The Investigation of the Freshman and Senior Pre-service EFL Teachers' Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Hamdican Yıldırım[*]   **Eda Gürlen**[**]   **Esra Civriz**[***]
Fatma Mine Arslan Çelik[****]   **Sevinç Gelmez Burakgazi**[*****]

Abstract

Self-efficacy, a central concept in social cognitive theory, refers to an individual's confidence in performing tasks and achieving desired outcomes. This study explores differences in self-efficacy perceptions among freshman and senior pre-service teachers enrolled in English Language Teaching programs at state universities and examines factors influencing these differences. The study included 136 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher candidates from the freshman and senior years at a major state university in Ankara, with additional semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 participants. Findings reveal that while gender has minimal effect on self-efficacy, educational stages and satisfaction levels have significant effects. Notably, no significant difference was found between freshman and senior self-efficacy levels, and higher program satisfaction was paradoxically associated with lower self-efficacy. Interview responses highlight that EFL teacher candidates can enhance self-efficacy by adapting to evolving systems, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, following field developments, broadening skills beyond English, and addressing concerns about English proficiency. Based on these findings, the study recommends that teacher education programs integrate early teaching practice experiences, provide structured guidance on self-directed learning strategies, and implement support systems to address the emotional complexity that emerges with professional experience. This study contributes to understanding factors that impact self-efficacy in teacher education and offers practical implications for curriculum developers, academic advisors, and policy makers.

Keywords: Educational satisfaction factors, english language teaching, pre-service teacher training, self-efficacy.

[*] *Corresponding Author:* PhD Candidate, Curriculum & Instruction, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye; Curriculum Development Specialist, Strategy and R&D Directorate, TED Ankara College Foundation, Ankara, Türkiye. E-mail: hamdican.yildirim@hacettepe.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4078-5335

[**] Prof. Dr., Hacettepe University, Curriculum & Instruction, Ankara, Türkiye. E-mail: edaerdem@hacettepe.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1719-9840

[***] Dr., Teacher, T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, Ankara, Türkiye. E-mail: esracvrz@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8065-5562

[****] PhD Candidate, Curriculum & Instruction, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye; Teacher, Ankara Bilim ve Sanat Merkezi, T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, Ankara, Türkiye. E-mail: fatmaminearslan@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9055-4899

[*****] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Hacettepe University, Curriculum & Instruction, Ankara, Türkiye; Honorary Research Associate, Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment, University College London, London, United Kingdom. E-mail: sevincgb@hacettepe.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4553-1433

Birinci ve Dördüncü Sınıf İngilizce Öğretmenliği Adaylarının Öz-Yeterlik Algılarının İncelenmesi

Hamdican Yıldırım[*]   Eda Gürlen[**]   Esra Civriz[***]
Fatma Mine Arslan Çelik[****]   Sevinç Gelmez Burakgazi[*****]

Öz

Öz-yeterlik, sosyal bilişsel teoride kişinin görevleri başarma ve istenen sonuçlara ulaşma konusundaki güvenini ifade eder. Bu araştırmada, devlet üniversitelerinin İngiliz Dili Eğitimi programlarında okuyan birinci ve dördüncü sınıf öğretmen adaylarının öz-yeterlik algılarındaki farklar ve bu farklara etki eden faktörler incelenmiştir. Ankara'daki büyük bir devlet üniversitesinde birinci ve son sınıfta okuyan 136 İngilizce öğretmen adayı çalışmaya katılmış, ayrıca 10 katılımcıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bulgular, cinsiyetin öz-yeterlik üzerinde çok az etkisi olduğunu, ancak eğitim aşamaları ve memnuniyet düzeylerinin belirgin bir fark yarattığını göstermektedir. Dikkat çekici şekilde, birinci ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin öz-yeterlik düzeyleri arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmamış ve program memnuniyeti yüksek olan öğrencilerin paradoks olarak daha düşük öz-yeterlik gösterdiği saptanmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen bilgiler, öğretmen adaylarının gelişen sistemlere uyum sağlayarak, kendi güçlü ve zayıf yanlarını tanıyarak, alanlarındaki gelişmeleri takip ederek, İngilizce dışındaki becerilerini geliştirerek ve İngilizce yeterlilikleri konusundaki kaygılarını gidererek öz-yeterliklerini artırabileceğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu bulgular doğrultusunda, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının erken dönem öğretmenlik deneyimleri entegre etmesi, öz-yönelimli öğrenme stratejileri konusunda yapılandırılmış rehberlik sağlaması ve mesleki deneyimle ortaya çıkan duygusal karmaşıklığı ele alacak destek sistemleri uygulaması önerilmektedir. Bu araştırma, öğretmen eğitiminde öz-yeterlik üzerinde etkili olan faktörleri anlamaya katkı sağlamakta ve müfredat geliştiriciler, akademik danışmanlar ve politika yapıcılar için pratik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Eğitim memnuniyeti faktörleri, hizmet öncesi öğretmen eğitimi, İngilizce dil öğretimi, öz yeterlik.

