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Should English Language Teaching Undergraduate Programs in Turkey be Restructured? Views of Pre-Service English Language Teachers

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Abstract

English language teachers in Turkey are officially entitled to teach at any level (from kindergarten to university) and any age group; however, it has been repeatedly argued that teaching English to young learners is different from teaching English to teenagers and/or adults as they require diverse skills, competences, qualifications and expertise (Bland, 2019; Enever, 2014; Gungor, 2020; Linse, 2005; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Rich, 2019). Moving from this line of reasoning, this study, first of all, aims to investigate whether ELT undergraduate programs in Turkey need to be restructured from the perspectives of pre-service English language teachers. Closely related to this aim, this study also intends to identify the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares pre-service English language teachers (PSTs) for the different school levels they are to work at. With these two complementary aims in mind, this study has employed a qualitative research paradigm. 192 senior pre-service English language teachers who take practicum courses and study at the English Language Teaching (ELT) programs of 14 different state and private universities in Turkey have participated in this study. The data for the study has been collected via an online survey form and a focus group interview. The findings show that ELT undergraduate programs prepare PSTs satisfactorily to work at primary and secondary level schools from the perspectives of PSTs. However, PSTs believe that their undergraduate program cannot prepare them as satisfactorily to work at pre-primary school, high school and university levels. Furthermore, almost half of the PSTs agree that ELT undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be restructured as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults'.

Introduction

Teachers, arguably, play the pivotal role throughout the whole process of education (Abazaoğlu et al., 2016; Aslan, 2003; Enever, 2014; Karahan, 2008; Kavcar, 2002; Uysal, 2020b; Üstüner, 2004; Yıldız, 2015) and faculties of education hold the main responsibility for the training of teachers for about four decades in Turkey. Throughout this period, Higher Education Council (HEC) implemented many reforms with the aim of improving the quality of teacher training practices and solving the problems that are encountered. As an example, HEC organized the *Pre-service Teacher Training Project* in cooperation with the World Bank between 1994 and 1998;

and consequently, faculties of education were restructured in order to keep up with the requirements of the age and fix the weaknesses of the previous program (Abazaoğlu et al., 2016; HEC, 1998a; Üstüner, 2004). To be more precise, while some programs were terminated or united, some others were established so that consistency between the school structure in the national education system and structure of teacher training programs could be achieved (Abazaoğlu et al., 2016; Aslan, 2003; Aydın, 1998; HEC, 1998a; Kızılcıoğlu, 2006). As a consequence, teachers of subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography and history were required to complete MA programs designed for them to be eligible for working at high schools whereas teachers of many other subjects including English, Turkish language, social studies, science and music were not required to hold a postgraduate degree (HEC, 1998a; 1998b; 2018). This implies that while teachers of some subjects are entitled to teach at only one level of school (primary, secondary or high school), teachers of some other subjects such as English can teach at any level, which has been harshly criticized by many researchers (Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008).

An overview of English language teacher training practices in Europe may be useful at this point. The duration of teacher training programs range between 3 to 5 years in most European countries (Enever, 2014), and local and national circumstances influence the structure and design of these programs. Lisbon Agreement signed at the turn of the century is regarded as a milestone since greater policy convergence has been witnessed especially thanks to publications such as the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages and the European Profiling Grid (Enever, 2014; Ries et al., 2016; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008). Turkey has struggled hard to keep pace with the latest global trends in foreign language teacher training; however, its success is generally judged to be limited (Altmisdort, 2016; Erdoğan & Savaş, 2022; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). When we examine English language teacher training programs in Turkey, we see that the training lasts for 4 years and the centralized curriculum prescribed by the HEC is to be followed by all the programs across the country. The curriculum consists of courses in three categories; namely, *content knowledge* courses (48% of the whole curriculum), *pedagogical knowledge* courses (34% of the whole curriculum) and *general culture* courses (18% of the whole curriculum). Pre-service English language teachers are required to successfully complete their practicum they take for two semesters in their final year. Upon graduation, they are entitled to teach at any level (from kindergarten to university) and any age group, which is considered as problematic by many researchers because teaching English to young learners requires different skills, competences and qualifications than teaching English to teenagers and/or adults (Bland, 2019; Enever, 2014; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008).

