

## Identifying the Soft Skills for Foreign Language Teacher Training and the Perspectives of Prospective Teachers

### Yabancı Dil Öğretmenliği Eğitimi için Destekleyici Becerilerin Belirlenmesi ve Öğretmen Adaylarının Görüşleri\*

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#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the essential soft skills for prospective foreign language teachers and determine which skills should be prioritized in their training. Through an extensive review of existing research and a thorough document analysis, 11 key soft skills were identified for teacher education: motivation, empathy, problem-solving abilities, stress management, presentation skills, organizational and planning skills, communication skills, teamwork, creativity, professional resilience, and time management. To understand which skills prospective foreign language teachers consider most important, focus group discussions were held with students from teacher training programs in Turkey and Germany. These sessions underscored the particular importance of empathy, communication, stress management, and motivation as the most valued skills for successful teaching. This research underscores the relevance of all identified soft skills for foreign language teacher training, emphasizing communication, empathy, stress management, and motivation. Embedding these skills in teacher education programs will not only support teachers' professional growth but also enhance the foreign language learning experience for students.

**Keywords:** Communication skills, empathy, motivation, soft skills, stress management, teacher training.

#### ÖZ

Bu araştırma, aday yabancı dil öğretmenleri için önemli olabilecek destekleyici becerileri belirlemeye ve hangilerinin ön planda olması gerektiğini saptamaya odaklanmaktadır. Kapsamlı bir literatür taraması ve ayrıntılı bir doküman analizi sonucunda, öğretmen eğitimi için iletişim becerileri, empati, problem çözme yetenekleri, zaman yönetimi, stres yönetimi, mesleki dayanıklılık, sunum becerileri, ekip çalışması, organizasyon ve planlama becerileri, motivasyon ve yaratıcılık olmak üzere 11 destekleyici beceri belirlenmiştir. Gelecekteki yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin hangi becerilere öncelik verdiklerini değerlendirmek ve bakış açılarını anlamak amacıyla, Türkiye ve Almanya'daki yabancı dil öğretmenliği programlarına kayıtlı öğrencilerle odak grup oturumları gerçekleştirilmiştir. Oturumların analizi sonucundaki bulgulara göre, etkili öğretim ve öğretmenlik mesleği için en önemli beceriler iletişim, empati, motivasyon ve stres yönetimi olarak saptanmıştır. Bu araştırma, belirlenen tüm destekleyici becerilerin yabancı dil öğretmeni yetiştirmede önemli olduğunu, özellikle de araştırma sonucuna göre iletişim, empati, motivasyon ve stres yönetimine öncelikli olarak vurgu yapmaktadır. Bu becerilerin

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öğretmen eğitimi programlarına entegre edilmesi, öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimini desteklemenin yanı sıra yabancı dil öğrenen öğrencilere sunulan yabancı dil öğrenme süreçlerinin de kalitesini önemli ölçüde artıracaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İletişim becerileri, empati, motivasyon, destekleyici beceriler, öğretmen eğitimi, stres yönetimi.

## INTRODUCTION

In teacher education, subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge - often referred to as “hard skills” - are the foundational abilities required to perform effectively in the teaching profession. These skills are measurable, verifiable, and supported by concrete credentials such as diplomas, certificates, or training programs. However, it is widely recognized that hard skills alone are not sufficient for success in teaching. Today, it is increasingly important for teachers to develop “soft skills” alongside their technical expertise to thrive in their roles. Soft skills have gained prominence as key elements for enhancing the quality of teaching, going beyond technical knowledge to encompass emotional intelligence and communication abilities (Peters-Kuhlinger & John, 2022; Hansel, 2010). The underdevelopment of soft skills can hinder the achievement of professional success, as these skills are often regarded as the “key to success” in many professions. Therefore, the appropriate integration of soft skills into teacher training programs can positively impact the quality, competence, and motivation of teachers. This view is supported by Shakya & Dube (2023a), who highlight the positive impact of soft skills training on prospective teachers’ social competency. Their study emphasizes the importance of incorporating structured modules - such as effective communication, empathy, active listening, and cultural sensitivity - into teacher education programs. Additionally, they stress the value of practical applications, real-life simulations, tailored instruction, and collaboration with schools to enhance the relevance and sustainability of soft skills development. Expanding the scope of their research, Shakya & Dube (2023b) also examined the relationship between soft skills training and teaching competency, concluding that such training plays a key role in preparing effective and responsive educators.

Soft skills are diverse and include, for example, empathy, communication, teamwork, motivation, and time management. In teaching, it is crucial to identify which specific soft skills need to be prioritized for development. This is particularly true in foreign language teaching, where teachers often work with a wide range of student groups, from different age levels, language proficiencies, and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As such, foreign language teachers may require a broader range of soft skills compared to those in other teaching fields. In this context, soft skills enable teachers to foster more effective and empathetic communication with their students, enhancing both teaching and learning. By developing these skills, teachers not only improve their own performance but also help students derive maximum benefit from the educational process.

Each teaching discipline comes with its own unique set of requirements, making it essential to accurately identify the specific soft skills necessary for success in that field. This research focuses on identifying the key soft skills required for foreign language teachers. Understanding these needs in detail is crucial, as foreign language teaching demands a distinct set of skills and knowledge compared to other educational fields. The primary aim of this study is to systematically identify and categorize the essential soft skills needed for effective training of foreign language teachers.

