The Teacher Competency and Beliefs on How to Improve Language Skills of Students

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Abstract: This study deals with the English language teachers' perceived beliefs on how to improve English language students' learning skills. English language teachers' level of competencies on how to improve language skills of their students is the main focus of this study. Therefore, the domain, "Improving Language Skills," defined by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye in the field of "Subject Specific Competencies for Teaching Profession" has been used. This specific domain includes seven competency performances and 63 related performance indicators at three levels: A1, A2, and A3. This study, first, aims to develop a new "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" under the light of MoNE descriptors; second, it aims to observe the English teachers' competency levels following the suggested performance indicators. The participants of the study were 100 English language teachers, teaching at public and private primary schools in Türkiye. Accordingly, the teachers responded to the mentioned scale, including other variables; such as gender, professional experience, educational background, and the type of schools they worked in. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the teachers' competency beliefs about their professional experience, gender, and educational background; however, there was a significant difference in terms of the type of schools the teachers worked in. Also, this study revealed feasibility of developing the "English Language Teacher Competency Scale,", and made the scale available to use for evaluating English Language Teaching teachers' competency levels on how to "Improve Language Skills" in class.

Keywords: *English language teachers, language skills, teacher beliefs, teacher competency.*

Introduction

Language teacher education shows signs of evolving from a perspective of purely theoretical knowledge acquisition system, to a concept that mostly interweaves theory-practice in the field. Teachers, before they graduate, need to be more aware of the components of the teaching system in order to safely proceed with their professional teaching careers. Teachers act as a bridge between knowledge and those who demand it, and transfer social and moral values to future generations. Therefore, they are the core components of a society, and have been carrying extensive responsibilities throughout human history. The two core components of teaching are professional knowledge and teaching skills. To qualify for educational professions and teaching skills in Türkiye, four to five comprehensive years of knowledge acquisition and qualified teaching experience is required. Teacher education has always been at the heart of developing countries and researchers teaching "how to teach" at different levels; thus, teacher education policies are still under discussion especially in the field of competence and performance of teachers as well as self-efficacy.

The concept of teacher competencies has been studied for many years, but the definition and scope of these competencies are not always clear. Generally, teacher competencies refer to the knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary for effective teaching in a given context (Darling-Hammond, 2017). These competencies can include a variety of factors, such as content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, classroom management, and social and emotional intelligence. Since teachers have a critical role in the educational process, their competencies and self-perception are key factors in determining students' success. Research has identified a number of competencies that are important for successful teaching, including knowledge of the subject matter, classroom management skills, communication skills, and the ability to create meaningful learning experiences.

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Competency is "to be able to act knowledgably in relevant situations" (Baartman et al., 2007, p.115). It emphasizes: (a) the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes into a functional whole; (b) competency as something that people acquire and not as something that they are born with, and (c) the situated nature of knowledge, where competency depends not only on the individual but on contextual factors and the actions of others.

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, refers to teachers' own beliefs about their capabilities, perceptions, and assumptions to accomplish specific tasks in teaching. Teachers, in that sense, are the ones who own a high sense of belief in their teaching capabilities and skills. Therefore, teachers' self- perception of how they see themselves has played a role on various stages of teacher candidates, and their achievements, motivation, self-esteem, dedication, professional and personal behaviors. So, the most important layer of self-efficacy is teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

It has been established that teacher self-efficacy has significant roles on various educational outcomes not only on students' outcomes like students' achievements, motivation, and efficacy beliefs but also teachers' determination, passion, assurance, and instructional behavior (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Studies show that there has been a positive relationship between teacher efficacy and students' achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992; J. A. Ross, 1992; Shahzad & Naureen, 2017; Swarnalatha, 2019)

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) are the two main institutions that cover all aspects of English Language Teaching (ELT) policies, procedures, and ELT Education programs in Türkiye. In 1999, MoNE in Türkiye initiated the "Teacher Competencies Commission" and started to determine teacher competencies for clarifying teacher education standards established by the Turkish National Committee of Teacher Education. The declaration was finalized and published on April 17, 2006. The competency document was released with six basic competency indicators, 31 sub-competencies, and 233 performance indicators, and is accepted as the "General Competencies for Teacher Profession" (MoNE, 2006).

Immediately after the General Competencies for Teaching Profession was published, the "Subject Specific Competencies for Teaching Profession" determined the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of teachers teaching 14 different Subject Specific Fields: Turkish Language, Foreign Language (English), Science and Technology, Information Technologies, Visual Arts, Pre-School, Mathematics, Classroom Teaching, Social Studies, Music, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge, Physical Training, Technologic Design, and Special Education (visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing, and mental disabilities) were developed. The competencies for the primary and secondary school teachers were also developed and put into effect by the official 26/01/2011 authorization, within the scope of the Secondary Education Project.

