

HOW COMPETENT ARE WE AS ENGLISH TEACHERS? ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTION AS TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES⁽¹⁾

Nezahat GÜÇLÜ¹ Ömer Faruk CANTEKİN²

¹Gazi Faculty of Education, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

²School of Foreign Languages, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

Abstract: The primary medium of today's communication and digital world is the English language, which makes the teaching of it an important matter. For the pupils to develop their language skills, teacher support is essential. A great deal of research has emphasized the key role of the teacher in student learning, and this is also valid for English language teachers and learners. In line with this emphasis, this study aims to find out the level of perception of the English language teachers working in high schools in Ankara as to their professional competencies. The main question the study answers is how competent the teachers perceive themselves to be in terms of their professional competencies. The data were collected through English Teachers' Professional Competencies Scale. A 5-point Likert type scale of 40 items, the scale has two factors, namely "English Language Proficiency" and "English Teaching Competencies." Validity and reliability of the scale were evaluated positively, and reliability coefficients for each factor were calculated to be 0.93 and 0.95 respectively. The findings are analyzed according to gender, department of graduation, length of service, and participation in in-service training activities. As a result of the study, it is identified that the teachers have a "high" level of perception as to their professional competencies, and that the level of perception concerning professional competencies did not vary according to gender, department of graduation, length of service, and participation in in-service training activities, while it varied according to education level.

Key Words: Teacher Competencies, English Teachers, Language Teaching Competencies

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that the principal agent in educational activity is the teacher (Bell and Gilbert, 1996; Dunkin, 1997; James, 2001; Klaassen, 2002). Students, curriculum, and teachers are regarded as the basic components of the school system, and it is emphasized that education and

school would not exist without the presence of any of them (Sönmez, 2003). Similarly, the facilities, class materials and equipment designed to meet the basic needs of the students are the fundamentals of instructional programs. However, effective teacher is of vital importance for the success of dynamic instructional programs. It is

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the teacher that is the most important variable for the effective educational programs at all levels and in all settings (Miller and Miller, 2002).

Concerning the effective variables on student success, which is the main goal of instruction, teacher and the quality of instruction delivered by the teacher are the central issues for exploration. The significance of the teacher as an influential factor on student success in the context of education requires the fulfillment of certain fundamental tasks on the part of the teacher as expected by students and the school as organization. The sources of such expectations are school administration, colleagues, parents, students, and all the other agents surrounding the school. Consequently, teachers are thought to have certain basic competencies so as to meet the expectations coming from these sources (Acar, 2005; Altan, 2006; Richards, 2002).

Teachers could be seen as the main actors in the teaching-and-learning processes and in in-class activities. Previous research found positive relationship between such teacher characteristics as intelligence and academic skills and student success, and recent research has produced certain findings concerning the positive relationship between teacher's verbal skills, experience, and knowledge of subject matter and student success (Şişman, 2002), which is thought to have highlighted teacher competencies and fuelled related discussions and research.

It is evident that educational programs will not be able to work effectively toward their goals without teachers competent in their subject matter and in the delivery of instruction (Miller and Miller, 2002). On the other hand, the teacher's

effectiveness in the basic areas of competence has the potential to enhance school culture and effectiveness, school-parents relationship, contribute to student success and thus improving the quality of instruction in general. Such growing importance has been attached to teacher competency that it is accentuated in teacher education, selection, and supervision practices in many countries, indicating that teachers need to have certain basic competencies so as to accomplish what is required by the teaching profession itself (The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Languages other than English [TEKS for LOTE], 1997; Adult Basic and Literacy Education [ABLE], 2001; Peacock and Rowson 2001; Scottish Executive, 2002; The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2003; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2007).

In terms of language teaching, it is necessary for language teachers to have certain professional competencies to meet the demands of the teaching profession (Brown, 2001; Kalebic, 2005). This has stimulated new research into the identification of the English teachers' professional competencies along with the teaching standards for English Language Teaching [ELT] (MEB, 2008). On the other hand, it is seen in such documents as Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, European Language Portfolio, and European Language Passport, that the language skills students are expected to master are considered within a single framework (Demirel, 2004:198). Consequently, it is thought that improving the quality of language instruction and facilitating students mastering the language skills stated in the abovementioned documents are

closely related to the professional competencies of English teachers.

In such a context for the teaching of English language, this study aims to identify the level of perception of the English teachers working in general high schools concerning their professional competencies and explore their perceptions by certain demographic variables. The second section of the study presents literature review on teacher competencies. The third section covers the methodology, and the fourth findings and results. The final section includes the discussion of the results, comparing them with other research results and suggestions.