It has commonly been assumed that *younger equals better* in terms of second and/or foreign language learning (Cameron, 2001; Lenneberg, 1967; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2019); therefore, early introduction of second and/or foreign language instruction has gained momentum across the globe in the last three decades across the globe (Haznedar, 2020; Kirkgoz, 2020; Rich, 2014; 2019; Shin, 2006; Uysal, 2020a). Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) did not remain indifferent to this trend and a major breakthrough in foreign language education was witnessed in 1997, when Turkish MoNE introduced English in the primary school curriculum of 4th grade (Kirkgoz, 2020). In accordance with this reform, '*Teaching English to Young Learners*' course was offered to pre-service English language teachers in order to equip them with the necessary skills and competences to teach

young learners (Gungor, 2020). 15 years later, in March 2012, a further structural reform in its English language teaching policies was executed by the MoNE; the length of primary, secondary and high schools were arranged as 4 years each and English lessons started to be offered at grade 2 (Erdoğan & Savaş, 2022; Gungor, 2020; Kirkgoz, 2020; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Sözen & Çabuk, 2013).

It should not go without saying that the term *young learners* is employed as an umbrella term because children under 7 are labeled as *very young learners* and children between 7 and 12 are regarded as *young learners* (Ghosn, 2019; Rich, 2014; Shin, 2000; 2006). It should be noted at this point that teaching English to a 5-year-old child is completely different from teaching English to a 10-year-old child since they are at different stages in terms of their physical, cognitive and social development (Gungor, 2020) and while the latter has basic literacy skills in his/her L1 (native language), the former lacks them. Therefore, contrary to common misconception, teaching English to (very) young learners is a challenging undertaking which demands expertise and age-appropriate methodology (Bland, 2019; Linse, 2005).

Benefits of an early start to foreign language learning include increased length of exposure and learning time, higher fluency, motivation, creativity and (inter-)cultural awareness, better pronunciation and less anxiety (Linse, 2005; Rich, 2014; Uysal, 2020a). Young learners' developing a positive attitude to language learning is regarded as the most persuasive argument for an early start (Copland, 2020; Rich, 2014). Despite such benefits, it has widely been reported that there is a global scarcity of qualified teachers of English to young learners who can employ age-appropriate methodology in line with the specific needs of young language learners due to insufficient planning, teacher training and infrastructure, which may result in children's developing negative attitudes towards foreign language learning (Copland, 2020; Copland et al., 2014; Enever & Moon, 2009; Gaynor, 2014; Nikolov & Djigunovic, 2011; Rich, 2014; Uysal, 2020a; 2020b). In support of this argument, Kırkgöz and Yaşar (2014) conducted their study in Turkish context with teachers of English to young learners and reported that teachers did not perceive themselves ready to teach young learners due to certain challenges.

These challenges are related to every stage of the design, delivery and evaluation of instruction and teachers of young learners should pay close attention to psychological, cognitive, social, emotional and moral characteristics of children (Cameron, 2001; Johnstone, 2019; Linse, 2005; Mirici, 1999; Rich, 2014; 2019; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2019). More precisely, as young learners tend to have shorter attention spans and feel much more energetic, activities should involve movement and supported with visuals and realia that offer visual, auditory and tactile input (Linse, 2005). It has even been suggested by Shin (2006) that young learners can be involved in the process of designing visuals and materials so that their level of engagement will be boosted. Shin and Crandall (2014) note that young learners are generally energetic, spontaneous (not afraid to participate), curious, imaginative, egocentric, social and welcoming to new ideas; thus, teachers of English to young learners need to be aware of these factors and instruction targeting them needs to take them into consideration (Linse, 2005). In a similar vein, the characteristics of young learners need to be kept in mind throughout the processes of design and selection of instructional materials (Ghosn, 2019), provision of feedback and assessment of their progress and performance (Cameron, 2001; Linse, 2005; Papp, 2019). It has also been suggested that young learners' developmental characteristics should be recognized and appreciated by teachers of young learners in order to be

able to manage the classroom effectively and create a welcoming and positive classroom climate (Linse, 2005; Nguyen, 2017; Shin, 2000; Yıldız, 2015; Zein, 2019). Furthermore, the duration of activities should be fixed with a specific view to young learners' attention spans and transitions between activities need to be as smooth as possible. Teachers of young learners should also choose familiar and interesting themes/topics that are supported with concrete vocabulary items considering their cognitive developmental levels (Tavil & Soylemez, 2020). In addition, fun should be a fundamental part of classrooms and songs, poems, stories, visuals, games and physical movement should be incorporated as much as possible (Linse, 2005; Shin, 2000). Use of L1 is another concern with young learners and a judicious use of L1, especially when the teacher assumes it will be more efficient and save time, can be desirable and acceptable (Linse, 2005). Even the skill of asking effective questions to young learners and waiting for a sufficient amount of time require expertise (Linse, 2005; Salaviva, 2020). It should be kept in mind that while adult learners are more autonomous and independent, young learners need more guidance and support on how to learn (Tavil & Soylemez, 2020).