The previously defined subject specific competencies of teachers were added into the general competencies, and only a single text was created. Therefore, every single teacher's subject area was also covered in the competencies (MoNE, 2017). After the General Teacher Education competency document was updated, and the Bachelor Degree pre-service programs were redesigned by the CoHE, the "General Competencies of Teacher Profession" was released as a new form. These generic and subject field competencies and how teacher candidates could acquire them through their pre-service and in-service teacher education were determined for teachers.

The MoNE, designed the new curriculum, started in-service education and changed the content of teacher education in all Faculty of Education programs. Literature shows a growing need in Türkiye for teachers trained according to the new language teaching policy. Since the roles of the teachers have considerably changed, then this new language tradition can lead to more efficient teachers graduating. Accordingly, those graduating according to this new tradition are believed to be more competent, with fair judgments of capabilities to bring out desired outcomes of students' active participation and learning, even among students with various difficulties in learning (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In order to contribute to the field of Language Teacher Education, the following research questions will guide this study.

Research Questions of the Study:

1) Is it possible to develop a new "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" in light of the MoNE "Improving Language Skills" descriptors to observe English teachers' competency levels?

2) Do primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs differ within the domain of "Improving the Language Skills" according to the following variables?

- Gender
- Professional experience
- Types of schools, teachers worked in
- Educational background

Literature Review

The concept of efficacy, which should be evaluated in many ways, is as difficult as defining language teaching itself, and that is why this process is open to discussion. Efficacy in language teaching, with its many dimensions, passes through certain stages, day by day, leading to diversified studies in this field (Freeman & Richards, 1993). In the following paragraphs, a list of studies on competency in teaching will be presented thematically. The themes include studies carried out in competency subject defined for effective teachers, the challenges and requirements for teachers, qualifications of effective teachers, self-efficacy and perceptions of teacher candidates.

Several frameworks have been developed by various institutions throughout the world to clarify the competencies of efficient language teachers; thus, determining the competencies needed in language teaching requires further analysis. Eaquals Profiling Grid for Language Teachers (North, 2009), NBPTS National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2010), EPG European Profiling Grid (Eaquals, 2020), Eaquals Framework for Language Teacher Training and Development (Eaquals, 2016), and the framework ELTDSC (MoNE, 2015) published by the MoNE are examined through qualitative content analysis. This systematic classification and coding process suggest that teachers' linguistic competencies are indicators for the quality of teaching process since competent instructors always serve as role models. The development of professional competencies is also an ongoing process, so teachers might be in different stages at specific competence areas (Deregözü, 2022).

Efforts to define the competencies of language teachers in a more detailed way within the framework programs have revealed many studies. Houston and Hawson (1972, p.3, as cited in Özdemir, 2007) defined the capability as having required knowledge, skill, and capacity. While explaining the language and pedagogical capabilities, Thomas (1987, as cited in Özdemir, 2007) emphasized the importance of knowing the functional structure of language capability components that represent writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills. On the other hand, McDonough et al. (2013) prepared the following list related to the language teachers' capabilities that includes the following items:

1. Knowledge of the language system
2. Good pronunciation ability
3. Being a good colleague
4. Experience in language teaching
5. Ability to prepare teaching materials
6. Knowledge of teaching theories

According to Altan (2006), there is a list of challenges and requirements that can make foreign language teaching effective. These are being up-to date, pedagogically informed, competent, multi-skilled, resourceful, over-qualified, and technologically informed. Effective teachers look for opportunities that help them to improve (MoNE, 2006). In this improvement process, teachers understand the methods of acquiring basic information about their subject area (Bamber & Koç, 1997, as cited in Özdemir, 2007). Qualified teachers know the learning process, how learners acquire information, how they develop their skills and which approaches, methods and techniques have to be used to realize effective learning. They also know the weaknesses and strengths of the strategies used (MoNE, 2006); therefore, while using the methods, approaches and techniques; teachers should organize their classes according to these principles (Sönmez, 2001 as cited in Özdemir, 2007).

An efficient teacher is also expected use current technological sources in the classroom as well as utilizing the assigned course books. These sources are audio-visual materials that provide multi-skilled language teaching opportunities for the students (Demirel 1993, as cited in Özdemir, 2007). A qualified teacher knows the effect of well-prepared materials in language teaching. Hence, teachers prepare materials according to student needs at different levels, and they can utilize and apply these materials effectively (MoNE, 2002). Açıkgöz (2003, p. 110-111, as cited in Özdemir, 2007) created a list, showing the capabilities of teachers who use materials effectively. The list includes the following abilities:

1. Evaluating appropriateness of teaching materials
2. Diversifying teaching atmosphere to increase student participation
3. Benefiting from various materials and methods
4. Using technology (i.e., movies and a projector)

