



## Investigating Self-Perceived Competency Levels of EFL Teachers at Public Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aimed to investigate the self-perceived competency levels of EFL teachers in the Turkish MONE (Ministry of National Education) context and if these perceptions vary according to multiple variables as a mixed-methods study. Another subject of the study was to identify the areas where teachers see themselves as less competent and need professional development. In doing so, the English Teachers Field-Specific Competencies Assessment Scale was applied to 267 English teachers by snowball sampling via an online survey. Simultaneously, 27 English teachers filled out written interview forms prepared by the researchers to obtain in-depth knowledge. Then, the data were analyzed with the convergent parallel design method, and the qualitative and quantitative data thus complemented each other. The main results indicated that participants were uncertain about their professional skills in teaching English to students with special needs. It was also revealed that teachers had similar views on improving students' English-speaking abilities. Another finding was that education level, professional experience, and participation in previous in-service teacher training programs statistically affect teachers' self-perceived competency levels. In brief, it was understood that developing language skills, specifically speaking skills, was the most common need, followed by the demand to develop EFL teachers' digital skills.*

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers, who are one of the essential components of the education-teaching process, have an important place in the functioning of the education system, its success, and the training of a qualified workforce. 'How does one learn?' 'How should a good education be?' These questions have been up to date for centuries, and the development of teacher competencies is one of the possible answers. While it is vital to raise individuals who learn, research, question, and take responsibility for their learning with the changing understanding of learning-teaching, this situation has led to some changes in the roles of teachers. The most critical role expected from the teacher, who actively transfers information in the traditional learning-teaching approach, is to guide individuals to learn.

The curricula, which are the roadmap of the teaching process, no matter how successful they are prepared, depend on the competencies of the teachers who are the implementers of the programs (Arslan & Özpinar, 2008; Çelikten, Şanal & Yeni, 2005). Teacher competency is an essential factor that directly affects the quality of education. It is important to be aware of the qualities and competencies that teachers should have because teaching recognition of the profession and determination of the duties and responsibilities of teachers become more of an issue to increase teacher performance (Karaca, 2008). Therefore, teachers' competencies need improvement for better education and student success (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goe & Stickler, 2008).

The concept of competency is defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to perform a successful and professional performance and reach a specific goal (Gonczi, Hager, & Oliver, 1990). Besides knowledge, skills, and attitudes, it is also possible to consider personality traits such as an individual's motivation, attention, and curiosity within the concept of competency (Sysoyev & Evstigneev, 2014). In addition to including explicit and implicit knowledge, skills, motivation,

beliefs, and value judgments, teaching profession competencies can be decisive in enabling teachers to carry out complex demands professionally by activating psycho-social resources.

The concept of competency is handled in two different ways in the learning-teaching dimension. One of them is teaching competencies which refer to the role of the teacher in the classroom, directly related to the teaching profession. The other is teacher competencies, which refer to the broader and systematic expertise of the teacher in various fields such as personal, school, community, and professional networks. The competencies in this study are the ones that include knowing how to perform the roles of teachers with their knowledge, skills, and attitudes expressed by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE) in parallel with their continuous professional development.

Another area where teacher competencies are still being discussed is the issue of English language teaching within the context of Turkish MONE. Foreign language teachers are expected to have field-specific competencies and a mastery of the language they teach, that is, after providing language proficiency. Richards (2010) states that language teacher competencies consist of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, teaching skills, context knowledge, teacher identity, pedagogical reasoning skills, theorizing practices, active in the school-society relationship, and professionalism. According to Turkish MONE (2017), teachers are supposed to have some competencies regarding content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of legislation, planning of education and teaching, creating learning environments, managing the teaching and learning process effectively, assessment and evaluation together with national, moral, and universal values, approach to students, communication and finally personal and professional development. It shows that the competencies that foreign language teachers are expected to possess are apprehensible comprehensive and multidimensional. Considering the point where foreign language education is located in our country, it is essential to train teachers, who are the critical agents of foreign language teaching, with the expected competencies.

The high level of performance and competency of teachers, as well as the abundance of educational services and resources made available to them, are directly correlated with rising efficiency and quality in education (OECD, 2005). However, improving this quality and maintaining ongoing effectiveness rely on accurate, regular, trustworthy, and efficient teacher monitoring and assessment (European Commission, 2012). Teachers can assess themselves using a variety of approaches, decide where they need to grow professionally, and continually better themselves. Knowing the teachers' strengths, seeing their practice-related weaknesses, and giving them help to address these needs, in other words, contributing to their professional growth, are all important for realizing this development.

In recent years, stakeholders, including administrators, teacher educators, and teachers themselves, have sought ways to redefine what and how much a competent language teacher should learn. They have also chosen to investigate which areas and to what extent they are qualified. According to Steiner (2004), teacher competencies are valuable tools for professional growth and teacher evaluation. Hence, to improve teacher quality and contribute to English language education in Turkiye, it becomes essential for national bodies to examine English teacher competencies and scenarios.