Regarding the above-mentioned differences between teaching English to young learners and teenagers/adults, it has been hypothesized by the researcher that pre-service English language teachers (PSTs) may not welcome the idea of having to teach at different school levels and different age groups. Thus, the present study aims to answer the following two research questions:

- a) To what extent do English Language Teaching undergraduate programs, from the perspectives of pre-service English language teachers, prepare them for teaching at different school levels?
- b) Should English Language Teaching undergraduate programs be reformed as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults'?

Methodology

This study has been conducted with two complementary aims in mind: a) to identify the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares pre-service English language teachers for the different school levels they are to work at, and b) to reveal whether pre-service English language teachers think that English Language Teaching undergraduate programs should be restructured as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults' by employing a qualitative research design. Qualitative research paradigm has been adopted within the study since it enables researchers to obtain a rich description of how individuals create their world and how they interpret their experiences in this world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Silverman, 2016). In this respect, specific details concerning the study group, data collection tools and data analysis procedures are provided within this section.

Study Group

The focal point of the study is to reveal whether pre-service English language teachers think that English Language Teaching undergraduate programs should be restructured as 'ELT for young learners' and 'ELT for teenagers/adults' by determining the views of pre-service English language teachers as to the efficiency of their undergraduate education in terms of preparing them to work at different levels of schools. In line with this, the maximum diversity sampling method, one of the qualitative sampling methods, was adopted in this study. In

compliance with the aim of the study, working with a study group that would reveal wide-ranging situations and significant common patterns in order for the researcher(s) to discern the differences (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2005) was regarded as crucial. The study group for the online survey, therefore, comprises of a total of 192 senior (4th grade) PSTs who take practicum courses and study at the English Language Teaching (ELT) programs of 14 different state and private universities in Turkey.

Table 1. Demographics of the Study Group for the Online Survey

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	128	66.7
	Male	64	33.3
Type of University	State	175	91.1
	Private	17	8.9
Practicum School Level	Primary	7	3.7
	Secondary	121	63
	High School	64	33.3

Table 1 demonstrates that 128 female and 64 male PSTs have participated in the study and 175 of them study at state universities whereas 17 of them study at private universities in Turkey. In accordance with the current curriculum of ELT programs, PSTs have to take practicum courses for two semesters in their final year. Table 1 indicates that 7 PSTs do their practicum at primary level schools, 121 PSTs do their practicum at secondary level schools and 64 PSTs do their practicum at high schools. At the second stage of the study, a focus group interview was organized in order to reveal the in-depth understanding of the participants as well as their reasons behind their perceptions. Convenience sampling technique (Dörnyei, 2007; Nunan, 1992) was employed for the selection of the study group because only those PSTs who volunteered to participate were included in the focus group interview. Accordingly, 13 PSTs in total took part in the interview and 2 of them studied at a private university while the remaining 11 studied at state universities. As for the levels of their practicum schools; 1 PST did his/her practicum at primary school, 9 PSTs did their practicum at secondary schools, and 3 PSTs did their practicum at high schools. Thus, it would be safe to claim that an even distribution of participants has been achieved for the focus group interview stage.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection process for the study has been completed in two successive stages and two independent but complementary tools have been designed for the collection of the data. The first data collection tool is an online survey form consisting of 5-point Likert-type and open-ended items. The second one, on the other hand, is the interview form to be utilized throughout the focus group interview. The interview form was designed after the online survey was administered and analyzed since the researcher aimed to construe the reasons underlying the stated views of the participants. Figure 1 outlines the steps followed in the design of the online survey form (Büyükoztürk, 2005).

