

Foreign Language Teaching in Early Childhood Education: Attitudes and Beliefs of Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract

This study examines changes in attitudes towards foreign language teaching and beliefs about foreign language education among pre-service preschool teachers from multiple perspectives. The research was conducted within the framework of a training program organized under the TÜBİTAK 2237-A Scientific Education Activities Support initiative, which aimed to enhance the foreign language skills of pre-service preschool teachers. The participants underwent a 40-hour training program comprising both theoretical and practical components. The research sample consisted of 18 pre-service preschool teachers enrolled in various universities across Turkey. A sequential transformational research design, a mixed-method approach, was employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data sources. The collected data were analyzed using comparative tests and inductive thematic analysis. The findings reveal shifts in attitudes towards foreign language teaching in preschool education, along with insights into the adequacy of foreign language training at universities, the teaching responsibilities associated with foreign language instruction in preschools, the necessity of introducing foreign languages at the preschool level, concerns regarding potential negative effects of early foreign language learning, and the school preferences of pre-service preschool teachers. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers, educators, and future research.

Keywords: Preschool, language education, pre-service preschool teachers, early childhood education.

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Okul Öncesi Eğitiminde Yabancı Dil Öğretimi: Öğretmen Adaylarının Tutumları ve İnançları

Makale Türü	Başvuru Tarihi	Kabul Tarihi
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Öz

Bu araştırma, okul öncesi öğretmeni adaylarının yabancı dil öğretimine yönelik tutumlarındaki ve yabancı dil eğitimi hakkındaki inançlarındaki değişiklikleri çeşitli açılardan incelemektedir. Araştırma kapsamında, yabancı dil becerilerini geliştirmeyi amaçlayan bir eğitim programı araştırma ortamı olarak kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılar, TÜBİTAK 2237-A Bilimsel Eğitim Etkinlikleri Desteği Programı kapsamında yürütülen, teorik ve uygulamalı derslerden oluşan 40 saatlik bir eğitim programına katılmıştır. Çalışma grubu, Türkiye'deki farklı üniversitelere kayıtlı 18 okul öncesi öğretmeni adayından oluşmuştur. Araştırma hem nitel hem de nicel veri kaynaklarını kullanan karma bir araştırma yöntemi olan sıralı dönüşümsel araştırma tasarımına uygun olarak yürütülmüştür. Toplanan veriler, karşılaştırma testleri ve içerik analizi tekniği kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, anaokullarındaki yabancı dil öğretimine yönelik tutumların değişimini, üniversitelerdeki yabancı dil eğitiminin yeterliliğini, anaokullarındaki yabancı dil öğretim sorumluluklarını, anaokulu döneminde yabancı dil öğretiminin gerekliliğini, erken yaşta yabancı dil öğrenmenin olumsuz etkilerini ve anaokulu öğretmeni adaylarının okul türleri tercihlerini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, politika yapıcılara, öğretmenlere ve gelecekteki çalışmalara önerilerle sona ermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Okul öncesi, dil eğitimi, okul öncesi öğretmeni adayları, erken çocukluk eğitimi.

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Introduction

The integration of foreign language education into early childhood settings has gained considerable attention in recent years, supported by extensive scholarly research and pedagogical advancements. Early childhood represents a critical period for language acquisition, as the heightened neural plasticity of the brain during this stage creates an unparalleled opportunity for linguistic development (VanPatten & Benati, 2015; Hartshorne, Tenenbaum, & Pinker, 2018; Long, 2017; Yule, 2022). Beyond the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar, early foreign language learning is deeply intertwined with cognitive growth and cultural literacy, emphasizing its multidimensional value in shaping young minds.

Foreign language education in early childhood goes far beyond the traditional aim of linguistic competence. It serves as a catalyst for significant cognitive and academic benefits, as evidenced by numerous studies (Kirsch, Aleksic, Mortini, & Andersen, 2020; Thoma & Platzgummer, 2023). Research indicates that children exposed to foreign languages from an early age develop enhanced problem-solving abilities, improved creativity, and superior memory retention. These cognitive advantages arise from the mental flexibility required to switch between languages, which strengthens executive function skills (Baqiyudin, Nurhasan, & Suroto, 2023). Furthermore, early exposure to foreign languages fosters cultural awareness and sensitivity. As children learn to communicate in another language, they gain an appreciation for the cultural contexts and perspectives it encompasses. This early engagement with diverse cultures nurtures empathy and open-mindedness—qualities essential for navigating an increasingly interconnected world (Soto-Boykin et al., 2021). By understanding cultural differences and commonalities, young learners build a foundation for global citizenship and social harmony.

The societal implications of early foreign language education are equally profound. In a globalized world, multilingual individuals are highly valued for their ability to bridge cultural and linguistic divides. Early foreign language learning, initiated in preschool settings, can pave the way for lifelong advantages, including broader career prospects and deeper cross-cultural connections (Gimatdinova Çağaç, 2018). Moreover, acquiring a foreign language at an early age has been shown to boost children's confidence and self-esteem, equipping them to navigate various social and cultural environments with ease.

However, the successful implementation of foreign language programs in early childhood largely depends on the preparedness and competence of educators. While preschool teachers are often well-versed in general early childhood education, their readiness to deliver effective English language teaching (ELT) specifically in preschool settings is often insufficient. This issue is not unique to Turkey but represents a widespread challenge faced by educators globally. Despite EU policy documents emphasizing foreign language competence as a key skill for modern EU citizens, teacher training programs often fail to align with these objectives, resulting in a critical gap in educator preparation.