In line with these, this study aimed to examine English language teachers' perceptions of their subject area competencies. In doing so, the researcher investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived competency levels of in-service English language teachers regarding field-specific competencies set by Turkish MONE?
  1. a. Are there any statistically significant differences in EFL teachers' competency perceptions regarding gender, department of graduation, work experience, school type, and previous in-service training activities?
2. In which areas do EFL teachers need to develop their competencies professionally?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The current study adopted a mixed-method research design to investigate the EFL teachers' self-perceived competency levels. According to Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick (2009), mixed-methods research combines qualitative and quantitative data in the same study to better comprehend the research. In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2007) stated that using a mixed-methods research design allows for more accurate data to be obtained for a study.

### Participants and Sampling

The sampling method of the participants is summarized in Figure 1 below:

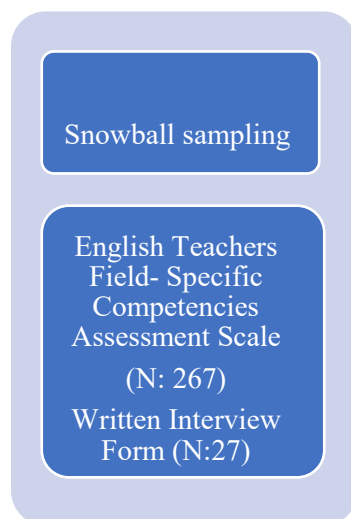


Figure 1. Overview of sampling

As evident in Figure 1 above, quantitative data were collected from 267 English teachers working in public schools in Adana Province, Turkiye with the snowball sampling method, a non-probability sampling method. The English Teachers Field-Specific Competencies Assessment Scale, developed by Kararmaz and Aslan (2014), was applied to 267 English teachers to learn about teachers' perceptions of their field competencies. In addition, qualitative data were collected simultaneously from 27 teachers with a written interview form. A convergent parallel design was utilized to conduct the quantitative and qualitative aspects concurrently at the same phase of the research process, weigh the approaches equally, analyze the two elements separately, and interpret the results together (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011).

### Data Collection Tools

#### English Teachers Field- Specific Competencies Assessment Scale

The English Teachers Field-Specific Competencies Assessment Scale, which was developed by Kararmaz and Arslan (2014), was used to collect quantitative data about EFL teachers' perceptions of field-specific competency levels. Also, it was among the purposes of using this scale to determine if teachers' perceived competency levels vary according to different variables. The reliability results of the scale are presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Reliability Analysis Results of the Scale

	Number of Items	Item Total Correlation	Cronbac h Alfa
Planning and Organizing English Teaching Processes	5	0.611-0.749	0.873
Developing Language Skills	7	0.566-0.822	0.907
Monitoring and Evaluating Language Development	4	0.720-0.848	0.897
Collaborating with Schools, Families, and Community	6	0.483-0.767	0.852
Continuing Professional Development	4	0.704-0.867	0.896

When the Table is examined, the item-total correlation ranges of the factors and the reliability coefficients obtained in this study are given. The first of the factors in the scale is planning and organizing English teaching processes. This factor has a total of five items, with item-total correlations ranging from 0.611 to 0.749. This factor's Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.873. The second factor, developing language skills, consists of 7 items and the item-total correlations range from 0.566 to 0.822. This factor's Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.907. The third factor, monitoring and evaluating language development, includes four items, and item-total correlations range from 0.720 to 0.848. This factor's Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.897. In addition, the fourth factor, collaborating with school, family, and community, consists of 6 items, and the item-total correlations of the items vary between 0.483 and 0.767. This factor's Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.852. Finally, there are four items in the fifth component, continuing professional development, with item-total correlations ranging from 0.704 to 0.867. This factor's Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was discovered to be 0.896. As is apparent in Table, the reliability coefficients of the scale's factors vary between 0.852 and 0.907. Accordingly, it can be said that the scale makes measurements with high validity and reliability (Karamaz & Arslan, 2014, p.64).

### Written Interview Form

The written interview form was another qualitative approach employed to collect data from the participants. This form was applied online to 27 English language teachers to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions about their subject area competencies, learn which areas they feel more or less competent in, and determine which areas they need professional development to improve their competencies. Eight questions in the interview form required the teachers to answer them according to their perceptions and teaching experiences.

### Data Analysis

Along with the first research question, 267 English teachers filled out the 'English Teachers Field-Specific Competencies Assessment Scale' developed by Karamaz & Aslan (2014) to investigate the perceptions of English teachers working in public schools in Adana about the subject area competencies they are expected to have. With the data collected through this survey, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to see the effect of different variables on these perceptions. At this stage, quantitative data were analyzed with the statistical program. To get complementary data, 27 English language teachers filled out a written interview form developed by the researcher. This written interview form was used to learn more about teachers' evaluations of their subject area competencies, learn which areas they feel more or less competent in, and

identify which areas they need professional development to improve. Qualitative data gathered from written interview forms have been analyzed using computer content analysis through MAXQDA 22. The data from both data collection tools that we used to answer the two research questions were analyzed using the convergent parallel design approach.