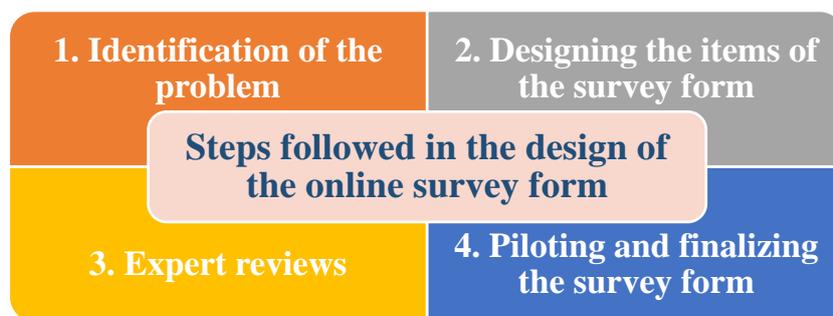


Figure 1. Steps Followed in the Design of the Online Survey Form

1. Identification of the Problem

The problem addressed within the study has its roots in the theoretical component meetings of the practicum courses that the participants are taking. To be more precise, PSTs doing their practicum at different levels of schools often voiced the challenges they have encountered and stated that they would prefer to work at a secondary level or high school rather than a primary level school or vice versa. These exchanges of ideas and experiences triggered this present study. Thus, this study aims to reveal whether pre-service English language teachers think that English Language Teaching undergraduate programs should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’ by determining the views of pre-service English language teachers as to the efficiency of their undergraduate education in terms of preparing them to work at different levels of schools. In this respect, the data collection tool (online survey form) needed to be designed in such a way as to provide the answer to this question. Consequently, the researcher tried to prepare items to ascertain the views of PSTs as to the relationship and correlation between their undergraduate training and their perceived preparedness and readiness for teaching at different school levels.

2. Designing the Items of the Survey Form

Prior to designing the items of the survey form, the researcher scanned the relevant literature in line with the focus of the study; however, though the problem was mentioned in several previous studies (Bland, 2019; Enever, 2014; Kic-Drgas & Comoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008) and reconstruction of ELT programs was offered as a solution for the problems experienced (Kızılcıoğlu, 2006; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Rich, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008), the researcher did not encounter any studies that directly addressed the problem. As a result, the researcher decided to design a survey form that involves 5-point Likert-type items and open-ended questions to encourage the participants to respond wholeheartedly so that an in-depth and detailed understanding and views of the participants could be obtained. A total of twelve items were included in the online survey form and the first three items aimed to collect data as to the genders, university types, and practicum school levels of the participants. The fourth item was designed in order to identify the school levels PSTs would prefer to do their practicum at and reasons underlying their specified preferences. As has been mentioned above, PSTs are required to take practicum courses for two semesters in their final year. Accordingly, the fifth item questions whether the PSTs would prefer to do their practicum at different levels of schools in the first and second semester. In addition, the PSTs are requested to give the reasons as to their preferences. The sixth item was designed in a five-point Likert-type format

(1: very unsatisfactory; 2: unsatisfactory; 3: average; 4: satisfactory; 5: very satisfactory) and aimed to identify the perceptions of the PSTs as to the extent to which their undergraduate training prepared them for the school levels they are to work at. In addition, the participants were encouraged to explain the reasons behind their specific ratings and perceptions through an open-ended question. In the seventh item, the names of the courses offered by English language teaching undergraduate programs were provided as a reminder and the PSTs were invited to write the names of the courses that they perceive to be important and relevant to be able to teach at each school level. The eighth item was also designed in a five-point Likert-type format and asked the PSTs about their perceived self-efficacy and readiness to teach at different school levels. The participants were again encouraged to explain the reasons behind their specific ratings and perceptions through an open-ended question. In the ninth item, the PSTs were requested to state their preferences as to the school level they would like to work at when they graduate from the ELT departments by basing their preferences on reasons with the help of an open-ended item. In the tenth item, the PSTs were requested to agree or disagree with the statement “English Language Teaching undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be restructured as ‘ELT for Young Learners’ and ‘ELT for Teenagers & Adults’” by supporting their responses with reasons. In connection with the tenth item, the eleventh item asked the PSTs to state which undergraduate program they would prefer if ELT undergraduate programs were restructured by giving their reasons for their preferences. Finally, in the twelfth item, the PSTs who volunteered for focus group interview were asked to provide their contact details. Thus, the second stage of the study; namely, the focus group interview was conducted with the PSTs who volunteered in the first stage.

3. Expert Reviews

The online survey form designed in the native languages of the participants (Turkish) by the researcher was sent to three experts who majored in the fields of English language education, Turkish language education and measurement and evaluation, respectively. The researcher aimed to ensure that the data collection tool served the aim of the study in a valid and reliable fashion and caused no misunderstandings. Suggested revisions were implemented and the final form of the data collection tool was approved by the three experts before moving on to the final stage.

