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## CHALLENGES AND DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Edited by Subhan Zein and Yuko Goto Butler

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# English for Young Learners in Asia

## Challenges and Directions for Teacher Education

**Edited by**
**Subhan Zein and**
**Yuko Goto Butler**

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# 6 English for Young Learners in Turkey

## Reflections from Pre-Service English Language Teachers

*Melike Ünal Gezer*

### Introduction

The impact of the global trends in need of early introduction of languages due to economic and political concerns and parentocracy causing pressure on the demand for early language introduction (Cameron, 2003; Enever & Moon, 2009) are the major factors changing the future of English language learning/teaching. Early English education has expanded exponentially in the past few years on a global scale (Enever, 2012). Proficiency in English enabling greater social and economic gains to citizens is the reason behind this trend transforming the world into a global village. The lowering age of English as a foreign language (EFL) introduction at a global level is based on two assumptions: first, that young learners are better at learning languages including English and, secondly, that a longer period of learning increases EFL proficiency by the end of schooling (Enever, Moon, & Raman, 2009). On the dilemma of the *earlier is better*, Butler (2015) demands researchers pay closer attention to the quality of instruction as the proposition "the earlier the better" has not come to a conclusion one way or the other.

Early language learning programs vary to a great extent from awareness raising to language focus programs, and from content-based curricula to immersion (Inbar-Lourie & Shohamy, 2009). Global trends display the introduction of foreign languages is lowered to Grade 1 in Poland and Croatia, and to Grade 3 in Korea and China. However, factors such as misalignment across policy making, logistics, and workforce impact these trends adversely. Crowded classrooms, resource problems, and continuity of EFL across grades and tiers, somewhat misaligned dynamics between top-down policies and bottom-up implementations, the global demand and the local realities, and most importantly, quality teacher training in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) are the most pressing concerns.

Recent estimates report about seventy million teachers who serve in the field of TEYL globally. Quality teacher workforce for TEYL is a priority for educational policies of nations. Despite the dire need, there is still limited information on TEYL in EFL contexts (Butler, 2015). Enever (2011) and Enever, Moon, and Raman (2009) report the lack of trained teachers enforce the countries to rely

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on teacher provision without sufficient TEYL-specific training. The pre-service English language teacher (PSELT) training lacks drastically across nations; the ones implementing specialized PSELT training are lacking in quality instruction with a needs-based training program (Zein, 2017a). Hence insufficiencies in pre- and in-service teacher education in TEYL across Europe have been reported (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; Enever, 2011). While the global trends tend to direct the attention of the nations to early language instruction, the challenges at the local contexts vary drastically. One factor causing educational language policy recommendations to fail is insufficient and ineffective teacher training (Zein, 2017b). Inadequate English teaching personnel policy with systematic training based on the emerging needs in the local contexts (Baldauf, Kaplan, Kamwangamalu, & Bryant, 2011) is a high-priority matter across the world including Turkey's policy development in TESOL and multilingualism (Ünal Gezer & Dixon, 2021).

With the introduction of English starting early grade levels across Europe, inadequate supply of motivated, capable, and prepared teachers to serve the needs of TEYL sector of education systems of European countries has tremendously increased (Enever, 2014). One point that has been consistently reported in different research findings is that English for young learners (EYL) teachers are not adequate in delivery of instruction and improvement of teachers' professional development is a pressing agenda for countries across the world (Zein, 2016a). The dilemma of qualified teacher training for effective TEYL has been a global concern including Indonesia (Zein, 2016b), Turkey (Kırkgöz, 2008), and Japan (Butler & Iino, 2005), and a training scheme for teacher education to effectively teach young learners (YLs) is necessary (Butler, 2019; Zein, 2015). PSELT training is crucial for successful TEYL but it is not sufficient to prepare English language teachers for YLs (Zein, 2016b). As for Korea, China, Taiwan, and Japan, systematic teacher support with in-service training that embodies workshops, study abroad programs and additional courses offered by teacher-trainers are recommended (Butler, 2004).

Using Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) model for language-in-education-policy planning to examine EFL teacher training, Butler (2015) compares the early foreign language introduction policies of East Asian nations including China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan and reports major concerns on personnel matter discussing teacher qualifications, local teachers and native English-speaking teachers as revealed in the following words: "Securing qualified teachers for early English instruction is a major issue in the focal countries, both in terms of how best to train local teachers and how best to utilize the abilities of native speakers" (p. 309).

According to Shin and Crandall (2014), the most important factor in a child's educational life is the teacher. Young language learners are highly dependent on their teachers; therefore, teacher education and professional development in TEYL are of great importance (Butler, 2011). Hu (2005), along these lines, reports China needs trained instructors to teach YLs more efficiently. The essential goal of PSELT training should be to educate teachers who are motivated,

capable, and trained to teach English to YLs. In doing so, the work load of teachers of young learners should be arranged in a way that enables teachers to reflect on their own practices and to work collaboratively to improve the quality of early English instruction.