## FINDINGS

### Perceived competency levels of in-service EFL teachers regarding field-specific competencies

The first research question investigates English teachers' perceptions of subject area competencies in public schools. In this section, it was aimed to see the competency levels of all participants, secondly, to investigate their level of competency in terms of specific categories such as planning and organizing English teaching processes, developing language skills, monitoring and evaluating language development, collaborating with the school, family, and community, and finally continuing professional development in English. The results of the scale are presented in the Tables below:

**Table 2.** Teacher Perceptions Regarding “Planning and Organizing English Teaching Processes”

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
<b>Items</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Sd</b>
I can make planning appropriate for English language teaching.	267	2	5	4.11	.588
I can organize learning environments suitable for teaching English.	267	2	5	4.21	.497
I can use materials and resources appropriate for the English teaching process.	267	3	5	4.31	.517
I can use methods and techniques appropriate for the English teaching process.	267	3	5	4.19	.568
I can use technological resources in teaching English.	267	2	5	3.95	.785
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>2,8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.19</b>	<b>.441</b>

As shown in Table 2, 267 English language teachers participated in this study. According to Table 16, it is possible to say that the highest mean score belongs to the scale item “*I can use materials and resources appropriate for the English teaching process*” ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.31), whereas the lowest mean is related to the statement “*I can use technological resources in teaching English*” ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.95, SD: .785). Although the participants generally see themselves as competent in the planning and organization of the English lesson, it can be understood that they need a little more support in the use of technological resources compared to other scale items. Yet, from a general point of view of the competencies in this category, it can be said that the participants are considered quite competent in planning and organizing English language teaching processes ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.19, SD: .441).

**Table 3.** Teacher Perceptions Regarding “Developing Language Skills”

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Sd
I can help students develop effective language learning strategies.	267	2	5	3.91	.690
I can ensure that students use English correctly and clearly.	267	2	5	4.04	.518
I can improve the listening/watching skills of students.	267	1	5	3.88	.723
I can improve the speaking skills of students.	267	1	5	3.63	.845
I can improve the reading skills of students.	267	2	5	4.07	.606
I can improve the writing skills of students.	267	2	5	3.75	.730
I can do practices considering the needs of the students who need special education	267	1	5	3.22	.898
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>2,14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>.563</b>

Table 3 reveals the descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions regarding the sub-competency of developing language skills. When results are considered, the lowest mean score is related to doing practices considering the needs of the students who need special education ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.22, SD: .898). It can be grasped that participants were undecided about their proficiency in teaching English language skills to students with special needs. It can also be seen that teachers share a similar perception about developing students' speaking skills. On the other hand, the highest mean score belongs to the statement “*I can improve the reading skills of students*” ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.07, SD: .606). With an overview of all statements involving the development of language skills, it can be argued that teachers see themselves as most competent in the development of teaching reading skills.

**Table 4.** Teacher Perceptions Regarding “Monitoring and Evaluating Language Improvement”

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd
I can determine the objectives of measurement and evaluation applications related to English language teaching.	267	1	5	3.96	.633
I can use measurement and evaluation tools and methods in teaching English.	267	1	5	4.06	.652
I can interpret the assessment results and give feedback to determine the language development levels of students	267	1	5	3.96	.706
I can reflect on the assessment results in my practices to determine students' language development.	267	1	5	3.75	.746
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>.576</b>

In the next section of Likert-scale items, which evaluates competency in monitoring and assessing language improvement, Table 4 shows that the participants perceived themselves as most competent in using measurements and evaluation tools and methods in teaching English ( $\bar{x}$ :

4.06, SD: .652). Although they agree about a high degree of perceived competency in reflecting on the assessment results in their practices to determine students' language development, this statement has the lowest mean score in this section ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.75, S: .746). As can be deduced from the results, although the participants feel very competent in using different methods and techniques to make assessments, they are less competent in designing activities by reflecting on the assessment results to determine students' language development than other competencies in this sub-category. As a result, when the sub-competencies of monitoring and developing language improvement were examined, the teachers stated a high level of competency perception at the "agree" level ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.95, SD: .576).