4. Piloting and Finalizing the Survey Form

At the piloting stage, the final version of the online survey form was administered to 5 PSTs doing their practicum at 3 (primary, secondary and high school) different levels of schools. As they stated that they did not experience any difficulties understanding and responding to the items, the researcher did not apply any revisions on the online survey form. It would be safe to argue that, as a consequence of the steps taken, a reliable and valid data collection tool has been achieved (Mertens, 1998; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1984).

The focus group interview form functioned as the second data collection tool within the study. The researcher aimed to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the data collected through the online survey form with specific reference to PSTs’ line of thinking and reasons underlying their views via the focus group interview. With this aim in mind, the following questions were developed for the focus group interview:

- Do you perceive yourself equally sufficient for teaching at different school levels? Why (not)?
- Do you think that your undergraduate program prepares you sufficiently for teaching at different school levels? Why (not)?
- Do you agree that English Language Teaching undergraduate programs should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’? Why (not)?

Data Analysis

Two sets of data have been collected via data collection tools employed within the study. To start with, the online survey form yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. For the analysis of quantitative data, means and standard deviations have been computed and presented in tables. For the qualitative data collected through the online survey form and the focus group interview, the technique of content analysis in accordance with qualitative methodology has been employed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yin, 1984). As the first step of the qualitative data analysis, the responses provided by the PSTs who participated in the first and second stages of the study were combined in a single document. The names of the participants were not requested for the purpose of confidentiality; therefore, their responses were tagged (such as *PST1* for the first pre-service teacher) and potential concepts and themes were coded.

The coding process was implemented in some cases on the basis of words and in some other cases on the basis of sentences with a specific view to the emerging concepts and themes. Consequently, a preliminary list of codes was obtained after re-codings and reductions were implemented (Merriam, 2001). The researcher was assisted by another expert (who did not participate in the research) in the process of generating the code lists. Thus, two separate and independent code lists, which were compared in terms of similarities and differences, were produced. The differences in the code lists were reviewed and, when needed, a third expert’s opinion was requested in order to accurately interpret the responses. The responses of the study group were reviewed and reconsidered in line with the final list of codes, and after it was concluded that the obtained codes fully represented the responses, the frequencies were ascertained.

The process of content analysis was concluded by classifying the codes in the final code list, which was assumed to represent the data, and grouping them under certain categories (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher benefitted from two techniques in order to ensure a high level of reliability throughout the content analysis process. First of all, as has been aforementioned, the data collected in the study were coded independently by two experts (the researcher and his colleague) and the two separate code lists created by the two experts were compared and finalized by re-evaluating the conflicting interpretations between the researchers. The reliability of this procedure was computed using the formula “ $(\text{Agreement}) / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100$ ” offered by Miles and Huberman (1994). The inter-rater reliability level between the coders was found to be 88% in the first round, and 100% in the second round. Secondly, the list encompassing categories and codes, which was formed after the two separate analyses were compared and revised, was examined by a third expert, who also did not participate in the research, in order to verify the process via the triangulation method (Denzin, 1978).

Findings

The aim of this study is to identify the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares pre-service English language teachers for the school levels they are to work at and six items in the online survey form (items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) serve for this aim. In close connection with this, the study also intends to address the question whether ELT undergraduate programs need to be restructured and final two items in the online survey form (items 10 and 11) focus on this aim. In accordance with this, the findings gathered as a result of analyses of the online survey form and focus group interview are presented collectively under the titles of each related research question.

To what extent do ELT undergraduate programs, from the perspectives of pre-service English language teachers, prepare them for teaching at different school levels?

In response to the first research question, the PSTs were requested to indicate their perceptions as to the extent to which their undergraduate education prepared them for the different school levels they are to work at by rating a five-point Likert-type item (1: very unsatisfactory; 5: very satisfactory) and descriptive statistics for the findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceived Efficiency of ELT Undergraduate Programs in Preparing PSTs for Different School Levels

School Levels	Mean	Score Category Breakdown*	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Pre-primary	3.36	average	1.02	1	5
Primary	4.06	satisfactory	1.21	1	5
Secondary	3.98	satisfactory	1.01	1	5
High School	3.21	average	1.11	1	5
University	2.57	unsatisfactory	1.24	1	5

* Score category breakdown has been computed as: 1.00-1.80: very unsatisfactory; 1.81-2.60: unsatisfactory; 2.61-3.40: average; 3.41-4.20: satisfactory; 4.21-5.00: very satisfactory.