COMPETENCIES FOR ELT

Competency is defined as “the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to do a job properly” (Gündüz, 2003:43). Korthagen (2004:80) considers teacher competencies as “a consistent whole composed of knowledge, skills, and attitudes” and reckons that teacher competencies serve as the foundation upon which teachers behaviors are built.

Successful language teaching depends largely on teachers having a high level of skills and expertise. Language teachers are expected to have the knowledge of the subject matter, of students, and of instructional methodology. They are thought to be able to adapt the theories to their practices, and develop proper tools for instruction and evaluation, if they have such knowledge (Richards, 2002: 216). The characteristics of a good language teacher are considered as technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities (Brown, 2001: 430). Technical knowledge covers

understanding the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar and discourse, comprehensively grasping basic principles of language learning and teaching, having fluent competence in speaking, writing, listening to, and reading English, knowing through experience what it is like to learn a foreign language, understanding the close connection between language and culture, and keeping up with the field through regular reading and conference / workshop attendance. Pedagogical skills basically include having a well-thought-out, informed approach to language teaching, understanding and using a wide variety of techniques, efficiently designing and executing lesson plans, effectively perceiving students’ linguistic needs, using appropriate principles of classroom management, and using effective, clear presentation skills.

Professional competencies for Turkish and English language teachers working primary and secondary schools have been identified by the Ministry of National Education. According to the report, the competencies are listed as (MEB, 2009:1-11):

- 1. Knowledge of language components and language acquisition:** This area covers using the language accurately and appropriately by attending to phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic components of knowing a language and the knowledge of language acquisition.
- 2. Knowledge of English Language Teaching:** This area covers the practices for planning language learning-teaching process, organizing settings supportive of language learning, fostering language skills, developing strategies for learning and using a language, considering the students who need special education, using appropriate methods

and techniques, materials and resources as well as technological tools, monitoring, assessing and evaluating students' development.

3. Attitudes and Values: This area covers promoting awareness of the importance of speaking a foreign language through social and cultural interaction, and teachers' having positive attitudes and values to their professional development.

To sum up, English language teachers are expected to have awareness of using English accurately and fluently, advanced level of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and advanced level of grammar and vocabulary. This constitutes the subject matter and language proficiency of the English teachers (knowledge of the language). On the other hand, in terms of their pedagogical competency, English language teachers are expected to be able to plan the English lessons according to the curriculum, to know and implement the methods and techniques of English language teaching, to have effective classroom management skills, to be able to monitor and evaluate students' language development, to be able to give feedback to the students about their development, motivate students to learn English, to promote language skills development, and to be able to select and use appropriate class and lesson materials (Barnes, 1996; Briguglio and Kirkpatrick, 1996; Brown, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Chastain, 1989; Demirel, 2004).

METHOD OF RESEARCH

This descriptive study has surveyed the level of perception of the English teachers working in general high schools concerning their professional competencies and investigated their perceptions

by such variables as gender, department of graduation, education level, length of service, and participation in in-service training activities.

The population of the study consisted of the English teachers working in the general high schools in the provincial districts of Ankara (Altındağ, Çankaya, Etimesgut, Gölbaşı, Keçiören, Mamak, Sincan and Yenimahalle). The total number of the English teachers working in the general high schools in provincial Ankara in the educational year 2007-2008 (404 teachers) was received from Ankara Directorate of National Education. Sample size for the study was calculated to be 163, using simple random sampling.

The instrument of the study has two sections. The first section presents demographic information of the participants. The distribution of the participants according to the variables of gender, department of graduation, education level, length of service, and participation in in-service training activities is illustrated in Table 1. The second section has the scale developed by Cantekin (2009), namely "the Scale of English Teachers' Perception of their Professional Competencies." It is a 5-point Likert type scale where 1 refers to the lowest, while 5 the highest.

Table 1 Participants' demographic data

Variable	Categories	f	%
Gender	Female	104	63.8
	Male	59	36.2
Department of graduation	English Language Education	97	59.5
	English Language and Literature	47	28.8
	Others	19	11.7
Level of education	Institute for Education	13	8.0
	Undergraduate	140	85.9
	Graduate (Masters)	10	6.1
Length of service	Less than 10 years	50	30.7
	10-20 years	82	50.3
	Over 20 years	31	19.0
Participation in in-service training activities	Yes	100	61.3
	No	63	38.7

104 (63.8 %) of the participants were female; more than half of the participants (59.5) graduated from the Department of English Language Education; the majority of the participants (85.9 %) were university graduates; almost half of the participants had 10-20 years of length of service, and 100 of the participants (61.3 %) participated in an in-service training activity.

