

## Perceived Social Self-Efficacy and Foreign Language Anxiety among Undergraduate English Teacher Candidates: The Case of Turkey

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**Abstract:** This study sought to investigate (1) the perceived social self-efficacy (PSSE) levels of undergraduate English teacher candidates in Turkey, (2) the foreign language anxiety (FLA) levels of them, (3) the relationship between teacher candidates' PSSE and their FLA, (4) the effect of teacher candidates' gender and age on their FLA and PSSE, and finally (5) the link between PSSE and FLA of teacher candidates moderated by age. Results indicated that a huge number of the participants lacked high PSSE as measured by the applied criterion. As in the case of PSSE, the majority of the undergraduate English teacher candidates in Turkey stated they had medium self-efficacy. However, in terms of the results on participants with high and low levels of PSSE and FLA, the data show a negative correlation; that is, the number of participants with a high PSSE was close to the number of participants with a low FLA, and the number of participants with a low PSSE was close to the number of participants with a high FLA. These findings suggest that an increase in PSSE would result in a decrease in FLA. Finally, all relevant information (i.e. R-squared, F, and P values) support the premise that age positively moderates PSSE, meaning that as the participants' age increases, their PSSE goes up too. We can also infer that increased age can result in a decline in FLA.

### Anahtar Sözcükler:

Yabancı dil kaygısı, algılanan sosyal öz yeterlik, öz yeterlik

### İngilizce Öğretmen Adayları Arasında Algılanan Sosyal Öz Yeterlik ve Dil Kaygısı: Türkiye Örneği

**Özet:** Bu çalışma, (1) Türk öğretmen adaylarının algılanan sosyal öz yeterlik seviyelerini, (2) onların yabancı dil kaygı düzeylerini (3) öğretmen adaylarının algılanan sosyal öz yeterlik ile yabancı dil kaygıları arasındaki ilişkiyi, (4) öğretmen adaylarının yaş ve cinsiyetlerinin yabancı dil kaygıları ve sosyal öz yeterliklerine etkisi ve son olarak 5) yaşa göre algılanan sosyal öz yeterlik ile algılanan yabancı dil kaygısı arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmıştır. Sonuçlara göre, uygulanan ölçüt modele katıldığında katılımcıların çoğunluğunun yüksek seviyede sosyal öz yeterlikten mahsun oldukları görüldü. Algılanan sosyal öz yeterlilik incelendiğinde ise, Türk öğretmen adaylarının orta seviyede öz yeterliliği olduğu tespit edildi, fakat düşük ve yüksek seviyede yabancı dil kaygısı olan öğretmen adaylarının tam aksine düşük ve yüksek seviyede sosyal öz yeterliliği olduğu saptandı. Buna ek olarak, değişkenler ve seviyeleri arasında önemli derecede negatif ilişki belirlendi: sosyal öz yeterlilik arttıkça yabancı dil kaygı düzeyinin düşüş gösterdiği görüldü. Sonuç olarak R-squared, F ve P değerlerine bakıldığında, yaşın algılanan sosyal öz yeterliliği pozitif olarak ılımlandırdığı anlaşıldı. Pozitif ılımlılık demek, ortalamayı değişkenin yani yaşın modelimizin gelişmesine katkıda bulunması demektir. Ayrıca bu çalışmamız, algılanan sosyal öz yeterlilik ile yabancı dil kaygısı seviyelerinin arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir.

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## 1. Introduction

Language anxiety is defined in the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2002) as “subjective feelings of apprehension and fear associated with language learning and use” (p. 285). Language anxiety is an affective variable that adversely influences language learning. That negative attitudes perform like filters and consequently hinder the individual from utilizing the linguistic input can be traced back to the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1981), in which successful language acquisition is believed to be dependent on the learner’s feelings. This is because language anxiety can affect motivation and the preference of learner strategies (Richards & Schmidt, 2002), and it plays a significant “affective role in language acquisition” (Brown, 2014, p. 150). More than three decades ago, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986, p. 128) characterized FLA as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning”. As they clarify, FLA can include anxiety in communication, apprehension of negative judgments and fear of assessment.