When English teachers and students were asked about the qualifications of a good English teacher, the studies varied and the concept of self-efficacy emerged. A study conducted by Güven and Çakir (2012) showed the importance of teachers' perceptions of professional competencies in relation to their demographic and background characteristics, namely experience and gender. According to the t-test results, no significant difference was seen between the main scores of the male and female teachers. It can be said that teachers' perception of professional competence did not change according to gender differences. While teachers who had 16-20 years' teaching experience had the highest scores, no significant difference was seen between the teachers' mean scores obtained from the full-scale "Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence" in relation to their experience. Finally, Güven and Çakir (2012) examined the correlation between educational background and teachers' perception of professional competence, and it was noticed that teachers who graduated from English Language Teaching Departments had the highest mean scores. The same study revealed that,

there was no significant difference between gender and teachers' perception of professional competence obtained from the full scale. Even though the teachers who had 16-20 years' teaching experience had the highest mean scores, there was no significant difference with regards to experience. The results of the data indicated a significant difference between teachers' perception of professional competence in material development and the departments the teachers graduated from (Güven & Çakir, 2012).

Furthermore, self-perceptions of fourth grade students, studying at Dicle University, Ziya Gökalp Education Faculty, ELT department were researched. The results indicated that students perceived themselves as partially competent in presentation and question-answer methods, but not self –competent enough while applying teaching methods and techniques (Aşılıoğlu, 2006).

In terms of exploring English language teachers' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge about learner-centeredness, Hatipoğlu Kavanoz (2006) conducted a study with teachers who taught at public primary schools and private primary schools. The study reveals that teachers working at private schools had a better understanding of learner-centeredness and using novel methods in language teaching, compared to teachers employed in public schools.

On the application of active learning strategies used by English teachers, Düztepeliler (2006) concluded that the mean scores of male teachers were higher than female teachers. However, there was no significant difference between professional experience and application of active strategies in the beginning of the lessons, and the teachers' application of active strategies at the beginning of the lesson did not change according to their professional experiences. So, while a gender difference was found between English teachers, experience was not a central factor.

Özdemir (2007) examined the competency perceptions of first stage primary school English teachers in terms of using methods, techniques and materials, and determined whether there was a difference between teachers who graduated from English Language Teaching Departments and other departments. Whether their professional experience affected their perception of competencies or not was also studied. Most of the participants regarded themselves as competent enough to use appropriate methods or techniques in their classrooms; however, they did not regard themselves competent enough to use speaking activities or writing activities that encouraged the students to use language accurately, apply drama activities in the classroom, or provide English songs to attract the students. While the teachers generally found themselves competent in using materials such as realia and flash cards; they did not find themselves competent enough to use technological equipment/materials such as CDs or tape recorders.

Kararmaz and Arslan (2014) conducted a study to reveal the self-perception of primary school English language teachers' field specific competencies, and to determine whether they differed in terms of variables such as gender, professional experience, educational background, and the type of schools they worked in. For English language teachers' field specific competencies, the findings showed that no significant difference was found in terms of professional experience, while significant differences were found in terms of gender, school type, and educational background.

The study conducted by Memduhoğlu and Çelik (2015) attempted to explain the self-efficacy levels of student teachers' and the students who had the potential to be English teachers in the future, while to demonstrate whether self-efficacy changed according to selected variables. This research showed that student teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about reading skills were higher than their writing, speaking, and listening skills. On the other hand, the study revealed whether there was a significant difference in terms of variables such as gender and grade levels. The findings indicated that male students' self-efficacy beliefs regarding speaking skills were higher than female students. At the same time, the research showed that students' self-efficacy beliefs increased proportionately with their grade levels.

Yenen and Dursun (2019) aimed to determine the self-efficacy perceptions of English teachers towards the teaching process and to reveal how they applied their self-efficacy in the classroom environment. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) was used to collect data and a structured observation form was also used. According to the results of the data, the self-efficacy perceptions of English teachers towards the teaching process were high. According to this study, the self-efficacy perception of English teachers does not change according to gender.

The investigation of English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs considering certain variables such as gender, experience, and educational background was the focus of another study. The data collected using the "English Language Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale" and "English Language Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Interview Form" was analyzed in a mixed research design. The results showed that teachers' educational background affected their self-efficacy perception, especially in terms of maintaining professional development. However, there was no significant difference in terms of variables such as gender and experience (Aslan & Gömleksiz, 2020).

Pulham and Graham (2018) studied the issues of the competencies in teacher education; Jenset et al. (2018) developed the domain of attitudes into eight dimensions of the conceptual framework of teachers' competencies in teaching and learning along with the several studies carried out by Bacon (2020) who emphasized teachers' learning, and other studies by López (2017) focused on improving the teachers' perspectives and teachers' knowledge (as cited in Shidiq et al., 2022).

