

## An Analysis of Primary School Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety

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### ABSTRACT

Anxiety is a crucial factor in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language. This study, designed as a mixed-method quasi-experimental study, investigates primary school teacher candidates' a) foreign language teaching anxiety levels, b) sources of anxiety, and c) expectations and suggestions about the "Foreign Language Teaching in Primary School" course. The study used quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data. The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in FLT anxiety levels of the participants over the Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools course. This study provided insider views about how to make this innovative course more cost-effective and better tailor its content to help them gain practical ideas about how to handle factors triggering foreign language teaching anxiety.

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### Statement of Publication Ethics

We confirm that this study has been conducted by following the publication ethics. The Ethics Committee approval for this study was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Board at Harran University (Number: E-76244175-752.01.01-79866, Date: 12.11.2021).

### Authors' Contribution Rate

All three authors have equally contributed to the design and data collection procedures. The literature review was written by the second and third authors while data analysis and interpretation were conducted by the first author. Writing the final form of this study was collaboratively performed by all the authors.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this study has no conflict of interest.

### Reference

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## Introduction

Foreign language teaching in Türkiye begins at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of primary education following the 4+4+4 education reform that was put into force in the 2013-2014 academic year. Although foreign language lessons are to be ideally carried out by English language teachers, primary school teachers may have to teach those lessons as there may not be any English language teachers in the primary schools. This is clearly expressed in the 64<sup>th</sup> article related to the amendment of regulation on primary education institutions of the Ministry of Education, which was published in the official gazette on July 21, 2012:

It is essential that foreign language and the ethics and religious culture courses are taught by branch teachers in primary schools. However, in case the need cannot be met by the branch teachers, these courses can be taught by primary school teachers who have completed their higher education in the aforementioned branches, or by primary school teachers who have received an in-service training certificate in this branch through course exchange. In cases where this is not possible, these courses are continued to be taught by the primary school teachers. (Bayyurt, 2013, pp. 101-102)

As can be seen, primary school teachers in Türkiye also play a role in teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools when necessary. This is not unique to the Turkish context. There are other countries such as Japan where classroom teachers need to teach English even though they do not have any professional training regarding teaching English as a foreign language (Machida, 2016). Considering that English language teachers who have formal education in foreign language teaching grapple with anxiety while performing their job, primary school teachers are also likely to have more anxiety if they are to teach a foreign language. In the literature, it is underlined that the number of studies conducted on foreign language teaching anxiety is far from being adequate (Aydın, 2016; Aydın & Uştuk, 2020). Taking the issue from the point of view of pre-service primary school teachers who may be required to teach English in their classes is believed to be more vital in terms of contributing to the related literature. Though there is a limited number of studies on foreign language teaching anxiety, especially by teacher candidates attending foreign language teaching departments at universities, the number of studies on the same topic focusing on candidate teachers in primary education departments is so limited. In Türkiye, several faculties of education offer their students the “Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools” course in just one term. This study, which aims to examine the anxiety experienced while teaching a foreign language, has been conducted with those candidate teachers who have attended the “Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools” course in their final year. Hence, the study aimed to investigate the following questions:

1. What are foreign language teaching anxiety levels of pre-service primary school teachers?
2. What are pre-service primary school teachers’ perceptions of effective foreign language teaching?
3. What are pre-service primary school teachers’ perceived difficulties in foreign language teaching?
4. What are possible factors causing foreign language teaching anxiety?

5. What are pre-service primary school teachers' expectations and suggestions about the Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools course?

## Literature Review

### Definitions and Types of Anxiety

Anxiety is a future-oriented state of mind that may occur against the things or situations to happen, and this mood may lead to complicated cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral reactions in the form of worry, fear or tension, sweating, high throb, etc. against "threatening" future events which a person finds hard to cope with (Hortwiz et al., 1986). However, anxiety is also regarded as a positive situation that can motivate and direct a person to perform a task (Brown, 1994). In the literature, anxiety is classified in various ways. While Scovel (1978) uses the terms *debilitative anxiety* and *facilitative anxiety*, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) classify anxiety as *trait anxiety*, *state anxiety*, and *situation-specific anxiety*. With a close look at the classifications, it can be stated that debilitating anxiety is an undesired type that causes worry, fear, and tension, and thus prevents a person from performing a task, whereas facilitative anxiety encourages and motivates a person to perform a task and the anxiety is no more a threat. The other classification points out that trait anxiety means the possibility of a person being anxious in any situation; namely, a person's permanent tendency to get anxious, which can be harmful to cognitive functioning and memory and the anxiety is stable over time as it is a personal feature of a person (Scovel, 1978). Another type of anxiety is state anxiety which means that when a person regards a situation as threatening and dangerous, s/he shows an emotional reaction. Contrary to the trait anxiety, this type of anxiety is not a stable one, but a temporary emotion occurring at a particular time when a person is likely to be in a stressful situation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Finally, situation-specific anxiety occurs in case of a particular event or situation like public speaking, foreign language learning process, or solving a math problem, etc. (Mutlu, 2017).

### Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Foreign language anxiety can be defined as having tension due to putting four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) into action while learning or using a second or foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). FLA, as a scientific subject, was first examined in the studies by Swain and Burnaby (1976), Scovel (1978), Bailey (1983), Horwitz et al., (1986), and Young (1990, 1991, 1992). The researchers think that learning a foreign language is a demanding and tough period. The studies underline the fact that as the level of students' anxiety increases while learning a foreign language, they become less proficient in a foreign language and mostly avoid using the language. However, if the anxiety type that a student has while learning a foreign language is a facilitating one, then that anxiety may lead the student to be motivated to perform new learning tasks. The debilitating anxiety, on the other hand, may result in avoiding using four language skills effectively, getting poor results on tests, having difficulty concentrating on any tasks,

avoiding studying and practicing the target language outside the classroom environment, and postponing or avoiding doing homework.

It should be noted that the linguistic features of the target language itself can also be the reason for language anxiety. To illustrate, for a Turkish student, it may be difficult to grasp the word order in English as the word order may vary and is more flexible in the Turkish language. In addition, as English, for instance, has a distinctive phonological system that is quite different from Turkish, Turkish learners of English have great difficulty in pronunciation, which prevents learners from speaking the target language. All these factors may be the sources of FLA for Turkish learners of English.

### **Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA)**

Teaching itself can be stressful and lead to anxiety. Concerning teaching a foreign language, the level of stress and anxiety of language teachers may get higher especially if teachers are non-native. Speaking a foreign language effectively and fluently in daily life may not be a guarantee for teaching that language without stress or anxiety. The term “Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety” was first stated for non-native teachers and pre-service teachers by Horwitz (1996) and some reasons were given for the foreign language teaching anxiety. According to Horwitz (1996), teachers or pre-service teachers who are to teach a foreign language may be anxious due to their previous foreign language learning experiences and a lack of confidence in using the target language. They may also have anxiety due to the probability of facing vocabulary and grammar rules or specific language use that they do not know. Besides, the fact that foreign language teachers, especially non-native ones can have anxiety due to the need to use the language in classroom settings orally, and speaking the target language both accurately and fluently can be very challenging for them.

As can be seen in the relevant literature, the concept of “anxiety” is viewed as one of the important affective factors, and the role of “anxiety” has become a prominent area of study and concern in language education due to its crucial impact on language learning and teaching processes. Even though there have been many studies related to foreign language anxiety, a limited number of studies on foreign language teaching anxiety have been carried out with in-service and pre-service EFL teachers (Mardhatillah et al., 2024; Öztürk, 2016). While some research studies have focused on pre-service teachers’ FLTA (e.g. Alrashidi, 2022; Aydın, 2016; Güngör & Yaylı, 2012; Mardhatillah et al., 2024; Merç, 2015; Pasaribu & Harendita, 2018; Tüfekci-Can, 2018), others have investigated teachers’ FLTA in their language teaching process (e.g. Aydın & Uştuk, 2020; Öztürk, 2016). Öztürk (2016) carried out a mixed-method study with 103 non-native teachers of English as a foreign language in the Turkish context. The findings of the study revealed that the teachers had a moderate level of foreign language teaching anxiety and experienced teaching anxiety when they felt that they were not competent enough to teach a skill in the target language. Also, the results showed that teachers’ knowledge of the target language, learners’ manners, and knowledge of the target language were the anxiety-provoking factors among EFL teachers. In a similar vein, Alrashidi (2022) investigated the pre-service English language teachers’ sources of FLTA in his study. The results confirmed the fact that non-native EFL pre-service teachers

have foreign language teaching anxiety stemming from five anxiety-provoking factors consisting of fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, teaching unfamiliar topics, lack of preparation, and a large number of students in one classroom. Likewise, in Pasaribu and Harendita's study (2018), the pre-service teachers indicated that confidence, their limited English language skills, preparation, lesson delivery, classroom management, students' profiles, and evaluation were among the factors causing anxiety in their teaching process.

When the issue is considered from the side of in-/pre-service primary school teachers, the possibility of teaching English lessons due to the lack of English language teachers can be the main source of anxiety. Most primary school teachers may not have taken an effective foreign language teaching course. The same situation may happen for the candidate teachers, as well. Machida (2016) puts forward that the number of elementary school teachers who had the responsibility to teach English in EFL countries because of governments' educational reforms is increasing even though these teachers lack complete training in teaching English as a foreign language. This leads to increasing the teachers' anxiety related to English instructions in their classes. The studies conducted with primary school teachers or candidate primary school teachers on foreign language teaching anxiety have reached some important conclusions and discussions. In a study (İlhan Beyaztaş, 2018) on self-efficacy beliefs of students in primary education towards teaching English, it was found that most of the students believed to be insufficient in teaching English while they had problems, especially in pronunciation, speaking, and writing. They also stated that the reason for not being confident was due to their previous foreign language learning experience which is mostly on grammar and accuracy and on memorizing language rules (İlhan Beyaztaş, 2018). Bratoz (2015) examined the attitude of students in the primary education department towards foreign language teaching and concluded that the students found English to be hard to teach, and even some participants mentioned that they could not imagine themselves teaching English to their students in a classroom setting. In some other studies (Aksoy, & Bozdoğan, 2019; Ünal et al., 2016; Zengin & Ulaş, 2020) focusing on the problems encountered by primary school teachers and multigrade class teachers in foreign language teaching, it was found that the low proficiency level of the teachers was one of the most important problems, and they did not have any training on foreign language teaching. Most of the participants in the studies believed that English lessons should be taught by English language teachers as they had difficulty in teaching the target language and that they needed well-structured in-service training. Also, in Butler's (2007) study, more than half of the Japanese elementary school teachers favored the idea by expressing that English language lessons should be taught by teachers having native-like proficiency in English because of their limited level of English proficiency.