A review of previous studies on soft skills in the teaching profession forms the basis for identifying the key soft skills in this research and can be summarized as follows:

A comprehensive review of the current state of soft skills for the teaching profession highlighted several important findings. There are studies in the literature on the general need for soft skills in teaching, i.e., not specifically defined. Lee & Tien - Tse (2011) investigated the soft skills necessary for success in the workforce, emphasizing the need for prospective teachers to develop these skills to become more attractive candidates. They suggested that educators incorporate soft skills into teacher preparation programs and that school administrators integrate these skills into in-service teacher training. Similarly, Chondekar (2019) discusses the importance of soft skills in teacher education, emphasizing that future educators should not only be aware of these competencies but also integrate them into their own teaching practices. The study highlights the need to embed soft skills into teacher training curricula to better prepare educators for fostering student engagement and building effective classroom relationships.

When looking at studies on which specific soft skills teachers might need, Mozgalova et al. (2021) focused for example on the soft skills of music art teachers in pedagogical institutions. Their research underscored the necessity for universities to equip graduates with appropriate skills for employment, recommending the inclusion of interpersonal skills in training programs. They found that most music teachers regarded communication as the most vital soft skill required in their work tasks, followed closely by critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the same context, Fernandes, Jardim & Lopes (2021) conducted a systematic review of studies published between 2010 and 2020 to identify the most relevant soft skills in the teaching profession. Focusing on special education teachers, their analysis revealed that key competencies such as resilience, reflexivity, empathy, collaborative work, self-efficacy, creativity, and effective communication are consistently emphasized across the literature. Among these, effective communication, collaboration, and reflexivity stood out as particularly central to teachers' educational practices. The review revealed a lack of systematic integration of these skills into teacher training programs and emphasized the need for further investment in developing training models and assessment tools related to soft skills in teacher education. Likewise Devedzic et al. (2018) identified key soft skills in education, including critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, responsibility, communication, and collaboration. In another study, Müller et al. (2008) highlighted the significance of teacher motivation, suggesting that examining the self-determined motivation of teachers in relation to student learning can be a promising research area. In a related study, Rongraung et al. (2014) summarized components essential for the development of soft skills among school teachers, identifying communication skills, thinking and problem-solving abilities, teamwork, lifelong learning, innovation, ethics, professionalism, and leadership. Moreover, Tang et al. (2015) explored gaps in soft skills acquired during teaching training, revealing that teamwork and communication skills were the most important components for novice teachers. Russell et al. (2005) emphasized teamwork, cooperation, empathy, and listening as critical soft skills in the teaching profession. In addition, Robles (2012) found that business professionals ranked courtesy, communication, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork, and work ethic among the top ten soft skills. Ağçam & Doğan (2021) also emphasize that soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, time management, and leadership are essential components of effective teacher education, although they are not easily reflected in formal credentials.

Research by Bunga Noah & Abdul Aziz (2020) applied mixed methodologies to investigate the development of soft skills among TESL graduates, concluding that their program sufficiently fostered critical thinking, problem-solving, entrepreneurial skills, and moral and professional ethics. In a systematic review, Bunga Noah & Abdul Aziz (2020b) underscored the importance of soft skills, particularly motivation, teamwork, communication, time management, and presentation skills. Tang (2020) emphasized that teamwork was deemed the most important soft skill by lecturers in higher education, while the lecturers themselves highlighted communication skills as crucial. Azeem & Nazır (2008) examined the relationship between

stress and burnout, arguing that occupational stress could lead to mental and physical health issues among teachers. Similarly, Buschmann & Gamsjäger (1999) had previously investigated the determinants of teacher burnout.

Manchini et al. (2022) identified several essential soft skills for teachers, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, learning, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, ethics, social skills, creativity, information technology skills, leadership, responsibility, curiosity, decision-making, discipline, honesty, openness, and personality.

Rongraung et al. (2014) developed four modules for enhancing teachers' competencies in primary schools, focusing on innovation development, communication skills, thinking and problem-solving, and information management. Maureen (2007) created a practical guide for developing communication skills among teachers, while Dalen et al. (2001) explored methods for teaching and assessing communication skills. Piyawan Charoensap et al. (2015) evaluated criteria for soft skills training, comparing online and face-to-face formats for effectiveness. Nopiyanto et al. (2023) integrated various soft skills into their learning program, demonstrating significant improvement in pre-service physical education teachers' soft skills after an eight-week service-learning program. Harun & Salamuddin (2013) investigated outdoor education's contribution to developing soft skills among pre-service teachers, while Li Yan et al. (2019) assessed the feasibility of the Australian FWB program as a targeted soft skills teaching program, reporting positive impacts.

When examining studies on the measurement of teachers' soft skills Escolà-Gascón & Gallifa (2022) developed the SKILLS-in-ONE questionnaire, providing a valid and reliable measure of the 13 most common soft skills. Another measurement tool is the study by De Pietro & Altomari (2019), they identified five fundamental soft skills for teachers: communication, leadership, teamwork, lifelong learning, and problem-solving. Al-Sa'di et al. (2023) explored educators' soft skills in stress and resilience through a self-assessment instrument, while Chamorro-Premuzic et al., (2010) designed an inventory to assess the importance and development of 15 soft skills (self-management, communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, working under pressure, creativity, critical thinking, willingness to learn, attention to detail, taking responsibility, planning and organizing, insight, maturity, professionalism, and emotional intelligence) among tertiary students at UK universities.

Lastly, Maren et al. (2021) emphasized communication, teamwork, and creativity as vital soft skills in assessing prospective teachers' curriculum implementation. Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis pointed out the low impact of subject-specific expertise, revealing that motivation and teacher-student relationships significantly influence student learning success.