In order to investigate the self-perception of EFL teachers and students regarding competencies, both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Pham (2022) study. The results showed that both teachers and

students perceived the knowledge of language teaching as the most significant. While knowledge of language subject and language learners was highly appreciated, learning in and from practice and informed by context had a relatively low appreciation (Pham, 2022).

The relationship between teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of explicit instruction as well as their own abilities and teacher performance was elaborated by Petermann and Vorholzer (2023). Assuming that the beliefs of teachers are vital, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and the components of teachers' professional competence and teacher performance was studied by Blömeke et al. (2022).

The study on the teachers' global citizenship education and how experienced teachers and teacher educators look at GCE and related global teaching competencies by following the Delphi method was concluded with reaching a consensus on a definition of GCE and what a globally competent primary school teacher should do to support the learning of diverse learners and engage them in van Werven et al. (2023).

Moreover, to investigate the self-efficacy beliefs of English language teachers in terms of gender, degree, teaching level and experience, the research revealed that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs do not differ based on their gender; however, there is significant difference between self-efficacy belies of teachers and experience (Çankaya, 2018). The study conducted by Orakcı et al. (2023) also aims to investigate teachers' views about their self-efficacy with a mixed research design according to variables such as gender, education level, seniority and the school level. While the results show a significant difference between scores of self-efficacy and seniority, no significant difference were found according to gender.

This paper primarily focuses on the teachers' general competency and perceived beliefs on how to improve language skills of their students. The methodological design, participants and the improved scale will be introduced in the following parts.

Methodology

Research Design

Educational research, which requires more than just applying the basic steps in the research process, is conducted through quantitative or qualitative procedures according to the nature of the research questions (Creswell, 2012). Classified as educational research, the purpose of this study is to learn if a 63-item "English Language Teacher Field Specific Competency Scale" (ELT-FSCS) can be developed with the performance indicators in the content stated in MoNE's "improving language skills". Additionally, based on the performance indicators, the study aims to illustrate the current profile of English language teachers teaching at primary schools in central Mersin. This will highlight whether the teachers' competency beliefs differ in terms of certain variables such as gender, professional experience, type of schools, teachers worked in (private-state), and the teachers' educational backgrounds.

The descriptive method is one of the most effective methods used to collect data regarding the current status of the subjects in a study (Ekmekci, 1991). Thus, this study aims to gather data regarding the profile of English language teachers teaching at primary schools. Identifying such practices and views in respect to numerous variables requires a quantitative research design. This refers to a process of producing information through constructing a cause-effect relationship, and gathering, analyzing or demonstrating data in numerical form, which is the basis of this empirical inquiry process (Given, 2008). Finally, the use of specially designed scales ensures that this quantitative research applies both survey and correlational designs.

Research Instrument

The items of the data collection instrument were devised using the performance indicators of the "improving language skills". These 63 performance indicators were submitted to an expert on Measurement and Evaluation at Mersin University for assessment and feedback. (A. Erkuş, personal communication, December 25, 2009). The performance indicators were negotiated according to the expert feedbacks; as two of the performance indicators were similar, they were extracted from the instrument. The initial design of the data collection instrument, consisting of seven parts, contained 61 items. As a likert-type scale, the instrument contained 61 items that had sub-scales such as; helping students develop effective language learning strategies, providing students with using English in an accurate and meaningful way, developing students' listening/monitoring skills, developing students' reading-writing-speaking skills, and developing practices in English language teaching considering students with special educational needs. The scale ranged from "totally inappropriate for me (1) to very appropriate for me (5)" so that teachers could respond to each item according to their degree of appropriateness. The performance indicators were constructed in positive sentences, by including expressions such as "I can." Finally, the instructions and independent variables were added to the initial form of the data collection instrument, which required teachers to carry out a self-evaluation of their professional competencies.

After gathering 100 initial forms of the data collection instruments from the primary school teachers, another 100 initial forms of the data collection instrument which were responded by high school English teachers were added with the aim of enhancing the reliability and validity study of the instrument with more participants. The data gathered from total 200 English language teachers was processed. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) on Windows 11.5 was used to

carry out the reliability analysis and factor analysis. While the purpose of the reliability analysis for the scale was to find the reliability and validity of the scale, the factor analysis was carried out to determine the structure of the scale in terms of the existence of sub-scales. First, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were carried out (KMO: .908, Bartlett's Test: .000). As the values were appropriate according to the criterion of the factor analysis, the scale was found appropriate for the factor analysis.