**Table 5.** Teacher Perceptions Regarding "Collaboration with the School, Family and Community"

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd
I can cooperate with families for the development of students' language skills.	267	2	5	4.00	.704
I can cooperate with relevant institutions, organizations, and individuals for students to understand the importance of using a foreign language.	267	2	5	3.97	.717
I can enable students to realize the meaning and importance of national holidays and ceremonies and participate actively.	267	1	5	4.21	.640
I can manage and organize national festivals and celebrations.	267	1	5	4.10	.793
I can manage and organize national festivals and celebrations.	267	2	5	4.01	.725
I can be a social leader.	267	1	5	3.76	.857
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.01</b>	<b>.553</b>

When Table 5 is examined, the highest mean score belongs to the responses given by the participants to the competency "I can enable students to realize the meaning and importance of national holidays and ceremonies and participate actively" ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.21, SD: .640). Besides, the participants highly perceive their competency in preparing and conducting national holidays and celebrations ( $\bar{x}$ : 4.10, SD: .793). Although the lowest mean score in this section was related to teachers' seeing themselves as social leaders, they indicated that they had a high level of CSFC competency in the "agree" range with an overall mean score of  $\bar{x} = 4.01$ .

**Table 6.** Teacher Perceptions Regarding "Continuing Professional Development in English"

Items	N	Min.	Max	Mean	Sd
I can identify professional competencies.	267	2	5	4.03	.772
I can provide my personal and professional development for teaching	267	2	5	4.25	.515

English.					
I can use scientific research methods and techniques for my professional development.	267	1	5	3.79	.933
I can reflect my research on professional development in my practices.	267	2	5	4.05	.678
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>2,5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>.669</b>

When the participants' perceptions regarding the competency area of continuing professional development in the field of English are examined in Table 6, the mean score of the answers given by the teachers regarding the sub-competency item "I can provide my personal and professional development in teaching English" is  $\bar{x}=4.25$ . This mean score corresponds to the range of "strongly agree". According to this, it can be said that teachers perceive themselves as reasonably competent regarding the sub-competency of providing personal and professional development for teaching English. The lowest mean score is related to the sub-competency "I can use scientific research methods and techniques for my professional development" ( $\bar{x}=3.79$ , SD: .933). Although this mean score is in the "agree" range, it has a relatively lower mean score when compared to other scale items. As a result, when the sub-competencies of the CPD proficiency area in English were examined, teachers stated that they had a high level of CPD competency in the range of 'agree' with a general mean score  $\bar{x}=4.03$  ( $\bar{x}=4.03$ , SD: .669).

### Effect of Several Factors on Self-perceived Competency Levels

Another research question aims to answer if some variables have a statistically significant effect on EFL teachers' competency perceptions. A normality test was utilized to ascertain if sample data were collected from a regularly distributed population. The results revealed that the data obtained from the English Teachers Field-Specific Competencies Assessment Scale does not follow a normal distribution in all sub-categories of the scale. Therefore, it was determined that non-parametric tests should be used in data analysis. The Mann-Whitney U test determined whether the participants' perceptions of competency differed significantly by gender. Test results are shown in Table 7 below:

**Table 7.** Mann Whitney U Test Results by Gender

Sub-competency	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
POETP	Female	198	135.18	26766.50	6596.50	-.432	.666
	Male	69	130.60	9011.50			
DLS	Female	198	135.62	26853.50	6509.50	-.585	.559
	Male	69	129.34	8924.50			
MELD	Female	198	134.85	26701.00	6662.00	-.316	.752
	Male	69	131.55	9077.00			
CSFC	Female	198	137.87	27299.00	6064.00	-1.398	.162
	Male	69	122.88	8479.00			
CPD	Female	198	137.71	27266.00	6096.00	-1.356	.175
	Male	69	123.36	8511.50			

$p < 0.05$



As provided in Table 7, female teachers had higher mean ranks than male teachers. This means that female participants have a higher degree of self-perceived competencies than male participants regarding the five sub-categories of the scale. However, it is noticed that gender does not have a statistically significant effect on participants' competency levels considering all categories and related competencies at the  $p > .05$  levels. In other words, the study's findings indicate that competency levels do not show any statistically significant change among the five sub-competencies of the scale by gender.

**Table 8.** Kruskal- Wallis Test Results by Education Status of Participants

Sub-Competency	Education Status	N	Mean	Sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
POETP	BA	208	125.41	.441	14.931	<b>.005</b>
	MA student	21	147.31			
	MA graduate	25	174.72			
	Ph.D. student	12	164.83			
	Ph.D. graduate	1	252.50			
DLS	BA	208	127.85	.563	9.953	<b>.041</b>
	MA student	21	131.98			
	MA graduate	25	162.40			
	Ph.D. student	12	177.42			
	Ph.D. graduate	1	224.00			
MELD	BA	208	126.65	.576	11.209	<b>.024</b>
	MA student	21	145.45			
	MA graduate	25	169.04			
	Ph.D. student	12	160.21			
	Ph.D. graduate	1	232.00			
CSFC	BA	208	128.90	.553	9.102	.059
	MA student	21	135.88			
	MA graduate	25	173.54			
	Ph.D. student	12	128.96			
	Ph.D. graduate	1	227.00			
CPD	BA	208	125.25	.629	17,040	<b>.002</b>
	MA student	21	139.07			
	MA graduate	25	183.88			
	Ph.D. student	12	166.00			
	Ph.D. graduate	1	216.00			