The present research aims to identify the specific soft skills required for foreign language teachers and to present them to prospective foreign language teachers for evaluation and feedback. The soft skills that are considered important and necessary by the prospective foreign language teachers could be recommended for integration into the curriculum of foreign language teacher training programs. In this way, an important step can be taken toward developing soft skills in addition to hard skills in foreign language teacher education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Design**

Following the aim of this research, the first step was to review the literature to identify the soft skills that may be necessary and important for foreign language teachers. In the second step, these identified soft skills were presented to prospective foreign language teachers through focus group sessions for evaluation and feedback. For this purpose, qualitative research

methods, including document analysis to identify the soft skills and content analysis for the focus group sessions, were employed. The recorded focus group sessions were then subjected to a thorough content analysis using a qualitative analysis program.

## **2.2. Participants**

The participants of the study were prospective foreign language teachers enrolled in teacher training programs during the 2023-2024 academic year in Turkey and Germany, specializing in German as a Foreign Language and English as a Foreign Language (N = 39). The group consisted of 28 females (72%) and 11 males (28%), with ages ranging from 20 to 27. The students were distributed as follows: 16 (41%) in English as a Foreign Language and 23 (59%) in German as a Foreign Language. All participants were in the final semesters of their training programs, preparing to become teachers.

## **2.3. Procedures and Data Analysis**

First, an extensive review of the current state of soft skills in the teaching profession, as discussed in the research literature, was conducted. Based on this review, a detailed document analysis was carried out to identify the relevant soft skills for teachers. In the next step, focus group sessions were planned with prospective foreign language teachers in foreign language teacher training programs in Germany and Turkey over the month of June 2024. Before the data collection procedures, the researcher sought approval from the Ethics Committee of Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş University. Following the Ethics Committee meeting, approval was granted for the research. The document date and number were 30/05/20204 - 2024.06.126.

Focus group sessions are structured group interviews, typically consisting of eight to ten participants and a moderator. A topic is provided, and participants are encouraged to speak sequentially and engage in dynamic group dialogue on that topic (Işık & Semerci, 2019, p. 57). During the focus group sessions, eight questions were posed regarding soft skills for the foreign language teaching profession. These sessions allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and cultural contexts in the study.

The audio recordings from the focus group sessions with prospective foreign language teachers were transcribed using a qualitative analysis program, and necessary translations were completed. Following this, the audio data were analysed according to qualitative content analysis principles. The data were then organized into a coding system and categorized.

# **RESULTS**

This section presents both the analysis performed, which includes the identification of 11 soft skills as priorities for the teaching profession, and the results obtained from feedback during the focus group sessions. These soft skills include motivation, empathy, problem-solving abilities, stress management, presentation skills, organizational and planning skills, communication skills, teamwork, creativity, professional resilience, and time management. They will be presented to prospective foreign language teachers for their evaluation and feedback. During the focus group sessions, eight questions were posed regarding soft skills for the foreign language teaching profession. The analysis and results of each question were presented in tables and explained.

## **3.1. Analysis of the Focus Group Sessions – Research Question 1**

*RQ1: In addition to fundamental skills (hard skills), it is also important to develop soft skills in the teaching profession. Which of the 11 soft skills listed do you think is the most important and necessary for this profession, and why?*

**Table 1***Soft Skills for the Teaching Profession*

Soft Skills	Frequency
Communication skills	23
Empathy	9
Motivation	9
Time management	7
Problem-solving skills	4
Organizational and planning skills	3
Stress management	3
Creativity	2
Presentation skills	2
Professional resilience	2
Teamwork	0

In Table 1, communication skills were identified by the prospective foreign language teachers as the most important and necessary soft skill for the teaching profession (F: 23). Empathy and motivation were regarded as the second most important skills (F: 9), followed by time management (F: 7).

Problem-solving skills (F: 4), organizational and planning skills, and stress management (F: 3) came next. Presentation skills, creativity and professional resilience were also noted (F: 2).

Teamwork was not considered one of the most necessary soft skills for the teaching profession by the prospective foreign language teachers.

Some opinions of prospective foreign language teachers (coded as S) on soft skills are presented below:

#### Communication skills

*S3: "Communication skills are essential because teaching involves mutual communication."*

*S5: "Communication skills. As in every profession, communication with students should be excellent in teaching as well."*

*S10: "Communication skills. The first step to conveying something to a student is by establishing healthy communication."*

*S12: "Communication skills are critical because teaching is a profession that requires constant communication, and it is nearly impossible for someone with poor communication skills to be a teacher."*

#### Empathy

*S11: "Empathy is important because without understanding people, we cannot contribute to or help them in any way."*

*S27: "I don't think other skills matter without empathy. Unless we view things from the learner's perspective, we won't know how our teachings are received."*

*S35: "Empathy is essential to correctly understand and empathize with another person's emotional world."*

#### Motivation

*S10: "Motivation is the key to everything. A teacher without motivation will lack enthusiasm, which the students will sense, leading to decreased participation in the lesson."*

*S30: "Without motivation, learning takes more time, and the process of teaching and learning becomes more difficult."*

#### Time management

*S33: "Time management is essential because it is necessary to design a meaningful lesson and to keep track of the curriculum throughout the school year."*

*S6: "Time management is crucial because a teacher needs to manage their time well."*

#### Problem-solving skills

*S3: "Problem-solving skills are necessary because problems will inevitably arise during lessons."*

*S5: "Problem-solving skills. In any situation or problem, a teacher should be solution-oriented towards the students and must have the ability to solve the issue at hand."*

#### Organizational and planning skills

*S5: "Organizational and planning skills. The teacher should effectively organize activities and tasks in the classroom."*

#### Stress management

*S25: "I think stress management is important for the teacher's health. This way, wear and tear in the profession can be reduced."*

#### Creativity

*S33: "I consider creativity important for differentiation and adaptability."*

#### Presentation skills

*S3: "Presentation skills are important because teaching is done through presenting."*