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.908
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	**Approx. Chi-Square**	10206.368
	Df	1830
	Sig.	.000

The factor analysis revealed 12 factors, eigenvalues of which were larger than 1.00, and it explained variance of 71,904% of the whole scale. The eigenvalues of the first factor was 24,036 and the variance it explained was 39,404% and it was larger than the eigenvalues of the closest factor (4.208) about six times. When the following Scree Plot is examined, a sharp fall can be seen after the first factor.
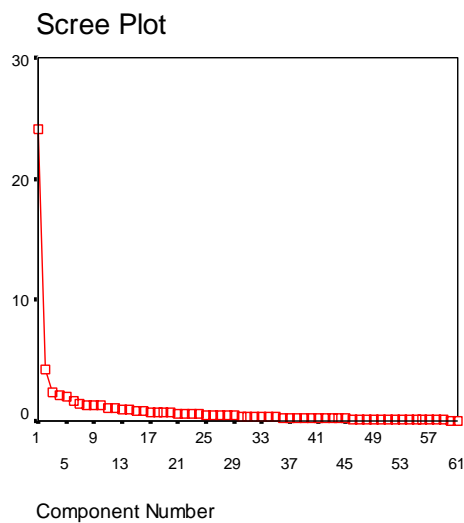

Figure 1. Scree Plot related to Factor Analysis

According to factor loadings of the first factor; as all the items have the positive and high loadings, it was concluded that the scale had one factor. Accordingly, although MoNE stated formal sub-competencies, all the items in the sub-scales measured the same features. As all the features could be collected under just one competency, the analysis should be carried out according to total scores of the scales. Despite the low factor loads of the 12 items, none of the items were extracted from the scale, for the remaining items still represent the intended construct and having such a large number of items enhances richness of the data collection instrument on the same topic. Accordingly, the final form of the data collection instrument also had 61 items but no sub-scales, which means that one characteristic can be assessed elaborately in many ways. The analysis was carried out according to the total scores of the scales. The reliability and validity of the study provided sufficient support for the scale's use.

Data Collection

The process started with obtaining the list of the state and private primary schools on the southern part of Türkiye from the MoNE website. The list contained 143 state primary schools in the four districts of Mersin and 12 private primary schools from all towns in the city. That is to say, there was a comprehensive list, with a total of 155 state and private primary schools. For accurate and reliable data, as many English teachers as possible were needed from different schools. Despite considerable distance and limited time, 40 of the primary schools were visited by the researchers.

The schools that were visited were randomly chosen according to their accessibility, and after the instrument was introduced, the scale was applied to 135 English language teachers working in the primary schools stated in the list. While some teachers were relatively eager to complete the scale, the others were somewhat reluctant. The department heads and headmasters also contributed to the study. As the instrument had many items, many of the teachers refused to respond during their break time; in that scenario, one week was given to the teachers to respond to the instruments. Due to various reasons, the researchers had to visit the same schools several times; thus it took three months to retrieve all the scales.

Finally, a total of 105 instruments in hand were collected. As five of the instruments were incomplete and there were some items that had not been responded to, five of the instruments were extracted from the study. Hence, a total of 100 instruments were taken into consideration at the final form of the data collection instrument's process of statistical analysis

Sample

The participants of the study were 100 English language teachers working for in public and private primary schools in southern part of Türkiye. Large numbers of samples teaching in different regions are sought; thus, teachers especially in four towns of Türkiye were approached; this way, it was possible to find a large number of English language teachers in each school.

Table 2. Participant Details

Variables		N	%
Gender	Male	30	30
	Female	70	70
Professional Experience	1-5 years	26	26
	6-10 years	40	40
	11-15 years	15	15
	16 years and more	19	19
Educational Background	ELT Department	68	68
	English Language and Literature	19	19
	English Linguistics	4	4
	Other Departments	9	9
Types of School	State-Primary	72	72
	Private-Primary	28	28

Table 2 presents the gender characteristics of the English language teachers; it shows that 30% of participants were male, while 70% of participants were female. It also indicates the common profile of teachers in terms of gender, since the numerical dominance of female English teachers' is evident.

Considering the professional experience characteristics of English teachers; Table 2 shows that 26% of the participants were teachers who had 1-5 years of professional experience; 40% of the participants were teachers who had 6-10 years of professional experience; 15% of the participants were teachers who had 11-15 years of professional experience; and 19% of the participants were teachers who had more than 16 years of professional experience.

Table 2 also presents the educational background characteristics of the teachers. Graduating from ELT Departments, English Language and Literature, English Linguistics and Other Departments are considered as variables of the study in this regard. Accordingly, 68% of the participants were teachers who graduated from ELT Departments; 19% of the participants were teachers who graduated from English Language and Literature; 4% of the participants were teachers who graduated from English Linguistics; and 9% of the participants were teachers who graduated from other departments.