Numerous changes are taking place in European Union countries where the age of EFL introduction is lowered to age six in 2002. The repercussions of such policy changes have a butterfly effect on the nations that try to implement the educational policy decisions unvaryingly with or without necessary infrastructure available (Haznedar & Uysal, 2013). In a discussion on PSELT education, it is claimed PSELT education is handled with add-on, short training programs in most countries so teachers could gain necessary skills and competence in TEYL. In many countries in Western Europe and East Asia, a heavier emphasis is put on PSELT education with or without a specific emphasis on TEYL. Shin and Crandall (2014) mention the lack of specialized training programs and coursework needed to train PSELTs adequately. Turkey had its share in this trend with consecutive attempts to lower the age of EFL introduction in about a decade apart without necessary preparation including teacher qualifications to effectively serve EFL learning YLs in Turkey.

The present chapter aims to fill in this gap in the current literature by initiating PSELT training, a shortfall in many other emerging nations' EFL education systems. The following sections of the chapter deal with the literature review, methods for data collection and analysis, results, and findings. A concluding section appears after that, followed by a section on the limitations of the study.

## Literature Review

The training and professional development of PSELT concerns are prevalent across nations and are of great importance. The ELLiE project by Enever (2011) gathering data on TEYL from seven different European countries reports teachers mainly choose traditional teaching that is teacher centered and mainly offered in native languages to teach EFL to YLs. Existing literature reports the incompetency of TEYL instructors in different ways. In a narrower scope, the participating PSELTs (N = 100) who were senior EFL majors in Turkey report PSELTs' voices and disbelief in their second language (L2) fluency and phonological ability despite their enjoyment in L2 communication attempts and their adequate knowledge in English (Gürsoy, 2015). It is evident that PSELTs' willingness to partake in communicative efforts in the target language – English – would not guarantee success in necessary teacher qualities (i.e., correct intonation and pronunciation) due to the multi-faceted and long-winded nature of TEYL professional development.

Recruiting qualified early English teachers is on the verge of being a globally pressing concern and to tackle this problem, nations offer numerous solutions such as recruiting homeroom teachers who are primarily trained to teach other subjects but EFL or by recruiting EFL instructors with needed linguistic capacities without sufficient pedagogical training in TEYL (Emery, 2012; Enever &

Moon, 2009; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Kırkgöz, 2009a). None of these solutions yield long-term and effective results for an effective TEYL.

### *English Teacher to YLs and Professional Training*

English has become the *sine-qua-non* language of early language programs across the world. English instruction is a long-term investment trend around the globe and the implementation of early English instruction is quite popular across nations (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011). Due to the rapidly increasing number of young learners in the world as well as East and Southeast Asia, teacher training for TEYL has become a pressing and complicated matter (Butler, 2015; Spolsky & Moon, 2012). Primary school teachers of English had to face some challenges. In Korea, teacher shortage after the introduction of compulsory English at the primary level forced policy makers to find quick solutions such as approximately 120 hours of in-service English language pedagogy, methodology, and language competence boosting training. Teacher education is the key to success of early English education (Enever, 2014); however, many countries carry out pre-service and in-service young learner teacher education by trial and error (Butler, 2019). Thus, young learner instructors or teacher trainees struggle to meet policy requirements and expectations. In TEYL, there are further issues such as shortage of qualified teachers, regional (i.e., urban-provincial) and institutional (i.e., public-private) gaps in terms of qualification levels of teachers.

Garton (2014) lays out the issues in TEYL as personnel policy within recruitment, training, and English language competency frameworks. Heavy emphasis on the theory and theoretically oriented teacher education coursework holds teachers in Korea back to confront the realities in the classrooms. Teachers' lack of target language proficiency is due to their lack of self-confidence. Lack of self-confidence is the cause and the result of the insufficient English language proficiency. Investigations on prospective English language teachers' self-perceptions about primary school language teacher qualifications and teacher self-reported data reveal teachers are least comfortable with their L2 fluency and cultural knowledge associated with L2 (Gürsoy, 2015).

In light of global TEYL policy analyses, the following two questions have emerged: *who should teach YLs?* and *how to educate qualified YL teachers?* Responding to the first part of the questions, *who should teach YLs*, in Asia, the division is very sharp with the choice of specialists (a teacher who specifically is trained to teach English) in China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, and the choice of generalists (a primary education specialist – also known as *homeroom teacher*) in Korea and Japan. To overcome this common problem, other countries come up with different solutions such as increasing the number of prospective teachers graduating from English departments in South Korea (Kang, 2012), teacher training programs having a required EYL component in China (Chen, 2012), having a certain level of proficiency in the target language (B2 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or CEFR) in Vietnam, and specially designed coursework for EYL in Indonesia (Zein, 2015,

2016a). The formats of pre-service and in-service teacher training, the length and nature of training programs vary across nations. While some training programs – also known as *cascade models* – are based on traditional, top-down ideologies which ineffectively aim at training teachers collectively, some other training models are more differentiating and needs oriented.