According to Ellis (2004), learners may show a natural inclination to feel apprehensive (trait anxiety), or they are likely to feel anxious in particular contexts (situational anxiety). Different from classroom anxiety in general, FLA is considered a kind of situational anxiety because being expected to use a different language while proficiency is insufficient poses a threat to a learner’s language-ego. In the same vein, Richards and Schmidt (2002) maintain that, similar to public speaking anxiety, language anxiety is situation specific, and it can be identified from other types of anxiety. Based on the identified FLA, Brown (2014) categorizes language anxiety into three components:

- Communication apprehension, emerging from the inability of the learners to sufficiently communicate mature perceptions and beliefs,
- Apprehension of negative social evaluation, emerging from the students' need for a constructive social evaluation,
- Test apprehension or anxiety over academic evaluation.

Another significant distinction is made between "harmful" and "helpful" anxiety (Oxford, 1999, p. 60). The former is also called "debilitating anxiety" because this type of anxiety has a direct impact on a learner's performance in terms of a lack of participation and an obvious avoidance of language learning, and it has an indirect impact in terms of increased apprehension and lowered confidence. On the other hand, the latter is also named "facilitating" because it refers to the beneficial sides of apprehension which help to get the job done. Ellis (2004) categorizes anxiety along with learning style, motivation, personality, and willingness to communicate under the category of cognitive and affective traits. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) declare that language anxiety arises at each of the three main phases of the language acquisition process. Firstly, anxiety occurs as a result of a learner's attempt to deal with a set of external stimuli (input) to perceive. In the processing phase, anxiety is experienced when a learner tries to accumulate and process input. In the final stage (output), anxiety is present when retrieving already acquired material. Hence, anxiety is likely to impede the effectiveness of the stages.

Moreover, anxiety has been studied as one of the most important variables in second language learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Cheng, 2001; Brown, 2014). The issues in the studies on language anxiety have generally encompassed the cause or effect on language learning performance (Khattak et al.,

2011; Merç, 2011; Karunakaran et al., 2013; Kralova & Petrova, 2017), the anxiety in specific instructional situations (Horwitz, 2001; Zheng, 2008), the anxiety in exams (Aydin, 2009; Bensoussan, 2012), a teacher's role in managing student anxiety (Ewald, 2007; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013), the psycholinguistic processing of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), and the associations of language anxiety to specific kinds of anxiety, such as anxiety in speaking and listening (Gardner et al., 1997; Pertaub et al., 2001; Ay, 2010; Xu, 2011; Cagatay, 2015; Dalman, 2016; Yüce, 2018; Zorba & Çakır, 2019). In a study by Bailey et al. (2000), findings show a correlation between language anxiety and intelligence, competence, and low perceived self-worth. In a different study, Liu and Jackson (2008) found a negative correlation between language anxiety and willingness to communicate among university learners.

Speaking skills in the English language are undoubtedly necessary for effective interactions. However, because of being spontaneous and given that affective factors in language learning interrupt the productivity, speaking in the classroom is believed to be as one of the most important triggers of a higher level of anxiety in comparison to other language learning skills. The effect of anxiety on speaking in foreign language classroom has been investigated in literature (Ay, 2010; Gregersen, 2008; Phillips, 1992; Price, 1991). Some recent studies showed that students experience speaking anxiety due to the fear of negative evaluation (Liu, 2007; Liu & Jackson, 2008).

## **1.2. Self-Efficacy and Perceived Social Self-Efficacy**

In the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2002), the word efficacy is defined as “a sense of interacting effectively with one's own environment. In fact, efficacy points to the fact that “some degree of control exists within oneself” (p. 475). Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as individuals' beliefs about their own abilities to be successful in any given situation; and then he added that this construct is a consistent predictor of behavior and achievement, higher than any other education related variables.