Examining the employment characteristics of English teachers according to the schools where the teachers work was also taken into account in the study; Table 2 shows that 72% of the participants were teachers who worked in state primary schools, while 28% of the participants were teachers who worked in private primary schools.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the instruments were analyzed using SPSS Windows 11.5. Gender, personal experience, educational background, and the types of schools the teachers worked in were expressed using the frequencies in the SPSS Windows 11.5. Descriptive statistics frequencies test was employed and the results identified a normal distribution of participants' responses collected from the questionnaire. Then, a Descriptive statistics test was run to examine the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA)) were carried out for further analysis.

An independent samples t-test compares the means of two groups (A. Ross & Willson, 2017a, p.13). As the independent variables of gender (male and female) and the school types the teachers worked in (State-Primary, Private-Primary) only had two levels, t-test was carried out to find the significant difference between gender/school types the teachers worked in, along with the teachers' competency in terms of "improving language skills." Whereas the other independent variables, professional experience and educational background, were analyzed by carrying out ANOVA to find the significant difference between professional experience, educational background, and teachers' competency in terms of "improving language skills." One-way ANOVA was chosen because it compares the means of two or more groups for a single dependent variable. (A. Ross & Willson, 2017b). The issue regarding the selection of a significance level can vary

depending on the study context and the field of study itself. Significance testing remains the standard inferential tool in cognitive science and the criterion level of significance was chosen as ".05" for both of the analyses (Masson, 2011).

Findings / Results

1) *Is it possible to develop a new "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" in light of the MoNE "Improving Language Skills" descriptors to observe English teachers' competency levels?*

For the first research question, initially the data was gathered by using the initial form of the data collection instrument. After the data was processed, the tests were carried out to determine the reliability/validity of the scale and determining the structure of the scale through factor analysis. This was achieved by carrying out the reliability analysis-scale (alpha) for the whole scale. For overall reliability Cronbach's alpha value was 0.97 for the full-scale, which shows the appropriate level of construct validity and internal consistency of this modified questionnaire.

After the reliability analysis, factor analysis was carried out. The factor analysis showed the scale could not be divided into sub-scales since all items measured the same feature. Although 12 of the items had relatively low factor loads, none of them was extracted from the scale as they both represent the intended construct and enhance the content of the data collection instrument; therefore, they were taken into consideration during the analysis. The scales' total scores were also appropriate for the statistical analysis.

The Field of Competencies designs their own competencies according to the specific field/profession. In addition, each Field of Competency has content according to performance indicators that teachers have to fulfill and Sub-Competencies that represent the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to fulfill a competency requirement (MoNE 2006). However, sub-competencies were defined for all the "Field of Competencies", the study showed that the formal sub-competencies defined by MoNE do not work in real life. This was since the factor analysis showed that the scale's structure was not appropriate to have sub-scales that used the sub-competencies of "improving language skills." Accordingly, such phenomenon as cultural or regional differences, lack of training and other factors have to be taken in to consideration while making generalization according to the results, for the study was a regional one and the differences may be possible under different conditions.

2) *Do primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs differ within the domain of "improving language skills" according to the following variables?*

• *Gender*

• *Professional experience*

• *Types of schools, teachers worked in*

• *Educational background*

In order to answer the second question, statistical analyses were carried out for each independent variable. To compute the difference between competency and variables of gender and the types of schools the teachers worked in (State-Primary/Private Primary), an Independent Paired t-test was carried out. In addition, one-way analyses of variances were carried out to find the difference between competency, variables of professional experience, and teachers' educational backgrounds.

• *Do primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs within the domain of "improving language skills" differ significantly in regard to their gender?*

Table 3. The Results of the t-test Conducted for the Variable of Gender

	Gender	n	x-	SD	df	T	P
ELTSC	Male	30	246.8000	34.89136	98	-1.798	.075
	Female	70	259.3286	30.60204			

p > 0.05

Table 3 presents "t-test" results to analyze "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" (ELTCS) for gender. As in Table 3, the mean score of the teachers according to the gender variable differs in terms of male and female. While the mean score of the males was found as 246.8000; the females' score was 259.3286. This showed the difference between the mean of the two groups. However, primary school English language teachers' competency belief (t = -1.798, p > 0.05) scores were not found to differ significantly by gender. It can be inferred from the present finding that gender did not make any significant difference regarding primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs within the domain of "improving language skills" and that both male and female participants held similar views about their own self-efficacy beliefs.

- *Do primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs within the domain of "improving language skills" differ significantly in regard to their professional experience?*

In order to implement the analyses efficiently, the variables of teachers' professional experience were divided into four levels and each level labeled with numbers. The levels were determined based on years of professional experience (Level 1: 1-5 years' experience; Level 2: 6-10 years' experience; Level 3: 11-15 years' experience; and Level 4: more than 16 years' experience).