*S4: "Presentation skills are critical since verbal explanation is the first method used. Supporting it with presentations makes it easier to find visual aids and key points."*

#### Professional resilience

*S33: "Resilience is important because the job is becoming increasingly complex while the hours remain the same."*

#### Teamwork

*No opinions were provided.*

### **3.2. Analyses of the focus group sessions – Research Question 2**

*RQ2: If you had to prioritize the soft skills in terms of their importance for the teaching profession, which would be in first place, which in second place, and which in third place?*

**Table 2***Soft Skills Ranking*

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>First Rank</b>	<b>Second Rank</b>	<b>Third Rank</b>	<b>Total</b>
Communication skills	21	5	2	28
Empathy	4	6	10	20
Motivation	8	8	1	17
Problem-solving skills	0	8	5	13
Time management	1	2	8	11
Creativity	2	1	6	9
Organizational and planning skills	1	2	5	8
Stress management	4	3	1	8
Professional resilience	1	4	2	7
Presentation skills	1	2	4	7
Teamwork	0	0	2	2

Table 2 shows that prospective foreign language teachers prioritize communication skills in the first, second, and third places (F: 28). Empathy (F: 20) and motivation (F: 17) also rank highly after communication skills, followed by problem-solving skills (F: 13) and time management (F: 11).

Creativity (F: 9), organizational and planning skills (F: 8), and stress management (F: 8) are considered moderately important. Professional resilience (F: 7) and presentation skills (F: 7) are also viewed as having moderate priority. Teamwork (F: 2) was indicated as the soft skill with the lowest level of priority by the prospective foreign language teachers.

### **3.3. Analyses of the focus group sessions – Research Question 3**

*RQ3: Could you share your opinion on which soft skills should specifically be included in teacher training programs and why? Why do you think the selected soft skills could be important for the teaching profession?*



**Table 3***Soft Skills Categories and Frequencies*

<b>Soft Skills Categories</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Communication skills	16	26
Empathy	8	13
Motivation	6	10
Stress management	6	10
Organizational and planning skills	6	10
Creativity	6	10
Problem-solving skills	4	7
Presentation skills	3	5
Time management	3	5
Teamwork	1	2
Professional resilience	1	2
Total Frequency of Codes	60	100

Table 3 shows the categories of soft skills identified by prospective foreign language teachers that should be specifically included in teacher training programs, as well as their importance for the teaching profession. A total of 60 codes were identified.

Among the 11 soft skills, communication skills (F:16) were found to be the most important and should be included in teacher training programs. This was followed by empathy (F: 8), motivation (F:6), stress management (F:6), organizational and planning skills (F:6), and creativity (F:6).

Less frequently mentioned were problem-solving skills (F:4), presentation skills (F:3), time management (F:3), teamwork (F:1), and professional resilience (F:1).

Prospective foreign language teachers' selected opinions on the soft skills that should be specifically included in teacher training programs, as well as their importance for the teaching profession, are as follows:

#### Communication skills

S1: *“Effective communication with students is important for accurately conveying information, efficiently conducting lessons, and maintaining classroom control.”*

S3: *“Teaching is akin to life itself. In an environment with individuals, both communication and issues are inevitable. A teacher cannot be effective by merely delivering lectures.”*

S6: *“Strong communication skills in teachers lead to proficiency in other skills and facilitate problem-solving by establishing proper communication with students.”*

S18: *“A teacher who lacks the ability to communicate well will always face negative outcomes in practice, no matter how well-equipped they are theoretically.”*

#### Empathy

S10: *Empathy skills enable a teacher to establish an emotional connection with their students, helping them understand how to communicate effectively.*

S19: *Empathy skills are essential because a teacher must understand their students, and students must also understand their teacher.*

*S34: Empathy helps students see the teacher as a person they can turn to when they have questions, difficulties, or something on their mind.*

#### Motivation

*S2: Without motivation, this profession will no longer attract interest.*

*S11: Motivation is essential for any type of work.*

*S21: When a teacher is motivated, it reflects in the classroom and captures students' attention.*

#### Stress management

*S5: Stress management is important because many teacher candidates may not know how to cope with stress. Therefore, it should be included.*

*S7: Stress management plays a significant role in helping a teacher express themselves better during lessons.*

*S31: Stress management is relevant in the teaching profession as it involves dealing with a variety of challenges and must be managed well.*

#### Organizational and planning skills

*S28: Teachers who are well-organized will perform their job more comfortably.*

*S33: Good planning results in less stress for the teacher and less unrest among students.*

*S34: Organizational and planning skills are important to avoid losing oversight and to ensure that students feel well-supported by the teacher.*

#### Creativity

*S10: Creativity allows the teacher to engage students and deliver more effective instruction.*

*S20: Creativity is necessary to design various activities and applications to increase student interest and motivation in the lesson.*

#### Problem-solving skills

*S11: Problem-solving plays a significant role in classroom management as students take cues from it.*

*S33: Problem-solving skills are important because new challenges continually arise for which there is no pre-existing solution, requiring improvisation.*

#### Presentation skills

*S13: Presentation skills are very important because many high school and university lecturers rely solely on slides or reading from sources. This negatively impacts students' learning.*

*S29: Presentation skills should be included in teacher training programs because they make the subject matter both engaging and educational.*

#### Time management

S2: *Even experienced teachers struggle with time management. Insufficient time can lead to incomplete coverage of topics, resulting in students receiving either too much or too little information.*

S11: *Without time management, a teacher may not cover all the necessary topics, creating problems for both students and teachers.*

#### Professional resilience

S33: *Professional resilience is important because the job is becoming increasingly complex and our training is often inadequate.*

#### Teamwork

S22: *Teamwork is of great importance as it supports the teaching process.*

### **3.4. Analyses of the focus group sessions – Research Question 4**

*RQ4: Which events or courses in your training have been or are effective for the development of the soft skills you have chosen? Are there specific courses or elective events that have contributed or contribute to the development of these soft skills?*

The prospective foreign language teachers provided valuable insights regarding the effectiveness of specific courses and events in the development of soft skills within the context of the existing specific courses and events in the foreign language teaching program, which can be summarized under the following main headings.