Research highlights the multifaceted challenges associated with ELT in preschool education. Foremost among these challenges is the English language proficiency of preschool teachers, particularly in contexts where English is not their native language. Common issues include limited vocabulary (Ping et al., 2013; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012), weak phonetic knowledge (Mahmoud Ghoneim & Abdelsalam Elghotmy, 2015), pronunciation difficulties (Fauzi et al., 2021; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2019), and concerns about teaching incorrect English (Chu, 2014; Huang et al., 2019). These limitations can negatively impact the language performance and development of young learners (Bernstein et al., 2021; Milton et al., 2020).

Beyond language proficiency, a lack of formal training in ELT methods tailored to preschool learners worsens the issue. Studies show that while most preschool teachers are proficient in general early childhood education, they often lack specialized ELT training (Huang et al., 2019; Milton et al., 2020). Even when training is provided, it often lacks depth and fails to address essential areas such as bilingual education (BE) and teaching strategies for culturally diverse children (Goh, 2019; Hegde et al., 2018). Furthermore, some teachers rely heavily on textbooks and translation-based methods, leading to rote learning and boredom among young learners (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Ng, 2015).

Pedagogical skills represent another critical area of concern. Many teachers lack proper guidance and rely on mechanical drilling or repetitive approaches to teach language skills (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012). The absence of engaging, interactive, and learner-centered teaching practices undermines the effectiveness of ELT in preschool settings. As Khurramovna and Bakhtiyarovna (2021) note, successful ELT in preschool must resemble a game, incorporating fun and interactive methods that resonate with young learners' natural curiosity and developmental needs.

Globally, efforts to address these challenges remain fragmented. For instance, in countries like Slovenia, teachers express willingness to teach foreign languages but acknowledge that their training is inadequate (Fojkar & Skubic, 2017). Similar gaps exist across Europe, where short in-service programs in countries like France and Cyprus are insufficient to fully prepare educators (Ellis, 2016; Ioannou-Georgiou, 2015). In other regions, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there are no formal qualifications for pre-primary English teachers, leaving a void often filled by freelancers (Černá, 2015; Portiková, 2015).

The disparity between policy goals and teacher preparation highlights an urgent need for systemic reform. Effective ELT in preschool requires targeted professional development that equips teachers with the necessary linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural competencies. Providing comprehensive training in methodologies such as BE and interactive teaching strategies can bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. As Al-Darwish (2012) and Wang and Hou (2021) emphasize, continuous professional development and curricular interventions are critical to sustaining quality instruction in early childhood ELT.

In conclusion, while the demand for early foreign language instruction continues to grow, the ability of preschool teachers to meet this demand is hindered by gaps in proficiency, training, and pedagogical skills. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort to align teacher training programs with the realities of FLT in preschool contexts, ensuring that educators are equipped to foster the linguistic and cultural competencies of future generations. Only through systemic reform and focused support can the goal of creating multilingual, culturally aware global citizens be achieved.

Significance of Study

This study addresses the gap in understanding pre-service preschool teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding foreign language instruction, providing insights to enhance teacher preparation programs and inform effective policy development. By examining changes in attitudes and exploring opinions on responsibility, necessity, and potential challenges of early-age language instruction, the findings offer a foundation for refining educational practices and curricula.

Improving pre-service preschool teachers' foreign language teaching skills enables governments to utilize financial resources more efficiently, reducing dependence on external support while improving early language education within existing systems. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, this study contributes to the literature and offers practical strategies for bridging theory and practice in early childhood foreign language education.

Research Questions

Within the scope of this research, this study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in pre-service preschool teachers' attitudes towards foreign language instruction between the pre-test and post-test assessments?
2. What are pre-service preschool teachers' opinions on foreign language instruction in university programs?
3. What are pre-service preschool teachers' perspectives on the responsibility for foreign language instruction in preschool educational institutions?
4. What are pre-service preschool teachers' views on the necessity of foreign language instruction in preschool educational institutions?

5. What are pre-service preschool teachers' perceptions of the potential negative effects of early-age foreign language instruction?

6. What are pre-service preschool teachers' opinions on the type of preschool educational institution?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a sequential transformational research design, a type of mixed-methods approach. This design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data before or after qualitative data, or vice versa, based on the researcher's objectives and requirements (Almeida, 2018). While one data type—either qualitative or quantitative—is typically prioritized, in some cases, both may be given equal importance. Data analysis is often combined in the interpretation and discussion sections. This design is valuable as it allows researchers to capture diverse perspectives, support research participants, and gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Baki & Gökçek, 2012).

Participants

The research participants were 18 pre-service preschool teachers enrolled in various universities in Turkey. The participants represented 13 different state universities and took part in a project entitled “Practices to support foreign language teaching in preschool education” supported by TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey).

To select participants, the study employed criterion sampling, a type of purposeful sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Being a fourth-grade student in the preschool teaching department at the time of the study
- Having a minimum university grade point average (GPA) of 3.00, indicating academic readiness and preparation for training
- Not having previously participated in a similar study
- Allowing a maximum of two participants from the same university to ensure institutional diversity

To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned numerical codes instead of personal identifiers. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Participant	Gender	Age
P1	Female	31	P10	Male	21
P2	Male	24	P11	Male	21
P3	Female	23	P12	Male	21
P4	Male	23	P13	Female	21
P5	Female	22	P14	Female	21
P6	Female	22	P15	Male	21
P7	Female	22	P16	Female	21
P8	Female	21	P17	Female	21
P9	Female	21	P18	Female	20

As part of the project, the participants completed a 40-hour training program that incorporated both theoretical and practical components. The initial phase of the training focused on theoretical instruction, lasting four hours, to provide foundational knowledge on the subject matter. This was followed by four hours of applied activities designed to reinforce the concepts learned through hands-on practice.

