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Teachers' content knowledge: Implications for teaching practices and students' learning outcomes

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Teachers' content knowledge: Implications for teaching practices and students' learning outcomes

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Article Info	Abstract
	Content knowledge is one of Shulman's teacher knowledge. In no small measure, content knowledge promotes learning and contributes to students' learning outcomes. The knowledge of what to teach is a key requirement for effective teaching. This paper assesses the subject matter knowledge that Literature-in-English teachers possess and reveals subject content areas where they exhibit high mastery. This paper examines whether teachers' content knowledge could predict students' achievement in and attitude to Literature-in-English. The study is a descriptive research of the survey type. Data were collected through four research instruments: a classroom observation scale, a classroom content knowledge checklist, a self-constructed students' questionnaire and an achievement test. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The participants consisted of 632 students who were taught Literature-in-English and 127 Literature-in-English teachers. Findings revealed that the observable elements where mastery was shown are knowledge of elements of literary works and literary appreciation skills. However, the study showed that there is knowledge gap in language development and knowledge of values. The findings show that teachers' content knowledge predicted students' learning outcomes (achievement and attitude) in Literature-in-English. The findings raised concerns about pedagogical implications and recommendations for concerned education stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Literature-in-English is one of the various subjects offered in schools that contribute in diverse ways to national and human development. Literature-in-English is a composition in language which tells stories, represents culture, re-enacts ideas or dramatizes real life situations (Okoh, 2012). This subject aids moral, cultural, intellectual, and linguistic development. Its genres, prose, poetry and drama, have peculiar positive impacts on people exposed to them. Duff and Maley (1990) noted that Literature-in-English is taught in schools for linguistic, methodological and motivational reasons. The linguistic aspect equips learners with authentic examples of language, broad range of registers, vocabularies, styles, and text types. For methodological reasons, Literature-in-English gives room for multifarious meanings in literary texts, genuine interaction with the literary texts and diverse opinions among the readers. Literature-in-English is taught in schools for motivational reasons because it projects the real feelings and mood of the writer, helps readers to empathize and motivates learners to read.

Literature-in-English is taught in schools to develop students' potentials in a holistic style. These potentials could be observed in students' learning outcomes such as academic achievement and attitude. Students' academic achievement is the accomplishment of the stated objectives of a course, topic or content taught in Literature-in-English while students' attitude is the dispositions, feelings, reactions, opinions, and beliefs students have towards Literature-in-English. The knowledge of what to teach is a key requirement for effective teaching. In recent years, teachers' content knowledge has attracted increasing attention from stakeholders in education. In spite of this attention, Holvio (2022) affirmed that there is limited literature on teachers' content knowledge and its impact on students' achievement in developing countries. Also, Hill, et al., (2005) posited that what counts as subject matter knowledge for teaching and how it relates to students' achievement have remained inadequately discussed in past research. Invariably, limited literature on teachers' content knowledge, inability to pinpoint what counts as subject matter knowledge for teaching and impact of teachers' content knowledge on students' achievement could have dire consequences on students' academic achievements.

Students' poor performance in Literature-in-English at public examinations and learners' negative dispositions towards the subject in Ekiti State have become worrisome to the students, teachers, school authorities and concerned bodies. This is evident in the West African Examination Council Senior School Certificate results in Ekiti State. Data revealed that 30% of the students have credit pass in Literature-in-English while 70% failure rate was recorded (Ekiti State Ministry of Education and Technology, 2017). Perhaps, teachers' content knowledge could be an important factor that contribute to students' low performance and learners' negative attitude to the subject. This study therefore seeks to investigate whether teachers' content knowledge have implications for teaching practices and students' achievement in and attitude to Literature-in-English.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teachers' content knowledge

Content knowledge which is also called subject matter knowledge is defined as the "concepts, principles, relationships, processes, and applications a student should know within a given academic subject, appropriate for his/her knowledge and organization of the knowledge" (Özden, 2008, p. 634). Koehler and Mishra (2009) described teachers' content knowledge as what teachers know about the subject matter to be learned or taught. It is opined that teachers' knowledge of content has to do with teacher's competence to comprehend and rightly employ subject matter to execute teaching obligations (Hill et al., 2005). Content knowledge is the teachers' ability to appropriately comprehend the content to be taught and understand the structure of the subject taught. It is expected of every teacher to know beyond the stated contents in the curriculum. Teachers are expected to be able to explain why a particular idea or assertion is considered necessary or appropriate and its interconnectedness to other assertions.

Observation reveals that it is expedient to explore the knowledge of teachers about what they profess to teach in Literature classrooms. It, therefore, requires a proficient and skillful teacher to handle the foundations of Literature-in-English (Fakeye, 2012). Teachers' versatility in their discipline goes a long way in determining how Literature teachers introduce each daily lesson to students and the kinds of examples they provide. Content knowledge could be in two forms: substantive (knowledge of learning a discipline) and syntactic (knowledge of practices in a discipline). The knowledge that embodies the central facts, skills, structures, and terms used in a subject, fundamentals, and explanatory and organizational backgrounds in a discipline is called substantive knowledge (Shulman & Grossman, 1988; Garvey, 1996). On the other hand, syntactic knowledge encompasses searching for the "nature of enquiry in a field, the rules of evidence and warrants of truth within that discipline, and how new knowledge is introduced and accepted in that community" (Sehgal & Standish, 2021, p.242).

Researchers of the present study observed that Literature-in-English teachers are restricted to preferred content areas or topics if they are uninformed, incompetent or not knowledgeable about the subject matter to be taught. Teachers who exhibit these features seem to gloss over the unwanted topics and often encourage or mandate students to memorize and arrange their thoughts about the contents using exact format provided by the teacher. This act deprives students a sense of belonging and weakens their thinking faculties. A teacher who understands the topic to be taught uses straightforward words, gives room for discussion and provides better clarifications and illustrations than those whose background is weak and unsound (Fakeye, 2012). It is noted that teachers select some areas in the syllabus that are targeted in internal and external examinations but give little or no attention to some areas where questions are not set for examinations. It is expedient that Literature-in-English teachers are aware and comprehend the objectives of all the teaching contents, concepts, principles, theories, and facts as stated in Literature-in-English Curriculum as this might help them explicitly explain the significance of such contents, concepts, principles, theories, and facts to students which could be of interest to them.

The researchers of the present paper opine that competent Literature-in-English teachers would not only demonstrate magnitude of knowledge of specialty, string relevant information about the subject matter together from different sources, break down concepts effectively, and be abreast of innovations in the subject taught but also fast-track students' acquisition of content taught in classes, dispel their misconceptions and foster learning outcomes. Teachers' knowledge of subject matter could also boost students' self-esteem because students will be exposed to diverse means of organizing ideas without necessarily cramming, thinking and arranging their ideas about the subject in the same way as their teacher. This avenue gives the students a sense of belonging that their views, though not exactly as their teacher, are considered correct despite the forms of its presentation.

Hattie (2009) discovered that expert teachers and experienced teachers are similar in the amount of knowledge they have about curriculum matters or knowledge about pedagogies, but expert teachers are different in how they organize and use subject matter knowledge. Literature teachers with adequate content knowledge have the in-depth understanding of domain-specific concepts in Literature-in-English, have understanding about the correlations among these concepts, and they are equipped with forms and processes of acquiring and applying knowledge of a specific domain of these concepts. The mastery of teachers' subject content should cover the whole aspects of Bloom's cognitive taxonomy, that is, teachers' awareness of the various parts in the cognitive domain which constitute part of Literature teachers' evaluation of content mastery: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation and synthesis of the behavioural objectives. Three core aspects of the subject knowledge that can enable teachers expand their frontier of teaching from simple to complex aspects are: the content of the subject, the organization of the content, and the methods of inquiry used within the subject (Kennedy, 1990)

Literature-in-English comprises several content areas but the four major content areas investigated in the present study are elements in literary works (plot, characters and themes); literary

appreciation skills (knowledge of literary techniques); language development (diction, analytical and inferential skills); and values (feelings, importance of literary works and its application to phenomena). These areas are significant to the present study because they are areas that help readers: derive meaning behind every literary works, understand the significance of the texts, re-create life situations as literary texts, and learn about values, morals and beliefs embedded in the literary texts. The knowledge of these areas give the readers insight to the writers' concerns and holistic view of the literary texts.

Elements of literary works chosen in this study can expose readers to the sequential arrangement of events in a literary work, the central issue raised in the work and any animate figure within a story. Literary appreciation involves reading, comprehension, active reflection, analysis, interpretation, evaluation and making informed decisions by critically judging the theme, style, use of figurative and non-figurative language, and other elements of a literary work (Pawners Paper, 2022). The knowledge of literary appreciation helps students to discover purpose, style, tone, mood, and the logical, chronological, and spatial organization of the text. It helps readers connect the literary work to its historical, political, economic, cultural, and social contexts for easy comprehension of its significance and impact. Language development increases not only readers' vocabulary expansion, grammar development, reinforcement of language skills, sensitivity to language, model for writing skills, and creative thinking and activities but also comprehension and application of the rules of pragmatics, discourse, and social communication for various contexts and purposes. Values are learnt in Literature-in-English when readers read about characters and themes in a literary texts and share their thoughts, feelings and emotions. Readers engage with different attitudes and opinions expressed by the author or the characters in the literary texts, and also transact with the meanings given in the texts. The transaction fosters self-development, moral judgement, moral values, moral action, and understanding of the world.

Studies on teachers' content knowledge

Empirical studies show different results about teachers' mastery of their disciplines and how it informs their teaching practices. Aydin and Boz (2012) revealed that pre-service teachers did not possess understanding of the connections and organizations of the facts of the content taught. They gave answers to questions using definitions from textbook but easily forgot the answers since they memorized. They also find out that some of the pre-service teachers disliked discussion as a teaching method due to dearth of subject matter knowledge. In another study, Shepherd (2013) investigated the impact of teacher subject knowledge on learners' performance in South Africa using a within-pupil across-subject approach. The study showed that teachers' in-depth mastery of subject matter and teachers' ability to transfer the subject matter to learners are of importance. It could be inferred from the study that it is a different thing to have a deep understanding of content and a different thing to be able to transfer that idea meaningfully to learners.

Evidence from educational scene has revealed that teachers' content knowledge is part of teacher knowledge and teacher quality which is easily noticeable when teachers teach and also determines students' achievement. Metzler and Woessmann (2012) investigated whether the mastery of teacher subject knowledge could have impact on students' achievement. They discovered that teacher subject knowledge, which is one of the conspicuous factors of effective teacher quality, could significantly influence students' achievement. However, Mpofu (2016) examined the knowledge possessed by beginner teachers in the teaching of Literature in English. She discovered that the participants possessed knowledge of the curriculum, teaching, and learners, but had inadequate knowledge in the teaching of genres of Literature. Ariel (2021) noted that there "was a significant relationship between teacher's content knowledge in English and learners' academic performance in English" (p.16). Ghazi et al. (2013) noted that possessing teaching professional competencies especially possessing knowledge of subject matter at secondary level is particularly germane "because it deals with the teaching learning process, including the most useful

forms of instructional and behavioural strategies and it also deals with how students' can learn in the best way about the specific concepts and topics of a subject" (p.454).

Ghazi et al. (2013) concluded in their study that the "secondary school teachers working in various districts of their study possessed sufficient knowledge of their subject matter. However, their weakest area is to make the subject matter applicable to the real world situation" (p.459). However, some researchers have different perceptions about the significance of teachers' content knowledge to teaching and learning. Carnoy and Arends (2012) examined students' mathematics achievement gains in Botswana and South Africa. They found out that teachers' content knowledge had no significant effect on learners' achievement in Mathematics. Shepherd (2013) also affirmed that teacher content knowledge had no influence on learners' outcomes in both Mathematics and English subjects. Fakeye (2012) investigated teachers' qualification and subject mastery as predictors of achievement in English Language in Ibarapapa Division of Oyo State while Olowoyeye and Alonge (2014) investigated the impact of teachers' subject mastery and questioning behaviour on students' performance in English Language in selected senior secondary schools in Ikere Metropolis. These studies showed that teachers' mastery of subject matter is significant and contributes significantly to students' academic achievement in English Language.

Findings from these studies revealed that teachers' content knowledge in no small measure fosters students' learning and has impact on students' achievement. However, there are some missing gaps in these studies. The targets of the reviewed studies have been on in-service teachers' and pre-service teachers' content knowledge in Mathematics, science related fields, English language, and academic success in general while teachers' content knowledge in Literature-in-English has received no research attention. Although these studies attested that teachers' content knowledge has positive impact on students' performance in various school subjects, however, what counts as subject matter knowledge for teaching and how it relates to students' achievement in and attitude to Literature-in-English have remained inadequately discussed in past research. The present study, therefore, seeks to investigate: teachers' content knowledge in Literature-in-English, what counts as subject matter knowledge for teaching in Literature-in-English, and whether teachers' content knowledge could predict students' attitude to and achievement in Literature-in-English. Findings from these investigations will add to the existing literature on teachers' content knowledge. To this end, a research question and two hypotheses guide the present study.

Research question
1. Do Literature-in-English teachers exhibit mastery of literary works, literary appreciation skills, language development, and values?

Research hypotheses
1. Teachers' content knowledge significantly predicts students' (a) achievement in Literature-in-English and (b) attitude to Literature-in-English.

METHODOLOGY

This paper presents the results of the implications of teachers' content knowledge on teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted in the study.

Research design

The study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. The research design was adopted since the study focused on collecting data on teachers' content knowledge and students' learning outcomes (achievement and attitude). There was no manipulation of variables. Research ethics were observed as respondents' consent was sought and participation was voluntary. Their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed because respondents' identities were not disclosed under any guise.