Regardless of the efforts of the nations, the quality of teacher education has remained to be a problem with young learners at the central point of English at early years of education. English language educator professional development (PD) programs developed by agencies have been criticized for being conducted without needs analysis and more theoretically rather than practically, and for being sporadic rather than systematically implemented (Zein, 2017a). Such training efforts are often vulnerable to bureaucratic interventions including non-transparent participation selection and imposed content introduction. These are some frequently occurring problematic dimensions of professional development programs and they lower the quality of English language training. TESOL teacher education for TEYL is advised to be practically oriented with a shifting focus onto the child rather than the teacher (Zein, 2017b).

The follow-up question is *what characteristics should a teacher carry* so she can serve as a teacher to young language learners? The qualifications are mainly linguistic, content-related, pedagogical, and cultural knowledge and skills to teach English to young language learners (Shin & Crandall, 2014). When the list is further narrowed down, the ability to convey the information through contextualized, engaging, game-oriented, and implicit manner by tapping into multiple senses of YLs set the core of professional knowledge of a teacher to YLs (Ünal Gezer, 2021). The key to classroom management is differentiation, sheltering, observation & reflection, and routines (Cameron, 2001; Linse & Nunan, 2005).

A quest for unearthing the PD needs of primary EFL teachers, Zein (2017a) reports the teachers' need for language skills integration and improved pronunciation as must-have components of PD programs. Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014), having studied over 4,500 teachers worldwide, report similarly that TEYL teachers are in need of further language-based training and PD support to improve their language skills, pronunciation, and grammar. Additionally, content knowledge, content-specific pedagogical strategies, knowledge about language acquisition, familiarity with communicative language teaching methods (other contemporary ones such as task-based, content-based, and learner-centered methods), and assessment strategies are necessary for being a qualified TEYL instructor. Having been trained as an English language teacher based on traditional teacher education ideologies, PSELTs graduate without the needed skills and knowledge to design and implement communicative, learner-centered language instruction.

It is critically important for early English teachers to obtain professional skills, knowledge, and awareness specially tailored to TEYL. Teachers, including those with degrees in English teaching, find it challenging to design and implement age-appropriate, communicative tasks that can keep children's attention and

motivation alive, particularly for children with diverse proficiency levels (Butler, 2015; Lee, 2014). Implementing communicative language teaching with YLs often requires uniquely different pedagogical and instructional skills. Recruiting English teachers trained for general English learner profiles to teach primary school pupils does not yield healthy results as they need TEYL-oriented training and experience.

Countries have different approaches to sustain the increasing demand for TEYL instructor. South Korea aims to increase the number of teachers specializing in young learners (Butler, 2009a,b). Taiwanese and Chinese governments adopt another approach with a required teacher certification or an undergraduate degree in teaching EYL (Chen, 2012; Hu, 2005). Additional in-service training programs are available presenting theoretical information to increase the quality of English to young learner pedagogy. In Indonesia, universities offer EYL as an elective course for those teachers embarking on elementary English teaching. Zein (2017b) proposes a minor or concentration in EYL teaching as opposed to coursework with limited number of hours for Indonesian PSELT education programs.

Henceforth Turkish TEYL context and quality TEYL instructor training will be discussed.

### *An Overview of Turkish TEYL Context*

Turkey included English as a mandatory foreign language as part of primary education starting 1997 (Kırkgöz, 2005) modeling after other nations such as South Korea (Garton, 2014), China, Malaysia, Japan, and Brazil. In the Turkish education context, EFL became part of the primary education starting Grade 4 with a policy implementation that took place in 1997. Previously part of middle school curricula, English quickly became a part of primary education and started to be introduced as early as Grade 4. With its traditional foreign language teaching methodology, heavy reliance on government-approved English textbooks lacking in meaningful, age-appropriate learning opportunities for young English language learners (Haznedar, 2009), limited hours of instructional time in English, and its wish to improve English competency nationwide, Turkey shows similarities to emerging nations such as Taiwan (Butler, 2015) and Indonesia (Zein, 2012). Despite all favorable intentions, Turkey fails in EFL instruction (TEPAV, 2013). One of the remedial solutions in Turkey – like the rest of the globe – has been lowering the age of EFL instruction (Kırkgöz, 2008; Nunan, 2003).

As a consequence, Turkey undertook a policy change in 2012: it dropped the age of EFL instruction to age seven starting, or as early as Grade 2 in Turkey. This recent policy change is the repercussion of *4+4+4 educational reform* model that associates each tier with primary and middle school and high school education offered at state schools. Formerly, English was offered as a foreign language starting Grade 6 at middle school and is currently offered as early as Grade 2 at Turkish public schools. The age of English language introduction could be even lower at private institutions in the Turkish context.