To enhance the learning experience and minimize external influences, the training was conducted face-to-face. The specific content covered during the training is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. *The content of training for the participants*

Duration	Training Content
8 hours	Orientation workshops
	Foreign language teaching methods for pre-school education (Total physical response theory-Communicative language teaching)
8 hours	Foreign language teaching methods for pre-school education (English for specific purposes-Task-based language teaching)
	Teaching listening in the preschool
8 hours	Teaching speaking in the preschool
	Material development techniques for teaching foreign language in the preschool
8 hours	Digital material development techniques for teaching foreign language in the preschool
	Teaching foreign language with games in the preschool
8 hours	Teaching foreign language with songs in the preschool
	Teaching foreign language with stories in the preschool
8 hours	Teaching foreign language with environment/nature in the preschool
	Teaching foreign language with environment/nature in the preschool

The training program was developed in collaboration with six field experts specializing in foreign language education and early childhood education, along with an academic specializing in curriculum development. The design of the program was guided by the framework provided by the Tyler Model, formulated by Ralph W. Tyler, an American educator and psychologist, in the mid-20th century. This model, also known as the Tyler Rationale, has been widely acknowledged in curriculum design literature (Çelik, 2017; Posner, 1995). The model is structured around four fundamental questions (Tyler, 1993):

- What should be taught? (What educational objectives should the program aim to achieve?)
- How should it be taught? (What instructional experiences can be provided to facilitate the achievement of these objectives?)
- How should it be organized? (How can these instructional experiences be effectively structured?)
- How should it be evaluated? (How can we assess whether the objectives have been successfully achieved?)

Given the diversity of the participants' regional backgrounds and the limited duration of the training, careful attention was paid to avoid redundancy in the content. The program content was meticulously streamlined to present only the essential material, ensuring alignment with the research objectives while maintaining clarity and focus.

Data Collection Tools

Two data collection tools were used in the study: the Foreign Language Teaching Attitude Scale and a structured opinion form. The scale form, developed by Sevi (2010), consists of 30 items and includes four factors. The first factor is named the Priority of Foreign Language and consists of eight items. The second factor is named the Necessity of Foreign Language and consists of nine items. The third factor is named the Quality of Foreign Language and consists of seven items. Finally, the fourth factor is named the Sufficiency of Foreign Language and consists of six items. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, participants can score between 8-40 in the first factor, 9-45 in the second factor, between 7-35 in the third factor, and between 6-30 in the fourth factor. An increase in scores leads to positivity in the related attitude. The reliability of the Foreign Language Teaching Attitude Scale was evaluated, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.80. According to the literature, measurement tools with a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 are considered reliable (Domino & Domino, 2006).

The second data collection tool, the structured opinion form, consisted of five structured questions designed to align with the study's research objectives. Initially, a seven-question form was developed and piloted with a similar participant group to evaluate clarity and question functionality. Following the pilot phase, the form was reviewed by two experts in measurement and evaluation, who identified two questions with overlapping functionality. These questions were removed, resulting in the final five-question form.

While the questionnaire was administered before and after the training, the opinion form was delivered merely after the training.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed in this study. The data collected through the Foreign Language Teaching Attitude Scale were analyzed using a comparison test to examine participants' pre- and post-training status. The selection of the appropriate test was based on the normality findings of the data. Since the data followed a normal distribution, the related-samples t-test was applied. For the analysis of qualitative data, the researchers utilized the inductive thematic analysis technique, which involves identifying themes without relying on predetermined assumptions or coding schemes. The data were processed using natural language processing techniques, then categorized into themes, sub-themes, and codes, which were subsequently presented in figures.

To assess inter-rater reliability, Kappa analysis was conducted. In this analysis, which is applied in two ways, Cohen and Fleiss Kappa, Cohen analysis is applied if there are two evaluators, and Fleiss Kappa analysis is applied if there are three or more evaluators (Kılıç, 2015). Since two experts were involved in the data analysis process in the research, Cohen Kappa analysis was applied and the agreement between experts was calculated as 0.83 which falls within the range of "very good agreement" according to the intervals [(0.01—0.20 Insignificant agreement; 0.21—0.40 Weak agreement; 0.41—0.60 Moderate agreement; 0.61—.80 Good agreement; 0.81—1.00 Very good agreement] presented by Landis and Koch (1977). Accordingly, it was concluded that the agreement between the experts was at a very good level.

Ethical Procedures

This research was conducted as part of the project titled "Supporting Foreign Language Teaching in Preschool Education" (project number 1129B372200397), organized from September 5-10, 2022, under the TÜBİTAK 2237-A Scientific Education Activities Support Program. All participants involved in the study were part of the mentioned project and have filled out a commitment form to participate in the research.

Findings

In this part, the findings obtained from questionnaire data and qualitative data were presented in tables and figures.