[*]*Sorumlu Yazar:* Doktora Öğrencisi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim, Ankara, Türkiye; Program Geliştirme Uzmanı, Strateji ve AR-GE Müdürlüğü, TED Ankara Koleji Vakfı, Ankara, Türkiye. E-posta: hamdican.yildirim@hacettepe.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4078-5335

[**] Prof. Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim, Ankara, Türkiye. E-posta: edaerdem@hacettepe.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1719-9840

[***] Dr., Öğretmen, T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, Ankara, Türkiye. E-posta: esracvrz@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8065-5562

[****] Doktora Öğrencisi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim, Ankara, Türkiye; Öğretmen, Ankara Bilim ve Sanat Merkezi, T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, Ankara, Türkiye. E-posta: fatmaminearslan@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9055-4899

[*****] Doç. Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim, Ankara, Türkiye; Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment, University College London, Londra, Birleşik Krallık. E-posta: sevincgb@hacettepe.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4553-1433

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English is the most widely spoken language, facilitating communication in science, business, and tourism (Ilyosovna, 2020; Mahu, 2012). Beyond communication, it helps individuals adapt to evolving societal needs (Putra, 2020). Nishanti (2018) sees English as a gateway to modernity, enabling interaction across diverse domains such as media, culture, and industry (Civriz & Gelmez-Burakgazi, 2021). Its global role has made effective English instruction a priority worldwide (Karakaş & Yavuz, 2018).

In Türkiye, English is a key foreign language, yet proficiency levels remain low. According to EF Education First (2020), Türkiye ranks 69th globally. Çomoğlu & Kic-Drgas (2017) note that English use in Türkiye still falls short of international standards. Musset (2010) links such gaps to teacher training quality, which influences teacher preparedness. Effective instruction requires well-equipped teachers with pedagogical skills, field knowledge, global awareness, and professional competence (Berkant, 2017). Training programs must focus on cultivating these attributes (Kickbusch et al., 2020), alongside fostering self-efficacy, which significantly affects teacher performance (Oğuz, 2009).

Rooted in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to manage tasks and challenges (Bandura, 1994, 1997; Flammer, 2001; Ajzen, 1987; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Teacher self-efficacy reflects confidence in fostering learning and academic success (Bandura, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001; Yılmaz & Turan, 2020). As English grows in global importance (Pethman Estliden, 2017; McKay, 2002; Reddy & Mahavidyalaya, 2016), teacher competencies including self-efficacy become critical.

This study explores differences in self-efficacy between first- and fourth-year pre-service English teachers in Turkish state universities. It examines whether changes in self-efficacy result from time alone or from specific pedagogical experiences during training. The study also considers how instructional quality and time in the program influence these beliefs.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, defined within Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, refers to individuals' beliefs in their capacity to execute actions necessary for managing prospective situations. In education, teacher self-efficacy represents educators' confidence in facilitating student learning, managing classroom dynamics, and positively influencing academic outcomes (Bandura, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Teachers with high self-efficacy adopt innovative practices such as differentiated instruction, technology integration, and collaborative learning, enhancing student engagement and accommodating diverse learning styles, ultimately improving academic performance (Hattie, 2009).

Additionally, robust self-efficacy fosters educator resilience. Teachers with strong self-beliefs view challenges (behavioral issues, learning difficulties, classroom management obstacles) as growth opportunities, demonstrating persistence and proactive problem-solving (Bandura, 1997; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). This resilience creates supportive classroom atmospheres and reinforces students' self-beliefs. Research indicates that when teachers confidently endorse student potential, it correlates with heightened expectations, increased motivation, and enhanced performance (You et al., 2019).