$p < 0.05$

When Table 8 is examined, out of 267 English teachers who filled out the scale, 208 teachers, 77.9% of the participants, had a bachelor's degree. While 21 English teachers continued their education at the master's level, 25 teachers had already completed their master's degrees. In addition, there is only one Ph.D. graduate as 12 teachers were studying at the doctoral level. When the Kruskal Wallis test results are taken into consideration, education status has a statistically significant effect on teachers' perceived field-specific competency levels in planning and organizing English teaching processes ( $X^2$ : 14.931;  $p < .005$ ), developing language skills ( $X^2$ : 9.953;  $p < .005$ ), monitoring and evaluating language development ( $X^2$ : 11.209;  $p < .005$ ) and continuing professional development ( $X^2$ : 17.40.  $p < .005$ ). It can be assumed that education status is a determining factor in nearly all sub-categories, although it is slightly beyond the accepted p-value for the sub-category of collaboration with the school, family, and community ( $X^2$ : 11.209;  $p > .005$ ). As teachers improve

their knowledge and skills through postgraduate education, they perceive themselves as more competent in their fields.

**Table 9.** Kruskal-Wallis Test Results by Work Experience of Participants

Sub-competency	Experience	N	Mean	Sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
POETP	1-5 years	28	132.13			
	6-10 years	82	115.93			
	11-15 years	91	140.58	.441	8.258	.083
	16-20 years	43	142.90			
	Over 20 years	23	158.07			
DLS	1-5 years	28	140.64			
	6-10 years	82	118.61			
	11-15 years	91	136.95	.563	8.408	<b>.048</b>
	16-20 years	43	134.03			
	Over 20 years	23	169.04			
MELD	1-5 years	28	127.41			
	6-10 years	82	118.13			
	11-15 years	91	143.62	.576	7.589	.108
	16-20 years	43	136.06			
	Over 20 years	23	156.72			
CSFC	1-5 years	28	129.39			
	6-10 years	82	117.13			
	11-15 years	91	135.81	.553	8.803	.066
	16-20 years	43	153.86			
	Over 20 years	23	155.46			
CPD	1-5 years	28	146.80			
	6-10 years	82	123.22			
	11-15 years	91	135.15	.629	3.458	.484
	16-20 years	43	135.53			
	Over 20 years	23	149.43			

p<0.05

Examining Kruskal-Wallis's test results in Table by work experience groups, one can see that teachers with more than 20 years of experience have the highest mean scores across all sub-categories. The lowest mean scores belong to the 6-10 years of experience. The table above indicates that work experience statistically affects English language teachers' competency levels only in developing language skills ( $X^2$ : 8.408;  $p$ <.005). On the other hand, participants' subscale scores did not significantly affect their competency perceptions across sub-competencies except for developing language skills. One can assume that as teachers' work experience increases, their language teaching skills increase at self-perceived competency levels, and they consider themselves more competent in developing students' language skills.

**Table 10.** Kruskal Wallis Test Results by School Type

Sub-competency	School type	N	Mean	Sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
POETP	Primary	49	119.35			
	Secondary	133	133.36	.441	3.153	.207
	High School	85	143.44			
	Primary	49	120.78			

DLS	Secondary	133	133.54	.563	2.457	.293
	High School	85	142.35			
MELD	Primary	49	132.19			
	Secondary	133	126.84	.576	3.533	.171
CSFC	High School	85	146.24			
	Primary	49	123.41			
CPD	Secondary	133	130.89	.553	2.891	.236
	High School	85	144.96			
	Primary	49	119.77			
	Secondary	133	134.56	.629	2.536	.281
	High School	85	141.33			

$p < 0.05$

In Table 10, although the highest number of participants in the study are English teachers working in secondary schools (n: 133), the highest mean scores belong to English teachers working in high schools in five sub-competency levels of the scale. Kruskal-Wallis's test was applied to understand if the type of school the teachers work in has a statistically significant effect on their subject area competency levels. The results of this test revealed that teachers' perceptions of competency do not show a statistically significant change according to the type of school they work in. For this reason, it cannot be stated that school type is a determining factor within the scope of competency perceptions.

