributed to the development of these skills. The frequently obtained responses also suggest that the participants have practical experience using problem-solving strategies in real-life situations, as well. Furthermore, teachers who possess strong problem-solving skills can provide valuable guidance and support to their students when faced with challenges. By leveraging their own SEL skills, teachers not only create a positive learning environment in their classrooms, but also enhance their ability to effectively apply SEL skills in other educational contexts (Esen-Aygün & Şahin-Taşkın, 2017).

Relationship Skills

In relation to competence in relationship skills, the quantitative results indicated that pre-service teachers consider themselves highly capable in this area, as it received the second highest score on the scale ($\bar{x} = 3.49$, $SD = .395$) following problem-solving skills ($\bar{x} = 3.51$, $SD = .383$). These findings were supported by the qualitative data collected from 12 interviewees, highlighting specific attributes that influence their perceived communication competencies. Similar with the quantitative results, only a small number of the participants ($n = 4$) expressed a lack of competence in their relationship skills. Furthermore, five participants acknowledged their need for improvement while simultaneously viewing themselves as competent communicators. Lastly, three language teacher candidates expressed that their communication skills were stronger within the classroom compared to their skills in everyday life situations, suggesting a context-specific efficacy in communication. One example is as follows:

"I can say that I find my verbal communication sufficient, or good, in my opinion. I am generally a bit shy, and I am not someone who talks a lot. But when I am a teacher, the children are closer to my age compared to the other teachers, and I can better understand the things they like and use this information in my communication with them." (ELT6)

This excerpt exemplifies that pre-service teachers demonstrate a disparity in their communication abilities when interacting with students in the classroom versus people in real-life settings. Most of them ($n = 9$) state that establishing a connection with their students was not a challenge due to their close ages and their rapport-building efforts to identify student interests.

These qualitative findings align with Kounenou et al. (2021), who conducted a cross-cultural study involving educators from seven countries to examine the role of empathy in SEL competencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, using qualitative surveys and interviews, found that empathy plays a crucial role in fostering effective communication, understanding student needs, and managing classroom dynamics. This suggests that the pre-service teachers' competence in relationship skills is closely linked to their ability to empathize and adapt their communication strategies based on their understanding of student perspectives (Kounenou et al., 2021). Besides, positive teacher behaviors, such as leadership, helpfulness, and understanding, are closely linked to the development of students' SEL skills (Şimşek & Mutlu, 2021). Similarly, Baroody et al. (2014), in a randomized controlled trial with 63 teachers and 387 fifth-grade students, found that effective use of SEL-based strategies such as the Responsive Classroom approach significantly improved student-teacher relationship quality. The study highlighted that relational closeness was mediated by teachers' ability to implement responsive practices, such as emotional support and verbal and non-verbal communication, which aligns with the findings in the current study, where pre-service teachers used a variety of strategies, including non-verbal cues, to manage classroom interactions and establish rapport.

In this vein, focus on non-verbal communication skills of the participants ($n = 12$) revealed that pre-service teachers utilized nonverbal communication as a means of enhancing their communication with students, increasing the efficacy of their message, regulating classroom dynamics, and giving warnings. Techniques employed included the use of gestures and facial expressions, such as eye contact, nodding,

raising eyebrows, opening eyes, and smiling, as well as strategic use of body language and proximity to students. The following quotes show how participants ($n = 2$) use non-verbal communication for classroom management:

"For example, when students make a lot of noise, I do things like clapping or tapping on the board with a board marker to get their attention. Another thing I do is walk around between the desks, and the students tend to focus more and try harder to listen to the lesson." (ELT5)

"When a child misbehaves in the classroom, I think I can stop them by giving them a look that says, 'That's wrong, you should stop now.' Or, when a student stands up and gives a correct answer, I might give them a smile or tap on the shoulder to show my appreciation." (TLT4)

Reflecting the practicum teaching environment these excerpts suggest that pre-service teachers recognize effective classroom management as a crucial component in language learning contexts, potentially due to the inclusion of educational psychology courses in the curriculum, which offer valuable insights for professional growth, such as understanding existing teaching beliefs, reflective practicing, and developing self-efficacy. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) further emphasize this point, indicating that educators who possess strong SEC demonstrate greater effectiveness in classroom management, employing both verbal and non-verbal techniques to foster positive learning environments and mitigate disruptive behaviors. Additionally, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) emphasize that successful classroom learning is influenced by various factors, including student relationships, teacher immediacy behaviors, and a supportive classroom environment which is reflected in the pre-service teachers' emphasis on establishing rapport and navigating classroom dynamic through non-verbal communication. The pre-service teachers attempt to modify their communication style to correspond with students' interests resonate with the claim that effective education employ various communication strategies to motivate students and maintain a positive classroom climate. Furthermore, Zins et al. (2004) argue that relationship management is a fundamental aspect of SEC which is crucial for fostering supportive teacher-student interaction. Furthermore, cultivating advanced empathy skills in both teachers and students is essential for enhancing adaptability and flexibility in culturally diverse classrooms, with a focus on communication skills and recognizing diversity (Kounenou et al., 2021). This aligns with the observed findings; whereby pre-service teachers emphasized the need of balancing authority and empathy to improve student engagement and provide an inclusive learning environment.