Participants

Participants were 632 students who were taught Literature-in-English and 127 Literature-in-English teachers in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adopted the multistage sampling procedure. The selection of this sampling procedure was considered appropriate because samples were drawn from a large population and widespread groups through progressively smaller units at various stages. At stage one, simple random sampling technique was used to select four local government areas. Stage two, 4 schools were selected from each local government areas using simple random sampling technique. Stage three, 48 schools, altogether, were purposively selected from the sampled local government areas based on the following criteria: the school must have presented students for Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations for at least 10 years and the school must be willing to take part in the study. Stage 4, intact classes of Literature-in-English students in each selected schools were used considering the availability of the teachers and students.

Data collection instruments

Four research instruments were used for data collection: a classroom observation scale, a classroom content knowledge checklist, a questionnaire and an achievement test. 32 observers were recruited as research assistants to observe live classroom performances of 127 Literature-in-English teachers in classrooms. They were selected because they were the most senior Literature-in-English teachers in the selected schools who were not teaching the selected classes of students. The contents observed are elements of literary works (plot, characterization, themes); literary appreciation skills (knowledge of literary techniques); language development (diction, analytical and inferential skills); and values (feelings, importance of literary works and its application to life situations). The duration for the overall observation was 40 minutes with not less than 5 minutes for each element to be observed.

The Observation scale measuring teachers' content knowledge in Literature-in-English was employed to gather information on whether Literature-in-English teachers have the mastery of content knowledge, whether they displayed the mastery of the content knowledge very often, often, sometimes, hardly ever or never, and the degree to which the mastery of content knowledge was evident or absent when the teachers taught. Observers were given guidelines and descriptions of all the classroom activities to be observed. Observers were to observe the following: if the four major content areas in this study were appropriately explained, discussed, applied to life situations, appreciated and adequately supported with illustrations extracted from literary texts; if the four major content areas were appropriately explained, appreciated, applied to life situations, and adequately supported with illustrations but need minor adjustments; if the four major content areas were appropriately explained but not applied to life situations and not supported with illustrations; and if the four major content areas were inadequately and inappropriately explained, not applied to life sitautions, and not supported with illustrations and hence need major adjustments. The scoring is indicated as follows: excellent (4); good (3); fair (2); poor (1); fail (0).

Although it is expected that Literature-in-English teachers should be familiar with the contents of the subject they teach, however, probably, there could be some content areas that they master most than others. Therefore, the classroom content knowledge checklist addressed the four major content areas in this study so as to observe preferred and less preferred areas. The observation scale included 15 items focusing on the sub topics that are taught under the four major content areas in this study using four Likert-type of very difficult (VD), difficult (D), moderately difficult (MD), not difficult (ND). Students' questionnaire focused on students' attitude to Literature-in-English with 22 items. The content of the questionnaire focused on students' feelings, reactions, opinions, and beliefs about Literature-in-English. These were reflected in statements like how students got along with Literature-in-English lessons; why they studied Literature-in-English; their likes and dislikes for Literature-in-English; why they liked and disliked Literature-in-English, and if and how their teachers' content knowledge contributed to their dispositions to Literature-in-English. The questionnaire was placed on a four Likert-type format (Strongly Agree, Agree,

Strongly Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Students' achievement test in Literature-in-English was drawn in line with Literature-in-English Syllabus. Test was administered on students through essay questions and general objective questions which were drawn from the recommended literary texts and recommended Literature textbooks.

Validity and reliability of the instruments

The face and content validity of the questionnaire and achievement test were ascertained by experts in Test, Measurement and Evaluation (T.M.E) and Language Testing. Thorough scrutiny of the instruments was carried out and necessary corrections, suggestions and comments were effected before the final draft of the instruments. The reliability of the questionnaire and achievement test was ensured by administering these instruments on 350 Literature-in-English students selected outside the sample of the study. A test-retest method was used for the questionnaire and achievement test in Literature-in-English. Through Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, reliability coefficients for students' questionnaire (0.79) and students' achievement test in Literature-in-English (0.86) were obtained respectively. Reliability of classroom observation scale was ensured by defining research objectives and questions; selection of direct observation method and structured observation using a predefined checklist and observation scale to describe data respectively; and training and standardizing observers to ensure that data are collected and recorded in a consistent and accurate manner. Using inter-rater reliability, through Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, the reliability of Classroom Observation Scale (0.82) was obtained.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research questions were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, mean scores and standard deviations while all the hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of regression analysis.

FINDINGS

Research question: Do Literature-in-English teachers exhibit mastery of literary works, literary appreciation skills, language development and values?

Literature-in-English teachers who were the participants were rated by themselves and the observers who were the research assistants. The respondents who were Literature-in-English teachers responded to classroom content knowledge checklist in Literature-in-English and the research assistants who were the observers used classroom observation scale measuring teachers' content knowledge in Literature-in-English which were collated and computed.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of teachers' mastery of subject content areas in Literature-in-English

Content Knowledge Elements	Teachers' Rating (Classroom Content Knowledge Checklist)			Observers' Rating (Classroom Observation)			Grand Mean	Rank
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Literary appreciation skills (B)	127	15.16	2.84	127	23.19	5.42	19.18	1st
Knowledge of the elements of literary works (A)	127	5.70	1.44	127	11.44	5.15	8.57	2nd
Language development (C)	127	11.13	2.86	127	4.94	2.23	8.04	3rd
Values (D)	127	4.26	0.99	127	4.44	2.17	4.35	4th

Table 1 shows teachers' mastery of subject content areas in Literature-in-English. From teachers' personal assessment through the classroom content knowledge checklist, the result indicates that Literature-in-English teachers mostly possessed mastery of the subject contents of

literary appreciation skills with 15.16±2.84 mean and standard deviation. Closely followed by the mastery of language development (11.13±2.86), knowledge of the elements of literary works (5.70±1.44) and lastly, values (4.26±0.99) respectively in descending order of mean.

At the angle of teachers' observers using classroom observation, the table reveals that Literature-in-English teachers had mastery of literary appreciation skills with mean and standard deviation of 23.19±5.42. This is followed by knowledge of literary works (11.44±5.15), language development (4.94±2.23) and lastly, values (4.44±2.17) respectively. However, on the grand mean scale, the table shows that teachers showed mastery of the subject contents most in literary appreciation skills (19.18). This is respectively followed by knowledge of the elements of literary works (8.57), language development (8.04) and values (4.35). Thus, from the analysis, Literature-in-English teachers' content knowledge of the subject is noticeable in literary skills as well as knowledge of literary works. Further explanation is provided in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Teachers' mastery of subject content areas in Literature-in-English

	B	A	C	D
■ Mean	19,18	8,57	8,04	4,35
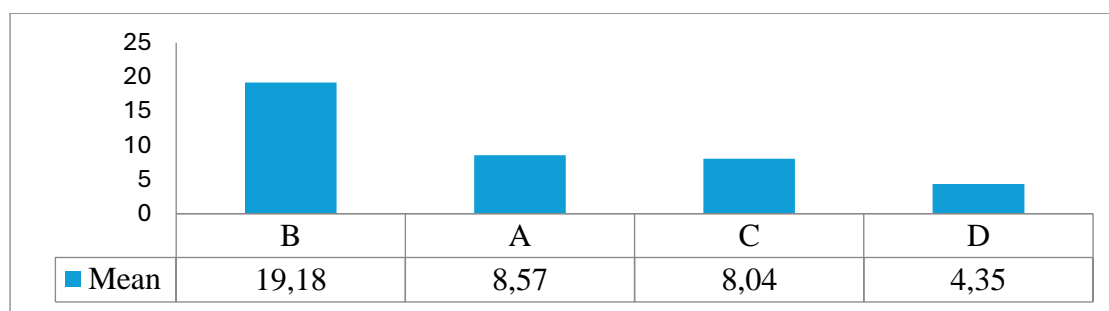
Testing of hypotheses

$H_{01:}$ Teachers' content knowledge significantly predicts students' achievement in Literature-in-English.

Table 2. Multiple regression of teachers' content knowledge and students' achievement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	P
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	55.448	3.810		14.552	.000
Knowledge of the elements of literary works	-.085	.476	-.017	-.179	.858
Literary appreciation skills	.020	.110	.018	.179	.859
Language development	-.098	.357	-.027	-.275	.784
Values	-.327	.242	-.135	-1.355	.178
R=.277; R²=.077; Adjusted R²= .046; $F_{4, 122}$ = 2.529, p=0.044					

p>0.05

Table 2 shows that there is relationship between teachers' content knowledge and students' achievement (R=0.277). Thus, teachers' content knowledge constituted 7.7% of the changes that occurred in students' achievement in Literature-in-English. Although, at individual level, no single element from teachers' content knowledge brought about improvement on students' achievement in isolation of the others. However, on the general scale, the result statistically reveals that $F_{4, 790}$ = 19.338, p=0.000. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that teachers' content knowledge significantly predict students' academic achievement in Literature-in-English.

The regression equation: $Y = 55.448 - 0.085X_1 + 0.0205X2 - 0.098X3 - 0.327X_4$

Where: Y = Students' achievement in Literature-in-English, X_1 = Knowledge of literary works, X_2 = Literary skills, X_3 = Language development, X_4 = Values

$H_{02:}$ Teachers' content knowledge significantly predicts students' attitude to Literature-in-English.

Table 3. Multiple regression of teachers' content knowledge and students' attitude

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	p
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	41.029	5.418		7.573	.000
Knowledge of the elements of literary works	-.678	1.532	-.046	-.443	.659
Literary appreciation skills	-.355	2.962	-.016	-.120	.905
Language development	1.756	2.769	.093	.634	.527
Values	1.107	3.006	.044	.368	.713
R=.315; R²=.099; Adjusted R²= .070; $F_{4, 122}$ = 3.359, p=0.012					

p>0.05

Table 3 indicates that there is correlation between teachers' content knowledge and students' academic achievement (R=0.315). Thus, teachers' content knowledge constituted 9.9% of the changes that occur in students' attitude towards Literature-in-English. But at individual level, no single element from teachers' contents knowledge could bring about improvement in students' achievement in isolation of the others. However, the result further reveals that $F_{4, 122}$ = 3.359, p=0.012. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that teachers' content knowledge significantly predict students' attitude towards Literature-in-English.

The regression equation: Y = 41.029 – 0.678X1 - 0.355X_2 + 1.756X_3 + 1.107X_4
Where: Y = Students' attitude towards Literature-in-English, X_1 = Knowledge of the elements of literary works, X_2 = Literary appreciation skills, X_3 = Language development, X_4 = Values

DISCUSSION

Findings revealed that the most observable elements where mastery was shown by Literature-in-English teachers include knowledge of the elements of literary works and literary appreciation skills. This shows that Literature-in-English teachers are skilled at teaching the elements of literary works which include plot, characterization, themes; and literary appreciation skills which include knowledge of literary techniques. These areas are cognitive-oriented areas where both internal and external examinations are set. This is the confirmation of the researchers' observation that Literature teachers are more concerned about the cognitive domain of Literature-in-English which is examination and knowledge oriented. The findings of this study is in line with Udu (2017) who found out that English teachers perceived literary works such as appreciating a poem, identifying themes/subject matter, explaining the role of characters, and explaining the sociocultural relevance of a literary work as easy topics.

However, the findings in this present study differ from Udu (2017) because this present study extends beyond mere perception of simple or difficult topics to capture content areas where teachers exhibited mastery. Figure 1 reveals that Literature-in-English teachers exhibited less mastery in language development (appreciation of diction, flexibility play of language and analytical and inferential skills) and values (description of feelings and discovering the significance of literary works by relating the themes in literary texts to situations around the students). The findings are in line with the study of Ghazi et al. (2013) who reported that participants in their study had sufficient knowledge of the content knowledge but they could not relate the subject matter taught

in the classroom to the real world situation. Another findings in Sedau (2004) revealed that language development in literary texts in English literature is one of the difficult areas in Literature-in-English. Although, Udu (2017) countered the findings of this present study that language development and knowledge of values are not knotty areas however, he noted that point of view and the setting of literary works posed as difficult topics in Literature-in-English. Lappan (1999) decries that knowledge gaps in subject matter knowledge "affects how teachers interpret the content goals they are expected to reach with students, it affects the way teachers hear and respond to students and their questions and it as well affects teachers' ability to explain clearly and to ask good questions." (p.1)

The findings discussed above show that since Literature-in-English teachers observed in this study are deficient in language development and values, students might not be exposed to language in action in literary texts, independent thoughts, critical judgment, and creative writing which are the parts of the aims and objectives of teaching Literature-in-English (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2009). The researchers of the present study observe that Literature-in-English teachers are more concerned about cognitive domain of knowledge of the elements of literary works and literary appreciation skills which are key areas where questions are frequently asked in examination thereby neglecting the affective domain of knowledge of values. One of the reasons for lack of insufficient knowledge in Literature-in-English is the idea that all teachers who teach English language are competent to teach Literature-in-English appropriately (Simuchimba, 2016). Literature-in-English has its distinctive features that differentiate it from English language. This could affect their approach to teaching the subject. Also, Lappan (1999) explained that there is a difference between *knowing what to teach and teaching what you know. She revealed that* it is simple to develop conventions in teaching so that teachers can simply dodge the parts of the book they like or are not comfortable with. Lappan (1999) reported that "recently, an elementary school teacher told me that in the more than 20 years she has been teaching, she has never taught the geometry sections of her text because she simply does not know the geometry" (p.1). This could be applicable to the present findings.