The aforementioned curricular reforms by Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MONE) prompt Turkey's Council of Higher Education to adjust PSELT education regulations consecutively in 1998 and in 2006. The EFL teacher education programs in Turkey consist of general education studies, the study of pedagogical content, knowledge of literature and linguistics, and practical training. Approximately half of the coursework in ELT focuses on the subject matter, 30% is for pedagogical practice, and 20% is for general and cultural knowledge (Seferoğlu, 2006).

Early foreign language education has quickly become one of the grandest teacher recruitment sectors in Turkey. According to statistical data retrieved from Turkey's MONE, the educational workforce in Turkey is approximately one million including all subjects and all educational tiers (excluding tertiary education which is governed by Council of Higher Education). Of all the teachers actively working in Turkish public schools, about 78,000 are English language educators. Among these English language teachers actively working at public schools across school types (e.g., public vocational schools to public boarding schools) and grade levels (e.g., public primary to public high school), about 12,000 serve students at primary education (Grades 1–4, ~ages 6–10) and about 35,000 English language teachers serve middle schoolers (Grades 5–8, ~ages 11–14). As this data-set retrieved from Turkey's MONE was only about teachers working at public schools, the educational workforce for private institutions was not included in this report. The statistical data revealing Turkey's early English teacher workforce imply the grand need to examine teacher training and professional development in TEYL. This effort is to ensure Turkish PSELTs develop necessary qualifications to serve YLs more effectively and for Turkish YLs to receive high quality early EFL instruction in Turkish education system.

The curricular change that took place in 1997 to revamp English instruction in Turkey paved the way to restructuring PSELT education provision and teacher training. Teacher education programs at higher education have sought ways to improve the quality of teacher education with additional coursework to train in ELT methodology and additional coursework to enable PSELTs gain familiarity in TEYL at earlier grade levels (Kırkgöz, 2009b). After the educational reform of 1997, English teacher education departments had an additional course called TEYL in Turkey and the demand on Turkey's education system for qualified TEYL teachers has been sustained to a certain extent with this step taken. Despite its urgency, pre-service PSELTs to YLs overall do not receive systematic training except for TEYL coursework with abundant theoretical discussions and meager practical experience through observation and reflection. This study examines field experience as part of providing enhanced practice of teacher education for PSELTs in the Turkish context.

## The Present Study

The center of the present study is subject-specific field experience reflective practices of PSELTs. The existing literature demonstrates reflective practice has long

been utilized as a teacher training tool (Cavanagh & Prescott, 2010; Liou, 2001; Russell, 2005); however, these studies mainly focused on PSELT training with practicum – the mandatory field experience – during senior year. The TEYL course does not offer a practicum and this is a major gap in Turkey's English language teacher education programs – especially for early language teacher education. With the existing research, reflections of PSELTs on TEYL-based practicum will provide timely feedback so teacher training programs expand their horizons to be more comprehensive in serving the needs of different learner profiles and this is the novelty of the present study. Qualitative research design based on PSELT reflection can deepen the teacher training theories and shed light on PSELTs' training practices.

In light of existing literature, the following research questions are posed:

*RQ1* Following each visit to TEYL classrooms, what do PSELTs mainly reflect on during their field experience with young language learners?

*RQ2* What is the nature of the reflection that emerges when PSELTs reflect on their field experience with young language learners, teachers, and learning settings?

## Method

### *Participants*

The participating junior undergraduate pre-service teachers (17 females, 6 males, average age 23 years) attended an ELT program at a private university in central Turkey. The volunteering participants were attending the TEYL course at the time of the study. They were sampled based on purposive sampling as they were taking the coursework called Teaching English to Young Learners during their junior year at the English language education program. The participation in this project was voluntary. Throughout the results section, pseudonyms were used and participating PSELTs were assured of confidentiality.

TEYL courses mainly provide theoretical information with some practice through demonstrations and in-class presentations. Whether theory or practice, the PD of PSELTs mainly takes place in the classroom which is often far from real classrooms with YLs and TEYL instructional practices. The present study implemented observation and reflection of field experience for PSELTs' training. All participating PSELTs were new to reflective writing. They had not been trained in how to reflect on educational settings, instructional practices before the study and throughout the present research they received systematic training in reflective practices.

### *Instrument*

Following the research schedule, data were collected with the participation of PSELTs. The two major data collection tools were observation and reflective journals (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Observation entailed visiting

English lessons to pay close attention to different aspects of teaching activities taking place.

Journals were teachers' records as responses to the observed teaching events. Journals were kept for two reasons: (a) to keep a record of events and ideas so the teacher could reflect on them later, (b) to use journal writing itself as a tool to discover the teachers' perspectives and insights about teaching. PSELTs beliefs were revealed through their reflective entries. The participants completed observation and they paid attention to certain characteristics of the teacher, the learner, the learning environment and when they retrospectively evaluated these observations (reflect on action), they re-considered some of the present tendencies, awareness, and current educational orientations (reflect in action) in order to think ahead and plan ahead (reflection for action).