As can be inferred from Table 2, PSTs believed that their undergraduate training prepared them most satisfactorily for primary school level ($M=4.06$) and least satisfactorily for university level ($M=2.57$). To be more precise, PSTs judged that their undergraduate training prepared them unsatisfactorily for university level, averagely for pre-primary and high school levels and satisfactorily for primary and secondary levels. The related qualitative data also show that ELT undergraduate programs do not prepare PSTs to teach effectively at pre-primary level students from the perspectives of the PSTs since very young learners do not have the literacy skills in their L1. The PSTs explicitly state that they do not know how to teach to learners who lack basic literacy skills. In a similar vein, some of the PSTs have stated that as the ELT undergraduate programs do not offer any courses that focus on *teaching English to adults* and they mostly target at A1/A2 level students in the microteachings they conduct, they are concerned about the level of their content knowledge to teach at tertiary level.

In connection with this, the fourth item of the online survey asked PSTs to state the school levels they would prefer to do their practicum at and reasons underlying their specified preferences. In response to this question, it

has been observed that a great majority of PSTs preferred to do their practicum at secondary level (N= 81) or primary level (N=54) schools. While a quarter of the PSTs preferred to do their practicum at high schools (N=47), a small number of PSTs favored pre-primary (N=5) or university (N=5) levels. In support of this, qualitative data reveals that some of the PSTs believe they lack the experience and perceived competence (in terms of content knowledge and classroom management skills) to teach at low (pre-primary) or high (university and high school) levels. In addition, some of the PSTs mentioned that they may build a good rapport with primary and/or secondary level students while some others claimed that their personality fits much better with high school and/or university level students; thus, they would prefer to teach at these levels. As a final note, many of the PSTs deemed that their undergraduate department prepares them most satisfactorily for teaching at secondary level; as a result, they would prefer to do their practicum at this level.

The fifth item of the online survey form asked PSTs whether they would prefer to do their practicum at different levels of schools in the first and the second semester by basing their responses on reasons. The findings clearly show that less than a quarter of the PSTs (N=40) preferred to do their practicum at the same level of school throughout two semesters since they were happy with the current level of school they were doing their practicum at. It implies that they did not wish to take risks by leaving their comfort zone. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of PSTs (N=152) stated that they would prefer to do their practicum at different levels of schools in the first and the second semester. Many of them stated that this would enable them to gain experience in teaching at different levels and help them improve their repertoire of material design and use, didactic and classroom management skills and assessment literacy. Furthermore, some of the PSTs thought that gaining experience in different levels would make them more aware of the advantages and disadvantages of different levels of schools so that they could select the level of schools they are to work at in a more informed manner before they are recruited by the MoNE.

The eighth item of the online survey form was also designed in a five-point Likert-type format and asked the PSTs about their perceived self-efficacy and readiness to teach at different school levels and descriptive statistics for the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. PSTs' Perceived Self-efficacy and Readiness to Teach at Different School Levels.

School Levels	Mean	Score Category Breakdown	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Pre-primary	2.90	average	1.12	1	5
Primary	3.89	satisfactory	1.23	1	5
Secondary	3.93	satisfactory	1.11	1	5
High School	3.33	average	1.05	1	5
University	2.44	unsatisfactory	1.28	1	5

Table 3 indicates that PSTs perceive themselves satisfactorily efficacious and ready to teach at secondary (M=3.93) and primary (M=3.89) level schools. On the other hand, they feel that they are averagely efficacious and ready to teach at pre-primary (M=2.90) and high school (M=3.33) levels. Nevertheless, they do not believe that they are satisfactorily efficacious and ready to teach at university (M=2.44) level. As for the reasons for these

tendencies, PSTs mostly blame their lack of educational background, experience, linguistic proficiency level and content knowledge for their perceived low level of efficacy and readiness to teach particularly at tertiary level. The findings of the ninth item in the online survey form, in which PSTs were requested to state their preferences as to the school level they would like to work at when they graduate from the ELT departments by basing their preferences on reasons with the help of an open-ended item, corroborate these findings in that a great majority of the PSTs would like to work at primary level (N=69), secondary level (N=68), or high schools (N=43). On the other hand, only a small minority of the PSTs preferred to work at pre-primary level schools (N=6) or at university (N=6) when they graduated from their ELT departments. The qualitative data demonstrates that PSTs believe the profile and characteristics of very high (university) or very low (pre-primary) level learners do not match with their own personalities and they will experience problems in communicating effectively and building good rapport with very young and/or adult learners. Furthermore, PSTs worry that they may encounter difficulties in classroom management and they do not feel competent enough to teach learners at pre-primary and university levels.