(i) Validity and Reliability

Construct validity of “the Scale of English Teachers' Perception of their Professional Competencies” was assessed through factor analysis. The factor analysis yielded the result that the scale was of two sub-dimensions called English Proficiency and

Competencies of English Instruction (Cantekin, 2009). The KMO measure was 0.901. The fact that the value was more than 0.60 showed that the data suitability for factor analysis was high. Varimax rotation was used in factor rotations and the items having a factor load of 0.40 were excluded from the scale. Cronbach alpha values for each dimension were calculated for reliability (See Table 2 for the summary of the results of factor and reliability analyses).

As is seen in Table 2, the factor loadings of the items in the scale ranged from 0.444 to 0.745. The total variance explained in the scale with a two factor structure was 46.17 % (23.44+22.73). It is suggested that the percentage of variance explained in social studies should be at least 40 (Tavşancıl, 2002:48; Scherer, 1988).

Table 2 Results of Factor and Reliability Analyses

English Proficiency			Competencies of English Instruction		
Item	Factor Loadings	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Item	Factor Loadings	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1	.695	.694	21	.524	.558
2	.642	.592	22	.453	.601
3	.575	.567	23	.517	.624
4	.649	.623	24	.444	.513
5	.617	.591	25	.517	.631
6	.611	.614	26	.541	.641
7	.535	.564	27	.708	.711
8	.586	.587	28	.705	.683
9	.629	.589	29	.709	.652
10	.485	.529	30	.652	.623
11	.613	.650	31	.656	.642
12	.604	.597	32	.649	.626
13	.700	.668	33	.684	.649
14	.735	.665	34	.729	.696
15	.580	.582	35	.740	.694
16	.610	.591	36	.745	.680
17	.534	.511	37	.681	.656
18	.643	.634	38	.680	.657
19	.547	.593	39	.702	.700
20	.613	.589	40	.671	.697
Variance explained = %23.44			Variance explained = %22.73		
Cronbach Alpha = 0.93			Cronbach Alpha = 0.94		

(ii) Data Analyses

Assumptions of normality were evaluated through Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. Under normality,

independent samples t test was used for the comparison of the two groups; one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for the comparison of more than two groups involved. When the

variance analysis produced a result that at least one group was different, Tukey test, one of the multiple comparison tests, was used to find which group was significantly different from the others. Levene's test was used to assess the equality of variances in the comparison of the groups and thus it was decided which test statistic should be considered. The significance level was chosen as 0.05 and the results of the analyses were interpreted accordingly.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The first finding is that the participants' level of perception concerning their professional competencies was found to be "high" in both dimensions of English Proficiency and Competencies of English Instruction. As seen in Table 3, the standard deviation values are close to one another, which shows that homogeneity is the same in both dimensions. Further, considering

the bounds of the confidence intervals, 95 % of the participants had means between 3.93 and 4.08 in terms of English Proficiency. Likewise, it is also seen that 95 % of the participants had means between 3.84 and 4.02 in terms of Competencies of English Instruction.

Consequently, the participants considered themselves to have a "high" level of perception concerning their professional competencies, but not "the highest." This is an implicit acceptance on the part of the participants that they still need further development in their profession.

The second finding is that the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to gender in both dimensions of English Proficiency [$t(161)=-.22$; $p>0.05$] and Competencies of English Instruction [$t(161)=.16$; $p>0.05$] (see Table 4).

Table 3 Participants' level of perception concerning their professional competencies

	M	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Mean	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
English Proficiency	4.00	.49	3.93	4.08
Competencies of English Instruction	3.93	.56	3.84	4.02
General	3.97	.48	3.89	4.04

Table 4 Professional competencies and gender

Dimensions	Gender	n	M	SD	t	p
English Proficiency	Female	104	4.00	.49	-.22	.83
	Male	59	4.01	.48		
Competencies of English Instruction	Female	104	3.93	.60	.16	.88
	Male	59	3.92	.47		

The third finding is that the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to department in both dimensions of English Proficiency [$F(2,160)=2.41$; $p>0.05$] and Competencies of English Instruction [$F(2,160)=2.73$; $p>0.05$] (see Table 5).