Self-Awareness Skills

Regarding self-awareness, pre-service teachers identified positive traits including fondness for explanation, belief in the impact of psychological support on their communication skills, emotional expressiveness, persuasive skills, adaptability to new settings, and straightforward communication. However, they also recognized challenges such as unintentional facial expressions conveying negative emotions, impulsiveness, communication struggles due to introversion, difficulties expressing emotions, lack of persuasive skills, and limited teaching practice opportunities due to the pandemic. These traits reflect the teachers' understanding of their own emotions and thoughts, which is a core component of self-awareness within the SEL framework. Moreover, pre-service teachers pointed out personality traits such as shyness, introversion, irritability, and impulsivity as factors contributing to these challenges. These self-perceived limitations hinder their ability to regulate emotions and communicate effectively, which are essential for personal and professional growth. Additionally, insufficient reading habits, a limited vocabulary stock, a family background that does not prioritize communication, and all the hardships experienced in childhood were the most frequently shared factors contributing to these challenges. The participants' reflection on their own weaknesses demonstrates an emerging self-awareness of how personal history shapes their ability to communicate and regulate emotions. For instance, one participant expressed a desire to appear flawless in the eyes of others, and was not open to receiving criticism, indicating a struggle with self-acceptance:

"... the happiness of others is important to me and even takes priority over my own. Other people's happiness comes first. Why else am I struggling? I also don't want to hear anything negative about

myself and I strive for perfection in others' eyes. I want to be the person people point to as an example model figure. Additionally, I don't like hearing anything bad in general" (TLT 6)

This reflects a challenge in self-awareness, as the participant's emphasis on external validation and perfection could hinder their ability to manage stress, accept constructive criticism, and develop healthier relationships with students and colleagues. Furthermore, such statements can be explained through the cultural characteristics of Turkish society, where the collective well-being of the community takes precedence over that of the individual (Telef & Furlong, 2017). This finding aligns with some earlier studies carried out in collectivist societies, including Hong Kong and other Asian communities (Bai et al., 2021; Çelik & Erbay-Çetinkaya, 2022). Although cultural traits can influence views on self-worth, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique differences and personal experiences that contribute to these challenges. Elements like family dynamics and personality traits can significantly influence the development of self-awareness in pre-service teachers and their ability to manage the challenges they will face in their future educational roles.

Similar concerns were observed in the following excerpt where another participant emphasized the pressure to meet family expectations, revealing how this external pressure shaped their self-awareness:

"I mean, it's always been like that since I was little. My family had a lot of expectations from me. The question of 'how are you' wasn't often asked, but the question of 'how are your lessons' was. So I tried to do whatever they wanted to be accepted by my family, friends and people who knew me. I didn't have time to think much about my feelings." (ELT 2)

In this instance, the participant's lack of time to consider their own emotions suggests an underdeveloped sense of self-awareness. While family expectations and societal pressures are important, these experiences also contribute to a limited capacity for emotional regulation and self-reflection.

Furthermore, while analyzing the verbal data, we saw that some views were related to past family backgrounds or gender stereotypes in the country and thus were not directly linked to the subdimensions of the scale. However, we found such views valuable and appropriate to be analyzed and shared as generic categories (Assarroudi et al., 2018), considering that these views are also related to the SEC of pre-service teachers in essence:

"I mean, when you try to reconcile and when you show kindness, I've noticed a negative reaction from some people. Unfortunately, in our society, there is a tendency to perceive kind and well-intentioned people as weak, which is a problematic kind of thinking. When you display kindness or vulnerability, some may take advantage of that perception and abuse it. I have personally sensed this many times in my life, unfortunately." (TLT 5)

This perspective indicates that societal norms may impact the participant's self-perception and emotional regulation. It is important to consider how the pressure to conform to these norms can limit self-awareness and hinder the development of authentic relationships (Ten Bokkel et al., 2023). Acknowledging individual experiences alongside societal influences is essential for a comprehensive understanding of how cultural factors shape emotional development and self-awareness. For instance, the excerpt above suggests that being polite is considered unsuitable for men, potentially leading to an adoption of a defensive identity to avoid being bullied. These invisible battle scars from the past may impact the pre-service teachers' ability to effectively participate and engage in the communicative side of the teaching and learning process. Thus, by focusing on self-awareness within the SEL framework and recognizing the influence of personal experiences and societal norms, we can foster a more inclusive understanding of pre-service teachers' development. To do so, incorporating collaborative, learner-centered activities that promote a social learning environment such as peer teaching, group projects and presentations can enhance interpersonal skills, communication, motivation, and self-confidence, contributing to both academic success and professional growth (Çelik & Erbay-Çetinkaya, 2020). Such an approach can better support their preparedness for the challenges they will face in teaching and social contexts.