Table 3. Related samples t-test results for pretest and posttest

Factor	Test	N	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	df	t	p
Priority	Pre-test	18	26,78±2,94	17	-2,229	0,040
	Post-test	18	29,06±4,19			
Necessity	Pre-test	18	36,89±4,11	17	-2,412	0,027
	Post-test	18	39,56±4,77			
Quality	Pre-test	18	27,72±3,49	17	-0,323	0,751
	Post-test	18	28,06±3,21			
Efficiency	Pre-test	18	15,17±2,77	17	-0,679	0,506
	Post-test	18	15,56±3,11			

Table 3 presents the results of related-samples t-tests conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores. The table reveals that there were significant differences in the participants' scores in the first factor (priority) and the second factor (necessity) between the two tests [(t_{priority} (18) = -2,229; $p=0,040$), ($t_{\text{necessity}}$ (18) = -2,412; $p=0,027$)]. Further examination of the mean scores showed a significant positive increase in the participants' attitudes towards the priority and necessity of foreign language education in the post-tests. This finding suggests that the participants' attitudes towards the priority and necessity of foreign language education improved after the intervention. However, when the results of the third and fourth factors were analysed, it was evident that there was no significant change in the participants' scores between the two tests [(t_{quality} (18) = -0,323; $p=0,751$), ($t_{\text{efficiency}}$ (18) = -0,679; $p=0,506$)]. Although there was a slight increase in the average scores, it did not lead to a meaningful change, as indicated in Table 3.

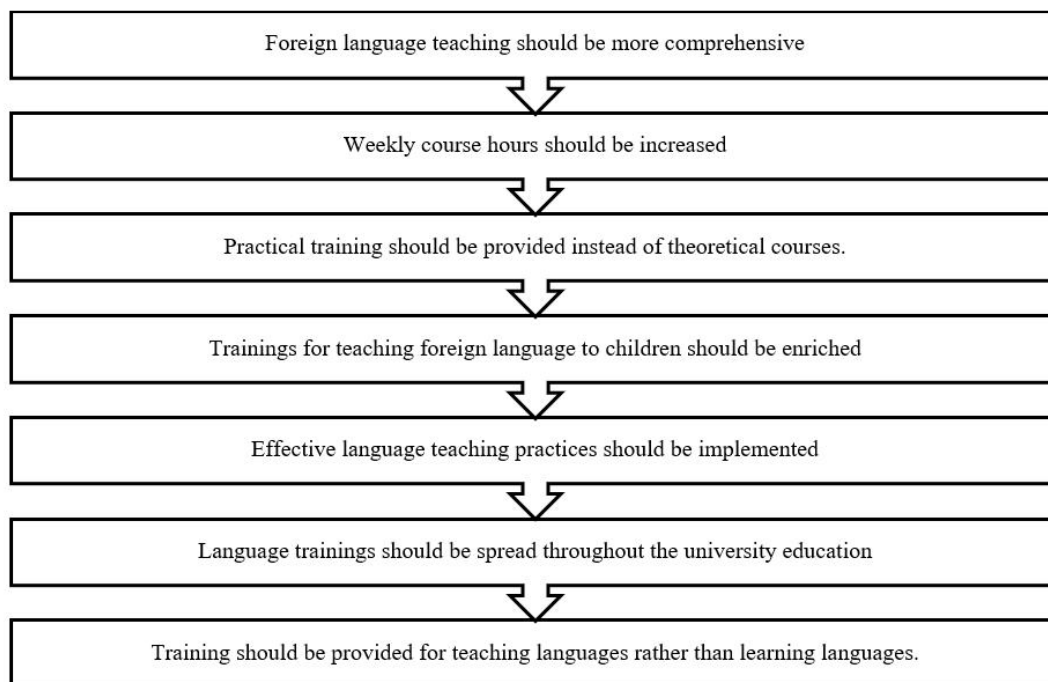


Figure 1. *The sufficiency of foreign language training at universities*

Figure 1 depicts participant perspectives on the adequacy of foreign language training in universities. They unanimously found the current training insufficient. To enhance teaching, they proposed seven solutions. Firstly, they suggested making Foreign Language Education (FLE) more comprehensive, focusing on all language skills, not just basics. Secondly, they recommended increasing weekly course hours for practicality. Thirdly, they emphasized the shift from theory-based to practice-based teaching. Moreover, they advocated enriching training for teaching foreign languages to children, aligning with their future roles as preschool teachers. They urged lecturers to employ effective teaching methods for a more enjoyable learning experience. The participants also emphasized the importance of extending language training throughout the entire university education. Lastly, they noted a disconnect between course content and its purpose, suggesting a shift towards teaching how to instruct a foreign language rather than just learning it.