#### Drama in Education Course

Many participants emphasized the Drama in Education course as highly beneficial for enhancing creativity and motivation. One participant stated, *“I can say that the Drama in Education course is very effective. It contributes to creativity and motivation, as well as problem-solving and communication skills.”* This course seems to engage students effectively, fostering an environment where they can explore and develop their interpersonal skills.

#### Verbal Communication Skills Course

The Verbal Communication Skills course was also frequently mentioned, with students noting its utility. One participant remarked, *“We had a Verbal Communication Skills course, which was useful, but I think it should have more hours.”* This indicates a desire for more comprehensive training in communication techniques, which are crucial for effective teaching.

#### Content Development Course

The Content Development course was recognized for teaching essential skills in time and stress management. A participant explained, *“I believe that the Content Development course teaches us how to handle time and stress management, make lessons more planned, and interactive.”* This highlights the course’s role in preparing future teachers for the multifaceted challenges of the classroom.

#### Field Courses

Field courses, were acknowledged for their contributions to presentation skills. One participant noted, *“The German language skills course contributed to my presentation skills and time management.”* illustrating the practical application of skills in real teaching scenarios.

### Career Planning Course

The Career Planning course was described as enjoyable and informative, with students referring to soft skills throughout. One participant mentioned, *“I took a course called Career Planning, where we constantly referred to soft skills. It was an enjoyable and informative course.”*

### Classroom Management Course

The Classroom Management course was identified as effective, with participants noting its relevance in developing skills necessary for maintaining a productive classroom environment. Despite the acknowledgment of several effective courses, some prospective teachers expressed concern about the lack of specific courses designed to develop these skills comprehensively. One participant candidly remarked, *“No, we have never had such courses,”* while another added that there are *“no courses that fully develop these skills.”* This reflects a clear demand among prospective foreign language teachers for more targeted training opportunities in soft skills.

In summary, while certain courses were highlighted as effective in fostering soft skills, the findings indicate a significant need for additional and more focused training in these areas, with a total of 25 participants mentioning relevant courses, 6 stating that such courses were not present, and 8 making no comments on the matter.

## 3.5. Analyses of the Focus Group Sessions – Research Question 5

*RQ 5: Looking at the soft skills listed, which do you think should be specifically taught to you through a separate course, seminar, event, etc.?*

**Table 4**

*Soft Skills - specifically taught through a separate course*

Soft Skills	Frequency	Ranking
Stress management	14	1
Communication skills	10	2
Empathy	7	3
Creativity	5	
Professional resilience	5	4
Problem-solving skills	4	
Time management	4	5
Organizational and planning skills	4	
Presentation skills	4	
Teamwork	1	6
Motivation	0	X

Table 4 indicates that prospective foreign language teachers ranked the skills in the following order: stress management (rank 1), communication skills (rank 2), and empathy (rank 3). The prospective foreign language teachers believe that these top-ranked skills should be specifically taught through separate courses, seminars, and events.

## 3.6. Analyses of the focus group sessions – Research Question 6

*RQ6: Would theoretical knowledge be sufficient for the development of the soft skills you have chosen? Or would you prefer these skills to be additionally taught through practical-oriented events or courses combined with theoretical knowledge? Which soft skills do you*

*believe can be effectively learned through theoretical education alone? For which skills would you specifically prefer practical-oriented or theory-combined events or seminars?*

**Table 5**

*Soft Skills - Practical-Oriented or Theoretical Courses*

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>Practical – Oriented (F)</b>	<b>Theoretical (F)</b>
Communication skills	15	0
Stress management	11	1
Presentation skills	10	2
Professional resilience	10	1
Creativity	10	0
Teamwork	9	0
Time management	9	4
Problem-solving skills	9	2
Empathy	8	4
Organizational and planning skills	7	3
Motivation	6	6

According to Table 5, for communication skills, 15 participants preferred practical-oriented instruction, with none choosing theoretical-only approaches. Stress management was favored in practical settings by 11 participants, with 1 indicating theoretical instruction alone would be adequate. Similarly, presentation skills were favored by 10 participants in practical-oriented formats, and 2 considered theoretical instruction sufficient. For professional resilience, 10 preferred practical instruction, while 1 favored a theoretical approach. Creativity was selected exclusively by 10 participants as best suited for practical-oriented courses.

Teamwork was another skill chosen by 9 participants for practical instruction, with no support for theory-only learning. For time management, 9 preferred practical instruction, while 4 felt theoretical instruction would be enough. In terms of problem-solving skills, 9 participants preferred practical formats, and 2 selected theoretical. Empathy was considered best developed through practical courses by 8 participants, with 4 favoring theoretical methods. Organizational and planning skills were chosen by 7 participants for practical formats, while 3 supported theoretical approaches. Finally, motivation received equal preference, with 6 participants each indicating a practical-oriented or theoretical approach. In summary, these findings suggest that future language teachers view most soft skills as being more effectively developed through practical-oriented courses and experiences rather than through theoretical instruction alone.