Furthermore, self-efficacy is a widely researched concept across various disciplines, and the field of education is no exception (Molnar, 2008). According to Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), teacher efficacy has long been viewed as one of the most important factors for teachers to have better performance, and in turn gain higher efficacy. In the same vein, numerous studies have revealed a positive relationship between learners' self-efficacy beliefs about language learning and their performance in various learning tasks (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Liu, 2013; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). In addition, several researchers' findings revealed perceived self-efficacy beliefs were strongly correlated to listening proficiency (Chen, 2007; Rahimi & Abedini, 2009). Following Bandura's (1997) categorization of self-efficacy construct into social, emotional, academic and physical domains, Smith and Betz (2000) define the PSSE as an extension of an individual's confidence to initiate and sustain social interactions.

It is widely believed that an academic learning environment is fed by successful cooperative and productive communication. In this social setting, in addition to having strong interpersonal skills, teacher candidates' beliefs about themselves can play a key role in determining potential impediments they may encounter in learning. How teachers evaluate themselves and their feelings, and how much they trust their strengths in relation to others are crucial when it comes to regular interaction in a social domain. It is even more valuable

to understand teachers' self-beliefs before they start their profession as their beliefs are established while they are in the teacher education programs (Borg, 2006; Johnson, 1994; Pajares, 1992). In fact, despite the large body of studies on self-efficacy and FLA, very few studies in Turkey have been conducted to study the relationship between Turkish teacher candidates' PSSE and level of FLA (Balemir, 2009; Merç, 2015). To this end, this study aims to provide results which could help enhance teacher candidates' performance in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. In so doing, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the PSSE levels of Turkish teacher candidates?
2. What are the FLA levels for Turkish teacher candidates?
3. Is there a relationship between teacher candidates' PSSE and their FLA?
4. What is the effect of teacher candidates' age and gender on their FLA and PSSE?
5. Is the relationship between PSSE and FLA of teacher candidates moderated by age?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

The design of the study was quantitative in which survey-based correlational research was conducted to test a potential relationship between the variables (i.e., perceived social self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety of the learners) moderated by age and gender.

### **2.2. Participants**

There were 69 Turkish undergraduate university participants, of which 20 were male and 49 were female. The participants were English teacher candidates, aged 16-40, who voluntarily took part in the study, which entailed an online questionnaire. The candidates were from two different English-medium private universities in Turkey.

### **2.3. Instruments**

This study was conducted with two questionnaires in which all the items were closed. Two questions to obtain some demographic characteristics (i.e., age and gender) from the participants were also asked.

#### **2.3.1. Perceived Social Self-efficacy (PSSE) Scale**

The PSSE scale, designed by Smith and Betz (2000), consists of a 5-point Likert-type scale with 25 items, from 1 to 5, in which 1 means "no confidence" and 5 means "complete confidence." The scale items measure the level of confidence of an individual who is in a variety of social situations such as performance in public situations, groups and parties, and receiving and giving help. The researchers reported the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.95. Given that the total scores range from 25 to 125, individuals with higher scores show higher levels of social self-efficacy beliefs.

#### **2.3.2. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) Scale**

The foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) scale, designed by Horwitz et al. (1986), contains 33 items in an individual self-report Likert scale, and it uses subscales of "communication apprehension", "test anxiety" and "fear of negative evaluation." Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported .93 and according to the researchers test-retest reliability yielded a  $r = .83$  ( $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the questionnaire categorizes students into two types. One type looks into the correlation of students' high anxiety in speaking

English, and the other one looks into the correlation of students' low anxiety in speaking English. This questionnaire uses the traditional Likert scale which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

#### 2.4. Data Collection

In this study, data was collected through the use of a questionnaire. In order to ease the process of answering, the items of the two questionnaires were translated to Turkish as well, and both the English and Turkish versions were shared through an online survey preparing platform (www.surveymonkey.com) to a large number of students. However, only 69 participants (48 English and 21 Turkish) filled in the questionnaires online.

#### 2.5. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the participants were analyzed using SPSS version 17.0. In the results section, all the paths taken in the data analysis are explained in detail.