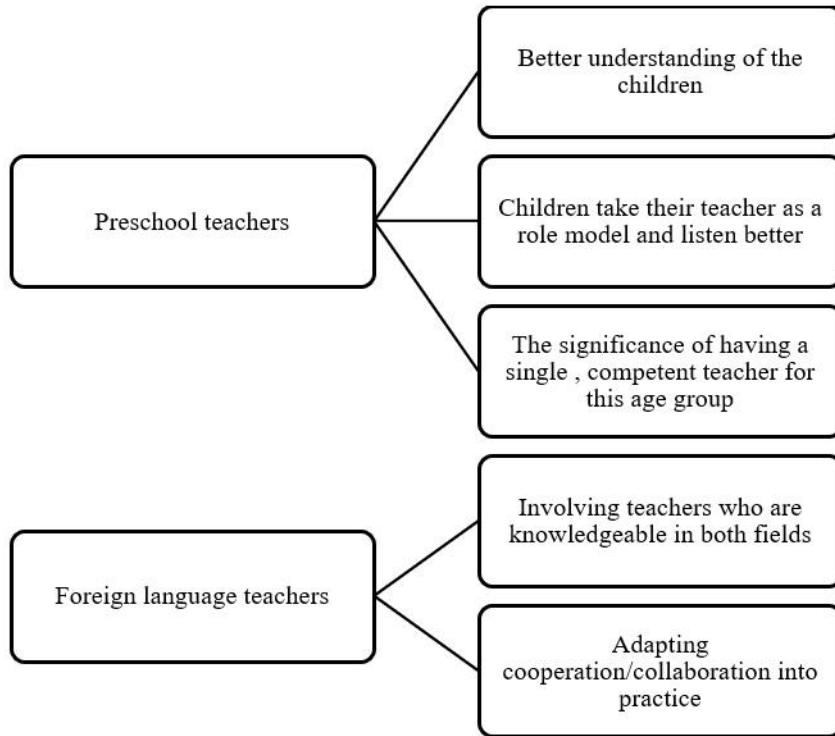


Figure 2. *Teaching duty of a foreign language in preschools*

Figure 2 illustrates the perspectives of the participants regarding the role of teaching foreign languages in preschools. When participants were asked who should be responsible for teaching foreign languages in preschools, it was found that they placed a strong emphasis on preschool teachers. Upon coding the responses, three codes emerged. The first code pertained to the "better understanding of children". Some participants believed that preschool education differs from other age groups and requires specialized knowledge and understanding. Consequently, the responsibility of teaching foreign languages should rest with preschool teachers who have received the necessary training to work with this age group. The second code was related to the role of teachers as "role models" and their ability to establish positive relationships with children. Participants believed that preschool teachers had more extended contact with children and were therefore better suited to manage classroom behavior and provide high-quality instruction. The third code related to the "importance of having a single, competent teacher for this age group". The participants argued that preschool education already has many factors that can disrupt classroom dynamics and that introducing another teacher could further complicate things. Thus, they advocated for continuity and stability in the form of a single, competent teacher. As these codes indicate, the relationship between teachers and students and the sensitivity of children were key factors in the participants' responses. Those who chose "foreign language teachers" also believed that foreign language teachers should not lecture alone. They claimed that teaching should be done by either involving teachers who are knowledgeable in both fields or adapting cooperation/collaboration into practice. While the first code refers to any teacher who is competent in both fields, the second code refers to hiring both subject-specific teachers and encouraging them to work collaboratively.

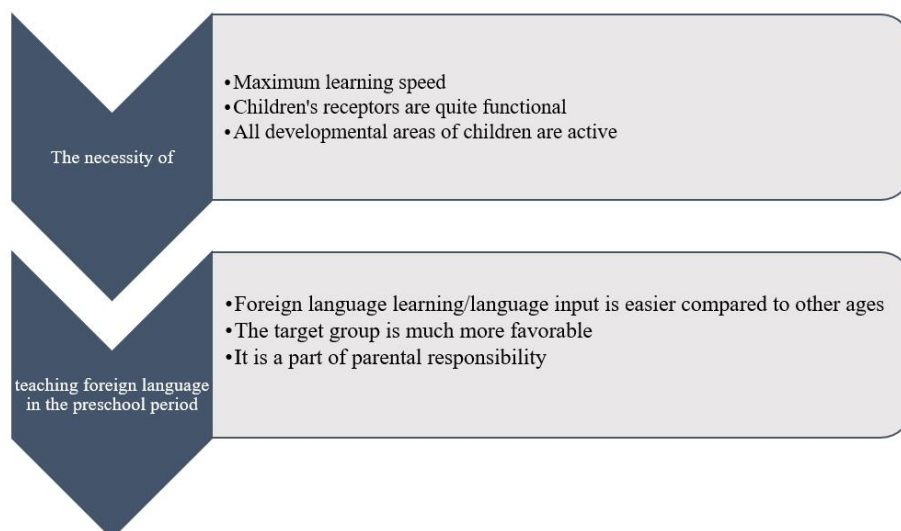


Figure 3. *The necessity of teaching a foreign language in the preschool period*

Figure 3 displays the perspectives of the participants regarding the necessity of teaching foreign languages in the preschool period. Upon coding the responses, six codes were obtained. The participants mainly expressed that the preschool age group is quite practical for learning a foreign language. They supported their hypothesis by citing the "maximum learning speed" of children, the "functionality of children's receptors", the "activeness of all developmental areas of children", the "ease of teaching foreign languages/language input", the "usefulness of the preschool age group", and "parental responsibility." Five of the codes were related to children's characteristics, while one of them concerned parents' duty. The participants' reasons clearly showed that preschool children have a better mastery of learning a foreign language, as they identified in their statements. The participants believed that the preschool period is not only feasible but also advantageous for children's learning development due to their brains' high plasticity and neural development, which makes it easier for them to acquire new information and skills. They also pointed out that preschool children's receptors are quite functional, so they can absorb and process new information more easily than other age groups, which provides them with another advantage. Additionally, the participants indicated that preschool children are advantageous not only in receptive skills but also in other developmental areas since they simultaneously use multiple areas due to their age characteristics. Thanks to these features, the participants believed that it is easier to teach a foreign language/deliver a language input to preschool children than to other age groups. Although the final code appeared different from the others, it was connected since a conscious parent has the responsibility to utilize their children's characteristics and pave the way for learning a foreign language at an early age.