In the seventh item of the online survey form, the names of the courses offered by English language teaching undergraduate programs were provided as a reminder and the PSTs were requested to write the names of the courses that they perceive to be important and relevant to be able to teach at each school level and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Courses Perceived as Relevant and Important for Different School Levels.

	Course	f	%
Pre-primary level	Drama	145	75.5
	Teaching English to Young Learners	143	74.4
	Material Design	135	70.3
	Language Acquisition	114	59.3
	Teaching of English Language Skills	101	52.6
Primary level	Teaching English to Young Learners	157	81.7
	Drama	153	79.6
	Teaching of English Language Skills	135	70.3
	Practicum	126	65.6
	Classroom Management	121	63
	Material Design	115	59.8
	Approaches in Foreign Language Teaching	101	52.6
Secondary level	Practicum	158	82.2
	Teaching of English Language Skills	145	75.5
	Material Design	136	70.8
	Approaches in Foreign Language Teaching	121	63
	Drama	109	56.7
	Classroom Management	103	53.6
High school	Instructional Technologies	100	52
	Practicum	148	77

	Course	f	%
Pre-primary level	Drama	145	75.5
	Teaching English to Young Learners	143	74.4
	Material Design	135	70.3
	Language Acquisition	114	59.3
	Teaching of English Language Skills	101	52.6
	Teaching of English Language Skills	145	75.5
	Classroom Management	136	70.8
	Material Design	131	68.2
	Literature and Language Teaching	124	64.5
	Instructional Technologies	120	62.5
University	Approaches in Foreign Language Teaching	114	59.3
	Testing and Assessment	103	53.6
	Teaching of English Language Skills	124	64.5
	Approaches in Foreign Language Teaching	119	61.9
	Literature and Language Teaching	113	58.8
	Research Skills	110	57.2
	Instructional Technologies	108	56.2
	Material Design	106	55.2
	Classroom Management	103	53.6
	Linguistics	100	52

As can be seen in Table 4, courses that have practical components such as microteaching or that are closely related to conducting a lesson such as material design or classroom management are mostly perceived to be important and relevant to be able to teach at each school level by the PSTs. In addition, a comparison between and among the levels demonstrate that *drama* and *teaching English to young learners* courses are regarded as more relevant for teaching at pre-primary and primary level schools. As the level of the school increases, such courses as *literature and language teaching*, *linguistics*, and *research skills* gain in more importance.

Should ELT undergraduate programs be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’?

PSTs were requested to agree or disagree with the statement “ELT undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’” by basing their responses on reasons in order to address the second research question. The analysis of findings show that a slight majority of the PSTs (52%; N=100) disagreed with the statement whereas the remaining PSTs (48%; N=92) believed that ELT undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’. Those PSTs who advocate that there is no need for such a reconstruction maintain that the quality of training offered by their undergraduate programs is satisfactory enough to prepare them to teach at different levels. However, as can be inferred from the figures presented in Table 2 and the

qualitative data, PSTs seem to contradict themselves since they assumed that their undergraduate training prepared them unsatisfactorily for university level, averagely for pre-primary and high school levels and satisfactorily only for primary and secondary levels. They also stated that, rather than reconstruction, the curriculum of the program needed to be updated with a specific view to practice opportunities. Furthermore, they admitted that if the ELT program was divided into two and they chose one of them, but they wanted to change their minds, it would not be possible for them to move between two programs; thus, they disagreed with this statement. They view the current situation as offering flexibility and freedom because they can work at any level of schools. On the other hand, PSTs who agree that ELT undergraduate programs should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’ think that it would enable them to specialize in teaching English to a specific age group employing age-appropriate pedagogy. Their main argument is that both *what you teach* and *how you teach* differ according to the level of school and age of learners; thus, specializing in one level would produce much better results.

As an extension of this research question, the eleventh item in the online survey asked the PSTs to state which undergraduate program they would prefer if ELT undergraduate programs were restructured by giving their reasons for their preferences. Almost a quarter of the PSTs (26%; N=51) stated that they would prefer ‘ELT for young learners’ program while an overwhelming majority of the PSTs (73%; N=141) preferred ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’ program. When the reasons underlying their preferences are examined, it is seen that their preferences are mostly based on personal reasons. To exemplify, some PSTs indicate that they can communicate more efficiently and get on well with teenager/adults while some other PSTs argue the same with young learners. It should not go without saying here that, as the figures clearly show, most PSTs admit that it is much harder to teach very young children and they prefer to teach teenagers. In addition to their personal preferences, they assume that the scope of ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’ program would be wider; thus, it would be much easier for them to find a job when they graduate from this program.