The fourth finding is that the participants' level of perception varied significantly according to education

level in both dimensions of English Proficiency [$F(2,160)=11.24$; $p<0.05$] and Competencies of English Instruction [$F(2,160)=3.30$; $p<0.05$] (See Table 6). According to the results of the multiple comparison tests, the level of perception of those graduating from Education Institutes was found to be lower than those of both university graduates and those with a graduate degree.

Table 5 Professional competencies and department of graduation

Dimensions	Departments	n	M	SD	F	p
English Proficiency	English Language Education	97	3.94	.51	2.41	.09
	English Language and Literature	47	4.12	.39		
	Others	19	4.05	.54		
Competencies of English Instruction	English Language Education	97	3.85	.51	2.73	.07
	English Language and Literature	47	4.08	.44		
	Others	19	3.98	.90		

Table 6 Professional competencies and education level

Dimensions	Education Level	n	M	SD	F	p	Diff.
English Proficiency	(1) Education Institute	13	3.43	.73	11.24	.00	1-2
	(2) Undergraduate	140	4.04	.42			1-3
	(3) Graduate	10	4.15	.53			
Competencies of English Instruction	(1) Education Institute	13	3.58	.71	3.30	.04	1-2
	(2) Undergraduate	140	3.97	.49			1-3
	(3) Graduate	10	3.82	1.01			

Table 7 Professional competencies and length of service

Dimensions	Length of Service	n	M	SD	F	p
English Proficiency	Less than 10 years	50	4.06	.46	1.31	.27
	10-20 years	82	4.01	.50		
	Over 20 years	31	3.88	.48		
Competencies of English Instruction	Less than 10 years	50	3.94	.65	.47	.62
	10-20 years	82	3.95	.49		
	Over 20 years	31	3.84	.57		

As seen in Table 7, the fifth finding is that the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to length of service in both dimensions of English Proficiency [$F(2,160)=1.31$; $p>0.05$] and Competencies of English Instruction [$F(2,160)=.47$; $p>0.05$].

The final finding is that the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to participation in in-service training activities in both dimensions of English Proficiency [$t(161)=1.19$; $p>0.05$] and Competencies of English Instruction [$t(161)=1.47$; $p>0.05$] (see Table 8).

Table 8 Professional competencies and participation in in-service training activities

Dimensions	Participation	n	M	SD	t	p
English Proficiency	Yes	100	4.04	.50	1.19	.23
	No	63	3.94	.45		
Competencies of English Instruction	Yes	100	3.98	.53	1.47	.14
	No	63	3.85	.60		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the English teachers working in the general high schools in provincial Ankara had a "high" level of perception concerning their professional competencies in the dimensions of English Proficiency and Competencies of English Instruction. Likewise, Kavak (1986) studied teacher competencies within five dimensions (knowledge of subject matter, methods of instruction, assessment and evaluation, research, human relations) with a sample of teachers and students and concluded that the participants saw themselves as "fairly competent." However, the students' opinions were not in the same direction; the students thought the teachers were "only partially competent." Evaluating the teacher education program for primary school teachers, Taşdemir (1995) found that the student teachers acquired the basic competencies at a level of partial adequacy with the program followed. In addition, investigating how important competen-

cies were in the eyes of teachers and the extent of acquisition of the competencies, Acar (2005) found that the teachers considered the acquisition of the competencies very important.

It is evident that the teachers' "high" perception of professional competency does not necessarily indicate that they have these competencies and display them in practice. This is one of the limitations of perception studies. Therefore, the findings need to be analyzed with this in mind. In conclusion, teachers' level of competency should be evaluated by using different tools like formal tests of knowledge and sources such as students, parents, school administrators.

It has also been found that the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to gender. Similar studies have been conducted with the same conclusion (Çelenk, 1988; Çakır, Erkuş and Kılıç, 2004; Oral, 2004; Çakır 2005). However, other studies have shown that gender could be a significant factor affecting profes-

sional competencies. For example, İzci (1999) found that female teachers had higher scores in terms of the knowledge of their subject matter. Still other studies indicate that gender could be an important factor (Sünbül and Arslan, 2007; Çapri and Çelikkaleli, 2008). Therefore, it is suggested that the relationship between gender and perception of professional competency should be evaluated by using varied samples at different levels of education.