Stress Management Skills

The lowest average score among the participants was in the stress management subcomponent of the SEL scale. This finding is particularly concerning because stress management is a key aspect of the SEL framework, which, according to Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017), involves the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in various situations. The qualitative data showed that participants ($n = 8$) believed they were successful at managing stress, while the remaining participants ($n = 4$) felt completely inadequate. Various stress-coping strategies such as physical activities (e.g., walking, exercising, and fishing), technology use (e.g., watching videos, using phones, and social media), creative pursuits (e.g., handicrafts, and playing music), socializing with friends, and spiritual practices (e.g., expressing gratitude, and engaging in mysticism like Sufism) were mentioned. For instance,

"If it's something I have to accept, then I accept it and solve the problems that way. Let me see, there's me and the situation. You know, I have this saying that I strongly believe in and that was derived from Sufism, 'Whatever God does is good.' Or, you know, 'This too shall pass,' I often say these to myself while looking up at the sky. It really makes me feel better about what's inside me and my problems. But it solves or at least helps the problem itself." (TLT4)

This spiritual approach, while beneficial in some contexts, still reflects a passive acceptance of stress rather than proactive management, which is central to effective SEL practice. Furthermore, seven pre-service teachers stated that when they faced stress, they resorted to solitary activities such as sleeping, crying, shouting, avoiding communication with anyone, and eating. For instance, one participant explained:

"I lie down and sleep. (Why do you sleep?) To relax, generally it feels like my problems will pass, it feels like the problem will be solved. I say to myself, 'What's done is done. If I sleep, everything will be okay, you know, like waking up as a new person. (Does it work?) It works when I sleep, it continues to be the same when I wake up." (TLT3)

While sleep can be restorative, relying on it to escape from stress rather than actively addressing the underlying emotions is indicative of avoidance—a behavior that lacks the emotional regulation necessary for long-term stress management. In light of the statements, it can be inferred that these participants possess insufficient competence in some key SEL abilities, notably emotion regulation and anger management, and often rely on avoidance strategies for stress management in some critical moments. The participants' use of avoidance strategies suggests an inability to regulate emotions in high-stress situations, echoing the findings of Esen-Aygün & Şahin-Taşkın (2016), who reported that many pre-service teachers lack sufficient training in SEL, particularly in skills related to emotional regulation and problem-solving.

Moreover, the data supports the argument that the inadequacy of instruction in SEL during teacher training is a contributing factor to these deficiencies. As Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) highlight, a profound gap exists between the SEL content required for teacher certification and the actual coursework provided by teacher education programs. Despite SEL's significance in promoting emotional well-being and resilience in both teachers and students, it remains under-emphasized in many training programs (Koller et al., 2004). The participants in this study reflect this gap, as their responses suggest they have not received adequate guidance on how to manage their emotions in a professional capacity. Similarly, Esen-Aygün & Şahin-Taşkın (2016) point out that Turkish pre-service teachers often enter the profession with limited knowledge of SEL principles, which leaves them unprepared to manage their stress or model effective emotional regulation for their students.

The strategies used by the participants, such as sleeping or avoiding communication, although effective in providing temporary relief, do not address the root causes of stress. According to Yang & Golshirazi (2023), effective SEL involves the recognition, processing, and regulation of emotions, which allows individuals to navigate stressful situations constructively. The participants' coping strategies lack this reflective and proactive dimension, as they do not involve emotional processing or problem-solving.

Instead, they fall into the category of avoidance behaviors, which, while momentarily helpful, fail to foster the emotional resilience necessary for long-term stress management.

Considering these findings, it becomes clear that the participants' stress management strategies reflect a broader issue in teacher preparation programs. The absence of structured SEL curricula that prioritize self-awareness and self-regulation skills leaves pre-service teachers ill-equipped to handle stress in the classroom. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) emphasizes that strong SEL competencies in teachers are essential for fostering emotionally supportive classroom environments. Yet, the participants' reliance on passive or avoidance-based strategies demonstrates that their training has not adequately prepared them to model these skills for their future students.

Suggestions to Enhance SEL Skills

Enhancing SEL skills in pre-service teacher education is an essential part of preparing future educators for the complex emotional dynamics they will face in classrooms. Although the statistical results showed that the majority of the pre-service teachers felt competent in most SEL skills, the following answer from one participant to an interview question asking them to assess their SEL skills emphasizes the necessity for additional improvement in these skills:

"In my opinion, I am somewhat bad at these skills. However, since our job involves dealing with people, especially children, one needs to adjust their language use accordingly. While conversing with an adult and a child you tend to use different languages." (TLT4)

This reflection suggests that pre-service teachers may struggle with skills related to self-awareness and relationship building, two core SEL dimensions that are critical in teaching. Self-awareness involves recognizing one's emotions and thoughts and how they influence behavior, while relationship skills require adapting communication to different audiences, which is particularly important when interacting with both children and adults (Adams & Richie, 2017; CASEL, 2013). The need to strengthen these competencies is echoed in broader research. For instance, Sugishita and Dresser's (2019) action research emphasizes that SEL strategies must be consistently integrated into teacher training, rather than being treated as an isolated component. Their study demonstrated that pre-service teachers who practiced SEL-supportive strategies, such as active engagement and positive classroom discipline, developed greater confidence in their ability to manage classroom relationships and communicate effectively with diverse student populations. This suggests that continuous practice of SEL strategies is necessary for developing proficiency, especially in skills like self-awareness and relationship building, which are directly connected to classroom success. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Ağrkan and Ergene (2022) indicates that SEL interventions are vital for developing specific skills and addressing behavioral issues. The findings suggest that SEL interventions implemented in Türkiye are a key approach to promoting social-emotional skills and reducing both externalizing and internalizing problems.

Furthermore, one area where pre-service teachers noted significant improvement was in their practicum experiences.