### **3.7. Analyses of the focus group sessions – Research Question 7**

*RQ7: Which of the soft skills in the list do you believe you possess as a teacher? Are there any soft skills on this list that you think you need to improve in order to be successful in your profession and life?*

**Table 6**

*Skills Prospective Foreign Language Teachers Possess vs. Skills Needing Improvement*

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>I Possess the Skills (F)</b>	<b>I Need to improve the Skills (F)</b>	<b>Ranking of Improvement Needed</b>
Stress management	6	15	1
Professional resilience	0	12	2
Creativity	6	10	3
Presentation skills	8	8	4
Teamwork	6	7	5
Organizational and planning skills	2	6	6
Communication skills	12	6	6
Problem-solving skills	6	5	7
Time management	7	4	8
Motivation	11	3	9
Empathy	16	2	10

Table 6 shows that prospective foreign language teachers identify the soft skills they most need to improve for success in their profession and personal life as follows: stress management (rank 1), professional resilience (rank 2), and creativity (rank 3).

### **3.8. Analyses of the focus group sessions – Research Question 8**

*RQ8: Have you personally made efforts to develop the soft skills you have chosen? If yes, what are those soft skills, and how have you developed them?*

**Table 7***Soft Skills - Efforts to develop – Ways to Develop*

<b>Efforts to develop (F)</b>	<b>Ways to Develop</b>
Communication skills (F:13)	Participation in school or extracurricular activities, part-time job, effort to participate more in daily life, meeting new people - small talks, reading development books.
Stress management (F:8)	Breathing exercises, researching stress-reducing methods, attending courses.
Empathy (F: 7)	Reading development books, trying to think like the other person, communicating with consideration for other person's feelings.
Creativity (F:6)	Developing interesting designs, trying new things, contribution of some courses, using brainstorming techniques, researching creative ideas.
Time management (F: 6)	Using a stopwatch, attending courses, using a calendar.
Presentation skills (F: 3)	Through observation, with prior preparation, timing.
Motivation (F: 4)	The idea of believing in and trusting oneself, reading development books, psychology courses.
Problem-solving skills (F: 4)	Listening to and understanding the problem, solution-oriented perspective, effort to participate more in daily life, self-experience.
Organizational and planning skills (F: 3)	With a planned life, reading development books, contribution of some courses, personal planning lists.
Teamwork (F:0)	-
Professional resilience (F: 0)	-
No effort to develop any skill (F: 6)	No effort at all, none, I don't know how.

In Table 7, responses show that prospective foreign language teachers most frequently seek to improve their communication skills (F:13), followed by stress management (F:8) and empathy (F:7). Additional efforts are directed towards enhancing creativity, time management, presentation skills, motivation, problem-solving skills, and organizational and planning skills. However, no efforts were reported for developing teamwork or professional resilience. Additionally, some teachers indicated that they had not made any efforts to improve any skills.

In terms of “ways to develop,” it is evident that prospective foreign language teachers are striving to improve through individual efforts, including part-time jobs, social interactions, specific courses, and self-development books.

To summarize the analysis and its findings, the ranking of soft skills based on the research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ5, RQ7, and RQ8) shows that four key soft skills stand out according to the views of prospective foreign language teachers. These top-ranked skills are communication skills, empathy, motivation, and stress management.

For research questions RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, communication skills, empathy, and motivation were consistently identified as the top three priorities. In RQ5, stress management ranked first, followed by communication skills and empathy. In RQ7, the focus shifted to stress management and professional resilience as the primary skills, with creativity ranked third. Finally, in RQ8, communication skills reappeared as the top skill, with stress management and empathy following closely.

This analysis highlights the emphasis placed on communication skills and empathy, which consistently appeared across multiple questions, along with a high prioritization of motivation and stress management in developing effective teaching practices.

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to foreign language teacher training that prioritizes interpersonal, emotional, and organizational competencies alongside technical skills. Key soft skills - including communication, empathy, motivation, and stress management - emerged as essential elements for effective teaching. Soft skills have the potential to deepen teachers' engagement with students, improve classroom dynamics, and support personal well-being. By implementing targeted training for these competencies, teacher training programs could bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, empowering future educators to meet the demands of their profession with confidence and resilience. This shift would mark a significant step forward in teacher preparation, equipping foreign language teachers not only with technical expertise but also with the adaptive skills needed for sustained success.

This research sheds light on the essential soft skills required for foreign language teachers, offering a framework for their integration into teacher training programs. Conducted with 39 prospective foreign language teachers specializing in German and English, the study provides in-depth insights into which soft skills these future educators consider crucial for professional effectiveness and personal growth.

A review of existing literature identified 11 essential soft skills for teachers: motivation, empathy, problem-solving abilities, stress management, presentation skills, organizational and planning skills, communication skills, teamwork, creativity, professional resilience, and time management.

The focus group sessions provided a comprehensive exploration of future educators' perceptions of soft skills and their importance. Communication consistently emerged as the highest priority across discussions, followed closely by empathy, motivation, and stress management. Among these, communication was consistently ranked as the most essential, seen as foundational for effective teaching. Prospective teachers emphasized its role in engaging students, managing classroom interactions, and fostering clear, empathetic communication. Empathy, deemed crucial for understanding and connecting with students, was ranked second across multiple questions. Participants valued empathy as a tool for engaging students and fostering a supportive, respectful classroom environment. Motivation was often cited as key to maintaining a positive and enthusiastic approach to teaching. Prospective teachers noted that motivation impacts their ability to inspire students and sustain personal resilience, especially under challenging circumstances. Given the high-pressure nature of teaching, stress management was recognized as vital for personal well-being and professional effectiveness,



with participants highlighting its importance for maintaining energy, composure, and patience in a demanding work environment.