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Figure 6.1 displays the data collection schedule of the present study. PSELTs were provided with an observation checklist in the first week and they were told the observation checklists were to direct their attention to different aspects of a lesson. After completion of the weekly visits to the field and observing the lessons, the PSELTs completed the observation checklists. After completing observation checklists during their field visits, PSELTs were advised to reflect on their school day with YLs. The consents of the participating PSELTs were granted and the participants were informed their identities and names would be kept confidential.

This step-by-step reflective paper exchange between the pre-service teachers and the instructor increased the quality of reflectivity in PSELTs observation and reflection efforts throughout the process.

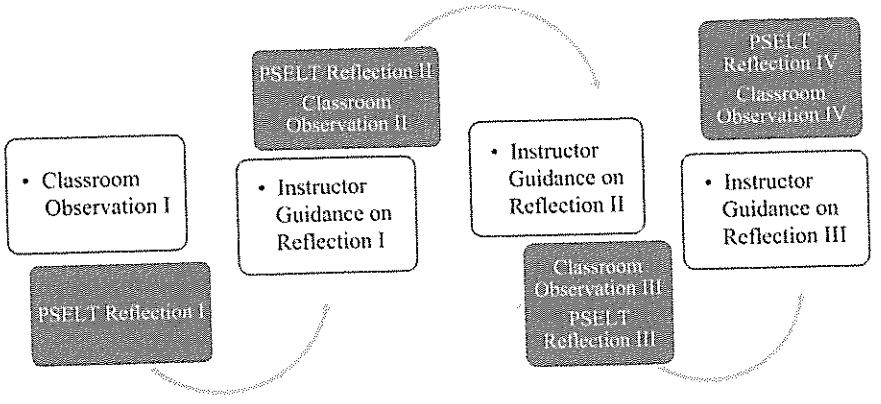



*Figure 6.1* Data collection cycle.

### *Data Analysis*

The present study is based on reflective practice; however, at times PSELTs had difficulty in differentiating between reporting and reflecting. This problem was overcome with an add-on PSELT training in observation and reflection. Then the reflective essays of all participating pre-service teachers were read multiple times, first to gain familiarity with the content and second to generate codes (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In terms of data analysis, a major limitation was the coding processes. In order to ensure reliability of the coding PSELT reflections, two coders worked with the data and an inter-coder agreement was reported to overcome potential reliability and validity concerns. The analyses of the content and the coding procedures necessitated several turns until the emerging themes were secured. The most commonly emerging codes and the themes were listed in the results section. The coding and the rest of the analyses were done by two raters and the scoring agreement (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) reached 85%, indicating that the agreement was reasonably high.

## Results

In this study, three most commonly occurring themes were reported in the reflective papers of PSELTs. These themes revealed what the participating PSELTs paid attention to the most throughout their classroom observations.

### *PSELT's Reflection on the Classroom Layout*

The classroom layout was mentioned over fifty times across PST reflections with the use of following adjectives describing the nature of learning environments with *spacious*, *colorful*, *relaxing*, and *bright*. A secondary dimension of the classroom layout theme was seating arrangement which became a theme with thirteen times occurrence of *seating* code. This theme was also implied with the expressions such as *working stations, YLs facing each other, facilitating communication among YLs*. In groups of four, students were seated facing each other and working together. This layout also facilitated transitioning from one stage of the lesson to the next and enabled the integration of numerous techniques such as a jigsaw activity. On this note, Cecile reflected: "Class atmosphere seemed very nice and sincere to me. The layout of the classroom is so that students could be together and work on most of the activities together."

On the classroom layout, a third dimension reflected upon by PSELTs was related to peripheral learning thanks to the walls of the classroom full of posters written in Turkish and English. *Poster* was coded in the PSELT reflections over twenty times and *peripheral learning* emerged in the reflections twice. The PSELT reflections highlighted how posters established an ongoing learning platform for the students with classroom rules, inspirational/motivational notes, students' birthdays, favorite toys, and the board of seasons, months, days, and

the weather chart. The following PSELT Candice's quote highlighted the functionality of peripheral learning:

> "Classroom environment with so many posters on seasons, jobs- good way to teach vocabulary. In the classroom there was another corner specifically for grammar – verbs, verb conjugations etc. I found this useful and I would like to make a corner like that in my future classroom."