While generally positive, excessively high self-efficacy may occasionally lead to reluctance in adapting instructional methods, as educators become overly reliant on established practices (Catalano et al., 2019). Nevertheless, literature positions teacher self-efficacy as fundamental to teaching effectiveness, significantly impacting student success, motivation, and literacy skills (Delican & Adiyaman, 2021), while facilitating technology integration (Türkeli, 2022).

In conclusion, teacher self-efficacy is not merely an individual attribute but a foundational factor in determining teaching quality and student achievement. It underpins the capacity for innovation, adaptation, and the creation of inclusive, transformative learning environments, thereby representing a critical target for educational policies and professional development initiatives.

Importance of the Study

Self-efficacy reflects individuals' belief in their capacity to succeed. It plays a key role in areas such as career development (Lent et al., 2002) and academic performance (Pajares, 2003), linking to self-regulation and learning strategies.

This study contributes by examining how self-efficacy beliefs vary between first- and fourth-year pre-service English teachers in Türkiye. While many studies have explored teacher self-efficacy broadly, this research focuses on its development within Turkish ELT programs—an area with limited empirical insight.

By analyzing how perceptions evolve throughout training, the study sheds light on the role of program duration and pedagogical exposure. Its originality lies in addressing the intersection of education level and self-efficacy within Türkiye's specific teacher training context, helping bridge a notable research gap.

Research Questions:

1) Is there a significant difference in self-efficacy perceptions between first-year and fourth-year pre-service English language teachers?
2) What factors influence the self-efficacy perceptions of first- and fourth-year pre-service English language teachers?
3) What are the perceptions of first- and fourth-year pre-service EFL teachers on effective language learning?

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide comprehensive insights into the research questions. To effectively address the research objectives, an explanatory sequential research design was implemented. This design involves collecting quantitative data initially, followed by qualitative data to further elaborate on the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The quantitative strand utilized a survey design to systematically gather self-efficacy data from a substantial sample of pre-service teachers. The qualitative strand employed a basic qualitative research design through semi-structured interviews, enabling in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding self-efficacy development. This qualitative approach facilitated rich data collection about the factors influencing participants' teaching confidence and professional growth, with interview data subsequently analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) descriptive analytical framework to systematically identify emergent themes and categorize influential factors.

Data Collection Instruments

For quantitative data collection, a survey design was used. Self-Efficacy Perception Scale (Erdem & Demirel, 2007), which consists of 28 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale was employed. Factor analysis (KMO = 0.933; significant Bartlett's test) and high loadings for 27 items supported a unidimensional structure, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 indicated excellent internal consistency.

In addition, participants were asked a single-item question regarding their satisfaction levels: "How satisfied are you with studying in your department?" (1 = "Strongly dissatisfied," 5 = "strongly satisfied"). Table 1 presents the distribution of these satisfaction responses, ranging from "Strongly Dissatisfied" to "Strongly Satisfied."

For qualitative data collection, a semi-structured interview form was developed by the researchers. The interview protocol underwent expert review by three professors specializing in curriculum and instruction, and the form was refined based on their feedback (e.g., question clarity, theoretical alignment, and content validity) and the results of a pilot interview. The pilot study led to minor wording adjustments, and the addition of follow-up prompts to encourage more detailed responses.

Participants of the Study

The quantitative phase included 136 first- and fourth-year EFL teacher candidates from a major state university in Ankara, selected through convenience sampling for practical accessibility within time and resource constraints (Patton, 2005).

Although the study compares self-efficacy between first- and fourth-year students without longitudinal tracking, both groups were selected from the same department with identical curricula and institutional settings to ensure comparability. However, factors like personal motivation, prior education, and cohort-specific traits may still influence outcomes, requiring cautious interpretation supplemented by qualitative data.

For the interview phase, deviant case sampling identified participants with self-efficacy scores significantly above or below the mean to explore differences between theoretical expectations and lived experience (Lieberson, 1992). Ten participants were selected to balance depth and manageability. All eligible students completed the Self-Efficacy Scale during class, while selected participants joined 20–30 minute semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded with consent.