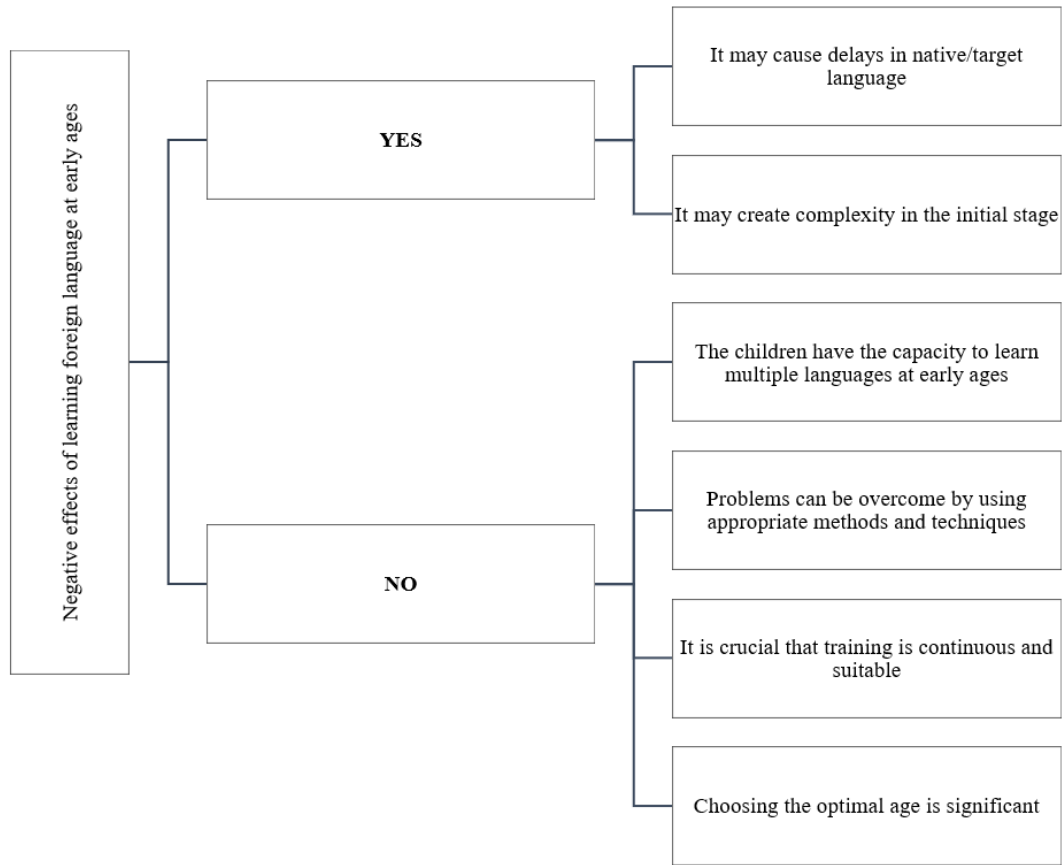


Figure 4. *Negative effect of learning foreign languages at early ages*

Figure 4 depicts the perspectives of participants on the negative effects of learning a foreign language at an early age. When the responses of participants were examined, six codes were identified: two for those who believe that learning a foreign language has negative effects on the native language, and four for those on the opposite side. While two participants claimed that it might cause some negative outcomes, such as speech delays in either the native or foreign language and complexity in the initial stages, others (14 of them) believed that it would not affect children's languages negatively. These participants provided four reasons for their hypothesis. They argued that children have the capacity to learn multiple languages at an early age. They also stated that even if there were problems, they could be overcome by using appropriate methods and techniques. Some of them mentioned that it is crucial to have continuous and suitable training to avoid such problems. Finally, some participants emphasized the importance of choosing the optimal age to start teaching a foreign language.