In light of the relevant literature, not only primary school pre-service teachers but also foreign language pre-service teachers experience anxiety in their language classes even though they have the related training regarding teaching a foreign language. It can be said that teaching English as a foreign language may become more challenging for primary school teacher candidates who are supposed to teach a subject in which they do not have

expertise, which in turn may trigger foreign language teacher anxiety among them. Compared to foreign language teaching anxiety among EFL or EFL pre-service teachers, a limited number of studies have been conducted on primary school teachers' or pre-service primary school teachers' FLTA. There remains a scarcity of research exploring primary school or pre-service primary school teachers' FLTA. Considering this gap, this study aims to find out pre-service primary school teachers' FLTA levels, and sources of their FLTA and reveal their expectations and suggestions regarding FLTPS courses.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The present study was designed as a mixed-method quasi-experimental study by non-randomly placing the participants in the study group (Creswell, 2009). The study comprised only one group (i.e. the study group), since having a comparison group deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the same treatment as the study group might not be appropriate considering the research ethics. This longitudinal study elicited mainly quantitative data through pre- and post-test administration of an anxiety scale. Yet, the study also collected qualitative data to ensure the triangulation of possible differences in the participants' FLTA perceptions (i.e. dependent variable) as a result of the FLT course (i.e. independent variable).

### **Publication Ethics**

The Ethics Committee approval was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Board at Harran University (Number: E-76244175-752.01.01-79866, Date: 12.11.2021).

### **Context**

Pre-service primary school teachers enrolled in the Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools (FLTPS) course were the target group of the study. After the official approval of the Council of Scientific Ethics was obtained from the host university, one of the researchers in this study who was also the course instructor informed pre-service primary school teachers of the study procedures and invited them to participate. They were ensured that their responses would be confidential and anonymous while participation (or rejection) in the study would in no way affect their course scores.

### **Participants**

The present study used convenience sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2012) for participant selection. Of a total of 42 students, 38 pre-service primary school teachers (25 females and 13 males) volunteered to participate in the study while the other four students preferred not to participate due to personal reasons such as busy schedules and/or heavy workload. The participants were all senior students majoring in the classroom education department of the host university and signed an informed consent form for participating in the study. The average age range of the participants was 21. The participants had never taken a national/international English proficiency test (such as TOEFL, or IELTS). Nor had they ever visited or lived in a country where English was used as a native or second language.

None of the participants had hands-on experience in teaching English as a foreign language to primary school students beforehand. Hence, the opinions they would state would truly reflect their intact perceptions rather than the interference of any practical experience.

The FLTPS course was a 5-ECTS course, which intended to introduce theories and practices necessary for teaching English to young learners (ages 6-10 in the context of this study). Covering 3 classroom hours per week, the course represented an innovative attempt in the Turkish higher education system because it was the first time that classroom education departments officially mandated pre-service primary school teachers to take a course for teaching English to primary school students. The course objectives included helping pre-service primary school teachers a select and sequence instructional topics appropriate for young learners, b- adopt/adapt/develop materials appropriate for the linguistic, cognitive, and affective development of young learners, c- learn about FLT classroom management techniques, and d- gain experiences in teaching language skills to young learners through micro-teaching experiences. The course content overall comprised a comparison of teaching Turkish and English, an analysis of the approaches, methods, techniques, and practices in English language teaching at the primary school level, and an introduction to the relevant topics, goals, and activity samples in the primary school (i.e. 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades) FLT curricula.

### **Instruments**

The present study used both quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data. The Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (FLTAS) (İpek, 2006) was used to collect quantitative data. The FLTAS comprised 26 Likert-type items anchored from 5- always to 1- never. The items in the scale investigated perceptions about FLT cases which provoked increased anxiety levels in teachers. Based on an investigation of possible incidents that would trigger anxiety in foreign language classrooms, the items in the scale focused on teachers' anxiety perceptions concerning teaching certain language skills, concerns about performance in the target language, fear of making mistakes, being compared to colleagues, and using the mother tongue. The scale was administered twice so that the participants' anxiety perception development could be thoroughly captured. The first time it was administered was in the first lesson of the FLTPS course (pre-test) while the second time was after the last lesson (post-test). İpek (2006) reported high reliability (Cronbach alpha .9173) for the scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient in this study was similarly found to be relatively high (.959). Likewise, the scale was considered highly valid as the total variance of the factors was reported to be 61.17 (İpek, 2006). For the specific purposes of this study, an additional section was added to the scale to elicit demographic information about such features as the participants' perceived proficiency in the four main language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing), FLT experience, English proficiency test score (if any), and living/visiting abroad etc.

As to the qualitative data, a structured form was used to probe into the participants' overall perceptions about FLT and the FLTPS course before and after taking the course. The form was constructed in light of the relevant literature along with the specific objectives of

the present study. A pool of 10 items was created initially and individually sent to two specialists in the field for expert opinions. Based on their feedback and suggestions, some of the items were removed while some others were paraphrased for reasons like irrelevance, vagueness, repetition, and complexity. The final version of the form which consisted of six items asked the participants about their perceptions of effective FLT, areas of perceived ease and difficulty in FLT, possible anxiety-provoking areas in FLT, expectations about the FLTPS course (pre-test), and suggestions for the course (post-test) along with the perceived method(s) through which they were taught English as a student.