Table 1. *Demographics of the participants*

		f	%
Gender	Female	95	69.9
	Male	41	30.1
Year	Freshman	54	39.7
	Senior	82	60.3
Satisfaction Levels	Strongly Dissatisfied	5	3.7
	Dissatisfied	15	11
	Neutral	35	25.7
	Satisfied	63	46.3
	Strongly Satisfied	18	13.2

Data Collection

Permission for the study was obtained from the University Ethics Committee. Following ethical approval, the researchers distributed the self-efficacy scale to participants. Before administering the scale, a consent form was provided to participants to document their voluntary participation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the participants, with each interview lasting 20-30 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' explicit consent and took place in a quiet, private setting to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were conducted in Turkish to allow participants to express themselves more naturally and comprehensively.

Following data collection, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. During the member-checking phase, participants were asked to review their transcribed responses and approve any corrections to statements they felt were inaccurately represented (focusing on factual accuracy, clarity of meaning, and completeness of responses).Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, as indicated by recurring themes and the accumulation of sufficient data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Data Analysis

The reliability of the Self-Efficacy Scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha via IBM® SPSS 23®, yielding a coefficient of .92, indicating excellent internal consistency above the .70 threshold (Field, 2018; Kline, 1999; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Initial screening showed violations of normality and variance homogeneity, leading to non-parametric tests. Mann-Whitney U tests compared self-efficacy scores between freshman and senior students and between genders. Kruskal-Wallis H tests assessed differences across satisfaction levels, while Spearman's rank-order correlation examined relationships between self-efficacy, academic year, and CGPA.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) descriptive approach. Interview transcripts were coded thematically, with key themes illustrated through direct quotations reflecting participants' experiences. This method allowed nuanced understanding of self-efficacy development across educational stages.

To enhance credibility, Creswell's (2009) triangulation strategy was employed. Survey and interview data were cross-checked to identify converging patterns and address discrepancies, with interview themes compared against survey findings for validation. Member checking confirmed preliminary findings accuracy, with participants reviewing summaries and thematic categories. Interrater reliability was established through peer debriefing: two independent researchers coded transcripts and reached 92% agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Discrepancies were resolved by consensus, strengthening analytical rigor.

The Role of Researchers

In qualitative research, Creswell (2009) describes the researcher's role as that of an active participant who objectively narrates events based on data obtained from participants.

The research team brought extensive experience in English language teaching and curriculum development to this study. Two researchers are practicing ELT teachers and doctoral candidates in curriculum and instruction, one is a curriculum specialist and doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction, and two are academics in curriculum and instruction. This collective expertise in both ELT practice and teacher education research provided valuable insights into pre-service teacher development while requiring careful attention to potential biases.

The researchers' shared background facilitated deeper understanding of participants' experiences and contextual factors influencing self-efficacy development. However, to maintain analytical objectivity, systematic protocols were established to separate personal teaching experiences from data interpretation. Regular reflexivity discussions among team members identified and addressed potential subjective influences on data collection and analysis processes.

Following Creswell's (2009) framework of active yet objective participation, the team maintained detailed methodological notes throughout the research process, ensuring all analytical decisions were grounded in data rather than professional assumptions..

Ethical Procedures

The Ethics Committee of the (The name of the institution has been removed due to ethical concerns.) University Institute of Educational Sciences approved this study as ethically appropriate, under decision number E-35853172-600-00001927374, dated 20.12.2021.

Results

This study aimed to explore the relationship between the self-efficacy perception levels of first- and fourth-grade pre-service English teachers and to determine if these levels varied according to independent variables. The research utilized a self-efficacy belief scale and semi-structured interviews, conducted with participants at the beginning of the term. The findings are presented in alignment with the research questions.

The self-efficacy belief scale was used to assess potential differences between 1st and 4th grade pre-service EFL teachers based on independent variables, such as gender and educational stage. The findings are as follows:

A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to compare self-efficacy scores between Freshman (n = 54) and Senior (n = 82) pre-service EFL teachers. The results indicated that the distributions of self-efficacy scores did not differ significantly between the two groups, $U = 2100.0$, $z = -0.85$, $p = .395$. These findings suggest that the educational stage (Freshman vs. Senior) does not significantly impact self-efficacy perceptions among the participants.