"Well, in previous years, I had a harder time communicating with people. But now, my anxiety has decreased a bit, I think because of the practicum. I have started teaching, and speaking in front of so many people has reduced my anxiety a bit." (ELT6)

This observation aligns with findings by Stipp (2019), whose mixed-methods evaluation of a semester-long SEL course for pre-service teachers demonstrated that hands-on practicum experiences significantly improved participants' confidence in handling student stress and managing classrooms. The neuroscience of trauma-informed teaching, a key component of Stipp's course, was particularly effective in helping pre-service teachers understand how environmental factors shape student behavior. These insights point to the importance of embedding SEL training into practicum experiences, where pre-service teachers can apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations.

SEL training during practicum placements also addresses the core SEL competency of self-management, which involves regulating one's emotions and handling stress effectively (CASEL, 2013). A meta-analysis conducted on thirteen studies by Oliveira et al. (2021) found that long-term SEL interventions, particularly those exceeding three months, significantly reduced emotional exhaustion and burnout among teachers. Similarly, Chen (2019) conducted a study with a sample of 963 Chinese pre-service teachers to investigate the correlation between their efficacy, emotions and practicum performance ratings. The findings indicated that the efficacy of preservice teachers was a significant predictor of their performance during practicum, mediated by their emotional states. These findings reinforce the argument that SEL training should be sustained over an extended period, allowing pre-service teachers ample time to develop emotional resilience and self-regulation strategies. By embedding SEL training into practicum experiences, teacher education programs can create opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice managing classroom dynamics in a supportive environment, thus preparing them for the emotional demands of the profession (Cochran & Peters, 2023).

However, to fully realize the potential of SEL training, teacher education programs must go beyond occasional workshops and superficial exposure. Instead, SEL should be woven into the fabric of daily instructional practices, as emphasized by Sugishita and Dresser (2019). This integrated approach ensures that SEL competencies are developed alongside other pedagogical skills, making them an inherent part of teaching practice. One way to achieve this is through structured workshops that focus on key SEL competencies like self-management and relationship skills. For instance, workshops could introduce mindfulness techniques to help pre-service teachers manage stress, while role-playing exercises could simulate classroom scenarios where teachers practice adjusting their communication style to different audiences (Cochran & Peters, 2023). Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) argue that fostering such emotional intelligence in teachers not only enhances their ability to communicate effectively but also contributes to the creation of a positive classroom environment that supports student learning.

In addition to workshops, collaborative learning and peer-led discussions can be valuable tools for reinforcing SEL competencies. Research by Durlak et al. (2011) found that cooperative learning strategies, which involve peer interaction and group problem-solving, help foster social awareness and relationship-building skills. These strategies enable pre-service teachers to engage in meaningful conversations about classroom challenges and solutions, thereby enhancing their ability to build positive relationships with students and colleagues. Moreover, incorporating reflective journaling into teacher education programs allows pre-service teachers to continuously assess their SEL growth. By regularly reflecting on their emotions and interactions, pre-service teachers can develop greater self-awareness and make informed adjustments to their teaching practice.

The broader literature on SEL also highlights the long-term benefits of integrating these competencies into teacher education. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) demonstrated that teachers who received SEL training were more likely to create well-managed classrooms, where students felt emotionally supported and engaged in learning. This positive classroom environment not only improved student behavior but also enhanced academic performance (Şimşek & Mutlu, 2021). Furthermore, teachers trained in SEL reported lower levels of stress and were less likely to leave the profession, suggesting that SEL training plays a crucial role in preventing teacher burnout. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) further emphasized that SEL skills, such as empathy, collaboration, and conflict resolution, are foundational to building a classroom climate where students can thrive both academically and socially.

Incorporating SEL into teacher education programs can also have a profound impact on student outcomes. Supporting this, a study exploring the implementation of SEL content and practices in teacher-education curricula found that these practices significantly impacted the personal and professional development of preservice teachers. Participants noted that the SEL components of the course enhanced the quality of learning and contributed to the development of a professional identity that is actively attuned to SEL elements (Lapidot-Lefler & Israelii, 2024). When teachers possess strong SEL competencies, they are better equipped to create nurturing, supportive learning environments that foster student engagement and emotional well-being. This is particularly important in today's diverse

classrooms, where students may face various social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. By embedding SEL strategies into daily teaching practice, teacher education programs can ensure that future educators are not only well-versed in academic content but also prepared to meet the emotional needs of their students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to enrich the growing literature on SEL by examining the SEL competencies of pre-service teachers in ELT and TLT programs. The findings offer both quantitative and qualitative insights, revealing that participants demonstrated a relatively high level of perceived SEL skills, with an average score of 131.11 out of 160. Despite this promising result, the data also highlighted key areas for growth, particularly in stress management and self-regulation, which are vital for effective teaching and long-term emotional resilience.