In addition, results of the study indicated that teachers' content knowledge significantly predicted students' academic achievement in Literature-in-English and their attitude to Literature-in-English. The teachers' mastery of subject matter is an essential factor that determines students' achievement in and attitude to Literature-in-English. This is in tandem with the study of Fakeye (2012) who posited that a teacher who possesses content knowledge uses simple words, their discussion is more connected and they provide better clarifiactions and illustrations than those who have weak background. While Adediwura and Bada (2007) noted that the way students perceive their teacher's mastery of the subject may affect students' academic achievement. Also, Adegbola (2018) discovered that teacher subject matter knowledge influenced students' performance in Basic Science. Omonije and Obadiora (2018) also indicated that teachers' content knowledge contributed to Economics students' academic performance. Opara et al. (2017) indicated that teachers' competence in Mathematics significantly predicted students' attitude to Mathematics. However, the results of the present study negate the findings of Carnoy and Arends (2012) who found no significant effect of teachers' content knowledge on learners' gains in Mathematics.

CONCLUSION

The present study discussed the importance of Literature-in-English to national and human development and how linguistic, methodological and motivational benefits have made Literature-in-English an important tool for teaching second language. The benefits inherent in teaching and learning of Literature-in-English cannot be fully harnessed if there are deficiencies in teachers' subject matter knowledge of the subject to be taught. Therefore, one of the factors that influence students' learning outcome is teacher's content knowledge. It is concluded from the findings of ther study that Literature-in-English teachers showed mastery of literary works and literary

appreciation skills but did not display sufficient mastery of language development and knowledge of values and these significantly predicted students' learning outcomes in Literature-in-English. Teachers' content knowledge constituted 7.7% of the changes that occurred in students' achievement in Literature-in-English and the 9.9% of the changes that occurred in students' attitude to Literature-in-English. It can be concluded that teachers' content knowledge are predictors of students' learning outcomes in Literature-in-English. However, teachers' insufficient or dearth of knowledge can impede students' learning. Therefore Literature-in- English teachers need to continue to hone subject content knowledge throughout their teaching careers.

LIMITATIONS

Initially, some teachers were reluctant to partake in the study as they considered it strenuous and time-taking. But when they were briefed of the purpose of the study and were assured of their confidentiality, they gave their consents and were enthusiastic about the study. Data were collected from the 632 participants from four local governments in a state, the generalizability of the findings is limited and subject to the number of participants.

SUGGESTIONS

For future research, the instruments could be conducted with more participants and a larger sample and a more diverse population. Also, the study was limited to content knowledge, one of Shulman's teacher knowledge. Further studies could be carried out on other teacher knowledge as predictive factors of students' learning outcomes in school subjects. The findings give way to the following suggestions:
1. Literature teachers should ensure that they pay attention by reading and studying all aspects of Literature-in-English with special attention given to gray areas where mastery is not exhibited.
2. Efforts should be geared by organizing training, seminars and workshops for Literature-in-English for optimal improvement and performance.
3. Literature-in- English teachers need to continue to hone subject content knowledge throughout their teaching careers.
4. Pre-service teachers' content knowledge should be constantly evaluated.

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Investigation of academic success, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy in teacher candidates

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Investigation of academic success, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy in teacher candidates

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Article Info

Abstract

In this study, it was aimed to examine the predictive role of psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables on academic success in teacher candidates studying at education faculties of different universities in Türkiye. The research was based on the correlational study. The research group consisted of 398 teacher candidates (167 male, 42%; 231 female, 58%) studying at the education faculties of different universities in Türkiye in the 2022-2023 academic year. Psychological Flexibility Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Personal Information Form were used as data collection tools in the research. In this research, data were collected via Google Form online method. As a result of the examination of the data obtained in the research, it was determined that the data were suitable for multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise). As a result of the research, the psychological flexibility variable significantly predicted academic achievement in the first place. In the second place, it was determined that the self-efficacy variable predicted significantly.

INTRODUCTION

Examinations held at all levels of education from primary school to university education in Türkiye and academic success in educational and vocational orientations, assessments and placements based on these exams are of great importance. In this context, academic success, which has a place in the success of a good position in education and career planning, is also an important criterion in determining the level of gaining skills and knowledge. Academic success, which is a criterion that is considered important not only by students but also by many people such as educators, families, administrators, is considered as a determining factor on both personal and professional development (Ateş, 2016; Ateş & Sağar, 2021a, 2022a).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that academic success is related to variables such as resilience, cognitive flexibility, life satisfaction, communication skills, psychological well-being and social competence, emotion regulation, emotional intelligence, metacognition, and self-control (Ateş, 2016; Ateş & Sağar, 2021a, 2022a; Beauvais et al., 2014; Coutinho, 2007; Graziano et al., 2007; Oriol et al., 2017). As in every stage of education, it can be said that academic success is an important criterion in terms of acquiring necessary knowledge and skills for teacher candidates who are in the university education process. In this context, it is thought that it is important and valuable to be able to reveal the variables related to academic success in teacher candidates and, accordingly, to guide studies to increase academic success. Based on this idea, it is thought that the variables of psychological flexibility and self-efficacy are related to the academic success of teacher candidates and may be significant predictors of academic success.

In this study, psychological flexibility is one of the variables thought to be related to the variable of academic success in teacher candidates. Psychological flexibility, which takes its place among the basic concepts of acceptance and commitment therapy, is considered as a concept that includes different kinds of human abilities. It is to be aware of the person's feelings and thoughts without accepting or rejecting them, without judging them, to evaluate the situation and to be able to continue or change their behavior with the thought of fulfilling their central interests and goals. (Bond et al., 2006; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). From another point of view, psychological flexibility is defined as the ability of a person to be in conscious contact with the present moment, as well as to be able to change or continue his behavior by directing his behavior in accordance with the purposes while doing this (Hayes et al., 2006). The opposite of the concept of psychological flexibility in the context of acceptance and commitment therapy is the concept of psychological rigidity, which Harris (2009) considers as the hexagon of psychological rigidity. Based on this, the psychological flexibility model was created based on this hexagon (Harris, 2009). Sub-factors expressed in relation to the psychological flexibility model; "acceptance", "segregation", "being in the moment", "contextual self", "values" and "actions towards values" (Luoma et al., 2010). These concepts are highlighted in order as follows. Acceptance is to evaluate life or events here and now, without judgment, and to consider experiences as they are without trying to change them. Segregation is the separation of dysfunctional ways within the context of the individual. The purpose of separation; to reduce the impact of nonfunctional cognitive processes that affect behavior and to establish a connection with the here and now and experiences. Being in the moment is the ability of a person to connect with the world directly, to be able to act more flexible and to show consistent actions for purpose, goals and values based on this. The contextual self is pure awareness, or in other words, awareness of awareness. Values, on the other hand, represent a structure that cannot be earned, has no end, or cannot be completed. At this point, it encourages the person to develop more effective behavioral patterns regarding their chosen values based on acceptance and commitment therapy (Bond et al., 2006; Harris, 2007; Hayes, 2004; Hayes et al., 2006). In the context of this information, psychological flexibility can be expressed as being aware of the moment one is in, and the ability to self-regulate by making efforts in line with their vital goals (Ateş & Sağar, 2022b; Sağar, 2022a, 2022b). Considering the subject in the context of the research, it can be said that the academic success levels of teacher candidates who have the ability to be aware of the moment they live in, to direct their life based on their goals and to organize

themselves may be high. Therefore, it is thought that academic success may be a variable related to psychological flexibility.

Another concept that is thought to be related to the variable of academic success in teacher candidates in this study is self-efficacy. This concept has been brought to the literature by Bandura and reveals the confidence in one's own competence in reaching a certain goal (Bandura, 1997). From another point of view, self-efficacy is considered as setting a goal for oneself, the effort made to achieve this goal, and being able to withstand the difficulties encountered in order to achieve the goal (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to achieve a specific goal (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1977) emphasizes that four important factors play a role in a person's self-efficacy perception and belief. These factors are in the form of "successful performances", "indirect experiences", "verbal persuasion" and "emotional arousal". Successes achieved through one's determined efforts are "successful performances". Observations of how well others are doing at a job or task are "indirect experiences". Encouraging and encouraging, encouraging and persuasive efforts by others are "verbal persuasion". It is "emotional arousal" when a person's performance is negatively affected due to a high level of stress and anxiety related to something to do or a task (Bandura, 1977). In this context, self-efficacy can be expressed as the judgment and belief of individual about themselves at the point of fulfilling a certain thing as a product of direct and indirect experiences (Ateş & Sağar, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b; Sağar, 2022b). Considering the subject in the context of the research, it can be said that the academic success levels of the teacher candidates who have the competence to have a judgment and belief about themselves in terms of fulfilling a certain thing in their direct or indirect lives may also be high. Therefore, it is thought that academic success may be a variable related to self-efficacy.

University education includes a wide range of content considering both the theoretical and practical curricula. It depends on the fact that teacher candidates can be competent in their fields and have gained the knowledge and skills related to their fields of education in the best way. In other words, it is important for teacher candidates to show academic success above a certain level in order to gain the necessary knowledge and skills in order to be competent teachers in their fields. In the literature review conducted on the subject of academic success, it was determined that there were studies in which academic success was examined together with different groups and variables. In this study, as an alternative to other studies, the academic success variable of teacher candidates, and the variables of psychological flexibility and self-efficacy were discussed. Therefore, this study is considered valuable and important in terms of the field. In this context, it was aimed to examine how psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables predicted the academic success levels of teacher candidates. Accordingly, the research question investigated in the current study was: Are psychological flexibility and self-efficacy significant predictors of academic success levels of teacher candidates?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research was based on the correlational study. Correlational study is a model for determining the existence or degree of co-variance among variables (Karasar, 2016).

Participants

The research group consisted of 398 teacher candidates (167 male, 42%; 231 female, 58%) studying at the education faculties of different universities in Türkiye in the 2021-2022 academic year. The distribution of the research group in terms of gender is presented in the table below. The average age of the teacher candidates in the study was determined as 21.60.

Table 1. The participants

Variables		F	Valid Percent
Gender	Female	231	58.0
	Male	167	42.0
Total		398	100

Data collection instruments

Psychological flexibility scale

The Turkish adaptation of the scale developed by Francis, Dawson and Golijani-Moghaddam (2016) was made by Karakuş and Akbay (2020). The scale consists of 28 items and is scored between 1-7. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .79. The scores that can be obtained from the scale are 28-196. Within the scope of the study, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was .83.

General self-efficacy scale

Aypay (2010) made the Turkish adaptation of the scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale is ten-item and 4-point likert type. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale is .83, and the test-retest reliability coefficient is .80. High scores on the scale indicate high general self-efficacy. Within the scope of the study, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is .87.

Personal information form

It was created on the basis of the principle of confidentiality in order to obtain information about teacher candidates within the scope of the study. General weighted grade point averages (GPA) in the quatrain system were taken as the basis in determining the academic success of teacher candidates.

Data collection and analysis

Ethics committee approval was obtained before starting the study (Afyon Kocatepe University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, Decision Date: 25.11.2022, Meeting: 11, Number of Papers: 143358). Afterwards, the research data were collected online via Google Form. In this direction, the data collection tools prepared via Google Form were sent to the teacher candidates via e-mail and the prospective teachers were invited to the research. The research was conducted in accordance with the principle of confidentiality, the participants were informed about the research and informed consent was obtained. Answering the questionnaires took an average of 40 minutes. The online data collection process was completed in approximately ten days. It was determined that the data obtained depending on the examinations were suitable for multiple linear regression analysis. The data obtained in the study were analyzed with the multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise) method. The significance level of .05 was used in the study.

FINDINGS

In this part of the research, first the arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of the academic success, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy scores of the teacher candidates, then the simple correlation analysis coefficients and multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise) results are presented. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of the research group are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation values

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SS
Academic Success (A.S.)	398	3.15	.60
Psychological Flexibility (P.F.)	398	125.85	19.28
Self-Efficacy (S.E.)	398	29.74	6.71

When the results of Table 2 were examined, it was found that the mean of the research group in terms of variables was as follows: Academic success ($\bar{X}$=3.15; SS=.60), psychological flexibility ($\bar{X}$=125.85; SS=19.28) and self-efficacy ($\bar{X}$=29.74; SS=6.71). The simple correlation analysis results of the variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Simple correlation analysis coefficients in terms of variables

Variable	A.S.	P.F.	S.E.
Academic Success (A.S.)	1		
Psychological Flexibility (P.F.)	.391**	1	
Self-Efficacy (S.E.)	.333**	.621**	1

**$p<.01$

According to Table 3, there is a significant positive correlation between academic success and psychological flexibility (r=.391, p<.01) and self-efficacy (r=.333, p<.01). According to the ANOVA table examined in the next stage; the variance or regression model described is significant ($F_{1/396}$=71.33; $F_{2/395}$=39.31, p<.01).

Table 4. Multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise) results regarding prediction of academic success

Model	U.C.		S.C.					R	R^2	F	df
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Zero Order	Partial					
1. (C.)	1.62	.184		8.83**							
P.F.	.012	.001	.391	8.44**	.391	.391		.391a	.153	71.33**	1/396
2. (C.)	1.58	.183		8.68**							
P.F.	.009	.002	.299	5.09**	.391	.248		.407b	.166	39.31**	2/395
S.E.	.013	.005	.148	2.51*	.333	.126					

(U.C.) Unstandardized Coefficients; (S.C.) Standardized Coefficients; (C.) Constant; **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$

According to Table 4, since the variables of psychological flexibility and self-efficacy significantly predicted academic success, they were included in the multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise) process. Considering the beta and correlation values, there is a positive and significant relationship between the academic success variable and the psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables. These two variables explain approximately 17% of the total variance in academic success in teacher candidates (R=.407; R^2=.166, p<.01).