Prospective teachers noted a significant lack of targeted soft skills training in current programs, with many expressing a strong desire for practical, experience-based learning opportunities. They conveyed a preference for practical over theoretical instruction, advocating for hands-on workshops, simulations, and scenario-based learning to better build these competencies. In support of this, Kniaz and Chukhno (2021) discuss a gap between trainee teachers' expectations and the attention given to soft skills development within teacher education programs. Their findings highlight that although many pre-service teachers rate their soft skills as intermediate or high, they report significant deficiencies in areas such as time management and emotional regulation—skills that are crucial for teachers and tend to decline throughout their training years. The study calls for greater focus on soft skills in teacher education curricula to meet the professional needs of future educators.

Participants identified certain courses, such as Drama in Education, Verbal Communication Skills, and Content Development, as beneficial for enhancing creativity, motivation, and time management. However, concerns were raised that these courses only briefly address soft skills without a comprehensive focus. Supporting the need for structured and effective soft skills education, Kolesnik et al. (2023) demonstrate through an experimental study that a combined embedded and standalone model can significantly improve future teachers' soft skills over a three-year period. Their findings confirm that targeted pedagogical strategies and active teacher engagement lead to measurable progress, highlighting the importance of holistic and systematic approaches to soft skills development in teacher education programs.

Integrating targeted soft skills modules on communication, empathy, motivation, and stress management as core components of the curriculum would provide prospective teachers with hands-on experience in key competencies. Incorporating experiential learning opportunities, such as real-life teaching simulations, role-play scenarios, and peer-led workshops, would allow teachers to practice and reflect on their skill development in a supportive environment. Additional resources, such as access to personal development books, mental health support, and stress management tools, could further support soft skill cultivation. Expanding effective existing courses to include more practical exercises and reflective discussions would enhance their impact, while interdisciplinary collaboration with fields such as psychology, organizational behavior, and communication studies could provide a well-rounded approach to skill-building.

Promoting these soft skills in foreign language teacher training can improve both the quality of training and the professional development of teachers. According to Li et al. (2022), positive teacher-student relationships can lead to better teaching outcomes. As highlighted by AlHouli & Al-Khayatt (2020), it is essential to identify the need for soft skills in teacher training programs. Additionally, the implementation of a soft skills curriculum, as suggested by Macqual et al. (2021) can positively influence success during teaching practice. Training programs should be developed and evaluated accordingly, following the recommendations of Charoensap-Kelly et al. (2016). Likewise, Ummatqul Qizi (2020) emphasizes that higher education should place a greater focus on the development of soft skills. Soft skills play a decisive role in the professional and personal development of foreign language teachers, making it essential to specifically promote these competencies in future teachers through suitable training opportunities.

Programs should embed soft skills as core components through workshops, simulations, and reflective tasks that allow pre-service teachers to actively develop and internalize these competencies. Furthermore, collaboration with disciplines such as psychology and

communication sciences could enrich teacher preparation and offer a holistic framework for professional and personal growth. Emphasizing soft skills in this way may improve classroom dynamics, increase teacher well-being, and foster stronger student - teacher relationships ultimately contributing to more resilient and adaptable educators.

This study was conducted with a limited sample of 39 prospective foreign language teachers enrolled in German and Turkish teacher education programs, specializing in English and German. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all teaching disciplines, cultural contexts, or educational systems. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research, while providing rich insights, relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or variation in interpretation. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies, larger and more diverse samples, and the inclusion of in-service teachers to explore how soft skills are developed and sustained over time in different institutional settings.

In conclusion, the study reaffirms that equipping prospective foreign language teachers with soft skills is not an optional enrichment, but a foundational necessity. Systematic integration of these competencies into teacher training programs - through experiential learning and interdisciplinary collaboration - will better prepare resilient, empathetic, and effective educators ready to meet the complex demands of modern classrooms.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

### Giriş

Öğretmen eğitiminde temel beceriler, yani alan bilgisi ve pedagojik bilgi, öğretmenlerin mesleki etkinliğini sağlamak için gerekli kabul edilmektedir. Bu beceriler; diplomalar, sertifikalar ya da yapılandırılmış eğitim programları ile ölçülebilir ve doğrulanabilir niteliktedir. Ancak, yalnızca bu temel becerilere sahip olmanın öğretmenlikte başarıyı garanti etmediğine dair bir farkındalık giderek artmaktadır. Destekleyici becerilerin eksikliği, profesyonel başarıyı sınırlandırabilir ve birçok alanda "başarının anahtarı" olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Öğretmen eğitim programlarına destekleyici beceri eğitimlerinin eklenmesi, öğretmenlerin kalite, yeterlilik ve motivasyonlarını olumlu yönde etkileyebilir.

Destekleyici beceriler; empati, iletişim, ekip çalışması, motivasyon ve zaman yönetimi gibi geniş bir yetkinlik yelpazesini kapsar. Her öğretim disiplini kendine özgü gereksinimlere sahiptir; bu nedenle, o alanda başarı için gerekli olan spesifik destekleyici becerilerin doğru bir şekilde belirlenmesi önemlidir. Yabancı dil öğretmenleri, çeşitli yaş grupları, dil seviyeleri ve kültürel arka plana sahip öğrenci gruplarıyla çalıştıklarından, diğer branşlardaki öğretmenlere göre daha çeşitli destekleyici becerilere ihtiyaç duyarlar. Destekleyici beceriler, öğretmenlerin öğrencileriyle daha etkili ve empatik bir iletişim kurmalarına olanak tanır ve böylece hem öğretim hem de öğrenme süreci gelişir. Bu becerilerin güçlendirilmesi, öğretmenlerin performansını iyileştirirken öğrencilerin eğitimden daha fazla faydalanmasına katkıda bulunabilir.