### 3. Results

The data for the first question were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 25 questions. The criterion which the levels were based on was determined by dividing the range of scores into the three equal intervals of low, medium, and high. To find out what percentage of participants fall in each level or category, a frequency analysis was run which revealed more than 62% of the participants fall within the medium category, slightly more than 26% fall within the low category, and only 8% fall within the high category. The analysis indicates that a huge number of the participants lacked high PSSE as measured by the applied criterion. These findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Figure 1 represents the percentages of participants falling at different levels schematically.

Table 1.

*Statistics for perceived social self-efficacy levels*

N	Valid	69
	Missing	0

Table 2.

*Perceived social self-efficacy levels*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	8	11.6	11.6	11.6
Medium	43	62.3	62.3	62.3
High	18	26.1	26.1	26.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

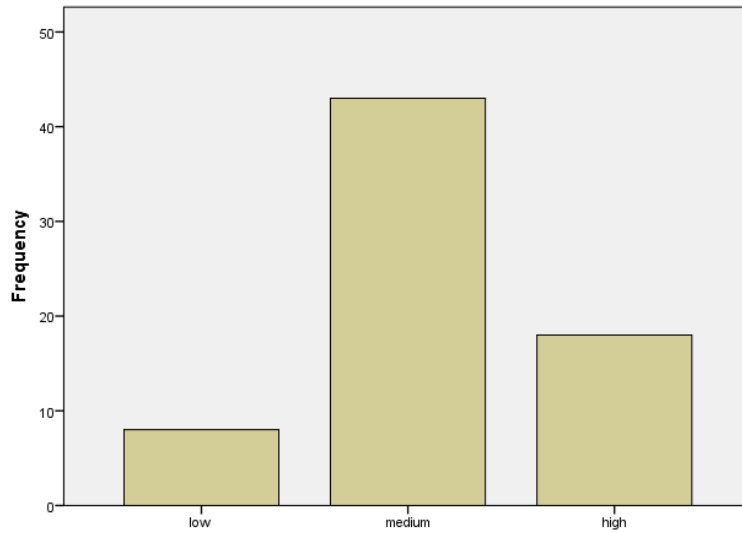


Figure 1. *Perceived social self-efficacy levels*

The data for the second research question were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 33 questions. The criterion used to determine the levels were the same, that is, dividing the range of scores into three equal bands of low, medium, and high. Again, a frequency analysis was run to observe the percentage of respondents falling at each level which revealed 65.2%, 27.5%, and 7.2% of them falling within medium, low, and high levels respectively (Table 3 and Table 4). As in the case of PSSE, the majority of the English language teacher candidates reported medium self-efficacy; however, in terms of the results on participants with high and low levels of PSSE and FLA, the data show a negative correlation; that is, the number of participants with a high PSSE was close to the number of participants with a low FLA, and the number of participants with a low PSSE was close to the number of participants with a high FLA.

Table 3.

*Statistics for perceived foreign language anxiety levels*

N	Valid	69
	Missing	0

Table 4.

*Perceived foreign language anxiety levels*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	19	27.5	27.5	27.5
Medium	45	65.2	65.2	65.2
High	5	7.2	7.2	7.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