Discussion and Conclusion

The principal aim of this study is to reveal whether ELT undergraduate programs need to be restructured from the perspectives of pre-service English language teachers. In connection with this aim, this study also intends to identify the degree to which their undergraduate training prepares pre-service English language teachers for the different school levels they are to work at. With these two complementary aims in mind, the findings indicate that ELT undergraduate programs prepare PSTs satisfactorily to work at primary and secondary level schools from the perspectives of PSTs. However, PSTs think that their undergraduate program cannot prepare them as satisfactorily to work at pre-primary school, high school and university levels. PSTs believe that they do not know how to teach English to very young children, who generally lack basic literacy skills. In addition, PSTs think that integration of a course that focuses on *teaching English to adults* into their curriculum would enable them to feel more self-efficacious to teach at higher levels. It has also been observed that PSTs mostly prefer to do their practicum and/or work at primary or secondary level schools since they feel more confident and ready to teach at these levels. This tendency clearly demonstrates that ELT undergraduate programs fail to train the PSTs for very low (pre-primary) and high (high school and university) levels. As a partial solution for this problem, it would be

safe to argue that practicum courses need to be designed in such a way to allow PSTs to experience at least two different levels of schools. As for the courses offered by ELT undergraduate programs, the findings indicate that PSTs mostly perceive courses that have practice components more relevant and important for their future profession. The curriculum of ELT undergraduate programs has been frequently criticized on the grounds that it is overly theory-oriented and PSTs do not get enough opportunity to put what they have learnt into practice (Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). Therefore, it can be argued that practicum courses should be extended to cover four semesters and PSTs do their practicum at four different levels of schools to gain more experience. Alternatively, at least the contents of the courses offered can be updated to allow for more practice and microteaching.

It would be justified to argue that, in line with the findings, almost half of the PSTs agree that ELT undergraduate programs within Education Faculties should be restructured as ‘ELT for young learners’ and ‘ELT for teenagers/adults’. PSTs who support reconstruction of the ELT undergraduate programs advocate that they will be able to specialize in the age group and school level they are to teach and feel more self-confident. It should be noted that while some of the PSTs prefer to teach teenagers/adults, some other PSTs feel more comfortable and confident with (very) young learners. Put differently, it does not come to mean that teaching English to young learners is easier or more difficult; on the contrary, teaching different age groups is simply *different*; it requires expertise and what you teach and how you teach should be different. The issue is closely related to personal characteristics and preferences of each individual PST. If we consider the other side of the coin, we see that some PSTs feel neither competent nor ready to teach at certain levels, which clearly substantiates that reconstruction of ELT undergraduate programs is more than necessary.

The structure and content of teacher training programs, as suggested by Kızılçaoğlu (2006), need to be revised and updated at regular intervals to keep up with the requirements of the changing world and society. Considering the pace of technological innovations and the profile of young learners (who are labeled as digital natives), *teaching English to young learners* is viewed as a dynamic field where constant change is typical (Linse, 2005; Shin, 2006); thus, it can be suggested that teachers of English to young learners be better trained so that they can employ technology in a pedagogically, developmentally and ethically appropriate manner for young learners (Asık, 2020). Highlighting the differences between teaching English to young learners and adults, several researchers (see Copland, 2020; Gaynor, 2014; Rich, 2019; Uysal, 2020b) report that qualified teachers of English to young learners are sought for globally. With the aim of meeting this demand, the findings of the present study indicate that ELT undergraduate programs need to be restructured in such a way to enable the PSTs specialize in teaching English to a specific age group. Moreover, PSTs should be encouraged to choose for themselves the age group they would like to specialize in considering their own personality traits, competences and preferences (Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Rich, 2019; Üstünlüoğlu, 2008). As a final note, Kirkgoz (2020) maintains that incongruence exists between policy and actual implementations in terms of teaching English to young learners and the findings of the present study may assist policy makers in removing this shortcoming. As a suggestion based on the findings of the present study, ELT undergraduate programs could be restructured in such a way to allow PSTs shift between the two related programs if they wish so, on condition that they meet the requirements of each specific program. In a similar vein, PSTs may be asked to choose either *ELT for young learners* or *ELT*

for teenagers/adults program after they successfully complete their first year in the program and start taking program-specific courses starting from their second year.

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