It is interesting to note that the present study found the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to department of graduation. Studies into teachers of other branches found variation according to department of graduation. For example, Şahin (1995) worked with classroom teachers and found significant differences between the teachers graduating from faculty of education and the teachers graduating from other faculties in terms of their knowledge of the subject matter. On the other hand, investigating the principals' perception as to teacher competencies in primary schools, Dağlı (1999) concluded that the principals regarded those graduating from faculty of education as "fairly competent" while they saw the teachers graduating from other faculties as "partially competent" in terms of their knowledge of the subject matter. Consequently, it is clear that further study is needed to identify the underlying causes of why there are no significant differences between ELT graduates and other teachers. Prospective research could look into the issue considering the content and quality of English teacher education, working conditions and the qualifications demanded.

Numerous studies have established that in-service training contributes positively to the professional development of teachers (Özdemir and Yalın, 1998; Akçamete, 2005; Baykal, 2005; Güven, 2005; Özdemir, 2005). However, Özdemir (2005) found in his study that the in-service training for the teachers new in profession did not live up to the expectations in terms of quantity and quality and thus did not produce a positive effect on teachers' perception as to their professional competencies. This study has the same finding that the participants' level of perception did not vary significantly according to participation in in-service training activities. It is possible that this finding is related to the content, timing, attractiveness, being to the point, and the delivery of the in-service training. Further research will clarify these points. Still, school administrators should take these into consideration before taking any steps for teacher development.

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İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİ OLARAK NE DÜZEYDE YETERLİĞE SAHİBİZ? İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN MESLEKİ YETERLİKLERİNE İLİŞKİN ALGILARI

Özet: Bu çalışmanın amacı, genel liselerde görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki yeterlik algı düzeyinin belirlenmesi ve bu algılama düzeylerine demografik değişkenlerinin etkilerinin incelenmesidir. Tarama modeline göre yürütülen bu çalışmanın evrenini, Ankara ili merkez ilçelerinden Altındağ, Çankaya, Etimesgut, Gölbaşı, Keçiören, Mamak, Sincan ve Yenimahalle’de bulunan genel liselerde görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenleri oluşturmaktadır. Örneklem seçiminde, seçilen Ankara ili merkez ilçelerindeki genel liselerde görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin toplam sayısı MEB Ankara İl Millî Eğitim Müdürlüğü’nden elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen verilere göre, 2007-2008 öğretim yılında seçilen Ankara ili merkez ilçelerindeki genel liselerde görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin toplam sayısı 404’dür. Araştırma için örneklem büyüklüğü basit seçkisiz örnekleme göre 163 olarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırmada kullanılan veriler, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen “İngilizce Mesleki Yeterlikler Ölçeği” aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Ölçek, “İngilizce Alan Yeterlikleri” ve “İngilizce Öğretimi Yeterlikleri” olmak üzere iki faktörlü yapıya sahiptir. Güvenirlilik analizi sonucunda bu iki faktöre ait güvenirlik katsayıları sırasıyla .93 ve .95 olarak hesaplanmıştır. Ölçek, üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümde, araştırmaya katılan öğretmenlerin çeşitli değişkenlere ilişkin kişisel bilgilerine yer verilmiştir. Buna göre, araştırmaya katılan öğretmenlerin 104’ü (%63.8) kadındır. Eğitim düzeylerine bakıldığında ise öğretmenlerin 140’ının (%85.9) lisans mezunu olduğu görülmektedir. İngilizce öğretmenlerinin yarıdan fazlası (%59.5) İngiliz Dili Eğitimi bölümünden mezundur. İngilizce öğretmenlerinin büyük çoğunluğu (%85.9) lisans mezunudur. İngilizce öğretmenlerinin yaklaşık yarısı 10-20 yıl arasında mesleki tecrübeye sahiptir. 100 öğretmen (%61.3) hizmet içi eğitim programına katılmıştır. İkinci bölümde, öğretmenlerin mesleki yeterliklerine ilişkin ifadeler yer almıştır. Araştırma sonucunda, genel liselerde çalışan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin genel olarak mesleki yeterliklerinin kazanımına ve kullanabilmelerine ilişkin algılama düzeylerinin “üst” düzeyinde olduğu bulunmuştur. Öğretmenlerin mesleki yeterlik algılama düzeylerinin cinsiyet, mezun oldukları bölüm, hizmet yılı ve hizmet içi eğitim etkinliklerine katılma durumuna göre farklılık göstermediği ancak eğitim düzeyine göre farklılık gösterdiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğretmen Yeterlikleri, Mesleki Yeterlik, İngilizce Öğretimi Yeterlikleri