One last dimension of the classroom layout was related to a corner of the classroom where there were storybooks and reading cushions. One other emerging theme was the functionality of carpet in TEYL with 25 times occurrences of *carpet* in the reflections data. Reflections reported how students who completed one task at the desk could easily take a break with a book on classroom carpet. A second function of the carpet would be to take a break from the classroom routine and create a stress-free zone. Lucy in this regard reflected, *"The use of carpet was to make students feel comfortable and give a sense of home-like."*

### *PSELT's Reflection on Contemporary Language Teaching Approach, Methods, and Techniques for TEYL*

Coded PSELT reflections revealed emerging themes referring to TEYL approach, method, and techniques. The most popularly reported method was *communicative language teaching* (N = 25) *which established the first theme. Thematic TEYL instruction* occurred thirteen times in the data set. This was reflected on by PSELTs examples of thematic vocabulary instruction through songs. *Song* was a frequently occurring code in the data set (N = 60) and *story* was the second most frequently occurring code in the PSELT reflections (N = 40). This yielded an emerging theme called *songs and children's storybooks as authentic TEYL techniques.* Songs such as "Baby Shark" "Finger Family" "How is the Weather?" were exemplified in the coded data supporting this newly emerging theme. Connecting language learning with subject contents of science or mathematics, *content-based instruction – CBI* – was coded multiple times in PSELTs reflections. A less popularly attended concept emerging in PSELT reflections was *phonics instruction* (N = 5) was partially implied with the code *pronunciation instruction with YLs* (N = 15) and *spelling* (N = 13) or overall *literacy development* (N = 1). Bryan reflecting on early spelling instruction mentioned,

> "I never had education on spelling the sounds in English. We always went straight into the words and I realized how wrong what our teachers were doing was. This is the perfect preparation for students to pronounce words in future."

Another PSELT reflection revealed PSELTs' attention on *early metalinguistic awareness-raising* activities such as tapping into tense indicators, verb conjugations with the use of storybooks and other phonics-based activities.

This established another dimension of phonics-based TEYL. For instance, one PSELT reflection was describing how an in-service teacher was using Scholastic Word Families series (Spring in the Kingdom of Ying) to take YLs attention to productive word endings called *word families*. Other codes emerging in the data set were related to using *push-in* and *pull-out methods* (*n*: 3), *differentiated instruction* (*n*: 3) to cater to the needs of YLs. An outdated language instruction method – *Audio Lingual Method* – was repeated a few times in the coded data set establishing another methodology-related theme.

### *PSELTs' Reflection on Teacher and Learner Characteristics*

PSELTs reflected on *student* (*n*: 150) and *teacher* (*n*: 87). Coded teacher qualifications revealed *teacher professional and personality characteristics* such as being lively, patient, kind, understanding, positive, and dominant. PSELT reflections descriptively reported YL teachers with over two hundred codes which established *teacher characteristics* theme. A second emerging theme was *teacher instructional abilities* such as using mimics and gestures for effective TEYL instruction and strong classroom management skills. The third sub-dimension of teacher qualities was defining *teacher roles* such as *a facilitator* (*n*: 9), a *guide* (*n*: 3). PSELT reflections also revealed a newly emerging concept of *(non)-native-speakerness* (*n*: 20). Teachers' years of experience, classroom management skills, pedagogy, and instructional tools such as lead-in, demonstration, exemplification, consistency in behavior and instructions were reflected across numerous PSELT reflective entries.

PSELT coded data revealed YL-related codes which yielded another emerging theme *YL characteristics*. The most frequently occurring codes were *YL linguistic proficiency* and *willing participation*. *YL developmental characteristics* was a second YL-based theme based on codes such as *inability to read or write* and *need for physical engagement*. Candice reflected:

> "Although this is a disciplined school, students are allowed to move around. When I went to elementary school, we were forbidden to move in class, still I do not know why but my primary school teacher has forgotten. Young learners need to move and touch. As someone who had to experience these bans, I will definitely use TPR in my classes."

## Discussion

The study findings paved the way for further discussions and practical implications for TEYL instruction, PSELT training practice and policy recommendations. In the results, classroom layout was extensively reflected on. TEYL should be conducted in welcoming, comfortable, and student-centered learning environments. This is necessary so that the YLs establish a sense of belonging – a key ingredient to feeling safe and secure in the classroom – around classmates and the teacher. Additionally, because classroom layout is the most tangible piece of

teaching English to young language learners puzzle, it has been the most commonly referred one across multiple entries.

A secondary dimension of *classroom layout* theme was *peripheral learning.* Creating linguistically-rich learning environments for YLs is crucial for continuous learning. In EFL contexts, exposure to L2 is already limited; therefore, the posters, charts, bulletin boards function as rich and authentic sources of L2 learning for YLs. Print-rich learning contexts are useful resources for an ongoing exposure to the target language or multiple languages (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015). In parallel with *classroom layout* theme was displaying YLs' work on the class walls. Student performances (e.g., writing or arts) being displayed on the classroom walls, emerging in PSELT reflections reveal their appreciation of YLs' effort and progress. Displaying YLs' artwork or language performances not only encourages peer learning but also plants the seeds of values education in a learning community (Cameron, 2001; Linse & Nunan, 2005).