In the first step of the "stepwise regression analysis", the beta coefficient of the psychological flexibility variable in predicting academic success was found to be .391, and the "t-test" result was also found to be at a significant level (t=8.44, p<.01). It has been determined that the psychological flexibility variable explains approximately 15% of academic success (R=.391; R^2=.153).

In the next step in the analysis process, the self-efficacy variable was also included in the model. Psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables explain approximately 17% of academic

success (R=.407; R^2 =.166). The beta coefficient of the psychological flexibility variable was determined as .299, the beta coefficient of the self-efficacy variable was determined as .148, and the results of the t-test were also found to be at a significant level (t_{PF}=5.09, p<.01/ t_{SE}=2.51, p<.05).

Based on the multiple linear regression analysis (stepwise) results, it can be said that psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables significantly predict academic success in teacher candidates. When the beta values of the variables in the model are examined, it is seen that the academic success of the teacher candidates is predicted by "psychological flexibility" in the first place and "self-efficacy" in the second place.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, it was investigated whether the variables of psychological flexibility and self-efficacy are important predictors of the academic success level of teacher candidates. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the research, it was seen that the variables of psychological flexibility and self-efficacy were significant predictors of academic success in teacher candidates. Psychological flexibility and self-efficacy were found to positively and significantly predict academic success in teacher candidates.

University period is a period in which teacher candidates acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to become a competent teacher. Therefore, academic success can be considered as an important criterion in determining the level of gaining knowledge and skills necessary for the profession of teacher candidates. In this context, it can be said that determining the variables related to the academic success of teacher candidates has an important function. In addition to presenting a perspective on academic success, studies on academic success can also be an important guide for studies to be carried out on this subject.

As a result of the research, firstly, it was seen that the academic success of teacher candidates was significantly predicted by the psychological flexibility variable and there was a significant positive relationship between them. According to this result, it can be said that as the psychological flexibility of teacher candidates increases, their academic success levels also increase. When the literature is examined, there are no studies that directly address the relationship between academic success and psychological flexibility. However, in the literature, it is seen that academic success is related to factors such as psychological resilience, psychological well-being, cognitive flexibility, social competence, self-concept, motivation, social adaptation, problem-solving skills, communication skills, life satisfaction, and happiness, and they indirectly support the result obtained from this study (Ateş, 2016; Ateş & Sağar, 2021a, 2022a; Chen et al.,1997; Yarin et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2012; Sharma & Sharma, 2018; Tabbodi et al., 2015). On the other hand, psychological flexibility is the ability to engage with the moment and change or maintain behavior according to goals (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda & Lillis, 2006). As a matter of fact, individuals are expected to be able to change and maintain their behaviors in line with a purpose in the education and training environment (Ateş, 2016; Ateş & Sağar, 2021a, 2022a). Although there are no studies in the literature that show that psychological flexibility is associated with academic success, there are studies that show that a high level of psychological flexibility positively affects the lives of individuals (Ateş & Sağar, 2022b; Lucas & Moore, 2020; Marshall & Brockman, 2016; Mendes et al., 2022). When the current results in the literature and the result of this research are evaluated as a whole, it can be said that increasing the level of psychological flexibility has an important function in increasing the academic success level of the individual. In this context, it is thought that studies to increase the psychological flexibility levels of teacher candidates may contribute positively to increasing their academic success. In other words, it can be said that one of the ways to increase the academic success of teacher candidates is to increase their psychological flexibility levels.

As another result of the study, it was observed that the academic success of the teacher candidates was significantly predicted by the self-efficacy variable, which was second after the

psychological flexibility variable among the variables examined, and that there was a significant positive correlation between them. According to this result, it can be said that as the self-efficacy levels of teacher candidates increase, their academic success levels also increase. In the studies conducted by Ateş and Sağar (2022a), Basith et al. (2020), Bouih et al. (2021), Goulão (2014), Macakova and Wood (2022), Motlagh Amrai et al. (2011) in the literature, it was determined that there is a positive and significant relationship between academic success and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy reveals confidence, belief, perception and judgment about efficacy in reaching a specific goal (Bandura, 1984, 1977, 1997). Although self-efficacy is a construct that originally emerged from the field of psychology, it can also be associated with various educational phenomena. In addition to these findings in the literature, 59 studies on academic self-efficacy and academic performance of university students between 2003 and 2015 were examined. As a result of this study, it was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. The result obtained from this research is consistent with the result of the study spanning a wide period of 12 years (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). When the result of this study and other available results are evaluated as a whole, it can be said that the higher the self-efficacy levels of the individuals, the higher their academic success. On the other hand, having a high level of self-efficacy can have a positive effect on academic success. Therefore, it can be said that high level of self-efficacy has an important function in increasing the academic success of teacher candidates.

This research has made important contributions to this field by explaining the variables that affect teacher candidates educational life and future career planning and explaining the variables that are effective in increasing and maintaining their academic success, which is of great importance. For this reason, it is seen as an important requirement for teacher candidates to discover and develop their existing potential resources in order to become active professionals. In this respect, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy studies can have a functional value in the academic success of teacher candidates.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has some limitations as well as revealing a very important result about the psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables being related to and predicting academic success. These limitations can be listed as the research group being composed of only teacher candidates, examining only the variables of academic success, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy, and conducting the research only with quantitative data. In this context, a similar research can be conducted on different research groups (university students, primary and secondary school students, adolescents, etc.) apart from teacher candidates. In addition, since academic success is an important issue in a person's career planning, it is possible to work with different variables such as work / professional success and adult groups, taking into account the professional success of the person. In this study, only psychological flexibility and self-efficacy variables were examined with academic success, and other psychological factors that might be related were not discussed. In future studies, the predictor of other psychological variables on academic success can be examined. This study was conducted as a cross-sectional study. Therefore, this research does not reveal the cause-effect relationships between academic success, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy. In future studies, the cause-effect relationships between academic success, psychological flexibility and self-efficacy can be examined by using experimental methods. With this study, it has been tried to both confirm the previous findings related to academic success studies and provide up-to-date data on the predictor of academic success at school by psychological flexibility and self-efficacy. In this context, interventions aimed at increasing the psychological flexibility and self-efficacy levels of teacher candidates in their efforts to increase academic success can also be carried out on academic success. Counseling activities can be carried out to help prospective teachers acquire variables that can contribute to their academic success by increasing their quality of life, such as psychological flexibility and self-efficacy. In this regard, studies can be carried out to improve the academic success of teacher candidates with training programs and seminars.

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Investigation of distributed leadership level of school administrators

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Article Info

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the distributed leadership level of school administrators. The study is in the cross-sectional survey model to determine the distributed leadership level of school administrators. The sample of the study consists of 325 school administrators (principals and assistant principals) working in schools in the districts of Konya, Türkiye. In the study, the "Distributed leadership scale" developed by Hairon and Goh (2015) and adapted into Turkish by Akyürek (2022) was used to determine the level of distributed leadership. The results show that distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators were high. Moreover, distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators did not show a significant difference according to gender, age, duty, educational status, seniority of administration and school type variables. In this context, cooperation can be made with all education stakeholders, especially school administrators, and their opinions can be sought in order to carry out distributed leadership in schools more effectively on the basis of authorization, participation and sharing.

INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of education and training activities at school is to ensure that children who are the future of a country, grow up in a healthy and efficient manner in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviour. School administrators are primarily responsible for educational activities in the school. The knowledge, skills and behaviours of school administrators have an impact on students and teachers, non-educational staff, and students' parents. Again, schools form the basis of the education system. That's why school administrators, which are so important, must have certain competencies (Töremen & Kolay, 2003).

School administrators must have certain competencies in order to fulfil their duties effectively and efficiently. Since the basic input and output in school organizations is human, the responsibilities of education administrators are more than other organizations (Töremen & Kolay, 2003). Administrators are people who have the responsibility and have to manage the people who come together in groups and who are organized for a certain purpose, in an effective and efficient way, in a harmonious and cooperative manner, in order to achieve the goal (Erdoğan, 2016). An effective school administrator must first be able to provide an optimum learning environment that allows the students to develop in all aspects in terms of cognitive, emotional, psychomotor, social, and aesthetic aspects (Balcı, 1993).

21st century school principals are expected to be leaders who have education and training qualifications, maintain their professional development, constantly update themselves, follow technology, strive for the development of the school in every aspect, establish good relations with the society, environment, and employees, and be responsible (Gürbüz, 2013). Leadership is perhaps one of the most discussed and researched concepts today. Leadership is so important for group success that people have been interested in it since history began. Although the concepts of administrator and leadership seem close to each other, they are not synonymous words. The most important difference emerging in most definitions is that leaders create loyalty while administrators use authority and power by assuming the responsibilities brought by their status (Akyüz, 2002).

Today, societies becoming more complex bring the need for more complex leadership (Fullan, 2001). For this reason, educational leadership had to continue its search for new models (Donaldson, 2006). The academic arena whose leadership has been working for a long time also focuses on a new leadership model depending on the change of societies. It is stated that this new model, which is expressed as distributed leadership, increases student success at school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

The traditional view of school leadership involves having a superhero at the top of the school organization. Distributed leadership has recently gained increasing importance as an alternative to leadership models that deal with the characteristics and behaviours of individual leaders such as situational and transformational leadership theory. This new model separates leadership responsibility from formal organizational roles, extends leadership into the actions and effects of individuals at all levels of the organization, and thus advocates a more taxonomic leadership perspective (Baloğlu, 2011).

When the literature is examined, though it is a relatively new subject, distributed leadership has been defined in different ways. While some theorists limit distributed leadership only to delegation of authority, some have defined it as benefiting from different characteristics of more than one leader, while others have evaluated distributed leadership as a process that occurs through spontaneous cooperation (Akgün, 2019). The most widely accepted definition among these definitions was explained by Spillane (2006) as the interaction of more than one leader in line with a common goal. Distributed leadership is also defined as the redistribution of power and reorganization of authority (Harris & Muijs, 2005). Distributed leadership has more impact than the sum of all leaders in a school and their efforts to achieve a larger-scale leadership behaviour (Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership is a leadership approach that includes spreading leadership to all components of the organization, regardless of hierarchy and position, and thus increasing the total leadership capacity in the organization. According to this approach, every organization has a

latent leadership potential. The best way to reveal this potential and to be able to work is to distribute the leadership (Baloğlu, 2016).

The distributed leadership model is more concerned with interaction than with actions. Today the importance of social interactions emphasizes the necessity of distributed leadership (Yılmaz & Turan, 2015). Distributed leadership is defined by Firestonen and Martinez (2007) as the different ways in which leadership is distributed while by Harris (2003) it is considered as maximizing human resources in the organization. In summary, when these definitions are examined, it is observed that the "distribution" of leadership behaviour is emphasized. In other words, one of the important points in distributed leadership is how and in what ways this distribution should be made. Gronn (2002) stated that there are three forms of the distribution of leadership. The first is spontaneous cooperation, which is the termination of the association with the end of the task after the employees have come together according to their abilities. The second is the intuitive working situation that is formed by the trust and relationships that individuals come together and establish. The third is the institutionalization process, which is called the formal structure that consists of a less systematic or designed structure.

Many definitions of distributed leadership require a better understanding of its practices (Spillane, 2005). In order to understand this, it would be useful to investigate the ways in which distributed leadership is currently manifesting itself in schools. The most valid way to do this is to explore distributed leadership in schools and support its implementation. However, it can be said that the studies (Baloğlu, 2011; Yıldırım, 2017; Akgün, 2019) carried out are limited. Baloğlu (2011) stated that distributed leadership has rapidly gained importance in the field of school leadership in parallel with the developments in other fields of science. In the study, it is suggested that formal and informal forms of distributed leadership should be taken into account in school administration restructuring studies. A school that adopts a distributed leadership perspective attach importance to students, teachers, and other ancillary staff. In such a school, the leader's duties and responsibilities are distributed, and in this way, individualism is avoided, so success is accepted as the success of the team. In this way, the distribution of leadership among people will cause people to adopt the institution more and make efforts to achieve success (Yıldırım, 2017). While the distributed leadership behaviours differ according to the school type and the age of the teachers, there is no significant difference according to the grade and the age of the teachers. It has been found that there are obstacles such as willingness, regulations and time in the application of distributed leadership. While sharing leadership in schools, variables such as willingness and expertise are prioritized (Akgün, 2019). Studies in the Turkish literature were generally limited to inventory development (Adıgüzelli, 2016). In addition, it is seen that the opinions of teachers are mostly used in studies (Korkmaz, 2011; Akçekoce & Bilgin, 2016; Akan & Kılıç, 2018) on the application of distributed leadership in schools. In this study, seeking the opinions of school administrators who are the focus of distributed leadership will shed light on the situation in schools. Our results will help develop distributed leadership practices in schools and contribute to the current literature. In addition, determining the differences of the distributed leadership practice in schools regarding some demographic variables (gender, age, duty, educational status, seniority of administration and school type) will contribute to the literature and its functionality in schools. Due to these reasons, distributed leadership practices in schools will be developed and the literature will be enriched. In this context, the aim of the study is to determine the distributed leadership level of school administrators. The sub-problems determined in this direction are as follows:

1. What is the level of distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators?

2. Does the level of distributed leadership of school administrators differ according to demographic characteristics

METHODOLOGY

Model of the research

This study is in the cross-sectional survey model to determine the distributed leadership level of school administrators. In the survey model, the person or subject in the research is tried to be described as it is within the framework of the conditions (Karasar, 2015). In the cross-sectional survey model, the features and variables to be described are measured at once.