Table 4. The Results of the one-way Analyses of Variances Conducted for the Variable of Professional Experience

Scale	Group	N	Mean	Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Significant difference*
ELTCS	3.00 (11-15 years)	15	240.9333	Between Groups	4915.855	3	1638.618	1.600	.194	
	4.00 (16+ years)	19	255.4737	Within groups	98302.655	96	1023.986			
	2.00 (6-10 years)	40	255.8500							
	1.00 (1-5 years)	26	263.6538							

Table 4 presents "ANOVA test" results for "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" (ELTCS) for professional experience. As in Table 4, primary school English language teachers' competency belief (F = 1,600; p > 0.05), scores were not found to differ significantly in regard to professional experience.

In the data in Table 4, which shows the distribution of mean scores according to their professional experience, teachers with 1-5 years of professional experience have the highest mean scores. Whereas the mean scores of the teachers who had 6-10 years and more than 16 years of professional experience had close mean scores; the teachers with 11-15 years of professional experience had the lowest mean scores.

Do primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs within the domain of "improving language skills" differ significantly in regard to the types of schools they work in?

Table 5. The Results of the t-test Conducted for the Variable of the Types of Schools Teachers Work in

	Gender	n	x̄	SD	df	T	P
ELTSC	State-Primary School	72	249.2083	34.42155	98	-3.315	.001
	Private- Primary School	28	271.9286	17.93802			

p<0.05

Table 5 presents "t-test" results to analyze "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" (ELTCS) for the types of schools they work in. As in Table 5, primary school English language teachers' competency belief (t = -3,315, p<0.05) scores were found to differ significantly according to school type. In addition, the mean scores of the teachers working in the State-Primary Schools is found to be 249.2083 and the mean scores of teachers working in the Private-Primary Schools is found to be 271.9286; thus indicating the difference between the means of the two groups.

Therefore, it can be concluded that primary school English language teachers' competence within the domain of "improving language skills" differs according to the types of schools they work in. The result of the t-test shown in Table 5 illustrates the types of schools teachers work in as a significant factor in determining the English language teachers' competence levels under the content of "improving language skills".

- *Do primary school English language teachers' competency beliefs within the domain of "improving language skills" differ significantly in regard to their educational background?*

In order to implement the analyses, the variable of educational background of teachers was divided into four levels. The first level was for teachers who had graduated from ELT Departments; the second one was for English Language and Literature graduates; the third one was for English Linguistics graduates; and the last one was for graduates from Other Departments.

Table 6. The Results of the One-Way Analyses of Variances Conducted for the Variable of the Teachers' Educational Background

Scale	Group	N	Mean	Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Significant difference*
ELTCS	EL	4	245.7500	Between Groups	4046.661	3	1348.887	1.306	.277	
	ELT	68	252.0294	Within groups	99171.849	96	1033.040			
	ELL	19	265.2105							
	OTHER DEPT.	9	266.3333							

Table 6 presents "ANOVA test" results for "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" (ELTCS) for their educational backgrounds. As in Table 6, primary school English language teachers' competency belief (F = 1,306; p > 0.05), scores were not found to differ significantly in regard to educational background. However, the test showed that teachers who graduated from Other Departments had the highest mean scores, whereas teachers who graduated from English Linguistics had the lowest mean scores. As a conclusion, it can be stated that primary school English language teachers' competence under the content of "improving the language skills" does not change according to their educational background.

Discussion

This study mainly deals with the English language teachers' perceived beliefs on how to improve English language students' learning skills. Therefore, the domain, "Improving Language Skills," defined by the MoNE in the field of "Subject Specific Competencies for Teaching Profession" (2017) has been focused. This study, first, aims to develop a new "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" under the light of MoNE descriptors; second, it aims to observe the English teachers' competency levels following the suggested performance indicators. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the teachers' competency beliefs about their professional experience, gender, and educational background; however, there was a significant difference in terms of the type of schools the teachers worked in. This study and the descriptors used mainly reflect the MoNE descriptors, which is why the findings of this study may have differences compared to the earlier studies. The data analysis and the findings are discussed under variables as well.

Also, this study revealed feasibility of developing the "English Language Teacher Competency Scale,", and made the scale available to use for evaluating ELT teachers' competency levels on how to "Improve Language Skills" in class. The research instrument, "English Language Teacher Competency Scale" which was developed in this study, revealed that the reliability and validity of the study provide sufficient support for the scale's use. So, the scale can be used to evaluate teacher's competencies, performances in teacher education, teacher development sessions as pre and post measurement tool. English Language teachers' perceptions on how to improve language skills of their students can be elicited and the strategies can be defined for teacher's in-service training needs. The instrument can also be integrated to educational divisions for assessing the competencies of primary school teachers

The study shows that almost all of the teachers who participated in the study obtained high scores from the scales; therefore, the mean participation score can be considered as high (255.57). This high mean score indicates teachers' self-appreciation; this way, the teachers regard themselves as perfect in improving the language skills of the students. Similarly, according to Orakcı et al. (2023), teachers' self-efficacy levels are high, and they feel self-efficient in their teaching. The study conducted by Pham (2022) also clearly showed that both teachers and students perceived the knowledge of language teaching as the most significant. While knowledge of language subject and of language learners were highly appreciated, learning in and from practice, while being informed by context, had a relatively low appreciation.