Further discussions on the PSELTs' reflections reveal how they are informed about the two methods employed in English-learning programs for YLs; they are English pull-out and push-in methods with YLs (Kang-Shin, 2013). In pull-out method, second language learners who are not as proficient in the target language receive supplementary English language training with other learners with similar proficiencies. The hope is that these English learners falling behind will catch up with the peers in their English-medium instructional efforts. They can be pulled out at certain times or stages of a class hour to receive additional language and academic support for about 30 minutes (Kang-Shin, 2013). In push-in method, English language learners are pushed into the mainstream classroom. To do so, English language teacher collaborates and, at times, co-teaches with the mainstream teachers to assist YLs improve their communicative and literacy capacities (Kang-Shin, 2013). PSELTs, through reflecting on TEYL practices, embellish their TEYL pedagogy and methodology capacities after observing such methods being practiced in an EFL context. Thanks to their observations on pull-out and push-in methods, PSELTs became more knowledgeable about the ways to provide equitable instruction for different young English learner profiles.

In the present study, PSELT reflections revealed each that YL classroom included two teachers: one native English speaker administering the lesson and one local teacher assisting YLs on one corner of the classroom. These services are provided based on the principle of *one size does not fit all*, and it aims to ensure differentiated instruction. Yet prematurely conceived roles of native (i.e., American) and non-native instructors of English (i.e., local Turkish teachers of English) due to the assignment of native-speaker teacher as the main teacher and the non-native teacher as the assisting one were further examined in PSELT reflections. The fact that native English-speaking teachers working in the school with the assistance of another instructor who is a Turkish-native made PSELTs believe native English-speaking instructors would be superior and more qualified. Thanks to their fluency, perfect pronunciation and representation of the target language culture, native, English-speaking teachers to YLs

can be an asset; however, locally trained non-native English-speaking (NNES) professionals are re-conceptualized within the framework of World Englishes (Jenkins, 2009; Kachru, 1992; Kamhi-Stein, 2013). NNES professionals are often in an advantageous position due to being bilingual compared to monolingual English-speaking counterparts. NNES also are former (and potentially continuous) language learners who are likely to have high metalinguistic awareness. Additionally, because NNES professionals are locally-trained ones, they can be more aware of micro-level issues and demand on English language instruction with young ones. Discussing native versus non-native dilemma, Shin (2008) points out non-native speaker teachers possess distinct advantages over native speakers with a deeper understanding of learners' first languages and an ability to explain second language features in ways young L2 learners can process more feasibly.

In PSELTs reflections, *phonics instruction* emerged as a sub-unit of *TEYL-methodology* theme. YLs are emergent reader and writers as they are developing their oral and literacy skills (Zein, 2017c). Zein states,

> These include aspects such as spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, phonemic awareness, and oral reading fluency. Spelling, for example, constitutes basic literacy skills, which both reading and writing skills are built upon. Spelling is, therefore, fundamental in L2 literacy development and correlates with L2 oral skills. L2 oral skills such as phonics and phonemic awareness are ingredients to proper pronunciation. These oral skills are related to learner's comprehension. (p. 69)

August, Shanahan, and Escamilla (2009) suggest such skills as stepping stones for second language literacy development. In light of these discussions, Zein (2017c) provides a pathway to a healthy oral and literacy development that is based on a predictable sequence: after hearing the proper pronunciation and spelling young learners begin to understand the functions of a language. "The task of the teachers is therefore to utilize their phonetics and phonology and morphological knowledge in order to assimilate and accommodate strategies in an L2 literacy and oracy instruction that is integrated, engaging and meaningful" (Zein, 2017c, p. 69). Along the lines of these discussions, Zein (2017c) proposes a minor or concentration in EYL instruction as opposed to a TEYL coursework with limited number of hours.

For further discussions on TEYL PSELT training, Copland and Garton (2014) report the lack of research in training teachers for young learners of English. PSELT training programs lack observing the target learning groups and the in-class practices in Turkish context (Tütüniş, 2014). In Turkey's PSELT training, observing and teaching in real language classrooms with actual learners take place in senior year with practicum. To fill in the existing gap in the literature, Gürsoy (2010) recommends TEYL-based hands-on and practice-based experience. Even today, the gap among educational policies, teacher belief and attitudes and classroom-based practices is wide and only with further research

on practice-based PSELT training can this gap be narrowed. In light of these studies, Yangın-Ekşi and Aşık (2015) examined the PSELT practicum reflections. The reflections of PSELTs displayed emerging themes such as *concerns about YLs*, and *self-teaching capabilities*. PSELTs were asked to compare simulation-based microteachings to practicum teaching experience of PSELTs. The participating PSELTs reported how smooth and yet artificial it was to hold micro-teaching in a pretentious context with other PSELTs compared to practicum teaching which was engaging, authentic, and challenging.