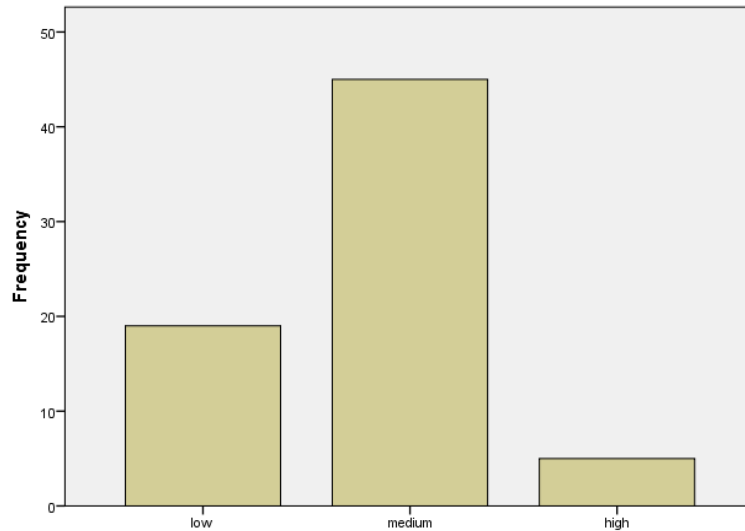


Figure 2. *Perceived foreign language anxiety levels*

To answer the third research question, we used two methods: comparing raw data totals of PSSE and perceived FLA or comparing levels of these variables as we categorized them. Table 5 shows the result of a Pearson correlation run to compare totals of raw data from the questionnaires for both traits. Table 6 is a display of the results of a Spearman rank-order correlation run between levels of the two variables. Both of the tables show significant negative correlations with  $r = -.531$ ,  $P = .001 < .05$  and  $r = -.379$ ,  $P = .001 < .05$  respectively for totals and levels of the variables. The findings indicate that in both cases an increase in PSSE would result in a decrease in FLA.

Table 5.

*Correlations between totals*

		SSE Total	FLA Total
SSE Total	Pearson Correlation	1	-.531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	69	69
FLA Total	Pearson Correlation	-.531**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	69	69

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6.

*Correlations between levels*

		PSSE Levels	FLA Levels
Spearman's Rho	PSSE Levels	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	-.379**
		N	.001
FLA Levels		Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	-.379**
		N	.001

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 shows the age and gender of participants. It is clear that gender is a nominal variable with two levels: male and female. The age variable too was divided into five categories in this study with the following ranges: 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40. However, the two dependent variables were interval. This arrangement of variables compelled us to run a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) after controlling for the assumptions. Table 8 displays the Multivariate Tests and shows that Roy's Largest Root statistic is significant for age although other tests also show a tendency toward significance. The interpretation of this finding could be that age has an effect, but we do not know yet whether the effect is related to PSSE or FLA. Table 9 Tests of Between-Subjects Effects shows which variables age has had an impact on. In this table, it is obvious that age has affected the participants' perceived social self-efficacy with  $F = 2.563$ ,  $P = .047 < .05$ .

Table 7.

*Between-subjects factors*

		Value Label	N
Gender	1.00	Male	20
	2.00	Female	49
Age	1.00	16-20	34
	2.00	21-25	29
	3.00	26-30	3
	4.00	31-35	1
	5.00	35-40	2

Table 8.

*Multivariate tests*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.005	.142 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	60.000	.868
	Wilks' Lambda	.995	.142 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	60.000	.868
	Hotelling's Trace	.005	.142 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	60.000	.868
	Roy's Largest Root	.005	.142 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	60.000	.868
Age	Pillai's Trace	.223	1.913	8.000	122.000	.064
	Wilks' Lambda	.788	1.902 <sup>b</sup>	8.000	120.000	.066
	Hotelling's Trace	.256	1.891	8.000	118.000	.068
	Roy's Largest Root	.184	2.809 <sup>c</sup>	4.000	61.000	.033
Gender *	Pillai's Trace	.021	.325	4.000	122.000	.861
	Wilks' Lambda	.979	.321 <sup>b</sup>	4.000	120.000	.863
Age	Hotelling's Trace	.022	.317	4.000	118.000	.866
	Roy's Largest Root	.021	.651 <sup>c</sup>	2.000	61.000	.525

Table 9.

*Tests of between-subjects effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	FLA total	21.652	1	21.652	.052	.820
	PSSE total	20.792	1	20.792	.084	.773
Age	FLA total	1902.185	4	475.546	1.153	.341
	PSSE total	2543.868	4	635.967	2.563	.047
Gender * Age	FLA total	471.727	2	235.863	.572	.568
	PSSE total	206.135	2	103.068	.415	.662

a. R Squared = .117 (Adjusted R Squared = .016)

b. R Squared = .172 (Adjusted R Squared = .077)