The significance of SEL in education is well-established, benefiting both teachers and students. Previous research by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) underscores that teachers with strong SEL skills are better equipped to manage classroom dynamics, cultivate positive relationships with students, and establish emotionally supportive learning environments. A study of Turkish EFL instructors revealed that many teachers believe incorporating SEL into language classrooms helps support students' academic goals, promotes self-awareness, builds coping skills, and enhances interpersonal skills and overall social competence (Daldal & Tuyan, 2024). These qualities are essential for meeting the demands of modern education for students and teachers. Despite these benefits of SEL, studies indicate that pre-service teachers often receive professional training primarily focused on pedagogical approaches related to their subject areas, with limited attention given to essential skills for teaching, such as communication, emotional control, and classroom management (Blewitt et al., 2020; King & Chen, 2019). Similarly, in this study, while pre-service teachers displayed strong problem-solving and relationship skills, findings have showed that they struggled with stress management and self-awareness, two fundamental SEL components. Qualitative interviews echoed these findings, with participants expressing confidence in their ability to mediate conflicts and maintain positive relationships yet acknowledging challenges in regulating their own emotions. This imbalance is not unique to this group; similar results were found in studies by Cochran & Peters (2023) and Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) which revealed that many pre-service teachers lack the training required to handle stress effectively and regulate their emotions under pressure. Furthermore, the gap in stress management in particular is concerning. Participants often resorted to avoidance strategies, such as sleeping or disengaging, rather than actively processing their emotions, and addressing stressors. This aligns with the study findings of Esen-Aygün & Şahin-Taşkın (2016), who indicated that pre-service teachers often start their careers without adequate emotional regulation abilities, making them prone to burnout and emotional fatigue. To address this, enhanced SEL training is essential, specifically focused on proactive coping mechanisms that foster emotional resilience.

The challenges related to self-awareness are also significant. Findings showed that the participants struggled with balancing their personal and professional identities, often influenced by cultural and familial expectations. Additionally, challenges in emotional management and adjusting to external pressures were reported, aligning with the research of Bai et al. (2021) and of Telef and Furlong (2017), which highlights the influence of cultural variables on self-perception and emotional regulation. This underscores the need for SEL programs to account for the cultural context in which pre-service teachers operate, helping them navigate both personal and professional demands more effectively.

In this vein, since emotions have a significant part in forming social relationships which define the essence of the language learning experience, it is evident that teacher education programs must include SEL as a fundamental component rather than a supplementary one (Brown & White, 2010). To guide learners in improving their language learning and communication skills through linguistic

experimentation and play, teachers first of all and at the same time must manage their own emotions and be attuned to the emotional climate in the classroom, serving as a facilitator (Gkonou et al., 2020). Structured SEL instruction, including mindfulness practices, emotional regulation techniques, and opportunities for reflective self-assessment, should be included into the curriculum. Practicum experiences, as highlighted by Stipp (2019), provide an optimal environment for implementing SEL concepts in real-world settings, enabling pre-service teachers to cultivate the confidence and skills required to navigate classroom dynamics and their emotional well-being. Sugishita and Dresser (2019) further emphasize the need for SEL training to be continuous and embedded within the teacher education framework, ensuring that pre-service teachers possess sufficient time and opportunity to enhance their SEL competencies. Ultimately, while the pre-service teachers in this study demonstrate a solid foundation in SEL skills, the findings point to critical areas that require attention. Effective stress management and deeper self-awareness are not only essential for their well-being but also for the creation of supportive, empathetic learning environments for their future students. Addressing these gaps through comprehensive SEL training will equip teachers with the tools they need to thrive both professionally and personally.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the importance of embedding SEL into the core of teacher preparation programs. Providing teachers with direct training in SEL can enable them to acquire effective strategies for understanding and managing emotions, resulting in more positive, caring, and supportive interactions with their students and colleagues (Castillo et al., 2013). By doing so, we can better prepare future educators to meet the complex emotional and interpersonal challenges of teaching, thereby promoting their success and well-being, as well as that of their students. Integrating SEL deeply into the teacher education process ensures that teachers are not only proficient in academic content but also in the social-emotional dynamics that are critical to effective and compassionate teaching.

Limitations and Further Suggestions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although this study was conducted with pre-service language teachers, many findings and implications may be relevant to pre-service teachers in different subjects. Additionally, convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of pre-service language teachers in Türkiye. Although the study was conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that participants' prior experiences with online learning or other pandemic-related factors may have influenced their responses. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study restricts the ability to track changes in SEL skills over time. Moreover, cultural factors can influence SEL skills, leading to varying outcomes in studies conducted across different cultural contexts. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal designs to track the evolution of SEL skills throughout pre-service teachers' undergraduate education. Examining the effectiveness of specific SEL interventions—especially those targeting stress management—could address challenges identified in this study. Additionally, with the increased use of online learning in recent years, exploring its impact on SEL skill development is essential. Identifying strategies to incorporate SEL instruction into virtual learning environments could enhance teacher preparation. Finally, extending research to in-service teachers may provide valuable insights into how SEL skills affect their well-being and teaching practices, particularly in the Turkish education context.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Communication skills

1. As a teacher, which verbal communication methods (being sincere and open, saying words correctly and understandably, speaking by ensuring harmony of words, gestures, and facial expressions, etc.) do you use to communicate effectively with your students?
2. As a teacher, how do you find your verbal communication? Why?
3. As a teacher, what non-verbal communication methods (such as gestures, facial expressions, etc.) do you use to establish effective communication?
4. As a teacher, how do you find your non-verbal communication (such as gestures, facial expressions, etc.)? Why?
5. Do you find it difficult to express or communicate your feelings to others? Why?
6. Which methods do you use to address communication problems and failures you encounter in daily life?

Problem solving skills

7. What do you do to solve problems and failures you encounter in daily life?
8. What roles do you take on when your friends have issues among themselves?
9. Describe an incident where you had a disagreement with your peers in detail. Explain how you managed the problem.

Stress management skills

10. What do you do to cope with feelings of tension (such as before an exam, after receiving bad news, or when you can't complete your assignments)?
11. How do you find your stress management strategies, such as calming yourself, ignoring the issue, laughing it off, or turning to a hobby?