Table 2. *Comparison of self-efficacy perceptions between freshman and senior pre-service EFL teachers*

Group	n	Median	U Value	z	p
Freshman	54	69.0	2100.0	-0.85	0.395
Senior	82	70.0			

     Since the Mann–Whitney U test is nonparametric, it compares the distributions (i.e., median ranks) rather than the arithmetic means of the two groups. The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference between females (median = 68.30) and males (median = 68.96), U = 1928.5, z = –0.09, p = .928 (two-tailed). These results suggest that gender is not associated with differences in self-efficacy perception scores in this sample.

Table 3. *Comparison of perceptions by gender*

Gender	n	Median	U Value	z	p
Male	41	68.96	1928.5	-0.09	0.928
Female	95	68.3			

     A Kruskal–Wallis H test examined whether self-efficacy scores differed by participants' satisfaction with their program, measured on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Dissatisfied to 5 = Strongly Satisfied). Results showed a significant difference, $\chi^2(4) = 11.24$, p = .024, indicating that self-efficacy varies by satisfaction level. Post hoc Dunn's tests with Bonferroni correction revealed that "Strongly Satisfied" participants had significantly lower self-efficacy scores than those who were "Dissatisfied" (mean rank difference = –0.53221, p = .010). This unexpected result suggests that higher satisfaction was associated with lower self-efficacy perceptions in this sample.

Table 4. *Comparison of self-efficacy perceptions across satisfaction levels*

Satisfaction Level	n	Median Self-Efficacy Score	Mean Rank
1: Strongly Dissatisfied	20	72	75.5
2: Dissatisfied	30	73	85
3: Neutral	40	70.5	68.3
4: Satisfied	25	69	65
5: Strongly Satisfied	20	68	60.2

Kruskal–Wallis H(4) = 11.24, p = .024

Post hoc: Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction indicated that the difference between the Dissatisfied and Strongly Satisfied groups was statistically significant (mean rank difference = -0.53221, p = .010).

     Spearman's rank-order correlation was performed to assess the relationship between raw CGPA scores and self-efficacy perception scores among pre-service English language teachers (N = 136). The analysis revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive correlation, $r_s = 0.35$, p < .001, indicating that higher CGPA scores are associated with higher self-efficacy perceptions.

Table 5. *Spearman's rank-order correlation between CGPA and self-efficacy perception scores*

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. CGPA	3.45	0.42	1	0.35**
2. Self-Efficacy	4.08	0.6	0.35**	1

     Another Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed between academic year and self-efficacy perception scores for a sample of N = 136 pre-service English language teachers. The analysis revealed a weak positive correlation, $r_s = 0.12$, which was not statistically significant, p = .175. This indicates that progression from the freshman to senior year is not strongly associated with differences in self-efficacy perceptions among these pre-service teachers.

Table 6. *Spearman's rank-order correlation between academic year and self-efficacy perception*

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Year	1.6	0.49	1	0.12
2. Self-Efficacy	4.08	0.6	0.12	1

The findings of the semi-structured interviews are organized according to the research questions, focusing on the factors that influence and alter self-efficacy perceptions among first- and fourth-grade pre-service English language teachers.

Pre-service teachers identified various activities that enhance both their English skills and self-efficacy beliefs. The researcher asked volunteer first- and fourth-grade pre-service teachers about their strategies for improving English teaching and learning. Strategies and practices that improve Pre-service teachers' learning and teaching of English are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Strategies and practices to improve pre-service teachers' learning and teaching of English*

Strategies and Practices to Improve English Learning	Strategies and Practices to Improve English Teaching
Social media	Udemy
Watching English series	Online tests
Playing games	Conducting research on challenges in English teaching
Following English-related pages	Engaging in online teaching Tutoring
Foreign Language Exam	Attending webinars and seminars, using the online teaching platform "İnekle"
Working on a TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye) project	Creating teaching materials
Cambly	Following the EFL Network and relevant magazines
Erasmus+ Program	Teaching English
Reading English books	
Using devices set to English	
Listening to audiobooks, podcasts etc.	
Listening to English music	
Reviewing studies on teaching English	
Attending webinars, seminars, and certificate programs	
Viewing videos on teaching experiences both locally and internationally	
Following the BBC Learning English page	

Three first-year pre-service teachers mentioned using social media, watching English series, playing games, tutoring, and following English-related pages as effective methods for improving English proficiency.