The last question addresses still another issue concerning the link between PSSE and FLA of teacher candidates who participated in this study, and it is what happens to this relationship after the effect of age is taken into account. The findings show that the variable age affects perceived social self-efficacy; however, to determine whether an increase in age enhances teacher candidates' social self-efficacy or causes it to decline a simple moderation analysis was performed using Andrew Hayes's PROCESS program. In this analysis, perceived social self-efficacy was treated as a predictor variable, perceived FLA as an outcome variable and age as a moderator. As the model summary for age in the resulting table reveals, all relevant information, that is R-squared, F, and P values, support the idea that age positively moderates perceived social self-efficacy with R-squared = .0719,  $F = 5.190$ , and  $P = .026 < .05$ . Positive moderation means that the moderator variable, in this case age, contributes to the improvement of our model. In other words, as the age of the participants goes up, their social self-efficacy goes up too. The results can also infer that an age increase can result in a decline in FLA since there was a negative relationship between PSSE and FLA. The two remaining sets of rows show the negative relation between PSSE and FLA discovered while conducting correlations.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study investigated the relationship between teacher candidates' PSSE beliefs and FLA. In so doing, attempts were firstly made to investigate the PSSE of Turkish teacher candidates, the FLA levels of them, the relation between teacher candidates' PSSE and their FLA, the effect of teacher candidates' age and gender on their FLA and PSSE, and finally the link between PSSE and FLA of teacher candidates moderated by age.

To begin with, the findings indicated that most of the teacher candidates have medium self-efficacy beliefs; however, in terms of the results on participants with high and low levels of PSSE and FLA, the data show a negative correlation; that is, the number of participants with a high PSSE was close to the number of participants with a low FLA, and the number of participants with a low PSSE was close to the number of participants with a high FLA. The results also indicate significant negative correlations for totals and levels of the variables that were found, indicating that in both cases an increase in PSSE would result in a decrease in FLA. The results are similar to those of the studies conducted by Anyadubalu (2010) and Merc (2015) in which a negative link between PSSE and FLA was reported. Similarly, Bandura (1997) asserts that individuals with low self-efficacy feel anxious while speaking. In a similar vein, Saka and Surmeli (2010) investigated the relation between teacher candidates' self-efficacy beliefs and their communication skills. Their study showed a positive and high correlation between the two variables, which means the more self-efficacious the teachers were, the more skillful they were in their communication. Lastly, as for the moderator variable role of age on PSSE and FLA, the results showed positive moderation. In this study, it was reported that as the age of the participants goes up, their PSSE goes up. We can also infer that an age increase can result in a decline in FLA since there was a negative relation between PSSE and FLA.

The present study was also an examination of the moderator variable, in this case age, that contributed to the link between PSSE and the level of FLA in Turkish teacher candidates. The results suggest that an increase in the teacher candidates' age can increase the level of PSSE. Previous research that considered the relation between levels of anxiety and language learning achievement in young language learners found a positive relationship between anxiety and age (Onwuegbuzie et al. 1999). To our knowledge, few studies have sought to

explain the relationship between PSSE and PSSE of teacher candidates and what happens to this relationship after the age is taken into account.

The study uniquely took self-beliefs of Turkish teacher candidates into account to create a baseline for future English language teacher education programs in order to enhance teacher candidates' performance in EFL classes. A number of factors can lead to the majority of the teacher candidates' medium PSSE beliefs including the general education system, the knowledge and usage of their linguistic abilities, or their teaching experience outside the classroom curriculum. Thus, there should be more emphasis on encouraging teacher candidates to trust themselves and their skills in order to prepare highly self-efficacious English language teacher candidates. The findings of the present study suggest that university instructors in the teacher education programs need to provide ample opportunities for teacher candidates to use English in and outside of the classroom to help them feel more self-efficacious in their speaking skills, which in turn leads to improvement in teacher candidates' performance in EFL classes.

Several constraints require close consideration in the current study. To generalize the results, other demographic variables, such as the number of the years spent to learn English in schools, parents' level of English language proficiency, and the time spent in an English-speaking country, can be taken into account. Besides, changes in beliefs about teacher candidates' level of FLA can be investigated over a long time, from the beginning to the end of their undergraduate teacher education program.

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