Population and sample

The population of the study consists of 1360 administrators (principals and assistant principals) working in schools in the districts (Karatay, Meram and Selcuklu) located in the city centre of Konya in Türkiye (Ministry of National Education [MNE], 2022). The lower limit for the sample size of the study in the 95% confidence interval is 306 (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). The sample of the study consists of 325 administrators (principals and assistant principals) working in schools in the districts (Karatay, Meram and Selcuklu) located in the city center of Konya in the 2021-2022 academic year. According to the population in this study, the number of samples is sufficient within the 95% confidence interval (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). Sampling of administrators was carried out by simple random sampling. Randomness indicates the equal probability of choosing the units based on the sample for the sample (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2012). In particular, a list was made and the participants were randomly selected.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, duty, educational status, seniority of administration and school type).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables		*N*	*%*
Gender	Female	35	10.8
	Male	290	89.2
Age	21-30	18	5.5
	31-40	135	41.5
	41-50	128	39.4
	51 and older	44	13.5
Duty	Principal	145	44.6
	Assistant principal	180	55.4
Educational Status	Undergraduate	233	71.7
	Postgraduate	92	28.3
Seniority of Administration	1-5 years	128	39.4
	6-10 years	92	28.3
	11-15 years	43	13.2
	16 years and over	62	19.1
School type	Kindergarten	18	5.5
	Primary school	89	27.4
	Secondary school	162	49.8
	High school	56	17.2
Total		325	100

When Table 1 is examined; according to the gender variable, men are more than women with 89.2%. According to the age variable, the highest ratio is 31-40 with 41.5%, the lowest ratio is the administrators in the 21-30 age group with 5.5%. According to the duty variable, assistant principals are more common than principals with 55.4%. According to the educational status variable, those with undergraduate are higher than those with postgraduate, with 71.7%. According to the seniority of administration variable, the highest rate is 39.4% for 1-5 years, the lowest rate is for the administrators in the 11-15 years group with 13.2%. According to the school type variable, the highest rate is the secondary school with 49.8%, the lowest rate is the administrators working in the kindergarten with 5.5%.

Data collection instruments

In the study, the "Distributed leadership scale" developed by Hairon and Goh (2015) and adapted into Turkish by Akyürek (2022) was used to determine the level of distributed leadership. The scale is a five-point Likert type scale. The measurement tool was developed in the form of 17 items and based on 4 theoretical dimensions. These dimensions are limited authorization (1-5 items), improved leadership (6-9 items), shared decisions (10-14 items), and collective participation (15-17 items). In this context, confirmatory factor analysis was performed to confirm the factor design of the instrument. As a result of confirmatory factor analysis, the t values of the latent variables explaining the observed variables were found to be significant at the .01 level. Since significant t values were obtained for all items in the model, all indicators were included in the model. The confirmatory factor analysis results of the distributed leadership scale are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis results of the distributed leadership scale

Compliance measurements	Measured value	Reference range
p	.00	> .01
X²/sd	2.68	≤ 3
RMSEA	.07	≤ .08
SRMR	.03	≤ .05
NNFI - CFI	.95 - .97	≥ .95

When the table is examined, it is seen that the p value is significant at the .01 level. In many confirmatory factor analyses, it is normal for the p value to be significant due to the large sample size. For this reason, alternative fit indices regarding the fit between the two matrices were evaluated. In this context, it can be stated that the X2/sd, SRMR, NNFI and CFI values are excellent, and the fit index of the RMSEA value has a good fit. As a result, it can be stated that the 17-item four-factor structure of the distributed leadership scale (5 items for limited authorization factor, 4 items for improved leadership factor, 5 items for shared decisions factor, and 3 items for collective participation factor) was confirmed as a model.

In this direction, within the scope of reliability analysis, first of all, item analysis was examined by using item-total correlation. In addition, the reliability of the scale was checked by using Cronbach's alpha. The results of the reliability analysis of the distributed leadership scale are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability analysis results of distributed leadership scale

			Alpha value	Item-total correlation
Distributed	leadership	scale	.97	.42-.88

The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the distributed leadership scale is .97. In this context, it can be interpreted that the internal consistency coefficient of the distributed leadership scale is sufficient for the reliability of the scale scores. It is observed that the item-total correlations for all items in the scale vary between .42 and .88. When the item-total correlations are examined, it can be interpreted that the items in the scale distinguish individuals well.

Data analysis

The measurement tool used in the research was explained and applied to 325 school administrators in Konya, Türkiye, in May 2022, and data were obtained. The data were transferred to digital media by coding to make them ready for analysis. Firstly, the condition of meeting the normality assumption of the data set was examined. In this context, kurtosis and skewness coefficients and mean, mode and median values were examined. The values of kurtosis, skewness and standard deviation calculated for the scale are as follows; 1.86, -1.58, .66. The kurtosis and skewness values in the study are between ±2. These results are interpreted as the data set has a

normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). In addition, in the analyses made, it was determined that the arithmetic mean was 4.13, the mode value was 4.00 and the median was 4.17. The closeness of these values indicates that the data set is normally distributed (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). In addition to these, the predicted sample size is usually shown as 30 and larger in order to put forward an assumption that the distribution does not deviate excessively from the normal distribution. However, most research in the social sciences is done on smaller groups. In the literature, there are studies showing that the use of a parametric statistic does not cause a significant deviation in the *p* significance level to be calculated in the analysis, if the sizes of each of the subgroups are 15 or higher (Büyüköztürk, 2013). In this context, parametric test techniques were chosen and used to test the sub-problems of the research. Firstly, percentage and frequency analyses were made. In addition, t-test was applied for independent samples in variables with two subcategories, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied for variables with three or more subcategories. In the interpretation of the findings, the significance value was taken as p> .05. The rating range of the distributed leadership scale is as follows; strongly disagree (1.00-1.79), disagree (1.80-2.59), undecided (2.60-3.39), agree (3.40-4.19), strongly agree (4.20-5.00).

FINDINGS

Within the scope of the first sub-problem of the research, distributed leadership level of school administrators was examined. In Table 4, descriptive statistics regarding the distributed leadership level of school administrators are given.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on distributed leadership level of school administrators

Dimensions	N	$\bar{x}$	SS
Limited authorization	325	4.01	.67
Improved leadership	325	4.10	.70
Shared decisions	325	4.22	.73
Collective participation	325	4.22	.75
Distributed leadership (General)	325	4.13	.66

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators are at the level of "agree" ($\bar{x}$ = 4.13). In addition, when the distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators are examined on the basis of dimensions, limited authorization ($\bar{x}$ = 4.01-"agree"), improved leadership ($\bar{x}$ = 4.10-"agree"), shared decisions ($\bar{x}$ = 4.22-"strongly agree"), and collective participation ($\bar{x}$ = 4.22 -"strongly agree" level) dimensions are seen.

When the distributed leadership level of school administrators is examined in terms of dimensions; the highest dimensions were shared decisions and collective participation, and the lowest dimension was limited authorization.

Considering the second sub-problem; distributive leadership level of school administrators was examined according to demographic characteristics (gender, age, duty, educational status, administration seniority and school type). Table 5 shows the findings regarding the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the gender variable.

Table 5. T-test results of school administrators' distributed leadership level by gender variable

Dimensions	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	p
Limited authorization	Female	35	3.97	.49	323	.38	.69
	Male	290	4.02	.69			
Improved leadership	Female	35	4.01	.72	323	.78	.43
	Male	290	4.11	.69			
Shared decisions	Female	35	4.12	.62	323	.88	.37
	Male	290	4.24	.74			

Collective participation	Female	35	4.11	.75	323	.94	.34
	Male	290	4.24	.75			
Distributed leadership (General)	Female	35	4.05	.52	323	.78	.43
	Male	290	4.14	.67			

*p> .05

According to Table 5, the distributed leadership level of school administrators does not show a significant difference in terms of gender (t(323)= .78, p> .05).
Limited authorization (t(323)= .38, p> .05), improved leadership (t(323)= .78, p> .05), shared decisions (t(323)= .88, p> .05) and collective participation (t(323)= .94, p> .05) dimensions of school administrators' distributed leadership level does not show a significant difference according to the gender variable.

The findings regarding the distributed leadership level of school administrators by age variable are given in Table 6.

Table 6. One-way analysis of variance results regarding distributed leadership level of school administrators by age

Dimensions	Age	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	F	p
Limited authorization	21-30	18	3.81	.63	.85	.46
	31-40	135	4.05	.52		
	41-50	128	3.99	.74		
	51 and older	44	4.06	.84		
Improved leadership	21-30	18	3.91	.61	.45	.71
	31-40	135	4.12	.56		
	41-50	128	4.10	.80		
	51 and older	44	4.10	.77		
Shared decisions	21-30	18	4.11	.56	.25	.85
	31-40	135	4.25	.56		
	41-50	128	4.21	.83		
	51 and older	44	4.26	.94		
Collective participation	21-30	18	4.05	.43	.38	.76
	31-40	135	4.24	.59		
	41-50	128	4.21	.87		
	51 and older	44	4.26	.92		
Distributed leadership (General)	21-30	18	3.96	.47	.51	.67
	31-40	135	4.16	.50		
	41-50	128	4.12	.76		
	51 and older	44	4.16	.83		

*p> .05

According to Table 6, there is no significant difference between the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the age variable (F= .51, p> .05). In terms of limited authorization (F= .85, p> . 05), improved leadership (F= .45, p> .05), shared decisions (F= .25, p> .05), and collective participation (F= .38, p> .05) dimensions, no significant difference was found according to the age variable.

The findings regarding the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the duty variable are given in Table 7.

Table 7. T-test results of the distributed leadership level of the school administrators by duty variable

Dimensions	Duty	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	p
Limited authorization	Principal	145	4.00	.81	323	.42	.67
	Assistant principal	180	4.03	.53			
Improved leadership	Principal	145	4.09	.80	323	.11	.90
	Assistant principal	180	4.10	.60			

Shared decisions	Principal	145	4.21	.88	323	.28	.77
	Assistant principal	180	4.24	.59			
Collective participation	Principal	145	4.22	.89	323	.04	.96
	Assistant principal	180	4.22	.61			
Distributed leadership (General)	Principal	145	4.12	.80	323	.23	.81
	Assistant principal	180	4.14	.52			

*p> .05

According to Table 7, the distributed leadership level of school administrators does not show a significant difference in terms of the duty variable (t(323)= .23, p> .05).

In terms of limited authorization (t(323)= .42, p> .05), improved leadership (t(323)= .11, p> .05), shared decisions (t(323)= .28, p> .05) and collective participation (t(323)= .04, p> .05) dimensions, no significant difference was found according to the duty variable.

The findings regarding the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the variable of educational status are given in Table 8.

Table 8. T-test results of the distributed leadership level of school administrators by the variable of educational status

Dimensions	**Educational Status**	**N**	**$\overline{x}$**	**SD**	**df**	**t**	**p**
Limited authorization	Undergraduate	233	4.02	.66	323	.13	.89
	Postgraduate	92	4.01	.70			
Improved leadership	Undergraduate	233	4.11	.68	323	.63	.52
	Postgraduate	92	4.06	.73			
Shared decisions	Undergraduate	233	4.24	.73	323	.42	.67
	Postgraduate	92	4.20	.73			
Collective participation	Undergraduate	233	4.24	.76	323	.58	.55
	Postgraduate	92	4.18	.72			
Distributed leadership (General)	Undergraduate	233	4.14	.65	323	.45	.65
	Postgraduate	92	4.11	.68			

*p> .05

According to Table 8, the level of distributed leadership of school administrators does not show a significant difference in terms of the variable of educational status (t(323)= .45, p> .05). In terms of limited authorization (t(323) = .13, p> .05), improved leadership (t(323)= .63, p> .05), shared decisions (t(323)= .42, p> .05), and collective participation (t(323))= .58, p> .05) dimensions, no significant difference was found according to the variable of educational status.

The findings regarding the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the seniority of administration variable are given in Table 9.

Table 9. One-way analysis of variance results on distributed leadership level of school administrators by seniority of administration variable

Dimensions	**Seniority of administration**	**N**	**$\overline{x}$**	**SD**	**F**	**p**
Limited authorization	1-5 years	128	4.02	.60	1.24	.29
	6-10 years	92	4.03	.56		
	11-15 years	43	3.85	.95		
	16 years and over	62	4.10	.71		
Improved leadership	1-5 years	128	4.07	.67	1.71	.16
	6-10 years	92	4.16	.60		
	11-15 years	43	3.91	.89		
	16 years and over	62	4.19	.73		
Shared decisions	1-5 years	128	4.22	.65	1.35	.25
	6-10 years	92	4.25	.66		
	11-15 years	43	4.05	1.03		
	16 years and over	62	4.34	.74		
Collective participation	1-5 years	128	4.24	.71	1.48	.22
	6-10 years	92	4.21	.64		

		11-15 years	43	4.03	1.00		
		16 years and over	62	4.34	.76		
Distributed leadership (General)		1-5 years	128	4.13	.59	.15	.19
		6-10 years	92	4.16	.56		
		11-15 years	43	3.95	.95		
		16 years and over	62	4.23	.69		

*p> .05

According to Table 9, there is no significant difference between the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the variable of seniority of administrator (F= .15, p> .05). In terms of limited authorization (F= .29, p> .05), improved leadership (F= .16, p> .05), shared decisions (F= .25, p> .05), and collective participation (F= .22, p> .05) p> .05) dimensions, no significant difference was found according to seniority of administration variable.