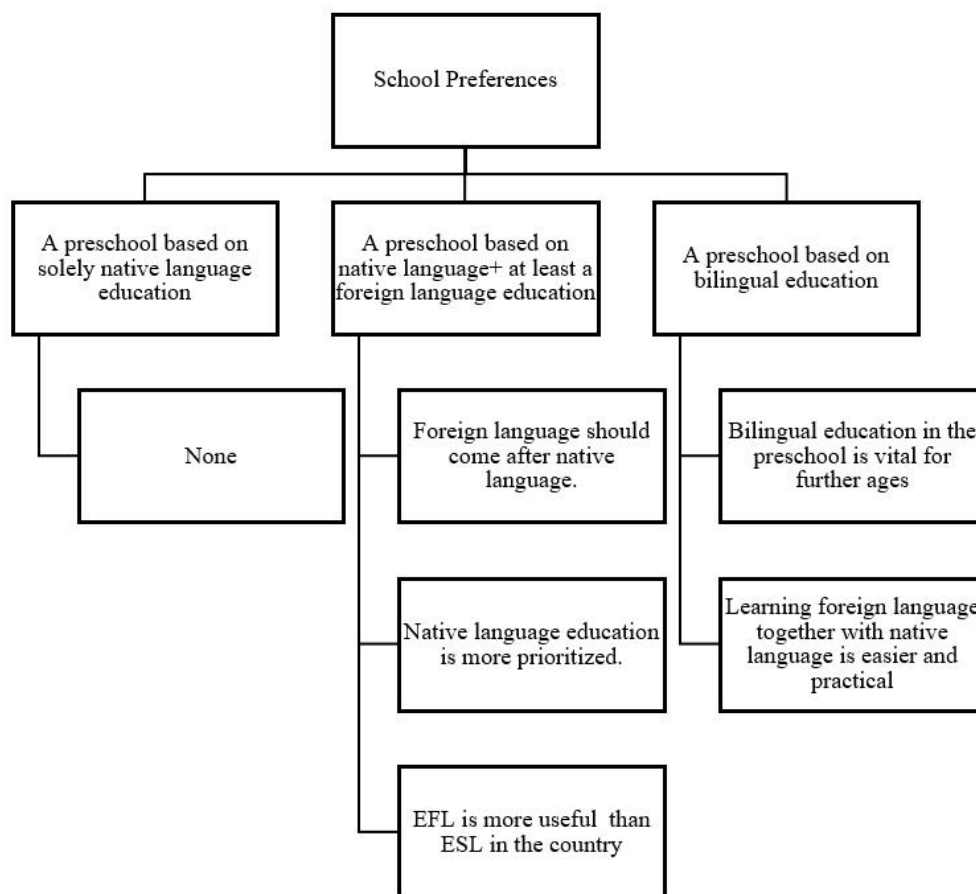


Figure 5. *School type preferences of the prospective preschool teachers*

Figure 5 shows the perspectives of the participants regarding school preferences after graduation. When they were given three options, none of them chose a preschool based solely on native language education. Fourteen participants preferred to work in a preschool that offered native language education in addition to at least one foreign language. Upon coding the responses of these teachers, three codes were obtained. In the first code, the participants' opinions on the sequence of learning languages were discovered, as they stated that foreign language should come after native language. In the second code, some participants underlined the significance of native language development at early ages and stated that their first goal was to teach the native language effectively. Therefore, it should be prioritized more in preschool. The last code of this theme highlighted the conditions of foreign language acquisition in the country. The participants emphasized that EFL (English as a foreign language) is more useful than ESL (English as a second language) in the country. Therefore, a preschool aiming to teach a language as a foreign language will be more practical. Regarding school preferences, four participants chose to work in a preschool based on bilingual education. They reasoned that learning a foreign language at an early age has advantages, and it is easier to teach two languages simultaneously.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined changes in pre-service preschool teachers' attitudes toward teaching foreign languages and their beliefs about foreign language education in preschool settings from different perspectives. Based on the research results obtained from both quantitative and qualitative data, the following conclusions were reached:

The first result pertained to attitude changes in teaching foreign languages. The Foreign Language Teaching Attitude Scale scores revealed that pre-service preschool teachers demonstrated a significant

positive shift in their attitudes toward the priority and necessity of foreign language instruction between the pre-test and post-test assessments. This improvement may be attributed to the activities implemented during the training program. Since foreign language training at universities is typically theory-based, pre-service teachers may initially hold negative or indifferent attitudes toward foreign language instruction. However, during the training sessions, they had the opportunity to engage in practical activities that could be directly applied in their future careers. This pragmatic approach may have played a critical role in shaping their positive attitude changes regarding these factors. Conversely, while there was a slight increase in attitudes toward the quality and efficiency of foreign language instruction, these changes were not as significant as expected. A closer examination of these factors suggests that they relate specifically to the quality and efficiency of foreign language education provided at schools and universities. Since the research design did not involve participants' actual university coursework or school-based instruction, but instead established a distinct learning and teaching environment, pre-service preschool teachers' attitudes toward these particular factors may have remained largely unaffected.

The second key result focused on the sufficiency of foreign language training in university programs. Participants widely agreed on its inadequacy and proposed several solutions, including enhancing comprehensibility, increasing weekly instructional hours, shifting towards more practical training, integrating child language teaching methods, implementing engaging and interactive practices, embedding language training within university education, and providing specialized instruction on language teaching methodologies. A study conducted by Çetintaş and Yazıcı (2016) also highlighted the deficiencies in foreign language education within undergraduate programs, emphasizing the need for significant improvements in this area. Additionally, the study underscored the importance of incorporating courses on bilingual foreign language education and teaching methodologies into undergraduate curricula. As a long-term solution, it was suggested that integrating bilingual foreign language education methods at an early stage—both within preschool education undergraduate programs and in the German, French, and English undergraduate programs of education faculties that train foreign language teachers—would be a crucial step toward addressing these shortcomings.

The third key result addressed foreign language teaching in preschools. While most participants agreed that preschool teachers should assume this responsibility, some expressed differing opinions. Five distinct teaching duty codes were identified: three advocating for preschool teachers and two for foreign language teachers. Pre-service preschool teachers supported their involvement in foreign language instruction, emphasizing their close relationship with students, their understanding of children's sensitivities, and their potential effectiveness as role models. They argued that having a single competent teacher for this age group would be more effective in fostering language learning. Conversely, some participants believed that foreign language teaching should not be the sole responsibility of foreign language teachers. Instead, they proposed involving teachers proficient in both preschool education and foreign language teaching or adopting a collaborative teaching approach. This issue has been well-documented in the literature. Bayyurt (2012) found that English teachers often lack sufficient prior knowledge and awareness of appropriate methods for teaching English to young learners. Similarly, Şad and Sarı (2019) examined the proficiency of English teachers in early-age foreign language instruction and found no significant differences based on gender, faculty type, or prior education in early language teaching, suggesting a broader need for attention to this issue. Unlike other disciplines, English language teaching in Turkey is not divided into education level-specific undergraduate programs, allowing graduates from general English language teaching (ELT) programs to teach at all levels, from preschool to higher education. This approach may lead to challenges in developing level-specific competencies. Research on English instruction by non-specialist teachers (classroom teachers) (Çelik & Işık, 2019; Gönül, 2020; Zengin & Ulaş, 2020) has shown that their involvement in English lessons negatively impacted instructional quality. These studies indicate that classroom teachers lacked proficiency in foreign language teaching, and those who participated in English lessons expressed that it would be more beneficial for subject-specific teachers to conduct these courses.

