Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Young Learners: Epistemological Beliefs of Pre-service Teachers

Mustafa Caner
Faculty of Education, Akdeniz University, Turkey
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5741-5037

Berker Kurt
Faculty of Education, Akdeniz University, Turkey
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4788-0909

Abstract

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language gained momentum in the last decades of the 20th century. However, teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners is still in its infancy as a field of study. Therefore, investigating practitioners' epistemological beliefs on the issue will contribute to fill the gap in the literature. Regarding this fact, the present study intended to scrutinize epistemological beliefs of pre-service Turkish language teachers on teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners. Adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative study in nature, the present study gathered data from 66 pre-service Turkish language teachers enrolled in a state university in Turkey through written interview forms. The content analysis of the gathered qualitative data revealed that although all the participants took a course on teaching Turkish as a foreign language, almost none of them felt satisfaction in terms of their accomplishments in teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners. The findings also revealed that the participants had varying reasons for their dissatisfaction, including theory and adult-oriented course contents and lack of practice in the field. As for suggestions for additional policies on teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners, the participants recommended launching field-specific courses for pre-service teachers.

Keywords: Young learners, Teaching foreign language, Turkish as a foreign language, Epistemology

Introduction

Teaching a foreign language unquestionably indicates considerable variations concerning the age and other characteristics of the learners. Some researchers (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002; Matsuoka & Smith, 2008) claimed that the main differences lie in the individual differences, whereas some others claimed that the developmental characteristics of learners (Harmer, 2007) play a critical role in teaching a foreign language to different age groups. For instance, emphasizing the role of developmentally appropriate instruction for children, Linse (2005) suggests that teachers should be aware of developmentally appropriate teaching activities for learners. Similarly, Arıkan and Özkan (2010) underlined that children tend to learn in concrete ways rather than dealing with those school subjects as abstract or merely intellectual activities. As for other differences in teaching a foreign language to different age groups, Shin (2006) emphasized that using craft activities with brightly colored visuals and contextualizing the language keep young learners engaged in activities. Muñoz (2008), on the other hand, claimed that the learning context might moderate the influence of age on second (or foreign) language learning.

Similarly, Lee (1995) claimed that cognitive and emotional levels of learners, as well as social environment in which the learner is in at the moment, influence the foreign language teaching practices. Likewise, Lightbown and Spada (2008, p. 74-75) emphasized that age is not the only factor influencing foreign or second language learning; however, the goal and process of language learning might play a critical role as well. Similarly, Agullò (2006) claims that to be effective, foreign language instruction for early ages must be intensive and adjusted to the age of the learner.

The differences in physical, biological, cognitive, and social conditions for young and older learners forced foreign language educators to develop different programs and approaches for different age groups in second or foreign language education. In a similar vein, the arguments about the differences in teaching a foreign language to young or adult learners bring forward the importance of educating the pre-service teachers and empowering them with ample and unique ways of teaching a foreign language to different age groups. According to Pinter (2011), the foreign language teachers' awareness of the similarities and differences between teaching a foreign language to young and adult learners conclusively increase the effectiveness of instruction. Similarly, Linse (2005) elaborated on the importance of being aware of the learners' individual differences in physical, social, and cognitive domains. Additionally, the ELLiE research project (2011), which intends to provide an insight into the policy for early foreign language learning programs in Europe, recommended that early primary foreign language teachers need fluency in the target language and have age-appropriate methodology skills to teach a foreign language to young learners.

As Lee (1995) claimed, "amid growing trends in inter-migration and inter-dependence, learning a second language has become a way of life for many people of the 20th century". Thus, although it starts far before the 20th century, teaching Turkish as a foreign language has become a popular topic in Turkey and other regions during the last decades of the 20th century. Accordingly, teaching Turkish as a foreign language has stood as an evolving field due to the migration waves, sociopolitical advancements of Turkey, and globalization. However, teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners (TTFYL) is still in its infancy and the Cinderella of the field. The rise in the number of immigrants and refugee inhabitants in Turkey, as well as the ever-growing demands for learning Turkish as a foreign language in abroad contexts, lead to the establishment of institutions that teach Turkish as a foreign language. However, those initiations mostly ignored the young learners and based their curriculum on adult teaching. This ignorance also leads to insufficiencies in material and textbooks and the need for well-equipped teachers who are aware of theoretical and practical differences between young and adult learners.

Regarding the fact that there is a dearth of studies in the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners into consideration, examining the pre-service teachers' beliefs in this specific and rather neglected field will hopefully contribute to the related literature. Various studies (Bendixen & Rule, 2004; Brownlee, Purdie, & Boulton-Lewis, 2001; Brownlee, Boulton-Lewis & Purdie, 2002; Chan and Elliot, 2004; Cheng, Chan, Tang & Cheng, 2009; Deryakulu, 2014; Hofer, 2001/2008; Kırmızıgül & Bektas, 2019; Pajares, 1992; Schommer-Aikins, 2004) outlined that personal beliefs of teachers on construction of knowledge and engaging it into teaching play crucial role in their classroom performances and their preferred ways of teaching. In other words, the instructional choices of teachers are the primary confirmation of their epistomological beliefs (Peterman, 1993). Thus, it can be claimed that teachers' instructional practices are established by their perceptions about teaching which are assumed to be driven by their epistemological beliefs. According to Perry (1981), epistemological beliefs of teachers refer to their personal beliefs about what knowledge is, how it can be gained, its degree of certainty, and the limits and criteria for determining knowledge. Similarly, Schraw and Olafson (2008) defined epistemological beliefs as "collective beliefs about knowledge and knowledge acquisition". It can be deemed that epistemological beliefs intuitively have an influence on teaching, learning and their consequences since they comprise the meaning linked with teaching and learning as well as teacher-student roles (Chan & Elliott, 2004).