Policy recommendations in light of existing study findings were made as the third component of discussions. Kırkgöz (2006), in laying out the nature of national EFL education in Turkey, mentions the driving-force behind Turkey's EFL instruction as political and economic ambitions. The key goals of introducing ELT in primary education in Turkey are awareness raising, boosting YL motivation, encouraging daily communication in L2, and helping to create positive attitude toward learning English (Kocaoluk & Kocaoluk, 2001). The goal of early introduction of foreign languages is to ensure longer period of exposure (MONE, 2001). However, Kırkgöz (2006) advocates a TEYL-oriented PSELT professional training through teaching with young and older young learners attending primary and middle schools.

## Conclusion

For success in educational practices "personnel policy is a critical issue in ELT the world over" (Hamid, 2010, p. 294). The statistical data via Turkish PSELT reflections suggest how crucial pre-service English language educators' training so they could serve Turkish YLs effectively. Crandall (2000) states the missing component of traditional teacher education programs is the PSELT PD through observation and reflection. The researcher highlights the role of teacher narratives to connect theory to practice through questions of *what*, *how*, and *why*. The inevitable cycle of observation, interpretation, introspection, and questioning (Bartlett, 1990) is the process where the participating teachers were involved. Crandall (2000) claims reflection on experience is what prospective and experienced teachers need for informed practice and this long-ignored practice is a useful tool for the development of language teacher.

Reflective practices of teachers are due to the shifting ideologies in teacher education where teachers are no longer the recipient of what is written and prescribed by others but the ones who experience the classroom practices and come up with best practices by trial and error. In other words, teachers are the ones who research and take action (Atay, 2003). Such practice of ongoing professional development of teachers is for personal growth as well as for the improvement of quality of education (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013) and a continuous support and PD system for primary English teachers with a materials bank (Daloğlu, 2004). For professional development to be effective, it should consider the needs of different stakeholders: the learner, teacher, and the school (Zein, 2016).

Reflection is a sustainable source of energy for professional growth. Critical reflective practices need to be an integral component of the curriculum (Kabilan, 2007). To prepare PSELT for TEYL, Chien (2014) incorporated simulated teaching practice and oral interviews into practicum coursework and looked into pre-service elementary school English teachers' PD via reflection. Similarly, Yeşilbursa (2011) emphasized the importance of PSELT reflections and examined the characteristics of a group of Turkish PSELTs' reflective writing shedding light on the TEYL problematic aspects and remedies.

Finally, findings of this study resemble the findings of a study conducted in the Jordanian context (Al-Hassan, Al-Barakat, and Al-Hassan, 2012). Al-Hassan, et al. showed that Jordanian pre-service English teachers' observation and reflective attempts were mainly descriptive at the beginning, but gradually they evolved to be more critical, having undertaken field experience. Similarly, findings of this present study show a pattern of Turkish PSELTs' reflection endeavors in the existing research as they were more on the descriptive side with a lot of reporting in the first cycles and then reflecting on to convey deeper argumentation and critical thinking-oriented comments in the later cycles of reflection. Although these patterns were quite obvious to the coders who dealt with PSELTs' reflective journals, these shifting patterns were not systematically analyzed and reported in the present study. This can be a guidance for the future studies focusing on pre-service English language teachers' reflective entries. As a rich source of information, field observation as first-hand experience was highly appreciated by Turkish PSELTs and the reflective pieces shed light on numerous dimensions of TEYL instruction such as PSELT qualifications, training, and personnel policy recommendations.

## Limitations

The limitations of the present study emerged from the sampling procedure and the sample size. Data collected from a small group of PSELT from the same institution yields limited room for generalizability of the findings. Instead, the reflections of pre-service language teachers can be regarded as insiders' feedback at the local context (Güngör, 2016). The study had two school sites: one with a group of very young learners (pre-primary level, ages three to five) and another school with young language learners at primary level with an approximate age-range of six to nine. Although this is a strength of the study, the non-randomized recruitment of sites for observation set a limitation. For more comprehensive data, public schools could have been recruited so PSELTs could enjoy different teaching environments and student populations. The study was designed in a way that enabled pre-service teachers to get a chance to observe very young language learners and young language learners at different school types and grade levels. This paved the way for PSELTs to observe differences across ages and grade levels as well as curricular differences across programs and curricula for various types of YLs. Having different teachers in different classrooms was an enriching experience as PSELTs observed and reflected on

methodology, language capacities, pedagogical knowledge, styles, tendencies, strength, and weaknesses of different in-service early English instructors. Due to scheduling challenges, every PSELT did not get to observe all YL profiles available for the observation. This was another limitation on the comprehensiveness of the existing data.

## Dedication

This study is dedicated to Mrs. Nurdan Karaca Biriz. She coordinated pre-service teacher visits and served a good professional role model with her love for young ones and enthusiasm for professional development. All of her endeavors were to receive reflective feedback from fresh souls, new pairs of eyes in the field of foreign language education with young learners. Without her continuous support throughout the pre-service observations in the field, this project would not have been possible.

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