The fourth key finding of the study revealed a strong belief among participants in the necessity of teaching foreign languages in the preschool period. Participants provided various reasons to support this

perspective, including the high learning speed of preschoolers, the functionality of their cognitive receptors, the simultaneous engagement of multiple developmental areas, and the role of parental support. These findings suggest that preschool age presents a practical and advantageous window for language acquisition, making it easier to teach foreign languages to preschool children compared to other age groups. Given these insights, it is crucial to recognize the importance of early language learning and actively support foreign language education in preschool settings to capitalize on young children's unique cognitive and developmental characteristics. This study contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing the role of early childhood education in fostering bilingualism. Several studies support the importance of foreign language instruction in the preschool period (Anşın, 2006; İlder & Er, 2007; İrem, 2019). However, to ensure an effective teaching and learning process, it is essential to focus on age-appropriate methodologies, including the use of games, songs, and nursery rhymes. Research suggests that successful foreign language acquisition in early childhood depends on the use of developmentally appropriate materials and instructional techniques tailored to children's linguistic and cognitive abilities.

The fifth key finding of the study explored participants' perspectives on the potential negative effects of learning a foreign language at an early age. The results showed that there were differing opinions on this subject. While some participants expressed concerns that early foreign language learning might lead to speech delays and initial confusion, others argued that it does not negatively impact language development and that any challenges can be mitigated through appropriate instructional methods, continuous and structured training, and selecting the optimal age to introduce a foreign language. The perspectives shared by pre-service teachers are supported by previous research in the literature. Sandhofer and Uchikoshi (2013) found that children learning two languages simultaneously may experience a slower initial learning and development process compared to monolingual children. Additionally, Espinosa (2015) noted that while bilingual children tend to have a smaller vocabulary in each language individually, their total vocabulary across both languages is comparable to that of monolingual children. In terms of recall times and verbal expression, bilingual children may initially take longer to retrieve words and may score lower than their monolingual peers due to the complexity of processing two languages simultaneously (Petitto et al., 2011). However, as children's proficiency in both languages improves, many of these challenges gradually diminish and eventually disappear (Conboy, 2013).

The final key finding of the study focused on pre-service preschool teachers' school type preferences. The results indicated a growing interest in foreign language-oriented preschool education, as none of the participants preferred working in a preschool that exclusively offered native language education. Although the preschool period is a significant phase for further educational phases and functions as a foundation for many things, it is vital that native and foreign language education be offered properly during this period. Otherwise, harder efforts may be needed to correct mistakes and fill gaps in learning during this phase. When analyzing other preferences, a significant number of participants favored native language-based preschools that incorporated a foreign language component, rather than bilingual education. At first glance, this preference may appear to contradict the increasing trend of bilingual education. However, the reasons behind this preference provide valuable insights. The first reason participants cited was the sequence of language instruction. They believed that prioritizing native language education first, followed by the introduction of a foreign language, would lead to more effective and sustainable language learning. Their primary concern was ensuring that native language instruction was properly established, as an unsuccessful early language learning experience could have long-term negative effects on further educational stages. The second reason related to the suitability of the local context for bilingual education. Participants argued that the sociolinguistic environment in their country was not conducive to bilingualism. Instead of attempting to train children as bilinguals, they believed it would be more practical to focus on strengthening their skills in the target foreign language. On the other hand, some participants expressed a preference for bilingual education in preschools, supporting their choice with two key arguments. First, they emphasized the importance of raising bilingual children during the critical period for language acquisition, as highlighted in the literature. They believed that early exposure to two languages would provide long-term cognitive and linguistic benefits. The second reason centered on the ease of language learning at this stage. Participants noted that since children's first language experiences occur during the preschool period,

they are free from the negative washback effects of previous language learning experiences. As a result, teaching both languages simultaneously would be easier, more natural, and more enjoyable for young learners.

Recommendations

The research results suggest some recommendations for policy makers, practitioners, and future researchers. These include:

- ✓ While the present study collected qualitative and quantitative data with a limited sample size, future research should aim to obtain quantitative data from a larger sample to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation.
- ✓ The findings of this research demonstrate the need for concrete measures to be taken in order to enhance the proficiency of foreign language trainers during the pre-school education period. These measures may take the form of hiring foreign language teachers or improving the foreign language skills of pre-service preschool teachers.
- ✓ The research findings indicate a need to shift the emphasis of foreign language education in universities. In addition to language acquisition, instruction should include pedagogical training that equips pre-service teachers with the necessary skills to teach the language effectively. Moreover, practical activities ought to be incorporated into the curriculum rather than relying solely on a theory-based educational model.
- ✓ It is crucial to educate both educators and parents about the potential effects of bilingual education on the mother tongue during the preschool period. Disseminating precise and timely information regarding both the positive outcomes and negative challenges that may arise in this process is essential for the effective implementation of bilingual education. Such information-sharing will play a pivotal role in the success of the program.
- ✓ The project activities carried out within the framework of this research can be extended to a university and/or city level. This approach could effectively eliminate negative perceptions of foreign language education among pre-service pre-school teachers. Additionally, similar activities could provide opportunities for teacher candidates to interact with both mother tongue and foreign language education disciplines, leading to benefits for all involved. Such activities could raise awareness about foreign language education among pre-service pre-school teachers and facilitate pre-service foreign language teachers' understanding of the pre-school education period.

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