Skills that enhance self-worth

12. What do you think of your strengths as an individual? Why?
13. What do you think of your weaknesses as an individual? Why?
14. What do you think you need to do to improve your weaknesses?
15. Do you have any additional thoughts about your communication methods and skills?

TÜRKÇE GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Richards (2022) tarafından “duygu yüklü bir etkinlik” olarak tanımlanan dil öğretimi çatışmalar ve zorluklar içerir. Öğretmenin koruyucu bir kalkını yoksa, eğitim ortamının kendine özgü zorlukları öğretmenleri işlevsiz olma, tükenmişlik ya da sinizm gibi durumlarla karşı karşıya bırakabilir. Bu nedenle, dil öğretmenlerinin mesleki dengelerini ve iyi oluşlarını korumak için bir tür bağımsızlık geliştirmeleri elzem hale gelmektedir (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). Bu bağlamda, Hiver ve Dörnyei (2017) öğretmen bağımsızlığını, “stresli öğretim ortamlarındaki aksaklıklar ve problemlerle başa çıkma konusunda edinilen deneyimlerin birikiminden ortaya çıkan ve dil öğretmenlerinin sınıf uygulamalarının kaçınılmaz zorluklarıyla başa çıkmalarına olanak tanıyan vazgeçilmez bir koruyucu zırh işlevi gören” yeni bir kavram olarak tanıtmışlardır (s.1). Bu yenilikçi fikir bizi, “Dil öğretmenleri bu koruyucu zırhı nasıl giyebilir?” “Öğretmen bağımsızlığı kazanmak için ne tür beceriler veya yeterlilikler gereklidir?” gibi sorular sormaya itmektedir. Dil öğretiminde duyguların önemli rolü göz önüne alındığında (Dörnyei, 2005), sosyal duygusal öğrenme (SDÖ) becerileri, öğretmen bağımsızlığını artırmak için potansiyel bir çare olarak görülebilir.

İkinci dil öğrenimi alanında SDÖ’yü incelediğimizde bu becerilerin dil öğrenme sürecinde oldukça önemli bir role sahip olduğunu görebiliriz. Bunun başlıca nedeni, dil öğreniminin bilişsel yeteneklerdeki benzersiz farklılıklar, duygusal koşullar, üstbilişsel süreçler, demografik geçmişler ve öğrenme ortamının duygusal, sosyal ve kültürel yönleri gibi çeşitli faktörlerden etkilenebilmesidir (Henter, 2014). Ancak duyguların önemi hem dil öğretmenlerinin hem de öğrencilerin deneyimlerindeki kritik rolüne rağmen, duygusal boyutlardan ziyade bilişsel boyutlara odaklanılması nedeniyle genellikle göz ardı edilmektedir (Richards, 2022).

Öğretmenlerin, öğrenciler için bir model oluşturmada, onlara kendi SDÖ’lerini geliştirmeleri için kaynak sağlamada ve destekleyici öğrenme ortamları teşvik etmede çok önemli olduğu açıktır (Elias vd., 1997). Ancak bazı çalışmalarda, öğretmenlerin SDÖ’nün neleri içerdiği ve ders programına ve öğretimine nasıl dâhil edilebileceği konusundaki kavrayışlarının hâlâ yetersiz olduğu tespit edilmiştir (Aidman & Price, 2018). Ayrıca bu anlamda yapılan çalışmalar, öğretmen adaylarına çoğunlukla doğrudan konu alanlarıyla ilgili pedagojik yaklaşımlar konusunda mesleki eğitim verildiğini, iletişim, duygusal kontrol ve sınıf yönetimi gibi öğretmenlik kariyeri için de önemli olan alanlara çok az vurgu yapıldığını ifade etmektedir (King & Chen, 2019).

Bu çalışma, SDÖ’nün ‘öğretmen bağımsızlığını’ artırma potansiyelini inceleyen ilk çalışma olarak literatürdeki bir boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. SDÖ’nün duygusal zorlukları nasıl ele alabileceğini, kültürel klişeleri nasıl ortadan kaldıracılabileceğini ve aday dil öğretmenlerinin karşılaştığı görünmeyen psikolojik etkileri veya ‘görünmez savaş yaralarını’ iyileştirmeye nasıl yardımcı olabileceğini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırmanın odak grubu, İngilizce Öğretmenliği ve Türkçe Öğretmenliği öğretmen adaylarından oluşmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, çalışma aşağıdaki araştırma sorularını ele almaktadır:

1. Katılımcıların SDÖ düzeyleri nedir?
2. Katılımcıların görüşmelerde ifade ettikleri görüşler SDÖ becerilerine ilişkin neleri ortaya koymaktadır?
3. Katılımcılar, kendi SDÖ becerilerini geliştirmek için ne önermektedirler?