The findings related to the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the school type variable are given in Table 10.

Table 10. One-way analysis of variance results regarding the distributive leadership level of the school administrators by the school type variable

Dimensions	School Type	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	F	p
Limited authorization	Kindergarten	18	4.12	.49	.15	.92
	Primary school	89	4.01	.67		
	Secondary school	162	4.01	.73		
	High school	56	4.00	.52		
Improved leadership	Kindergarten	18	4.18	.48	.20	.89
	Primary school	89	4.10	.66		
	Secondary school	162	4.10	.75		
	High school	56	4.04	.66		
Shared decisions	Kindergarten	18	4.26	.59	.23	.87
	Primary school	89	4.28	.67		
	Secondary school	162	4.20	.80		
	High school	56	4.20	.66		
Collective participation	Kindergarten	18	4.27	.52	.36	.77
	Primary school	89	4.28	.66		
	Secondary school	162	4.20	.81		
	High school	56	4.16	.77		
leadership (General)	Kindergarten	18	4.20	.48	.18	.90
	Primary school	89	4.16	.61		
	Secondary school	162	4.12	.73		
	High school	56	4.10	.56		

*p> .05

According to Table 10, there is no significant difference between school administrators' distributed leadership level according to the school type variable (F= .18, p> .05).

In terms of limited authorization (F= .15, p> .05), improved leadership (F= .20, p> .05), shared decisions (F= .23, p> .05), and collective participation (F= .36, p> .05) p> .05) dimensions, no significant difference was found according to the school type variable.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Regarding the first sub-problem of the research, the level of distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators was found to be high. This situation is positive for the development and success of schools. The result of the study shows partial similarity with the result of the study conducted by Akgün (2019) on "perceptions of distributed leadership at a high level". It is possible to say that distributed leadership is applied to a large extent in schools participating in the research. In addition, it can be said that teachers have a highly positive perception of the necessity of distributed leadership. In the light of these findings, Akgün (2019) remarks that distributed leadership is applied within the structure of our schools. In similar studies, in today's

changing conditions, it has been revealed that leader-orientedness affects institutions negatively, for example, it causes quitting, instead people-oriented behaviours will be more effective and employees can contribute more with a democratic management style (Şafaklı, 2005; Tengilimoğlu, 2005; Van Vugt, Jepson, Hart and De Cremer, 2004). Unlike these findings, Bozdoğan and Sağnak (2011) revealed that there is a positive relationship between autocratic leadership, cooperation, evaluation and freedom.

According to the current study, when the distributed leadership level of school administrators is examined in terms of dimensions; the highest dimension was shared decisions and collective participation, and the lowest dimension was limited authorization. When considered in the context of the human resource management skills of school administrators, school administrators should create a participatory and strong school culture, define their role definitions more generally and flexible, and obtain teachers' opinions in a dynamic environment (Argon & Demirer, 2015; Çalık & Şehitoğlu, 2006; Gümüşeli, 2001). Effective implementation of the decisions taken in educational organizations requires both the administrator and the teacher to participate in the decision together because the implementation of the decision is ensured by the cooperation of the school administrator and the teacher (Celep, 1990).

Regarding the second sub-problem of the study; distributed leadership level of school administrators was examined according to demographic characteristics (gender, age, duty, education level, seniority of administration and school type). Distributed leadership level of school administrators does not show a significant difference in terms of gender variable. Along with the general average, the gender factor does not have a significant effect on the basis of dimensions. This result is supported by the result obtained in the study by Yılmaz (2013). According to this result, it can be concluded that managers working in different types and levels want to take responsibility at an equal level, regardless of whether they are men or women.

It was concluded that there was no significant difference between the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the age variable. Along with the general average, the age factor does not have a significant effect in terms of dimensions. There are also some studies in the literature that do not overlap with the results of the current study. According to the results of the study conducted by Akgün (2019); statistical analyses showed that teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership differed significantly according to their ages; younger teachers had higher perceptions of distributed leadership in schools compared to older teachers. The source of the results of this study, which does not coincide with the result of the current study, may be due to the perspective brought by the contemporary management approach.

Distributed leadership level of school administrators does not show a significant difference in terms of duty variable. Along with the general average, the duty variable factor does not have a significant effect on dimensions either. The reason for this may be that principals and assistant principals are more willing to participate in managerial work with performance anxiety. Elmore (2000) built his distributed leadership approach directly on school leadership. The main focus is on how leadership effectiveness affects the organization and how it helps organizational development (Spillane, 2006). The participation and responsibility of all individuals forming the school in the school leadership process is very important for the implementation of distributed leadership. Establishing an environment of trust among employees and providing an environment for teachers to develop themselves are also important components in distributed leadership practice (Heller & Firestone, 1995).

Distributed leadership level of school administrators does not show a significant difference in terms of educational status variable. Along with the general average, the factor of educational status does not have a significant effect in terms of dimensions. In this regard, it can be argued that distributed leadership is considered important in schools, regardless of educational background. However, leadership practices, according to contemporary researchers and school administrators, are too complicated to be described by a single behaviour sequence (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2013). Therefore, according to this leadership approach, school administrators should first develop

themselves and then train teachers as leaders. When the common values of school culture are based more on trusting people and individualism, leadership behaviours will develop in the school environment (Göksoy, 2015).

There is no significant difference between the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the variable of seniority of administration. Along with the general average, the variable of administration seniority in terms of dimensions does not have a significant effect. This may be due to less experienced administrators seeing experienced administrators as role models for them. Distributed leadership is the guide and leading element for the development of education (Elmore, 2000). In this approach, the new criterion for leaders is to correctly identify their futures, to recognize their own skills and competencies and to maximize them as much as possible (Drucker, 1994).

There is no significant difference between the distributed leadership level of school administrators according to the school type variable. Along with the general average, the variable of administration seniority in terms of dimensions does not have a significant effect. The result of the study shows partial similarity with the findings of the study conducted by Akgün (2019). According to the results of the study conducted by Akgün (2019); in terms of the school type, a difference was observed between the perceptions of distributed leadership. The source of this study result may be sample group differences.

According to the results of the study, the level of distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators is high. Distributed leadership perceptions of school administrators did not show a significant difference according to gender, age, duty, educational status, seniority of administration and school type variables.

SUGGESTIONS

In this framework, cooperation can be made with all education stakeholders, especially school administrators, and their opinions can be sought in order to carry out distributed leadership in schools more effectively on the basis of authorization, participation and sharing. In addition, educational practices and activities can be carried out in schools and classrooms for the operability of distributed leadership. Considering that the current study is based on the quantitative method, similar studies can also be conducted in terms of qualitative and mixed methods in order to see the application situation of distributed leadership in schools.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to school administrators and the province of Konya. Conducting studies in different provinces is valuable in terms of seeing the situation of distributed leadership in schools throughout Türkiye. Additionally, using a quantitative model-based scale to conduct the study is one of its drawbacks. Conducting the study based on the qualitative model will contribute to an in-depth and detailed understanding of the situation of distributed leadership in schools.

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Navigating Turkish EFL teachers' perceived challenges with very young learners

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Navigating Turkish EFL teachers' perceived challenges with very young learners

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study sought to investigate teachers' perceived challenges in teaching English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) to very young learners (VYLs) (2 to 6 years-old pre-schoolers) in Türkiye, with a two-fold aim: 1) to explore the challenges that EFL teachers experience in teaching VYLs, and 2) to investigate whether there is a significant difference in the challenges they encounter regarding their gender and years of teaching experience. The participants were Turkish EFL teachers (N= 35) teaching English to VYLs in preschools. A mixed method convergent research design was adopted within the scope of the study: Quantitative data were collected by a Likert Scale Questionnaire, while qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. The data elicited via the questionnaire were analyzed through descriptive statistics and a Mann-Whitney U Test using SPSS, and the data gathered from the interview were analyzed by inductive content analysis. Several challenges emerged, and findings revealed that teachers mostly encounter challenges in managing the classroom and involving students in teaching English to VYLs. However, findings did not illustrate a statistically significant difference in the challenges teachers face regarding their gender or years of teaching experience. Exploring these challenges can help teachers and other stakeholders understand the potential problems in teaching English to VYLs and help improve their instructional practices accordingly. The article concludes with suggestions for further research.

INTRODUCTION

With the spread of globalization and digitalization**,** English has become the lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2005) during the past half-century and has been taught as a second or foreign language (L2) in many countries all around the world (Broughton et al., 2002). Today, in line with the global rise of English, more and more people are taught English in many non-English speaking countries, and children are no exception in this realm (Butler, 2015; Cameron, 2003; Copland & Garton, 2014). In this respect, there has been a rapid increase in the number of educational institutions catering to the crying need for addressing a diverse population of language learners with wide-ranging backgrounds and characteristics, so has there been a collateral dynamic increase in the necessity to train more English language teachers in terms of number and high quality, too. Especially with the policies promulgated for teaching the English language in primary or pre-primary schools in many non-English speaking countries (Copland & Garton, 2014; Nguyen, 2018), the need for English language teachers that would implement age-appropriate pedagogies has become even more critical. Nonetheless, teacher training processes appear to fall short in preparing these teachers to teach English to young learners (YLs hereafter) (Copland & Garton, 2014).

As a matter of fact, it has been stated that a "one-fits-all" standpoint seems to be dominant, oftentimes ignoring the context-specific theories and practices in instructing teachers teaching English to young learners (TEYL) (Nguyen, 2018, p. 13), and the Turkish context is not an exception. As in most educational systems worldwide, English is the primary and first foreign language being learned and taught in Türkiye. In primary school, students start learning English officially as a school subject in the 2nd grade (for 2 hours per week). In the preceding pre-primary school years, however, the provision of English lessons is not compulsory and, therefore, is not a part of the curriculum in state pre-primary schools. Yet, most private schools or institutions generally start teaching their students English from a very young age. Nevertheless, teachers are not generally provided with extra in-service training opportunities that would further specialize them in TEYL, and consequently, it can be a very common situation for English language teachers to encounter some challenges when they start TEYL. In that sense, although English language teachers already face a wide range of challenges both inside and outside the classroom environment, such as managing the classroom (Akçor & Savaşçı, 2020; Pertiwi et al., 2020), involving the students (Widodo & Dewi, 2019), and monitoring learning (Inostroza-Araos, 2015), the challenges experienced by those teaching English to YLs can take on varied forms, given that such challenges could diverge according to the age of the students being taught. Since teaching different age groups requires very different sets of teaching skills and competencies, the scope of challenges in TEYL could greatly vary at this level of education, namely pre-primary education.

Indeed, teaching YLs a foreign language could be pretty demanding for teachers (Cameron, 2003). Nevertheless, the empirical inquiry is very scant since there have been few investigations into what teachers go through in teaching YLs, particularly VYLs (from 2 to 6-year-old pre-schoolers). Drawing on this gap and so-called need, this study seeks to investigate teachers' perceived challenges in teaching English to VYLs as a foreign language (EFL).

Background to the study

Ellis (2014) provides a ubiquitous but obsolete definition of the term "young learner" by referring to it as "any learner under the age of 18" (p. 75) and then puts forward new terms by drawing attention to many different confusing definitions in the field. Ellis (2014, p. 77) refers to pre-schoolers (also referred to as pre-primary, early years, nursery, and kindergarten) as those whose ages range between 2–5 years. The proposed term is "Early years/pre-primary." Ellis (2014) stated that primary school students' age ranges between 6–10/11 years. Although some of their characteristics are similar, pre-schoolers and primary school students learn languages in different ways.

According to Piaget (1970), VYLs, whose ages range between 3-6 years, tend to learn languages through interacting with their environment and exploring the immediate setting. When compared to YLs, whose ages range between 6 and 12, the attention span of VYLs is very short, and they are very curious to explore the world around them (Degirmenci-Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). Vygotsky (1962) stated that children acquire language through social interaction and interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); they reach maximum capacity in language learning with scaffolding. When all the characteristics of VYLs are taken into consideration, it might be challenging for many EFL teachers to teach English to children at kindergartens (Moore, 2010). Some of these challenges include lack of time (Kusmaryati, 2020), lack of teaching resources (Copland et al., 2014), students' involvement (Khulel, 2021), and classroom management (Pertiwi et al., 2020). VYLs can also easily get distracted from the lesson and feel alienated because of their age. If teachers frequently use L2 in classrooms, making students participate in the lessons, monitoring their learning, and managing the classroom could be pretty challenging.

Accordingly, the challenges faced by teachers teaching teenagers or adult learners are likely to be different both in scope and number than those encountered by teachers teaching YLs, namely those whose ages range from 6-12 years. They are so because young learners differ from adult learners, not only in terms of literacy but also in terms of their cognitive, social, and emotional growth (McKay, 2006; Nguyen, 2018). To exemplify, YLs have great imagination and energy (Kusmaryati, 2020). They also pay more attention to their surroundings and are more interested in physical and tangible materials (Pertiwi et al., 2020). Therefore, English language teachers might encounter challenges in student involvement (Widodo & Dewi, 2019) or classroom management (Inostroza Araos, 2015) while teaching English to a group of YLs. However, since only a few studies focus on the challenges teachers encounter in teaching English to VYLs, this study aims to investigate the challenges Turkish EFL teachers face in teaching English to this specific group of learners. Exploring such challenges can help teachers and educators identify the possible challenges they might face in very young learners' classrooms and solve them beforehand in the teaching process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges faced by English language teachers teaching young learners (YLs)

Young learners possess different characteristics when compared to teenagers or adult learners because they are generally more energetic; they like playing games, and they have great imaginations (Kusmaryati, 2020). Since young learners are very active and energetic during the learning process, teachers might face some difficulties when teaching English (Widodo & Dewi, 2019). For example, Inostroza Araos (2015) indicated that many teachers worldwide encounter the challenges of insufficient student involvement, classroom management, assessing learning, and limited resources. So, the challenges faced by English teachers teaching young /very young learners generally center around student involvement, classroom management, and monitoring learning, as indicated in the literature.