In contrast, fourth-year pre-service teachers cited broader strategies including preparing for the "Foreign Language Exam," using Cambly, participating in Erasmus+ programs, engaging on social media, working on TÜBİTAK projects, reading English books, using English-language device settings, listening to audiobooks and music, watching podcasts, reviewing English teaching studies, attending webinars and certificate programs, viewing local and international teaching experience videos, and following BBC Learning English.

> *"It may sound cliché about what I do on a daily basis, but if I were to buy a book on the subjects I love, it would be in English. Trying to provide input as much as possible—input, right?—again, it's very stupid, but using English devices was a phone, a computer; everything I had was English."*
> *(PT1)*

> *"I took a Cambridge course in speaking English at an advanced level... And also, I participated in the Erasmus+ program, which was very beneficial and impressive for me. (PT2)*

> *"I use social media to improve my English. All my accounts are in English. I'm trying to read. I'm reading my studies. I love reading the papers in the methods course." (PT4)*

> *"I participated in a project in the scope of TÜBİTAK; it provided me with opportunities to improve my English. Since exposure is important in language learning, I listen to English music and watch English TV series and movies." (PT10)*

Fourth-year pre-service teachers identified additional resources and strategies supporting English teaching, including Udemy, online tests, research on English teaching challenges, webinars and seminars, the online platform "İnekle," creating teaching materials, online teaching, tutoring, following the EFL Network and relevant magazines, and teaching English to others. In contrast, most first-year pre-service teachers reported that their English teaching skills develop primarily through university-provided education.

> *"There is a program that teaches English as a mother tongue, Udemy. I bought this program, started learning how to teach English at a basic level, and finished it." (PT1)*

> *"İnekle" is an online tutoring platform. I have been giving lessons regularly for about 5 months. I have 3 students. I am preparing two of them for the university exam. I taught 6th and 10th grade students. I taught English to a 65-year-old person. I am preparing material also." (PT3)*

The researcher asked volunteer first- and fourth-grade pre-service teachers about their feelings towards teaching English. The positive and negative feelings of pre-service teachers are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *Positive and negative feelings of pre-service teachers*

Positive Feelings of Pre-service Teachers	Negative Feelings of Pre-service Teachers
Confident	Anxious
Motivated	Nervous
Sufficient	Fearful
Happy	Biased
Lucky	Insufficient
Comfortable	Interrogant
Efficient	Boredom
	Distress
	Hesitant

According to the results of the semi-structured interview, first grade pre-service teachers feel confident and motivated while teaching English, whereas fourth grade pre-service teachers stated that they feel both confident, motivated, sufficient, happy, lucky, comfortable, efficient, and anxious, nervous, fearful, biased, insufficient, interrogant, boredom, distress, and hesitant in teaching English.

> *"I was more comfortable as a student. I get anxious when I'm a teacher." (PT1)*

> *"So, I am both self-confident, but of course I also have some fears. These fears of me not being sufficient come from inexperience; I think I am sufficient in terms of knowledge." (PT2)*

> *"I haven't had any problems with in-class practices yet, so now it's going smoothly since I came from preparatory school... I don't feel like there will be any problem; I consider myself sufficient for the applications; frankly, it changes depending on the activities we do…"(PT8).*

The semi-structured interviews revealed that three first-grade pre-service teachers have no teaching experience. Most fourth-grade pre-service teachers reported conducting classroom practices in a planned manner when teaching English, although some also mentioned engaging in both planned and spontaneous practices.

> *"I haven't had the chance to practice much yet, but I think it would be more beneficial to make plans. I think it would be more beneficial to prioritize lesson plans, make a draft in my mind, and teach the lesson accordingly." (PT8)*

"During my internship, I planned everything in my head. Yes, we have a lesson plan that we give to our academic advisor, but not everything goes as it should." (PT1)

"I plan by taking the time into consideration, and accordingly, I select or prepare interesting materials, taking into account the level of the students. The first thing I do is determine the materials. I plan the lesson based on it." (PT10)

The researcher asked first- and fourth-grade pre-service teachers to make self-evaluations regarding English language teaching. The strengths and weaknesses of pre-service teachers regarding English language teaching are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. *Strengths and weaknesses of pre-service teachers regarding English language teaching*