### Data Analysis and Procedures

Once the ethical approval was received for the study, the first round of the study started via data collection procedures. Before the FLTAS was administered for the first time, the participants were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any phase of the study. Accordingly, those who agreed to participate filled out the FLTAS and structured form before and after the study. In the second round of the study, analyses of the data gleaned from the participants were conducted through joint efforts of the authors. Concerning the analysis of the quantitative data, the present study employed a set of statistical analyses. Normality tests were conducted to check if the data were appropriate for further statistical analyses. While the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality was found to be non-significant for pre-test administration of the scale, the value for post-test was significant ( $p = .05$ , See Table 2). Yet, Q-plot tests and histograms showed normal distributions for both administrations of the scale. Likewise, skewness and kurtosis values for pre-test and post-test data analyses confirmed normal distribution as the values fell between the range of +1.5 to -1.5, which Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) considered to indicate an acceptable normality distribution. Hence, a paired samples t-test was conducted to check if there were any statistical differences in the participants' anxiety perceptions before and after taking the FLTPS course.

**Table 1.** Tests of Normality for Pre- and Post-test Quantitative Data

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	df	<i>p</i>	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
<b>FLT pre</b>	,103	38	,200	-,001	,383	,026	,75
<b>FLT post</b>	,249	38	,000	-,952	,383	1,264	,75

Regarding the analysis of the qualitative data, content analysis was employed to enable a systematic recognition and coding of possible patterns in the data. Conducted by the researchers in this study, the content analysis process started with an initial coding (Charmaz, 2006), in which the researchers individually identified codes prevalent in the participants' responses to the structured form, selected possible keywords, and formed tentative themes. As a second step, the researchers jointly conducted focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), which helped to combine, revise, and discard the initial coding categories to reach ultimate themes and categories along with sample excerpts that would ideally represent the emerging themes.

## Results

### FLT Anxiety Levels Before and After the FLTPS Course

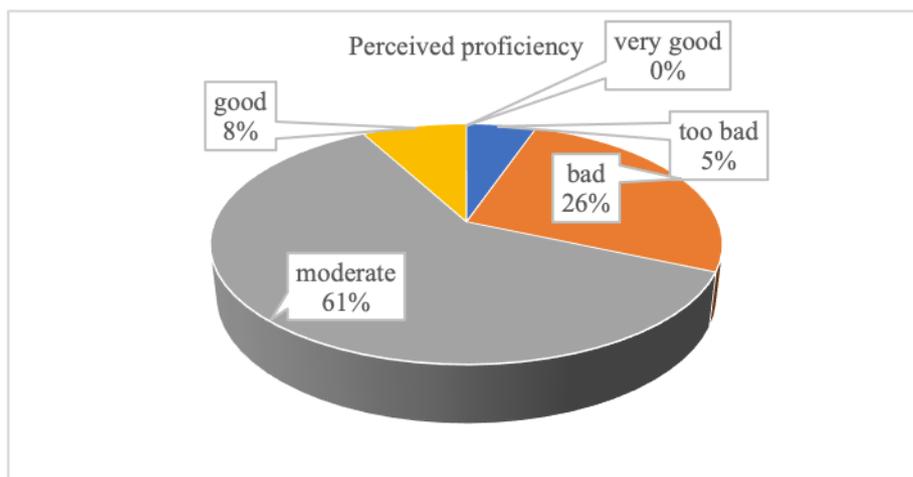
The present study found that while the mean anxiety score of the participants was 3.03 before they took the FLTPS course, it was 2.84 after taking the course. That's to say, the participants had a moderate level of anxiety before the course, and it was similarly almost moderate at the end of the course. Accordingly, the paired samples t-test analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in FLT anxiety levels of pre-service primary school teachers over the FLTPS course (See Table 2). More specifically, taking the FLTPS course made no significant difference in the participants' FLT anxiety levels. Though the abovementioned objectives and content of the FLTPS course seemed promising in terms of addressing several critical issues in FLT such as topic selection, materials development, and classroom management, it was surprising that the course fell short of making any significant contribution to decreasing the participants' FLT anxiety levels. Hence, this lack of significant difference required probing into some other underlying reasons that could trigger the participants' FLT anxiety levels.

**Table 2.** Paired Samples T-Test Analysis of FLTA Means

	Mean	SD	S.Error M.	95% Con. interval of the Dif.		t	df	Sig.(2- tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
<b>FLT-pre</b>	3,0314	,79222	,12851	-,19106	,56151	,997	7	,325
<b>FLT-post</b>	2,8462	,80534	,13064					