**Table 11.** Mann Whitney U Test Results by Previous INSET Participation

Sub-competency	Previous INSET	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
POETP	Yes	22	141.03	32155.00	2843.0	-	<b>.000</b>
		8			0	3.66	
DLS	No	39	92.90	3623.00			
		8				1	
MELD	Yes	22	138.73	31630.00	3368.0	-	<b>.015</b>
		8			0	2.43	
CSFC	No	39	106.36	4148.00			
		8				0	
CPD	Yes	22	135.54	30903.50	4094.5	-.815	.415
		8			0		
CSFC	No	39	124.99	4874.50			
		8					
CPD	Yes	22	134.90	30756.50	4241.5	-.462	.644
		8			0		
CPD	No	39	128.76	5021.50			
		8					
	Yes	22	137.92	31445.50	3552.5	-	<b>.041</b>
		8			0	2.04	
	No	39	111.09	4332.50			
		8				5	

$p < 0.05$

Table 11 indicates the effect of previous INSET participation on participants' self-perceived competency levels. Initially, participants' mean scores across all sub-competencies who responded positively to previous INSET program participation were higher than those who answered 'no' to the question. A Mann-Whitney test was administered to determine if involvement in earlier INSET programs significantly changed teachers' perceptions of competencies across all sub-categories.

Looking at the data in the table, one can see that participation in previous INSET programs has a statistically significant effect on teachers' self-perceived competencies regarding planning and organizing English language processes (U: 2843.00; p= .000), developing language skills (U: 3368.00; p: .015), continuing professional development competencies (U:3552.50; p: .041). As can be grasped from the results, as teachers participate in professional development programs such as in-service training, their knowledge and skills in their fields significantly affect their subject area competency perceptions.

### **In which areas do they need support to develop their competencies professionally?**

With this research question, the study also aimed to determine the perceived less competent areas of English language teachers and their needs for further development. Hereby, a complete understanding was provided with the quantitative results obtained from the scale. The results are demonstrated in Table 12 below:

**Table 12.** Perceived Less Competent Areas of EFL Teachers

<b>Perceived less competent areas</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Language skills	6	26.08
Digital skills	6	26.08
Classroom management	2	8,7
Implementing projects	2	8.7
Making research	2	8.7
Material development	2	8.7
Content knowledge	2	8.7
Lesson planning	1	4.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100,0</b>

As summarized in Table 12, teachers who filled out the written interview form reported diverse areas regarding the competencies they needed to develop. The most highlighted demand is linked with their anticipation of strengthening their language abilities, followed by the necessity for developing their digital skills (f:6; 26.08%). This result demonstrates that teachers placed a high value on improving their language skills in parallel with their digital capabilities while performing their professions, as detailed in the excerpts below:

- *I may need improvement in the field of reading skills as we have problems obtaining resources.*
- *My biggest wish is to be able to speak fluently and with an accent.*
- *Speaking a foreign language is an important aspect of being able to communicate in that language. As a result, I'd really like to enhance my speaking abilities as a teacher.*
- *Sometimes I feel less capable of improving students' writing skills because we do not have enough class hours to do the necessary classroom activities.*

Another need to improve the competency-related area is digital skills as pointed out by teachers in the excerpts:

- *I need to improve my abilities to keep up with the digital world since integrating some Web 2 tools into effective online classes with students is essential.*
- *I make an effort to keep up-to-date technological skills to create effective lessons.*
- *During the pandemic period, I realized that no matter how competent we are in language teaching, we are insufficient if we cannot transfer it to the digital learning environment. Therefore, I need to develop my competencies in this subject.*

Considering the opinions of the participants, one can assume that the emphasis is mostly placed on the teachers' displaying and developing language skills required by the subject area expertise and using information and communication technologies effectively in managing the teaching-learning process. Aside from these, the teachers stated that they needed to improve their competencies in classroom management, project implementation, research, material development, content knowledge, and lesson planning. All of the aforementioned less competent areas are outlined in the following excerpts:

- *I need support for planning lessons because I always use ready-made exams and plans.*
- *...Having to make some conversations about classroom management in Turkish makes me feel less competent.*
- *I think I may concentrate on material development to give learners opportunities to promote the target language for communicative purposes. Otherwise, it appears like we are sticking to the coursebook, which is monotonous.*
- *Since project-based studies such as E-twinning or Tübitak are very common lately, I need to improve my research skills to carry out them successfully.*

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of the current study were compared with comparable and pertinent studies in the literature in this section. In addition, suggestions and conclusions were drawn in light of the results.

The first research question aimed to determine all English language teachers' competency levels and then explore their degree of competency in particular sub-categories. The English Teachers Field-Specific Competencies Assessment Scale developed by Kararmaz and Arslan (2014) was utilized as a data collection tool to identify their competency levels. The results revealed that the competency perceptions of English teachers are pretty high. English teachers' perceptions range from  $\bar{x}$ : 3.78 to  $\bar{x}$ : 4.19 according to sub-competency areas. This range corresponds to the "agree" and "totally agree" ranges. It was very pleasing that teachers found themselves highly competent in the sum of the competencies because teachers with high self-efficacy believe they will demonstrate quality teaching with confidence in their competencies. However, it is possible to evaluate these results from a sceptical point of view; because there have been researchers who have determined that there are differences between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their observed competencies (Jacob & McGovern, 2015; Marshik, Ashton & Algina, 2017; Poulou, Reddy & Dudek, 2019).