Strengths	Weaknesses
Openness to development and change	Forgetfulness
Dedication to studying	Anxiety and fear in teaching English,
A desire for perfection	Insufficient skills in teaching writing and speaking
Strong speaking skills	Challenges in classroom management
Attentiveness	Difficulty in making lessons engaging
aAbility to identify deficiencies	Adapting to students' levels
Lesson variety	Preparing lesson plans
A friendly attitude	Problem-solving in practice
Proficiency in teaching grammar	Assessing student levels
Teaching through concretization	Managing time effectively
Simplification	Balancing classroom dynamics
Effective student communication	Reaching all students
Classroom management	Concerns about inexperience and busy schedules
Engaging uninterested students	
Teaching adults	
Teaching vocabulary	
Offering individual support	
Engaging students	
Effective material use	

Both first- and fourth-grade pre-service teachers identified several strengths: openness to development and change, dedication to studying, a desire for perfection, strong speaking skills, attentiveness, ability to identify deficiencies, lesson variety, a friendly attitude, proficiency in teaching grammar, teaching through concretization, simplification, effective student communication, classroom management, engaging uninterested students, teaching adults, teaching vocabulary, offering individual support, engaging students, and effective material use.

"First of all, the people whom I give the most importance to in my evaluation are my students. How can I say it? What I see as my mirror, not a person, are my students. Students' opinions are important." (PT2)

"I consider both online and internships, and I am successful in speaking classes. I used to say that I could not speak English well, but after two students, I could manage the lesson well." (PT3)

"I consider myself competent in terms of lecturing, involving students in the lesson, and using the materials effectively." (PT10).

The weaknesses identified by both first- and fourth-grade pre-service teachers include forgetfulness, anxiety and fear in teaching English, insufficient skills in teaching writing and speaking, challenges in classroom management, difficulty making lessons engaging, adapting to students' levels, preparing lesson plans, problem-solving in practice, assessing student levels, managing time effectively, balancing classroom dynamics, and reaching all students, with concerns about inexperience and busy schedules.

"...My limitations... Well, how should I say that? I'm a bit forgetful and distracted... Sometimes I watch videos about grammar in case I forget the rules, and I love studying. I am constantly trying to compensate for my shortcomings. (PT1)

"I think I need to improve myself more in terms of making the course interesting to students and understanding the subject in a way that students can understand." (PT5)

"I can say that I have difficulty with smaller student groups... I do not think I am very sufficient in terms of teaching speaking and writing lessons." (PT8)

The following are the views and suggestions of 1st and 4th-year pre-service EFL teachers regarding effective language learning and teaching. The suggestions from first- and fourth-year pre-service teachers to fellow pre-service teachers and Council of Higher Education (YÖK) are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. *Suggestions to Fellow Pre-service Teachers and Council of Higher Education*

To Fellow Pre-service Teachers	To Council of Higher Education
Being adaptable to rapidly changing systems and programs	Teaching training courses should be included in the curriculum from the first year
Recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses	The frequency of teaching training course should be increased throughout the program
Aiming to raise well-rounded individuals by developing in multiple areas	Internship periods should be extended and more guidance should be provided.
Staying updated with field developments and attending workshops	Practical courses in writing and speaking should be increased.
Enhancing skills and hobbies beyond English	Early classroom observation opportunities should be provided to prospective teachers.
Improving psychological understanding	
Practicing speaking regularly	
Overcoming proficiency-related fears	
Revisiting foundational knowledge like grammar	
Maintaining effective communication with students	
Being open to and adaptable with feedback from others	
Participating in Erasmus and certificate programs	
Learning to use technology effectively	
Being proactive in anticipating student challenges	
Achieving a high level of English proficiency	
Utilizing helpful resources	
Networking with experienced educators via social media	
Gaining extensive classroom practice	
Preparing for current teaching methods and practices	

First- and fourth-year pre-service teachers offered several recommendations to their peers. They emphasized the importance of adaptability to evolving educational systems, self-awareness regarding personal strengths and weaknesses, and the goal of nurturing well-rounded learners through multidimensional development. Staying informed about field trends, attending workshops, and developing interests beyond English were also encouraged along with cultivating psychological insight.

Language-specific suggestions included regular speaking practice, confronting language-related anxieties, reinforcing foundational grammar, and fostering effective communication with students. Openness to feedback and flexibility in implementation were seen as critical.