Çalışmada, Türkiye’deki bir devlet üniversitesinin eğitim fakültesinde öğrenim gören iki grup öğretmen adayının (iki dil eğitimi programındaki dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin) algılanan SDÖ düzeylerini belirlemek için sıralı açıklayıcı karma yöntem tasarımı benimsenmiştir. Ölçüt amaçlı örneklemin ardından, ölçek puanlarından en yüksek, ortalama ve en düşük puanları alan katılımcılar belirlenmiş ve bu katılımcılarla nitel görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın nicel verileri eğitim fakültesinin son sınıflarında öğrenim gören İngiliz Dili Eğitimi öğrencileri ($N = 76$) ve Türkçe Eğitimi öğrencilerinden ($N = 63$) elde edilmiştir. Nitel veriler ise altısı Türkçe Eğitimi ve altısı İngiliz Dili Eğitimi olmak üzere

toplam 12 aday öğretmenden toplanmıştır. Nitel veri aracı olan yüzyüze yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere katılacak dil öğretmeni adayları, SDÖ ölçeğinde elde edilen skorlara göre; en yüksek, orta düzeyde ve en düşük değerleri elde eden katılımcılardan oluşturulmuştur. Öğretmenlik uygulama dersi sonunda ölçek uygulanmış ve görüşmeler yapılmıştır.

Çalışmada kişisel bilgi formu, SDÖ ölçeği ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden oluşan bir dizi veri toplama aracı kullanılmıştır. SDÖ ölçeği ilk olarak Kabakçı ve Korkut Owen (2010) tarafından ortaokul 6. ve 8. sınıf öğrencileri için geliştirilmiştir. Ancak ölçeğin Kocakulah ve Kırtak Ad (2015) tarafından yapılan uyarılama çalışmalarında, ölçek eğitim fakültelerindeki üniversite öğrencileri (öğretmen adayları) için de güvenilir bir araç olarak bulunmuştur ($\alpha = .890$). Çalışmanın nitel verilerinin toplandığı görüşme soruları ise alan yazın taramasıyla SDÖ ölçeğinin dört alt boyutuna uygun olarak oluşturulmuştur. Görüşme formu 14 sorudan oluşmaktadır. 2021-2022 akademik yılı boyunca Google Formlar aracılığıyla toplanan nicel veriler SPSS 26.0 aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca, her iki gruptan ölçekten en yüksek, ortalama ve en düşük puanları alan öğretmen adaylarıyla ($N = 12$) görüşülerek bu öğretmen adaylarının SDÖ becerilerinin ayrıntıları incelenmiştir. Bir sonraki adım olarak, ilk kodlamada gözlemlenen tüm ana ve genel kategoriler kontrol edilmiş, güvenilirlik için yüzdelere hesaplanmış (%81), kodlayıcılar arası güvenilirlik sağlandıktan sonra ve güvenilirliği artırmak için planlanmış toplantılarda beş yazarın da katkısıyla analizler ve bulgular tartışılmıştır.

Çalışmanın nicel verilerinden elde edilen sonuçlar katılımcı öğretmen adaylarının SDÖ düzeylerinin yüksek olduğunu göstermektedir. Yüksek düzeyde SDÖ'ye sahip öğretmenlerin öğrencileriyle etkili ilişkiler kurma ve etkili sınıf yönetimi becerileri sergileme, dahası SDÖ'yü öğretimlerine etkili bir şekilde dahil etme eğiliminde olduğu (Jones vd., 2014) göz önüne alındığında, elde edilen bu bulgu sevindiricidir. Sonuçlar SDÖ'nün alt boyutları (problem çözme becerileri, ilişki kurma becerileri, öz-farkındalık becerileri ve stres yönetme becerileri) bağlamında incelendiğinde ise katılımcı öğretmen adaylarının problem çözme ve ilişki kurma konusunda kendilerini yetenekli bulduğu ancak streslerini yönetmekte zorlandıkları gözlenmiştir.

Çalışmanın nitel verileri, öğretmen adaylarının en yüksek düzeyde sergiledikleri SDÖ becerisinin problem çözme becerisi olduğunu desteklemektedir. Katılımcıların çoğu, çatışma durumlarında arabuluculuk yapma ve farklı perspektifleri anlamaya yönelik adımlar attıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bu, empati ve sosyal farkındalığın bir göstergesi olarak öne çıkmaktadır. İletişim becerileri söz konusu olduğunda, adaylardan bir kısmı sınıfta gündelik yaşamda sergiledikleri performanstan daha iyi olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Ayrıca öğretmen adaylarının büyük bir kısmı sınıflarda öğrencilere ilettikleri mesajların etkililiğini artırmak, sınıf dinamiklerini düzenlemek ve uyarı vermek gibi birçok nedenle sözel olmayan iletişim araçlarını kullandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bu, öğretmenlerin sınıf yönetimi ve etkileşimde etkili olduklarını, öğrencileri motive etmek için beden dili gibi çeşitli stratejilere başvurduklarını göstermektedir. Ancak, stres yönetimi becerilerinde gözlemlenen düşük düzey, öğretmen adaylarının bu alanda daha fazla desteğe ihtiyaç duyduğunu göstermektedir. Nitel verilerde, adaylar kendilerini stresle başa çıkmada başarılı bulduklarını ifade etmelerine rağmen, kullanılan stres yönetim stratejilerinin daha çok kaçınma temelli olduğu gözlenmiştir (örneğin, uyuma veya sosyal ilişkilerden kaçınma gibi). Stresle başa çıkma becerilerinin geliştirilememesi, öğretmen adaylarının hem kişisel hem de profesyonel anlamda tükenmişlik yaşamalarına yol açabilir (Esen-Aygün & Şahin-Taşkın, 2016). Ayrıca, öğretmen adayları öz farkındalık konusunda, kültürel ve ailevi beklentiler nedeniyle kendilerinin içsel duygusal süreçleriyle yüzleşmede zorlandıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Mindfulness (farkındalık) ve benzeri teknikler bu alanda etkili çözümler sunabilir. Araştırmalar, öğretmen adaylarının kısa süreli mindfulness eğitimleri ile stres yönetimi ve öz farkındalık becerilerini geliştirebileceğini göstermekle birlikte öğretmenlik becerilerine olumlu katkıda bulunmuştur (Cochran & Peters, 2023). Bu bağlamda, mindfulness uygulamaları sayesinde öğretmen adayları, stresle başa çıkma ve duygusal farkındalık becerilerini daha iyi yönetebilir hale gelmektedir.