Developing language skills had the lowest mean score among all competency areas ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.78; SD: .563). To shed light on this result, it is first necessary to present a portrait of our country, Türkiye regarding English language teaching. Starting with the 2013–2014 academic year, students started learning English in the second grade of primary school. Although various changes have been made in English teaching programs to respond to today's changing needs, it is seen that the desired success in English teaching has not been achieved in Türkiye (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2017; Memduhoğlu & Kozikoğlu, 2015). To illustrate, when the international proficiency index for 2020 is examined, the Netherlands, which ranks first among 100 countries, has a very high (very high

proficiency) English level, while Türkiye ranks 69th among the countries with low proficiency in English. (English Proficiency Index, 2020).

Teachers in the current study reported a relatively lower mean score than other competencies in improving students' speaking skills ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.63, SD: .845). As emphasized in the teachers' opinions in the study conducted by Tunç and Kozikoğlu (2022), almost all teachers think that speaking is the language skill students have the most difficulty learning. They mentioned that this skill was followed by listening and other skills. Furthermore, according to Paker (2012), 95% of teachers primarily try to teach English grammar and do not see or use the language as a communication tool. Moreover, there is no section for communication in the exams. Similarly, Özmat and Senemoğlu (2020) discuss various factors, such as short course hours, a lack of flexibility in the course schedules, the inadequacy of the materials used in the course, insufficient use of technology in the course, too much emphasis on theory and grammar teaching, and the student's prejudices against the course, that makes it difficult to use English as a communication tool. For these reasons, even though English is a global language of communication, in this study, teachers' perceptions of a relatively low level of proficiency, especially in improving students' speaking skills, seem to be affected by the results of the above studies.

In the results, the lowest mean score was associated with conducting practices that consider special education students' requirements to account for the requirements of special education students among all items of the scale ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.22, SD: .898). In line with this result, it can be suggested that there is a significant lack of research in foreign languages despite the pervasive research in other disciplines related to inclusion and Individualized Education Program (IEP) preparation in the literature (Zeybek, 2015). Among the reasons for this situation, it can also be put forward that foreign language lessons are considered insignificant and unnecessary for children with learning difficulties. In addition, the fact that parents of children with special needs want their children to devote time to other disciplines that they consider more important and beneficial during their stay at school affects this situation even more negatively (Padurean, 2014). In the same vein, the study conducted by Yesmin, Ullah, and Khan (2020) demonstrated that instructors had a significant obstacle in teaching language to special children due to a lack of knowledge, suitable classroom equipment, a lack of awareness, and limited language training.

On the other hand, according to Article 27 of the Special Education Regulation of the Ministry of National Education, these students can be exempted from teaching some knowledge and skills in foreign language programs, the whole course, or even the foreign language course exam in the central system exams in line with their demands (by petition to the school administration) in primary education. Therefore, as long as students continue to be in the classroom even though they are exempt from the course, English teachers also need support to improve their competencies in teaching language to children with special needs.

Although the highest mean score included the teacher perceptions regarding planning and organizing English teaching processes among all competency areas, the proficiency level of teachers in using technological resources while teaching English was relatively lower ( $\bar{x}$ : 3.95, SD: .785). They demanded more assistance in utilizing technology resources than other scale items. Teachers needed to continually develop fresh teaching strategies in classrooms to keep students interested and motivated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as educators. This compulsory situation caught many teachers almost unprepared in this sense and made it difficult for many teachers to develop content in related fields and present online education effectively.

Another research question tried to determine if certain variables statistically impact EFL teachers' perceptions of their competencies. These variables included teachers' gender, educational background, work experience, school type, and previous INSET participation. The findings demonstrated that education status is a deciding factor in almost all sub-categories of the scale, except for collaboration with the school, family, and community, where it is slightly over the accepted p-value. This result showed that teachers consider themselves more competent in their professions as their knowledge and skills increase during postgraduate study.

It is well-known that postgraduate education requires a different level of knowledge, skills, and synthesizing skills than undergraduate education by conducting in-depth studies in a specific field, aiming to raise a high level of specialization for problem-solving, producing knowledge, and specializing in professional fields (Karaman & Bakırcı, 2010). At the same time, gaining an

important place in a constantly developing and renewing age necessitates the training of a qualified workforce, which is the most crucial input of development (İlhan, Sünkür & Yılmaz, 2012). In parallel with the current study results, teachers believe that postgraduate education benefits them in decision-making, academic autonomy, career development, critical thinking, and professional competency and values, as suggested by İltter (2020).