Accordingly, there are several studies in the literature focusing on the challenges encountered by English language teachers teaching YLs in different contexts around the world (e.g., Inostroza Araos, 2015; Keskin, 2019; Khulel, 2021; Kusmaryati, 2020; Pertiwi et al., 2020; Widodo & Dewi, 2021). For example, Pertiwi et al. (2020) studied the perspectives on the challenges of teaching English to YLs in the Indonesian EFL context. Findings illustrated that Indonesian teachers face difficulties with class size, classroom management, different characteristics of students, and difficult language skills, referring to some difficulties in reading and writing. Findings showed that the most challenging one was classroom management for teachers. In another study in the same context, Widodo and Dewi (2021) investigated the problems Indonesian EFL teachers face when teaching English to second-grade students. They found out that the problems stemmed from students' lack of discipline during the lessons, differences in their English abilities, difficulty in creating a habit of using English as a daily language, and lack of support from parents. Another

study was conducted by Kusmaryati (2020), who investigated teachers' perspectives on teaching English to YLs in Indonesia. The researcher reported that teachers encounter problems of lack of time, students' poor vocabulary and pronunciation skills, students' interest in English, and limited learning facilities and materials. Also, students' characteristics were a problem as they were very active and energetic. Khulel (2021) also conducted a study on the difficulties that English teachers face when teaching English to elementary students in rustic primary schools in East Java, Indonesia. Findings showed that teachers encountered three significant challenges: students' socioeconomic conditions, which refer to parental income or educational background; the status of English in the schools, referring to the allocated time for English in the curriculum; and the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected both students and teachers.

Apart from the studies in the Indonesian context, another study focusing on teachers' challenges was conducted in the Chilean context by Inostroza Araos (2015). The study focused on the challenges teachers face in Chilean young learners' classrooms. Findings illustrated that monitoring learning was the major challenge for teachers. Time limitations, lack of support from parents, and the differences between school reality and policy were the other problems that teachers encountered in young learners' classrooms. Findings also showed that teachers rarely used group work because of time limitations. Additionally, female teachers used teaching styles better, so they had a more positive attitude towards teaching English to YLs. In addition to Chilean young learners' classrooms, Keskin (2019) explored the challenges teachers face in teaching English to YLs in public primary schools in İstanbul, Türkiye. Teachers reported a variety of challenges such as institutional (e.g., time constraints and crowded classrooms), instructional (e.g., inadequate learning materials), community-related (e.g., lack of support from parents), learner-related (e.g., lack of motivation and nature of learners), and teacher-related (e.g., training and knowledge of English) challenges. Lastly, extensive research was implemented by Copland et al. (2014) to investigate the challenges faced by teachers from both global and local perspectives. As findings illustrated, teachers face challenges due to lacking training, knowledge, and resources. Additionally, it was demonstrated that teachers encounter challenges in teaching skills in the global context, yet they face challenges of confidence and time pressures locally.

When the aforementioned studies are considered, English language teachers appear to face several challenges (e.g., classroom management and monitoring learning) while teaching YLs in different contexts. However, since young learners' characteristics differ from those of very young learners, they tend to have different needs in English language education. Teachers might, therefore, encounter different challenges while teaching English to very young learners.

Challenges faced by English language teachers teaching very young learners (VYLs)

Very young learners (VYLs) have maximum energy but minimum concentration, and they need to be involved in more physical activities than young learners do (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). These characteristics of VYLs might cause difficulties for teachers in teaching English, but there are only a few studies that focus on the challenges that teachers encounter in teaching English to this group of learners. For example, the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English to VYLs in Indonesia were studied by Malik et al. (2021), who concluded that lack of motivation, limited time and teaching resources, inadequate materials, and crowded classrooms were the challenges encountered by English language teachers. Another study revealed that the challenges stem from teachers not knowing how to prepare a lesson plan and not having enough training. Moreover, the study showed that an unsupportive learning environment was another challenge for teachers in teaching English to VYLs (Masnan & Ngajib, 2016). Teachers' challenges when teaching English in Utah kindergarten were investigated in another study (Moore, 2010), and large class size, lack of resources and time, students' school readiness, academic curriculum, and lack of parental involvement were indicated as the challenges that teachers encounter.

These challenges teachers encounter could also vary according to different variables, particularly those stemming from teacher-related variables, such as their gender and years of teaching experience. For example, gender has been indicated as a significant variable in this respect.

According to Pavlenko and Piller (2008), in foreign language teaching, females have more positive attitudes than male teachers, and they use teaching and learning strategies better, so female teachers might face fewer challenges in the profession. In addition to gender, teaching experience could be another important variable since it might influence teachers' challenges in teaching English to young/ very young learners (Inostroza Araos, 2015). However, as Inostroza Araos (2015) illustrated, the challenges teachers face in young learners' classrooms did not vary across teachers' teaching experience.

Significance and purpose of the study

As the literature review suggests, the earlier studies mainly focused on challenges faced by teachers who teach YLs (e.g., Copland et al., 2014), in other words, primary school students. Nevertheless, a few studies focus on the challenges faced by teachers who teach VYLs in kindergartens (e.g., Malik et al., 2021; Moore, 2010), namely pre-primary school students. Also, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, only one study focuses on teachers' challenges (i.e., Keskin, 2019); however, that study was conducted with those teaching English to YLs in primary schools. Accordingly, it appears there is no study in the literature addressing teachers' challenges while teaching VYLs. Taking these limitations and gaps into consideration, this study sought to investigate the challenges faced by Turkish EFL teachers in teaching English to VYLs and was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do Turkish EFL teachers encounter challenges in teaching English to very young learners? If yes, what challenges do they encounter regarding
    1.1. students' involvement?
    1.2. monitoring learning?
    1.3. classroom management?
2. Is there any difference in the challenges they encounter according to their
    2.1. gender?
    2.2. years of teaching experience?

METHODOLOGY

Design

In accordance with the aim of the study, this study followed the mixed method sequential convergent research design, where the researchers first carried out a quantitative method, and then the qualitative method was used to gather additional detailed information to flesh out the results (Fraenkel et al., 2015). So, the researchers wanted to achieve an elaborate and comprehensive understanding of the target phenomenon (Dörnyei, 2007). As Cohen et al. (2002) stated, mixed-method research enables a more comprehensive and complete understanding of a target complex phenomenon than using single-method approaches. Considering that collecting only quantitative data would not be enough for answering the research questions of this study, the researchers also collected qualitative data to elaborate more on the phenomenon and have a fuller understanding of the issue, so the explanatory mixed method research design was adopted for the present study. Moreover, a cross-sectional research design was used in the study since it took place at a particular time; in other words, the data were collected at one point in time (a day or few weeks) (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Setting and participants

The study was conducted in the Turkish EFL context, where a total of 35 Turkish EFL teachers (30 females, five males) teaching English at private/public kindergarten schools in the Turkish educational context voluntarily participated. All of them were pre-primary and non-native English teachers. Participants sampled through snowball sampling had different years of teaching experience ranging from 1 to 17 years (M= 6 years). The snowball sampling method is "a principled

list of key respondents, who are then asked to recruit further participants who are similar to them in some respect central to the investigation" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 129).

Instruments

Data for this mixed-method study came from quantitative and qualitative instruments: Quantitative data came from a questionnaire adopted from Inostroza Araos (2015) (see Appendix A), which comprises two main sections: The first section includes items about the demographic information (e.g., gender and years of teaching experience) of the participants. The second section includes a total of 12 items delving into the challenges they face in teaching English to VYLs, which are categorized into three main categories: students' involvement (Items 1, 2, 3), monitoring learning (Items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), and classroom management (Items 10, 11, 12). Items were in the form of 5-point Likert-scale items ranging from very difficult (5) to very easy (1), where the respondents were invited to rate the degree of difficulty in accomplishing the specified activities. Thus, the questionnaire was specifically chosen, considering that it was the most suitable questionnaire that would serve the aims of the current study. Additionally, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were ensured by Inostroza Araos (2015) in her Ph.D. dissertation.

The qualitative data, on the other hand, were collected by semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B) administered individually. The researcher developed the interview protocol and asked three experts their opinions of the interview questions to see if there were any problems or if the questions were to the point and unbiased. The interview protocol includes a total of five open-ended questions about the challenges teachers encounter when teaching English to VYLs. The interviews were designed in a way to have a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges teachers experience.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected in several different steps. First of all, ethical permission was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the university where the authors study and work. After receiving the ethical permission followed by expert opinions, a pilot study was conducted with conveniently sampled two EFL teachers teaching English to YLs in a kindergarten so that they would be demographically similar to the target participants, who were not involved in the actual study. The questionnaire and interviews were piloted so that the researchers could foresee the instruments' applicability and identify possible problems that might occur during the data collection process. The instruments (namely, the questionnaire and interviews) were administered to the teachers, and their opinions about the questions in the questionnaire and interview were asked by recording their voices. They stated that the questions in the questionnaire and in the interview were straightforward and to the point. So, the instruments were finalized with some slight changes.

After ensuring the instruments were ready, the researchers invited participants to the study by informing them about the ethical issues. Upon their invitation, they were informed that involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Since they were not required to write their names on the questionnaire, they kindly provided anonymous information. The questionnaire was transformed into an online form and was sent to the participants. After gathering quantitative data via the questionnaire, the researcher invited six of the participants randomly selected for semi-structured interviews, and meetings were recorded upon their informed consent. Interviews lasted between 15-20 minutes (M= 15 minutes).

Regarding analysis procedures, the quantitative data were analyzed by administering descriptive and inferential statistics analyses through SPSS. Descriptive statistics were initially run to identify the mean and standard deviation of the items and subcategories (i.e., students' involvement, monitoring learning, and classroom management). Then, a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was run to understand whether there was a significant difference in the challenges teachers face regarding their gender and years of teaching experience because parametric tests are used when the researchers have a larger sample or when the data are distributed normally (Fraenkel

et al., 2011). As for the analysis of the qualitative data, they were transcribed and analyzed through inductive content analysis with the three other coders to avoid any bias and ensure inter-rater reliability. After labeling the data with the codes that were related to the research problems, they were gathered under relevant themes. The researchers followed the procedure of Dörnyei (2007) during the content analysis. Data elicited from the interviews were not analyzed using codes of the existing categories but rather using inductive content analysis.

FINDINGS

In order to answer the first research question, namely whether Turkish EFL teachers encounter challenges in teaching English to VYLs and, if so, what challenges they encounter concerning students' involvement, monitoring learning, and classroom management, quantitative data comprising participants' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed in three subcategories. Findings of the descriptive statistics analyses regarding the three subcategories (i.e., students' involvement, monitoring learning, and classroom management) are illustrated in Table 1.

As presented in Table 1, teachers had the highest mean score on the challenges of classroom management (M= 3.14, SD= 1.05), whereas the mean scores regarding the other two challenge categories (i.e., students' involvement and classroom management) were comparatively lower. In other words, teachers overall found classroom management much more challenging than arranging students' involvement (M= 3.11) or monitoring learning (M= 2.97), which had the lowest mean score. Overall, although teachers experienced all the challenge categories, namely students' involvement (e.g., keeping students interested), monitoring learning (e.g., monitoring learners' progress), and classroom management (e.g., managing discipline), the most challenging category was classroom management for them.

Table 1. Descriptives of subcategories

Subcategory	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Classroom management	35	1.33	5.00	3.14	1.05
Student involvement	35	1.33	5.00	3.11	1.02
Monitoring Learning	35	1.17	4.83	2.97	0.99

As the findings illustrated, the most challenging aspect of teaching VYLs for Turkish EFL teachers was classroom management (M= 3.14, SD= 1.05). As tabulated in Table 2, teachers found managing time effectively in the lessons more difficult than other activities regarding classroom management (M= 3.20, SD= 1.30).

Table 2. Challenges regarding classroom management

Items	M	Mdn	SD	Very Easy (1)	Easy (2)	Neutral (3)	Difficult (4)	Very Difficult (5)
10. Managing time effectively in the lessons	3.20	3	1.30	4 (11.4%)	8 (22.9%)	6 (17.1%)	11 (31.4%)	6 (17.1%)
11. Managing discipline	3.14	3	1.30	5 (14.3%)	7 (20%)	6 (17.1%)	12 (34.3%)	5 (14.3%)
12. Managing classroom setting	3.08	3	1.40	6 (17.1%)	6 (%17.1)	10 (28.6%)	5 (14.3%)	8 (22.9%)

Following classroom management, student involvement was the second most challenging aspect of teaching VYLs (M= 3.11, SD= 1.02). More specifically, findings indicated that teachers found keeping students interested (M= 3.17, SD= 1.36) and making all students participate in activities (M= 3.17, SD= 1.29) the most challenging among others. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges regarding student involvement

Items	M	Mdn	SD	Very Easy (1)	Easy (2)	Neutral (3)	Difficult (4)	Very Difficult (5)
1. Keep students interested	3.17	4	1.36	6 (17.1%)	6 (17.1%)	4 (11.4%)	14 (40%)	5 (14.3%)
2. Make all students participate in the activities	3.17	3	1.29	5 (14.3%)	6 (17.1%)	7 (20%)	12 (34.3%)	5 (14.3%)
3. Give learners the opportunity to express themselves in English	3.00	3	1.05	2 (5.7%)	10 (28.6%)	12 (34.3%)	8 (22.9%)	3 (8.6%)

Among the three subcategories, monitoring learning (M= 2.97, SD= 0.99) was comparatively much less challenging for participants. As the findings illustrated, participating teachers considered assessing learners' progress more difficult than others (M= 3.05, SD= 1.18). Accounting for different individual learning styles (M= 3.02, SD= 1.04) and monitoring learners' progress (M= 3.02, SD= 1.33) were similarly challenging for them, whereas they did not find providing feedback or providing remedial actions to learners that challenging. Findings are illustrated in detail in Table 4.