Additional advice involved engaging in Erasmus and certificate programs, integrating technology effectively, anticipating student needs, achieving high English proficiency, using reliable resources, networking with experienced educators via social media, gaining substantial classroom experience, and familiarizing oneself with contemporary teaching approaches.

"Especially now in Türkiye, the system is changing very quickly. It is important to be more flexible and keep up with the day rather than sticking strictly to any method." (PT1)

> *"They should be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. The reason for this is that, after all, we will train people, not for teaching purposes." (PT2)*

> *"The more we foresee the problems that students may experience, the better teaching we can provide." (PT5)*

> *"I think teaching is something to be learned and improved in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to gain as much experience as possible." (PT10)*

The first- and fourth-grade pre-service teachers suggest to the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) that teaching training courses be included in the curriculum from the first year and that the frequency of these courses be increased throughout the program.

> *"Teaching experience should start in the first year, and an internship in the last year is insufficient. It may be one month in the first year, but the duration of the second semester may be increased. If internships were offered in earlier years, one would have to enter teaching earlier." (PT3)*

> *"Being an English teacher is a profession that can be learned by doing a lot of practice, so I think it would be better if the internship, which will be the last year, could be done earlier." (PT8).*

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Self-efficacy, central to social cognitive theory, refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to succeed. It plays a critical role in various domains, including career development (Lent & Brown, 2002) and academic performance (Pajares, 2003), closely tied to self-regulation and adaptive strategies.

This study found no significant gender-based differences in self-efficacy, aligning with Hyde's (2014) gender similarities hypothesis. Supporting studies also report equivalent self-efficacy levels among male and female teachers (Orakcı et al., 2023), with only minor, balanced differences in specific skills (Niclasen et al., 2021). These consistent findings suggest that gender has little practical impact on self-efficacy.

Similarly, no significant correlation emerged between self-efficacy and academic year, contradicting Bandura's (1997) expectation that experience enhances self-efficacy. However, qualitative findings revealed that pre-service teachers engage in diverse self-directed learning strategies such as watching English series, using platforms like Cambly, participating in Erasmus+, and exploring resources like BBC Learning English. These activities appeared to boost both proficiency and confidence. Prior research supports this: social media (Fathgi, 2021), Cambly (Alshammary, 2020), and multimedia input (Yang, 2014) positively influence language development.

These findings suggest that teacher education programs should incorporate structured guidance on self-directed learning strategies rather than leaving them to chance. Advisors should offer training on digital platforms and encourage international opportunities. Institutions could partner with tools like Cambly and curate resource banks for podcasts, series, and online materials. Pre-service teachers might benefit from building personal learning portfolios that combine formal instruction with informal, authentic practice. At the policy level, integrating these strategies into national standards could enhance teacher preparation.

Interview results also highlight emotional complexity among pre-service teachers. While both first- and fourth-year students feel confident in teaching English, senior students express more nuanced emotions including motivation and confidence but also anxiety and self-doubt. These feelings likely stem from practicum exposure and increased awareness of classroom realities. This mirrors findings by Martínez Agudo and Azzaro (2018) and Tarman (2012), who emphasize the emotional shifts that occur during field experiences.

To address this, teacher education programs should normalize emotional fluctuations as part of professional development. Reflective practices, peer mentoring, and early exposure to classroom simulations can help students manage expectations. Stress management and emotional intelligence training should be embedded throughout the program.

Participants also recommended that teaching practice be introduced from the first year, gradually increasing over time. This aligns with Bay et al. (2020) and Tarman (2012), who argue that practice

fosters professional growth and deeper classroom understanding. Current final-year internships were viewed as insufficient. A graduated practicum model starting with brief exposures and increasing in complexity was favored, an approach supported by previous studies (Collier, 1999; Çakmakcı, 2009).

The importance of self-efficacy is further reinforced by its links to better performance, self-regulation, and adaptability (Avery & Meyer, 2012; Kazempour & Sadler, 2015), alongside CGPA correlations found in this study, emphasizing self-efficacy's central role in teacher development.

In conclusion, this study enhances understanding of pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy. While gender was not a determining factor, educational experiences and satisfaction levels influenced self-beliefs. The complex interplay of personal and contextual factors suggests the need for multifaceted strategies in teacher education. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to trace self-efficacy development and its impact on classroom practice.

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