Barduhn and Johnson (2009) also argue that, despite the prevalence of the opinion that four-year undergraduate education is sufficient for the development of professional competency of English teachers, the desired level of competency, which accepts the master's degree as a basic one, can only be achieved with a doctorate. They stated that there are ongoing opinions; therefore, for example, in New York, the title of permanent teacher is given to teachers with a master's degree. Similarly, if the knowledge and skills provided by undergraduate education are considered a layer, what is gained from graduate education will almost be like new bricks placed on top and, therefore, higher layers. The onion metaphor used by Korthagen (2004) for the development of teachers' competency can be given as an example of this situation, and this analogy would be appropriate to express the state of knowing and being able to expand in each layer.

Another noteworthy result for discussion was the statistically significant effect of work experience on EFL teachers' competency perceptions. Results revealed that out of 267 participants, teachers with 11 to 15 years of experience made up the largest group of participants, constituting 34 per cent of all. The 82 teachers with 6–10 years of professional experience came in second. Work experience statistically affects English language teachers' competency levels in developing students' language skills ( $X^2: 8.408; p.005$ ). As teachers' professional experience expands, so do their self-perceived competency levels in language teaching skills, and they feel more competent in enhancing students' language abilities. Obviously, not every experience is educational: Some experienced teachers are ineffective or may lose their enthusiasm, while others are active and competent. Nonetheless, a more experienced teaching staff generally benefits students and schools (Podolsky, Kini & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Koedel and Betts (2007) came up with a similar result that teachers learn the most from experience during their first years in the classroom, but they continue to increase their competency beyond these first gains. The researchers also noted that as teachers gain experience, their students are more likely to perform better on performance indicators other than standardized tests.

The effect of participation in professional development activities on teacher competencies also presented another essential result in this study. It was discovered in this study that participation in prior INSET programs significantly impacts teachers' self-perceived competencies in planning and organizing English language processes, developing language skills, and continuing professional development competencies. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that teachers' judgments of their subject area competency are greatly influenced by their knowledge and expertise in their professions when they engage in professional development programs like in-service training. Several studies have also found that professional development courses improve teachers' content understanding and pedagogical skills (Radford, 1998; Supovitz & Turner, 2000; Nguyen, 2018). Another set of research found that these courses boost teachers' trust in teaching their subjects and foster a positive approach to their professions (Derakhshan, Coombe, Zhaleh & Tabatabaeian, 2020; Arslan, Mirici & Öz, 2020).

Together with the scale results, the researcher also intended to identify the perceived less competent areas of English language teachers and their needs for ongoing development with another question: "*In which areas do they need support to develop their competencies professionally?*". The most prominent need was associated with their expectation of improving their language skills, specifically speaking skills, followed by the need to enhance their digital capabilities. The teachers' need to improve their English-speaking skills was consistent with the relatively lower level of "improving students' speaking skills" competency obtained from the scale. As it can be understood from the relationship between these data obtained from two different data collection tools, teachers, who do not see themselves as competent in speaking fluently and express the need to improve this language skill, may also feel inadequate in developing students' speaking skills. This situation leads us to conclude that teachers cannot teach effectively in areas where they do not feel competent, mainly in English speaking skills.

In addition to speaking skills, teachers also stated that they needed to develop their digital competencies. Although some of the participants described themselves as competent in digital skills in the previous research question, most of them stated that they needed to develop their skills related to this subject. Parallel to the results of the current study, pedagogical difficulties, specifically the lack of digital skills of teachers and students, a lack of structured content, and a lack of interaction and motivation of students, were among the fundamental problems of compulsory distance education (Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020). It is also stated that teachers are worried about the lack of knowledge that may occur in students and feels incompetent during the distance education process (Bakioğlu & Çevik, 2020). In another study, it was revealed that there are problems in assessment-evaluation in distance education, students are not on equal terms in terms of technical infrastructure and opportunities, they do not attend their classes, and teachers need in-service training to deal with some of these deficiencies (Balaman & Hanbay, 2021). For these reasons, it is understandable why English teachers may not feel competent enough in digital competencies and need further professional development programs in this study.

All in all, it can be put forward that teachers themselves need to be aware of the competencies necessary to educate qualified, productive, and interested individuals in foreign language learning and teaching. Furthermore, they are supposed to make continued efforts to improve them. Since teacher competencies are dynamic rather than static, they can be changed to meet the needs of the time and the specifications of current educational trends. Additionally, to better meet the requirements of students, various implementations of these competencies should be shared while taking into account context-dependent variations in educational environments.

Another important issue is that these competency items can be described by correlating them with their practical representations in actual classroom settings so that teachers can comprehend the underlying reasons for each competency item and find them achievable to depict classroom conditions. Teachers are more likely to regard these competencies as possible if the gap between their formal explanations and their consequences in practice can be bridged. As a final word, it can be suggested that teacher competencies need to be prepared with participatory understanding, and they should be continuously developed and updated in cooperation with the relevant institutions, benefiting from the feedback to be taken from the application at certain intervals, the innovations in education, and the findings of scientific studies on teacher competencies.

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