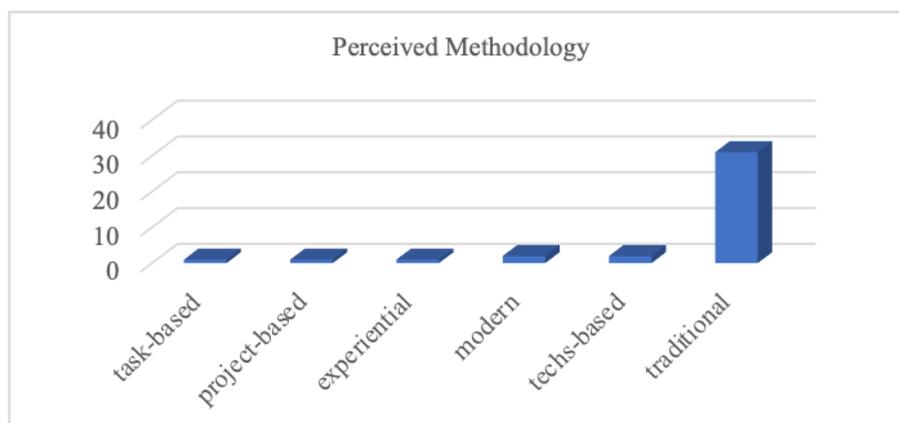
To get deeper insights into the lack of statistical difference in the participants' FLT anxiety levels despite taking the FLTPS course, the analysis of the qualitative data yielded salient results. As shown in Figure 1, a large number of the participants reported moderate proficiency in English while only 8% of the participants perceived their proficiency to be "good" along with none viewed their proficiency as high. Likewise, over a quarter of the whole population considered their proficiency level "bad", and a small number of the participants (5%) ranked their perceived proficiency as "too bad".

**Figure 1.** Perceived Proficiency Levels



Likewise, quite a few participants indicated that the way they were taught English in their overall education life (primary, elementary, and high schools) was primarily traditional (See Figure 2). While a few participants referred to more innovative methods of teaching English such as task-based, project-based, and technology-based, most of the participants defined the methods which their teachers used in FLT classes as “grammar-based”, “ineffective”, “no practice” and “no exposure to English”. One of the participants stated that her “English teacher taught us through narration, and it was not useful.” (Participant 3) while another participant critically underlined that “we learned only grammar. The teachers would write on the board, and we would copy to our notebooks. Absolutely, there was no listening or speaking. So, I saw no example of effective teaching” (Participant 12). Hence, the perceived lack of experience with effective, alternative English language teaching methods may have been another factor promoting the participants’ FLT anxiety levels.

**Figure 2.** Perceived Methods of Teaching/Learning English



### Perceptions of Effective FLT

In contrast to the emphasis on the traditional methodology employed by their English language teachers, the participants in this study documented certain features of the optimal FLT methodology (See Table 3). First and foremost, almost half of the participants (46.6%) underlined that effective FLT should be practical by offering opportunities to “communicate

through English” (Participant 14), “listen and speak about daily issues” (Participant 21), and “readily use the language rather than bothering students with grammar” (Participant 30). Furthermore, the participants pinpointed that effective FLT should be enjoyable by engaging students in “drama activities”, “songs”, “funny games and dialogues”, and “different materials”. In the same vein, the participants’ responses unequivocally highlighted that effective FLT methodology should pay heed to students’ needs and interests by being student-centered ( $f= 8.9\%$ ), student comfort ( $f= 7.8\%$ ), and student level (proficiency, and cognitive, socio-affective development) ( $f= 6.6\%$ ). The participants also pinpointed that effective FLT methodology should employ appropriate instructional techniques ( $f= 7.7\%$ ) as well as ensure due attention to teaching all four major language skills ( $f= 3.3\%$ ) along with grammar and vocabulary.

**Table 3.** Perceptions of Effective FLT Methodology

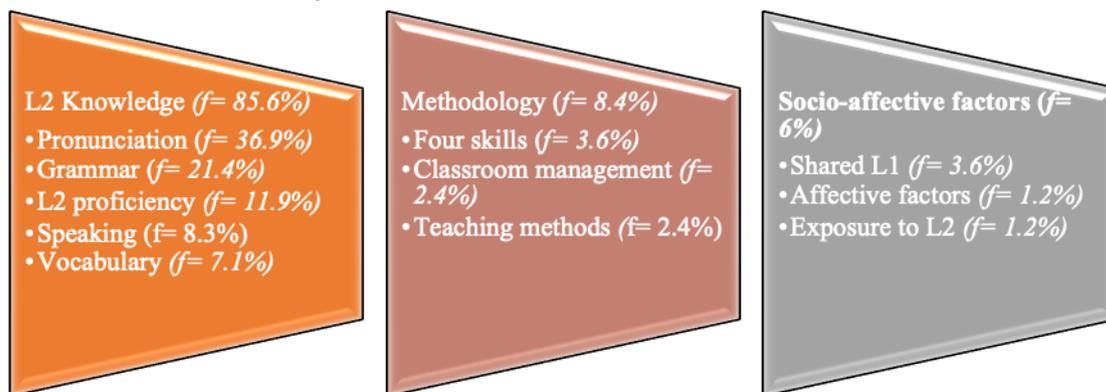
	f (%)
<b>Practical</b>	46.6
<b>Enjoyable</b>	19.1
<b>Student-centered</b>	8.9
<b>Student-comfort</b>	7.8
<b>Appropriate techniques</b>	7.7
<b>Student Level</b>	6.6
<b>All skills</b>	3.3