### Yöntem

Öncelikle, öğretmenlik mesleğinde destekleyici becerilerin mevcut durumu üzerine, araştırma literatüründe ele alınan kapsamlı bir inceleme yapılmıştır. Bu incelemeye dayanarak, öğretmenler için ilgili destekleyici becerilerin belirlenmesi amacıyla ayrıntılı bir doküman analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Literatür taraması sonucunda, eğitim ve öğretmenlik alanı için 11 temel destekleyici beceri belirlenmiştir: iletişim becerileri, empati, problem çözme, zaman yönetimi, stres yönetimi, mesleki dayanıklılık, sunum becerileri, ekip çalışması, organizasyon ve planlama becerileri, motivasyon ve yaratıcılık olarak sıralanmaktadır.

Bir sonraki adımda, bu beceriler Almanya ve Türkiye'deki yabancı dil öğretmenliği eğitim programlarındaki 39 yabancı dil öğretmen adayına görüşleri için sunulmuş ve yabancı dil öğretmenleri için en temel destekleyici beceriler saptanmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu amaç için öğretmen adaylarıyla Haziran 2024 boyunca odak grup oturumları planlanmıştır. Odak grup oturumlarında, yabancı dil öğretmenliği alanı için destekleyici becerilere yönelik sekiz soru yöneltilmiş ve oturumlar, çalışmaya farklı bakış açıları ile kültürel bağlamın dahil edilmesine

olanak tanımıştır. Yabancı dil öğretmen adayları ile gerçekleştirilen odak grup oturumlarının ses kayıtları, nitel analiz programı kullanılarak yazıya dökülmüş ve gerekli çeviriler yapılmıştır. Sonrasında, ses verileri nitel içerik analizi ilkelerine göre incelenmiş ve veriler, kodlama sistemiyle düzenlenerek kategorilere ayrılmıştır.

### **Sonuç**

Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, yabancı dil öğretmen adayları için öncelikli destekleyici beceri olarak iletişim becerisi öne çıkarken, onu empati, motivasyon ve stres yönetimi becerileri takip etmiştir. İletişim becerisi, öğrencilerle etkili etkileşim kurmak, sınıf içi dinamikleri yönetmek ve empatik bir iletişim sağlamak açısından temel bir yetkinlik olarak tanımlanmış ve en önemli beceri olarak vurgulanmıştır. Empati, öğrencileri anlamak ve onlarla güçlü bir bağ kurmak için gerekli görülmüş; aynı zamanda destekleyici ve saygılı bir sınıf ortamı oluşturmak açısından kritik bir unsur olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Motivasyon ise öğretmenlerin pozitif bir tutum sergileyerek öğretme isteğini korumaları açısından önemli bulunmuştur. Katılımcılar, motivasyonun öğrencilere ilham verme ve zorlayıcı durumlarda kişisel dayanıklılığı sürdürme konusunda faydalı olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Stres yönetimi ise öğretmenlik mesleğinin yoğun baskılı yapısı göz önüne alındığında, kişisel iyi oluş ve profesyonel etkinlik açısından kritik bir beceri olarak tanımlanmıştır.

Katılımcılar, mevcut programlarda hedeflenen bir destekleyici beceri eğitiminin eksikliğinden şikayet etmiş ve teorik anlatımlardan ziyade uygulamalı, deneyimsel öğrenme fırsatlarını tercih ettiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Bu becerilerin etkili bir şekilde geliştirilmesi için atölye çalışmaları, simülasyonlar ve senaryo tabanlı alıştırmalar gibi yöntemlerin daha yararlı olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Eğitimde Drama, Sözlü İletişim Becerileri ve İçerik Geliştirme gibi dersler, yaratıcılık, motivasyon ve zaman yönetimini destekleyici olarak ifade edilmiştir. Ancak katılımcılar, bu derslerin çoğunlukla destekleyici becerilere odaklanmak yerine yüzeysel bir şekilde ele alındığını ifade etmiştir.

Yabancı dil öğretmenlerini destekleyici becerilerle donatmak için, müfredata iletişim, empati, motivasyon ve stres yönetimi gibi becerileri hedefleyen modüllerin eklenmesi önerilmektedir. Gerçek yaşamda öğretim simülasyonları, rol yapma senaryoları ve adaylar arası atölye çalışmaları gibi pratik öğrenme deneyimleri, öğretmen adaylarının bu becerileri destekleyici bir ortamda uygulamaları açısından faydalı olabilir. Ayrıca, kişisel gelişim kitapları, ruh sağlığı desteği ve stres yönetimi araçları gibi kaynakların sunulması, destekleyici becerilerin geliştirilmesine katkı sağlayabilir. Mevcut derslerin daha fazla uygulamalı egzersiz ve yansıtıcı tartışmalarla desteklenmesi, derslerin etkisini artırabileceği gibi; psikoloji, örgütsel davranış ve iletişim çalışmaları gibi disiplinlerle iş birliği yapılması, beceri geliştirme sürecine daha kapsamlı bir yaklaşım sunabilir.

Bu araştırma, yabancı dil öğretmen eğitiminde sadece teknik bilgiye değil, aynı zamanda kişiler arası, duygusal ve organizasyonel yetkinliklere de önem veren bütüncül bir yaklaşımın gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Öğretmen yetiştirme programlarında önerilen değişikliklerin hayata geçirilmesi, yeni öğretmenleri yalnızca akademik bilgiyle değil, aynı zamanda mesleğin gereksinimlerine uygun kişiler arası, duygusal ve uyarlanabilir becerilerle donatarak daha dengeli bir eğitim programına ulaşılmasına katkı sağlayabilir. Bu yaklaşım, öğretmen hazırlık sürecinde önemli bir gelişme olarak kabul edilmekte olup, yabancı dil öğretmenlerini uzun vadeli başarı için gerekli teknik uzmanlık ve uyum sağlama becerileriyle donatmaktadır.