Table 4. Challenges regarding monitoring learning

Items	M	Mdn	SD	Very Easy (1)	Easy (2)	Neutral (3)	Difficult (4)	Very Difficult (5)
4. Assessing learners individually	3.05	3	1.18	5 (14.3%)	5 (14.3%)	11 (31.4%)	11 (31.4%)	3 (8.6%)
5. Accounting for different individual learning styles	3.02	3	1.04	1 (2.9%)	12 (34.3%)	10 (28.6%)	9 (25.7%)	3 (8.6%)
6. Monitoring learners' progress	3.02	3	1.33	5 (14.3%)	9 (25.7%)	7 (20%)	8 (22.9%)	6 (17.1%)
7. Identifying learners' difficulties	3.00	3	1.32	7 (20%)	5 (14.3%)	8 (22.9%)	11 (31.4%)	4 (11.4%)
8. Providing feedback	2.97	3	1.31	7 (20%)	5 (14.3%)	9 (25.7%)	10 (28.6%)	4 (11.4%)
9. Providing remedial actions to learners	2.77	3	1.28	7 (20%)	8 (22.9%)	10 (28.6%)	6 (17.1%)	4 (11.4%)

In order to answer the second research question, a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to further investigate whether the challenges teachers encounter vary between male and female teachers. Findings illustrated a slight difference across genders in the mean score of challenges categories. As reported in Table 5, regarding the challenges of student involvement, the mean score of female teachers (M= 18.23) was higher than those of male teachers (M= 16.60), suggesting that they reported experiencing more challenges. When it comes to the challenges of monitoring learning, on the other hand, male teachers (M= 18.70) had higher mean scores than female teachers (M= 17.88), who reported experiencing more challenges in this subcategory. Lastly, as for classroom management challenges, the mean score of female teachers (M= 19.37) was comparatively higher than that of males (M= 9.80), meaning that male teachers found classroom management comparatively less challenging. Overall, as findings showed, student involvement and classroom management were more challenging for female teachers, whereas male teachers found monitoring learning more challenging. However, there was no statistically significant difference

between female and male teachers in the challenges they encounter when teaching English to young learners. Findings are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Findings of the Mann-Whitney U test

Subcategory	Gender	*n*	Mean rank	U	*p*
Student involvement	Female	30	18.23	68.00	0.74
	Male	5	16.60		
Monitoring learning	Female	30	17.88	71.50	0.86
	Male	5	18.70		
Classroom management	Female	30	19.37	34.00	0.52
	Male	5	9.80		

*p< .05

Any potential difference in the challenges teachers encounter was also investigated across teachers having different years of teaching experience. In other words, whether these challenges vary between novice (i.e., those having 0-3 years of experience) or experienced (i.e., those having 4-12 years of experience) teachers according to their years of professional teaching experience, a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was run. Although findings did not reveal a statistically significant difference across these two groups of teachers, differences were observed in their mean scores in all the subcategories. Regarding student involvement, the mean score of novice teachers (M= 18.04) was higher than those of experienced teachers (M= 12.33), meaning that novice teachers found student involvement more challenging. When it comes to the challenges of monitoring learning, the mean score of novice teachers (M= 17.39) was likewise higher than that of experienced teachers (M= 15.25), so novice teachers found monitoring learning comparatively more challenging. Lastly, novice teachers similarly found classroom management more challenging since their mean score (M= 17.87) was higher than that of experienced teachers (M= 13.08). Findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Findings of the Mann-Whitney U test for teachers having different years of teaching experience

Subcategory	Gender	*n*	Mean rank	U	*p*
Student involvement	Novice	21	18.04	53.00	0.18
	Experienced	14	12.33		
Monitoring learning	Novice	21	17.39	70.50	0.62
	Experienced	14	15.25		
Classroom management	Novice	21	17.87	57.50	0.26
	Experienced	14	13.08		

*p< .05

Qualitative data findings from the semi-structured interviews, which were collected to support the quantitative data, were also in line with the quantitative data. Codes and themes identified in the transcribed data are presented in detail in Table 7.

Table 7. Findings of the inductive content analysis

Themes	Codes	Frequency (f)
Classroom management	Playful students	6
	Physical situation of the classroom	3
	Energetic/Active students	3
	Behavior problems	2
	Modelling/Imitation	2
	Time management	1
Students' involvement	Tired students	3
	Bored students	2

	Learning desire	1
Monitoring learning	Providing feedback	3
	Learning pace	2
Technology	Technology-literate families	1
	Internet	1

According to the interview findings, teachers generally reported that they encounter the challenges of playful students, and they stated that students wanted to play games during the lessons. An example excerpt from one of the participants is as follows:

> "*I told you before they are young, you know they are very playful, sometimes they are not listening to you, they want to play with the toys, and you have to get their attention*" (Int. 1).

Moreover, the interview findings revealed that teachers face some difficulties with students' involvement in teaching English to VYLs. For example, teachers stated that students get bored or tired and do not want to participate in the lessons. One of the teachers commented on the issue as follows:

> "*Of course, some of the students are not interested in English or maybe some students are just tired maybe they did not have their breakfast, they are just tired to participate in the class, I can say that*" (Int. 2).

Findings also indicated that teachers encounter challenges in providing feedback or students' different learning paces under the category of monitoring learning. The following excerpt may give a better idea about the interviewees' perspectives on this issue:

> "*I mean, I can monitor their learning very well, but when providing feedback, I am not sure, I think I am not perfect while providing feedback. I think I have challenges regarding that*" (Int. 3)

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, teachers reported that they encountered some challenges regarding technology-literate families and the internet. The following excerpt is an example:

> "*They are kids that their families became famous via internet, WhatsApp or Instagram they feel like they got the teacher's all attention they should be in the middle of attention, they are just like you know destroying the other ones*" (Int. 4).

DISCUSSION

Quantitative data findings revealed that classroom management was the most challenging aspect for teachers in teaching English to VYLs, followed by students' involvement and monitoring of learning. This finding implies that teachers generally face challenges in managing discipline, managing time effectively, and managing classroom settings. These findings corroborate those of some earlier studies (e.g., Malik et al., 2021; Petiwi et al., 2020), which similarly showed classroom management as the major challenge for teachers teaching YLs. The presence of similar findings among different contexts suggests that classroom management is a problematic issue for English teachers when teaching both YLs and VYLs (e.g., Keskin, 2019; Kusmaryati, 2020; Widodo & Dewi, 2021). Moreover, questionnaire findings also indicated that teachers also faced some challenges with respect to students' involvement and monitoring of learning. Likewise, students' interests were highlighted in the previous studies as a challenge for English teachers (e.g., Keskin, 2019; Kusmaryati, 2020; Malik et al., 2021; Petiwi et al., 2020; Widodo & Dewi, 2021).

Moreover, the findings of this study demonstrated that although there were differences in their mean scores, there was not a statistically significant difference between male and female

teachers in the challenges they face when teaching English to VYLs (see Table 5). In other words, it can be stated that both female and male teachers encounter similar challenges when teaching English to VYLs. Besides, findings showed no significant difference in the challenges teachers face regarding their years of teaching experience (see Table 6), suggesting that they tend to encounter similar problems in very young learners' classrooms regardless of their professional years of teaching experience. This result was in congruence with the study of Inostroza Araos (2015), which similarly reported no significant variance in challenges they faced according to teachers' years of teaching experience.

Qualitative data findings, similarly, correspond to the findings of quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire because teachers stated that they mostly faced the challenges of classroom management during the interview. Accordingly, this finding implies that teachers found classroom management as the most challenging aspect when teaching English in very young learners' classrooms. The interview results were in line with the study of Pertiwi et al. (2020), which indicated classroom management as the most challenging category for teachers when teaching English to VYLs. Furthermore, teachers stated that they encounter challenges of behavior problems of the students. This finding corresponds to the study of Widodo and Dewi (2021) because they likewise indicated that the problems stem from students' lack of discipline during the lessons. Findings also support Kusmaryati's (2020) and Copland et al.'s (2014) findings since they illustrated that teachers encounter problems of lack of time in teaching English to VYLs. Additionally, teachers stated during the interview that they encountered problems with energetic and active students. Kusmaryati (2020) also reported a similar finding, which showed the problems of students' characteristics as they are very active and energetic. Findings demonstrated that teachers face the challenges of physical circumstances of the classroom, which supports the study of Masnan and Ngajib (2016). Masnan and Ngajib (2016) found that difficulties come from unsupportive learning environments, so teachers should use fun activities in interesting environments (e.g., gardens) to teach language.

In addition to classroom management challenges, teachers also appeared to have problems with the challenges of students' involvement and their characteristics. They stated that students generally get bored and tired during the lessons. It can be concluded that teachers encounter some challenges in making the students participate in the lesson since they are bored or tired because of various circumstances. Similar findings were also highlighted in the studies of Pertiwi et al. (2020) and Kusmaryati (2020). Apart from students' involvement, teachers tend to have some challenges in monitoring learning, such as providing feedback and learning speed, in very young learners' classrooms. This finding suggests that teachers may not provide students with appropriate feedback because of their age and learning characteristics. Lastly, teachers reported during the interview that they have challenges with technology, the internet, and families who have technology literacy, so it can be deduced that this situation creates some challenges for English teachers when teaching VYLs because students learn everything from the internet, and they lose their interest in lessons. This finding was not in line with the study of Widodo and Dewi (2021) because they emphasized that using technology and applications could solve the problems that teachers face in the VYLs classroom. For example, teachers can use several different applications (e.g., ClassDojo) application to attract students' attention, manage discipline, control students' behavior, and progress even out of the classroom with the help of families.

CONCLUSION

The current mixed-method study was an attempt to investigate the challenges faced by Turkish EFL teachers in teaching English to VYLs. To this end, a total of 35 (30 female, five male) Turkish EFL teachers teaching English to VYLs in private/public preschools participated in the study. Within the scope of the aims of the study, quantitative data were gathered by a questionnaire, whereas qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Questionnaire findings revealed that teachers encounter challenges mostly in classroom management, student

involvement, and monitoring learning while teaching English to VYLs, encounter challenges mostly in students' involvement, monitoring learning, and classroom management respectively. As reported earlier, the most challenging category for the teachers was classroom management, suggesting that teachers mostly struggle with managing discipline, managing time effectively, and managing classroom settings.

However, with respect to their gender or professional years of experience, there was not a statistically significant difference in the challenges teachers face regarding their gender or years of teaching experience, so it can be implied that teachers have similar problems regardless of their gender and experience when teaching English to VYLs. Moreover, similar findings of the interview illustrated that teachers mostly encounter classroom management challenges, for instance, time management and playful students. Thus, it can overall be concluded from both quantitative and qualitative data that teachers mostly encounter challenges in classroom management.

Based on the findings, some pedagogical implications could be presented for teacher education programs. Teacher education programs should be redesigned in such a way that they contribute to EFL teachers' classroom management skills. Although there are such courses in undergraduate teacher education programs, they appear to fall short in catering to classroom realities and different age groups. For example, pre-service EFL teachers should be equipped with the necessary classroom management skills for teaching VYLs to provide a supportive learning environment and arrange activities suitable for students' age and learning characteristics.

Still, the findings of the study should be interpreted by taking into consideration its limitations. First of all, the current study collected data from foreign language teachers teaching VYLs in the Turkish educational context. Yet, future studies could elicit data from different contexts to ensure broader generalizability. Secondly, this study investigated the challenges Turkish EFL teachers face in VYLs' classrooms. However, further research can be conducted with more participants by adding the strategies used by teachers who have difficulties in teaching English to VYLs. In this way, both the challenges and the possible strategies for these challenges could be discovered. Thirdly, this study adopted a mixed-method design, collecting data via a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, yet future studies could adopt purely qualitative designs to elaborate on the challenges and address the needs of EFL teachers teaching VYLs. Indeed, ethnographic studies where teachers are observed in their classroom environments could also yield a fruitful avenue for further research and contribute to the literature.

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APPENDICES

A. The questionnaire (Inostroza Araos, 2015)

Items	Very Easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very Difficult
1. Keep students interested.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Make all students to participate in the activities.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Give learners the opportunity to express themselves in English.	1	2	3	4	5

4. Identifying learners' difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Accounting for different individual learning styles.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Monitoring learners' progress.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Assessing learners individually.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Providing feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Providing remedial actions to learners.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Managing discipline.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Managing time effectively in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Managing classroom setting (Moving Furniture).	1	2	3	4	5

B. The interview questions

1. Do you encounter any challenges while teaching very young learners? If yes, what challenges do you encounter? Why?
2. Do you encounter any challenges regarding students' involvement in teaching English to very young learners? If yes, what kind of challenges do you face? Why?
3. Do you encounter any challenges in terms of monitoring learning or providing feedback in teaching English to very young learners? If yes, what kind of challenges do you face? Why?
4. Do you encounter any challenges regarding classroom management in teaching English to very young learners? If yes, what kind of challenges do you face? Why?
5. Which one is the most difficult for you when teaching English to very young learners: students' involvement, monitoring learning, or classroom management? Why do you think so?