### Difficulties in FLT

Regarding the participants’ perceptions of possible difficulties in FLT that could challenge them in the classroom, the present study unearthed that the participants’ knowledge of the target language was by far the most challenging aspect of FLT ( $f= 85.6\%$ ) (See Figure 3). To illustrate, the participants explicated that in addition to an inadequate overall proficiency in English, their failure to “appropriately pronounce the words in English” (Participant 29), “form long and structurally correct sentences” (Participant 6), “speak fluently about daily issues” (Participant 12), and “know spellings and meanings of a large amount of vocabulary” (Participant 17) featured to be the prominent aspects of FLT that might challenge them while teaching English. Moreover, the present study unraveled that FLT methodology was another factor that could pose extra challenges while teaching English in the classroom. In particular, the participants put forth that “teaching all four skills” (Participant 8), “successfully managing students in a foreign language class” (Participant 14), and “choosing the appropriate methods from among many different teaching methods” would be challenging for primary school teachers. Referred by a smaller number of the participants ( $f=6\%$ ) notwithstanding, socio-affective factors were reported to be the other major source of perceived challenge for prospective primary school teachers. The participants asserted that they would be further challenged while teaching English if “some of my students who are from different mother tongue backgrounds such as Syrians

do not know Turkish” (Participant 32), “my students are biased against learning English” (Participant 1), and “the students do not get any exposure to English outside the classroom” (Participant 7). Therefore, one can argue that perceptions of such challenges about FLT might have blocked any significant differences in the participants’ FLT anxiety levels over the FLTPS course.

**Figure 3.** Perceived Challenges in FLT

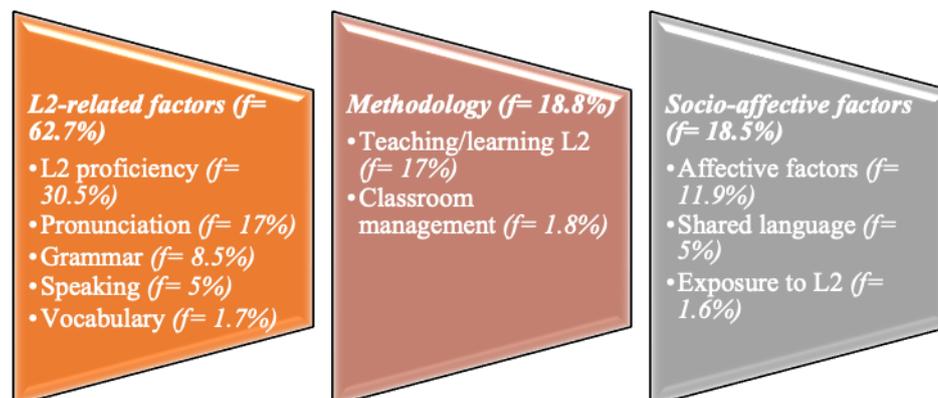


### Factors Causing FLT Anxiety

As for the participants’ perceptions about possible anxiety-provoking factors about FLT, the present study indicated a three-categorical pattern which was quite similar to the participants’ perceptions of challenges in FLT. More specifically, the participants’ responses iteratively elaborated on factors related to the target language, methodology, and socio-affective aspects of FLT (See Figure 4). Concerning the factors related to the target language itself, a large number of the participants ( $f= 62.7\%$ ) underlined that their overall proficiency in English was a source of much anxiety about FLT because they “have limited knowledge of English and that is why, I do not feel proficient in it, let alone teaching it” (Participant 21). Apart from overall proficiency, the participants expressed anxiety about particular components of English including pronunciation ( $f= 17\%$ ), grammar ( $f= 8.5\%$ ), speaking ( $f= 5\%$ ), and vocabulary ( $f= 1.7\%$ ). The second main category of factors causing anxiety about FLT underpinned the participants’ knowledge of FLT methodology ( $f= 18.8\%$ ). Within this category, most of the participants ( $f= 17\%$ ) premised that they felt anxious about failing in “effectively teaching the subjects” (Participant 8), “successfully transferring their knowledge to students” (Participant 19), and “using appropriate techniques for the students” (Participant 5) whereas a small number of the participants ( $f= 1.8\%$ ) ascribed their FLT anxiety specifically to issues related to classroom management. An equally salient category of FLT anxiety surfaced to be socio-affective factors ( $f= 18.5\%$ ). Intriguingly, several participants ( $f= 11.9\%$ ) illustrated that they would feel anxious if students “have biases about learning English” (Participant 7), “show negative attitudes towards English” (Participant 13), or “are not interested in learning English” (Participant 24). Lack of shared knowledge (i.e. mother tongue) emerged as another socio-affective source of FLT anxiety since some of the participants ( $f= 5\%$ ) stated that “teaching English to students who do not speak Turkish will make me anxious” (Participant 9). The other socio-affective factor that would promote pre-service primary school teachers’ FLT anxiety proved to be students’ limited exposure to the target language because “in most parts of Türkiye, students have very little

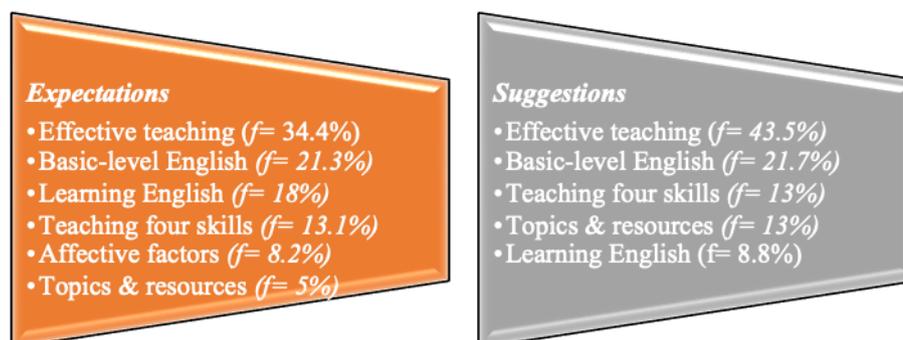
chance to be exposed to English outside the classroom and this will make my job more difficult" (Participant 3).