The t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female teachers. The studies conducted by Güven and Çakir (2012), Orakcı et al. (2023), and Çankaya (2018) also stated that there was no significant difference between the scores of the male and female teachers. It can be concluded that teachers' perception of professional competence does not change according to gender. However, the results do not comply with the study of Düztepeliler (2006); in this study, there is a significant difference between male and female teachers' mean scores, and the mean scores of male teachers were found to be higher than female teachers. Therefore, the study shows that male teachers are applying active learning strategies more than female teachers. In addition, Kararmaz and Arslan (2014) conducted a study to reveal the self-perception of primary school English language teachers' field specific competencies, and results showed that there were significant differences in gender, school type, and educational background.

When the related studies are examined; the more experienced the teachers are, the more efficient they are; a significant difference has been observed between professional experience and competency (MoNE, 2006).

According to Orakcı et al. (2023), teachers' seniority made a significant difference in their self-efficacy beliefs, which supports that their higher seniority effects their self-efficacy" beliefs more positively. However, this contradicts with Düztepeliler's (2006) study that found no significant difference between professional experience and applying active strategies in the beginning of lessons. The study showed that professional experience does not impact the application of active strategies at the beginning of the class. The study conducted by Çankaya (2018) revealed that the least experienced participants reported themselves more self-efficacious than others, and they are willing to spend much more effort as they feel more motivated, which leads to high self-efficacy levels. In addition to these studies, Özdemir (2007) also found that English teachers' competency in using methods and techniques did not change in terms of professional experience. As for the study by Güven and Çakir (2012), no significant difference was seen between teachers' mean scores obtained from the full-scale "Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence" in relation to experience.

It is also possible to find similar studies that indicate a significant difference between the types of schools. According to Hatipoğlu Kavanoz (2006), teachers who work in public primary school understand learner-centeredness as making students active by engaging them in grammar focused exercises. However, teachers who work in private primary schools understand a learning environment in which the students are active by producing projects, studying in groups, and being given chances to speak during lessons. It is observed that teachers working in the private school better comprehend and apply new methods in language teaching, compared to teachers who work in public schools. Nonetheless, according to Düztepeliler (2006), the significance level was too low to explain a significant difference; therefore, it can be stated that the strategies also do not change according to the school type the teachers work in.

No significant difference can be found in this study in terms of the teachers' educational background. The results coincide with the Düztepeliler (2006) and Özdemir (2007) studies; which similarly reported that applying active strategies did not change in accordance with the teachers' educational background. However, according to the scale obtained from their university department, Güven and Çakir (2012) found a significant difference between the teachers' mean scores. They also concluded that there was a significant difference between teachers' perception of professional competence in material development and university department.

Conclusion

This study's primary concern was to develop a scale using the performance indicators in the "Improving Language Skills" content, stated by MoNE, and to explore the current condition of the English language teaching in Türkiye. The study was conducted with 100 English language teachers in the central district of Mersin. Data was gathered with a 61-item instrument. After the reliability and validity tests and factor analyses were carried out, statistical analyses were finalized considering the final form of the 61-item instrument. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference between the teachers' competencies and gender, professional experience, educational background; however, there was a significant difference in terms of the type of schools the teachers worked in.

Recommendations

The instrument developed in this study can be used by other researchers, primarily serving the function of supporting instrument standardization; while the current study also provides an example for further studies in the field. Moreover, the other four contents in the English Language Teacher Special Field Competencies can be adapted to further studies and when combined with other content in the English Language Teacher Special Field Competencies, a new efficacy scale which measures the efficacy of the English Teachers in all competencies can be obtained. As previously mentioned, this study would be further encompassing with a higher sample size comprising of more participants across Türkiye.

Limitations

This study is limited to the availability of resources in the district of Türkiye, and also limited to the access to the respondents. That through the scale developed for this study, the descriptors describing the teacher competencies which are determined as suggested by the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye is another limitation. The competencies for teaching profession used as descriptors were only initiated to determine the "Competencies for Teaching Profession" addressing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that teachers need to have.

Authorship Contribution Statement:

Yaman: Conceptualization, design, writing, Editing/reviewing and supervision. Can: Data collection and analysis, writing, editing. Cakir: Data collection and analysis, writing, editing.

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