Ek olarak, SDÖ becerilerinin öğretmen eğitim programlarında yeterince yer almadığı dikkate alındığında, öğretmen adaylarının bu alandaki gelişimlerini desteklemek için daha yapılandırılmış eğitimsel müdahalelere ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Özellikle, stres yönetimi ve öz farkındalık gibi

becerilerin gelişimini destekleyecek uzun vadeli programlar, adayların profesyonel kariyerlerinde karşılaşacakları zorluklarla başa çıkma becerilerini artırabilir. Schonert-Reichl ve diğerlerinin (2017) araştırmaları, SDÖ becerilerinin öğretmenlerin mesleki dayanıklılığını ve öğrenci ilişkilerini geliştirdiğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu nedenle, öğretmen adaylarının bu becerileri daha erken dönemde geliştirmesi, onların sınıf içinde ve dışında daha etkili öğretmenler olmalarını sağlayacaktır.

Bulgular, öğretmen eğitimi programlarına SDÖ uygulamalarının entegrasyonunun önemini vurgulamakta ve bu becerilerin öğretmenlerin sınıf içi zorluklarla başa çıkma kapasitelerini artırdığını göstermektedir. Bu araştırmanın bulgularına dayanarak, öğretmen eğitim programlarına yönelik bazı somut öneriler sunulabilir:

1. Mindfulness ve Duygusal Düzenleme Eğitimlerinin Entegrasyonu: Öğretmen adaylarına yönelik mindfulness temelli eğitimlerin ve duygusal farkındalık atölyelerinin, adayların stres yönetimi ve duygusal düzenleme becerilerini geliştirmesi için eğitim programlarına entegre edilmesi önerilmektedir. Bu eğitimler, adayların sınıf içinde ve dışında karşılaştıkları stresli durumları daha sağlıklı bir şekilde yönetmelerini sağlayacaktır.
2. Uygulamalı SEL Eğitimleri: SDÖ becerilerinin sadece teorik olarak değil, aynı zamanda pratik olarak da uygulanabileceği deneyimsel öğrenme fırsatları yaratılmalıdır. Öğrenci öğretmenlik süreci, öğretmen adaylarının sınıf yönetimi, stres yönetimi ve problem çözme becerilerini gerçek hayatta deneyimlemelerine olanak tanıyan etkili bir yöntemdir. Uygulamalı SEL eğitimleri ve seminerler, bu süreci daha da etkili hale getirebilir.
3. Yansıtıcı Uygulama ve Geri Bildirim: Öğretmen adaylarına yönelik düzenli yansıtıcı uygulamalar ve geri bildirim süreçleri, adayların kendi duygusal süreçlerini anlamalarına ve sınıf içi deneyimlerini iyileştirmelerine yardımcı olacaktır. Adaylara, öz farkındalık becerilerini geliştirmeleri ve sınıf yönetiminde daha başarılı olmaları için çeşitli fırsatlar sunulmalıdır.
4. SEL İçeriğinin Uzaktan Eğitime Entegrasyonu: Pandemi ve diğer olağanüstü durumlar göz önüne alındığında, SDÖ becerilerinin uzaktan eğitimde de geliştirilmesi önem arz etmektedir. Özellikle, çevrimiçi sınıf yönetiminde ve öğrenci etkileşimlerinde SDÖ becerilerinin kullanımı, uzaktan eğitim sürecinin daha etkili olmasını sağlayabilir.

Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, öğretmen adaylarının SDÖ becerilerinde güçlü yanları ve gelişim ihtiyaçlarını ortaya koymuştur. Problem çözme ve ilişki kurma becerilerinin yüksek olduğu görülse de stres yönetimi ve öz farkındalık becerilerinde gelişime ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Öğretmen eğitim programlarının bu eksiklikleri giderecek şekilde yapılandırılması, adayların mesleki başarılarını ve duygusal dayanıklılıklarını artıracaktır.

Mindfulness ve duygusal düzenleme temelli eğitimlerin, öğretmen adaylarının stresle başa çıkma becerilerini geliştirerek, uzun vadede tükenmişlik ve duygusal yıpranma riskini azaltabileceği görülmektedir. Ayrıca, SDÖ becerilerinin öğretmen eğitim programlarına sistematik olarak entegre edilmesi, öğretmen adaylarının meslek hayatında karşılaşacakları zorluklarla daha iyi başa çıkmalarını sağlayacaktır. Öğretmen eğitim programlarının SDÖ becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik sistematik bir yaklaşım benimsemesi, sadece öğretmenlerin değil, aynı zamanda öğrencilerin de duygusal ve akademik gelişimlerini destekleyecek etkili öğrenme ortamları yaratılmasına katkıda bulunacaktır.