**Figure 4.** Perceived Factors Causing Anxiety about FLT



### Expectations and Suggestions about the FLTPS Course

The present study also probed into the participants' expectations and suggestions about the FLTPS course to obtain insider views about how to make this innovative course more cost-effective for pre-service primary school teachers and better tailor its content to help them gain practical ideas about how to handle factors triggering anxiety about FLT. On the one hand, the expectations were gleaned before the participants took the FLTPS course, and on the other hand, suggestions were elicited after they took the course. A comparison of the participants' expectations and suggestions revealed a close match because the participants consistently emphasized similar points about the FLTPS course (See Figure 5), which further aligned with the lack of a significant difference in their FLT anxiety levels. With specific reference to the expectations, the most prevalent expectation ( $f= 34.4\%$ ) was that the FLTPS course should introduce "effective" (Participant 13), "appropriate" (Participant 7), "the best" (Participant 29), and "permanent" (Participant 2) ways of teaching English. Another predominant expectation ( $f= 21.3\%$ ) required that the FLTPS course should inform about how to integrate "basic" (Participant 1), "daily" (Participant 9), and "simple" (Participant 17) English into the primary school curriculum. Surprisingly, a number of the participants ( $f= 18\%$ ) expected to learn English in the FLTPS course as the course was supposed to help pre-service primary teachers "improve my proficiency to express myself in English" (Participant 16) and "fully learn English as I will teach it" (Participant 28). A similar number of the participants ( $f= 13.1\%$ ) asserted that the FLTPS course should particularly teach pre-service primary school teachers "how to teach four major language skills" (Participant 12). Moreover, some of the participants ( $f= 8.2\%$ ) postulated that the course should address how to handle affective factors such as "students' fear of making mistakes" (Participant 34) and "helping students like learning English" (Participant 22). A few participants ( $f= 5\%$ ) also coined the expectation that one of the main functions of the FLTPS course would include clarifying "which topics will be appropriate for primary school children" (Participant 19) and "which sources to use for effective FLT and how to access them" (Participant 1).

**Figure 5.** Expectations and Suggestions about the FLTPS Course

With recourse to the suggestions that the participants stated about the FLTPS course after taking it, the present study pinpointed that the participants centered mainly on the same themes. A large majority of the participants primarily suggested that the FLTPS course should focus on effective FLT methods ( $f= 43.5\%$ ) and integration of basic-level English into the primary school curriculum ( $f= 21.7\%$ ). Several participants similarly reiterated that the FLTPS course should inform pre-service primary school teachers about ways of teaching all four skills ( $f= 13\%$ ) determining topics and easily accessing resources ( $f= 13\%$ ) for FLT classrooms. Likewise, a smaller number of participants ( $f= 8.8\%$ ) mentioned the function that the FLTPS course should serve to help pre-service primary school teachers learn English. Perplexingly though, no suggestion was made about students' affective factors as a point of consideration for a more effective design of the FLTPS course.

### Discussion

The present study showed that there was no statistically significant difference between anxiety levels over the FLTPS course. Namely, the FLTPS course did not have any positive or negative impacts on primary school candidates' foreign language teaching anxiety levels. Nonetheless, it provided valuable information regarding the sources of anxiety experienced by primary school teacher candidates. The participants' self-reports about their perceived proficiency levels may help to justify the lack of progress in their FLT anxiety levels because the moderate and low levels of proficiency in a large number of the participants might have triggered perceptions of inability to teach a language in which they did not feel satisfactorily proficient and thus, resulted in no progress in the participants' FLT anxiety levels even after taking the FLTPS course.

Besides, the perceived lack of experience with effective, alternative English language teaching methods, the clash between participants' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching methodology and the way they were taught English by their teachers may be the reasons lying behind the lack of significant difference in the participants' foreign language teaching anxiety levels over the FLTPS course. The results also revealed that there is a need to improve primary school teacher candidates' actual proficiency level in the target language. Determining the factors that trigger pre-service primary school teachers' foreign language teaching anxiety could help them realize what makes them anxious in the classrooms and find ways to handle the reasons for their anxiety. Also, recognizing these factors is crucial for stakeholders of the education world including pre-service teachers,

teachers, students, and researchers to contribute to the quality of learning and teaching a foreign language (Gannoun & Deris, 2023). As Horwitz (1996) states, one of the reasons for foreign language teaching anxiety is teachers' or pre-service teachers' previous language learning experience. İlhan Beyaztaş (2018) also points out that as the participants' previous foreign language experience mostly focuses on grammar, accuracy, and memorizing rules, they are anxious while they are trying to use the language. Tum (2015) also indicates that pre-service teachers' previous EFL experiences are one of the important factors triggering their anxiety, which may have a debilitating impact on their teaching of English.

As Butler (2004), Kawanami and Kawanami (2012), and Aksoy and Bozdoğan (2019) state, teachers' or pre-service teachers' low level of proficiency in a foreign language is an important factor as the participants in this study reported. In a similar vein, Aydın (2016) and Gannoun and Deris (2023) put forward that perceived language proficiency is one of the primary factors triggering FLTA. It is also in line with Amengual Pizarro's (2019) study with 75 Spanish-speaking pre-service primary school EFL teachers that the main source of anxiety was their lack of English proficiency. In the study conducted by Machida (2016), most of the participants who were elementary school teachers expressed that they had low English oral proficiency levels, which is one of the main causes of their anxiety. The findings of the study also confirmed the necessity of improving elementary school teachers' English proficiency levels. Likewise, in the study conducted by Kubanç and Selvi (2022), primary school teachers explained that they had challenges related to teaching English in primary schools and this can be a result of their proficiency level in English. Also, they claimed that they did not know English and thus they struggled during English language classes. It is a very striking finding that emphasizes the necessity of improving language proficiency level at first. Since the participants have a "poor" level of English and similarly, the aim of the Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools course is not to teach English but to teach how to teach English, it is not surprising that there is no statistically significant difference between anxiety levels over the FLTPS course.

The findings of the study also brought into light the possible difficulties prospective teachers may encounter in the process of foreign language teaching including their limited knowledge of the target language, foreign language teaching methodology, and socio-affective factors, which can be a challenge for them in the classroom. Öztürk (2016) also found out that even EFL language teachers feel the highest level of anxiety when they feel inadequacy in some elements of the target language and claims that knowledge of the target language is a major source of FLTA for nonnative EFL teachers and may suffer from it in their teaching environments. The findings of the current study suggest that the curriculum used in teacher education programs should provide a variety of opportunities for prospective primary teachers to improve their proficiency levels in addition to "foreign language teaching in primary school courses" to reduce prospective primary school teachers' anxiety level, which in turn may help them handle the reasons for their foreign language teaching anxiety. Even after graduation, when necessary, primary school teachers should be provided with opportunities to get help from specialists in the process of teaching English in primary schools since the presence of a substantial level of FLTA might negatively affect the quality

of learning and teaching processes as Gannoun and Deris (2023) stressed in their study. In brief, more courses related to teaching English in primary schools consisting of topics such as possible difficulties that can be encountered by primary school teachers in teaching English, suggestions for overcoming these difficulties, sources of FLTA, consequences of FLTA, and the ways how to control FLTA effectively in the classroom can be added to primary school teacher education program. Furthermore, these topics that may raise awareness of FLTA nationwide (Kobul & Saraçoğlu, 2020) should be integrated into the content of not only pre- but also in-service teacher training programs. Considering there are primary school teachers who have a low level of proficiency in English and lack knowledge of foreign language teaching methodology and hands-on experience (Karcı & Akar Vural, 2011), redesigning teacher training programs to address the above-mentioned topics seems vital for an effective foreign language education in primary schools. Likewise, some studies (Ergin et al., 2012; Karcı & Akar Vural, 2011) also focus on the importance of and need for teacher training programs (in-service and pre-service) during which teachers or pre-service teachers' knowledge of foreign language and effective teaching methods could be improved.

The study also probed into pre-service primary school teachers' expectations and suggestions related to the FLTPS course before and after the course. There was a close match between their expectations and suggestions. Their suggestions and expectations were related to effective, appropriate, and permanent ways of teaching English, the integration of basic, daily, simple English into primary school curriculum, and how to teach the basic four skills of language. Based on primary school teacher candidates' needs, expectations, and suggestions, the content of the FLTPS course can be revisited, and better-tailored course materials can be developed. As a result, in such a course pre-service teachers may learn and adopt some coping strategies to reduce their anxiety, contributing to overcoming problems relating to language teaching in the process of teaching English. Also, such courses may help pre-service primary school teachers have adequate preparation and planning before their teaching experiences, which are suggested by Pasaribu and Harendita (2018) as coping strategies for alleviating anxiety. Designing such courses may lead to more qualified primary school teachers in teaching English to young learners. In turn, it will contribute to the process of children's learning English at early ages in a better way. The current study may contribute to the relevant literature by providing insider views related to the process of teaching English. These insider views may pave the way for stakeholders of the education world including pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers in primary school education to design an effective teaching and learning program, leading to increasing the quality of language education programs.

### **Conclusion**

Considering primary school teachers' role in teaching a foreign language in primary schools, the importance of equipping them with the necessary skills to teach English effectively is quite clear in today's world where the significance of learning and teaching English seen as lingua franca is increasing day by day. Anxiety can be seen as a factor affecting teacher candidates in a negative way in the process of teaching English in primary schools. The present study aimed to examine pre-service primary school teachers' foreign language teaching anxiety levels before and after taking the course named "Foreign

Language Teaching in Primary Schools". Also, it revealed their expectations and provided suggestions about the "Foreign Language Teaching in Primary School" course. Though there was no statistically significant difference between anxiety levels over the FLTAS course, the perceived lack of experience with effective, alternative English language teaching methods, the clash between participants' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching methodology and the way they were taught English were considered to be the reasons underlying the lack of significant difference.

### Limitations

This study examines and may give important implications about foreign language teaching anxiety of primary school teacher candidates, but it has some limitations. Firstly, the participants of this study were enrolled in the primary education department of a single university, which reduced the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Prospective studies should be conducted with participants from a variety of universities in the same or different contexts. The data collection in the study is limited to the Likert-type scale (i.e. the FLTAS) and a structured form designed by the researchers. To ensure a deeper understanding of the reasons behind foreign language teaching anxiety, other data collection instruments could be applicable. For instance, observation and interview techniques may be used in prospective studies.

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