According to Chai (2010), teacher educators should understand the complex relationships between teachers' epistemological beliefs and how the teaching contexts influence the enactment of these beliefs. Similarly, Hofer (2008) recommends that the relationship between the epistemological beliefs and the variables in the educational context should be widely tested in diverse cultures. Thus, examining the epistemological beliefs of pre-service teachers might shed light on development of inspirational instructional policies in the field.

Several studies on in-service teachers' beliefs and instructional practices have been conducted and disseminated in the related literature, however, a dearth of studies focusing on epistemological beliefs of pre-service teachers in the TTFYL context particularly exists. Therefore, the central intention of this paper is to explore the epistemological beliefs of pre-service Turkish language teachers in TTFYL and figure out their conceptions of teaching and learning, and instructional practices.

In a similar vein, although there are plenty of studies dealing with teaching a foreign language to young learners in the Turkish context, almost none of those studies dealt with teaching Turkish as a foreign language to children and young learners. According to Kurt (2019) and Moralı (2020), very few studies exclusively focus on teaching Turkish as a foreign language to children. Moreover, those studies in the literature mostly elaborated the theoretical concerns or methodological aspects in TTFYL. Consequently, the review of available literature revealed that the studies concerning TTFYL are scarce in number. Moreover, there is almost no study that focused on teachers or pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs on TTFYL. Therefore, we believe that the present study, which intends to inquire about pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs on TTFYL, will contribute to the gap in the field.

In a study on the field of TTFYL, Hafız (2015) intended to draw attention to teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners through presenting appropriate ways of teaching to young learners. Hafız's study (2015) epistemologically signaled that TTFYL requires expert teachers who know the learning styles and developmental stages of young learners. Additionally, Hafız (2015) suggested that the teaching environments, course materials, and teaching activities for young learners should be organized, contemplating young foreign language learners' individual differences.

In another study Kurt (2019) intended to offer a roadmap for the appropriate activities used in four language skills while teaching TFYL. Kurt (2019) recommended that while teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners, teachers should evaluate the appropriateness of materials, activities, and teaching techniques concerning the learners' physical, social, and cognitive developments. Additionally, she claimed that the learners' age and the cultural background of the families should be considered while selecting activities and materials for teaching Turkish as a foreign language to the young learners.

Since TTFYL is in its infancy, studies on the issue in the available literature are very limited in number. Thus, the literature review on similar studies that focus on teaching English as a foreign language to young learners is examined to overview the current concerns and epistemological beliefs in teaching a foreign language to young learners. For instance, in a study Caner, Subaşı, and Kara (2010) examined teaching activities of two English teachers in terms of their beliefs about teaching foreign language to young learners regarding early childhood education principles. They found that the teachers considered age, level, and interests of their students and used different activities and materials to teach English in best ways to young learners.

In another study, Özkan and Arıkan (2010) examined opinions of novice English language teachers on the outcomes of teaching English to children courses in undergraduate English language teacher education programs. Their findings revealed that participants felt a strong need to experience teaching young learners in the real teaching spaces and to know about young learners' characteristics during their pre-service education. Similarly, in another study, Çakır and Güngör (2017) investigated pre-service teachers' appraisals of the practices in teaching English to young learners. Their findings revealed that pre-service teachers' requirements mainly centered on organizational skills, technology use, and young learners' characteristics.

As for teaching a foreign language to children, pre-service teachers' evaluation of their competencies in Şad's (2010a) study revealed that actual practices of pre-service teachers do not sufficiently correspond to the curricular and theoretical needs regarding the learning-teaching experiences, content, objectives, and assessment in teaching a foreign language, English, to children. In another study, Şad (2010b) examined pre-service primary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs on teaching a foreign language to young learners. His findings revealed that most participants ranked themselves below the average efficiency level in preparing activities for teaching a foreign language to young learners. Similarly, İşigüzel and Aktaş (2014), who examined self-efficacy belief levels of foreign language teachers in early foreign language instruction, found that regardless of their field, the self-efficacy belief of almost all the participants in early foreign language teaching were on average level. Likewise, Güngör and Ramazan's (2017) study, which investigated the pre-service Early Childhood teachers' and pre-service English language teachers' views on teaching English in early years, found some deficiencies of teacher preparation programs in terms of educating pre-service teachers for early foreign language teaching.

In a relatively recent study, Ölçü-Dinçer (2020) investigated pre-service EFL teachers' motivation concerning teaching learners from different age levels. The analysis of the findings revealed that pre-service EFL teachers have common background knowledge about age-related differences; however, they felt a lack of proficiency in teaching English to young learners although they have enrolled in a two-semester course on teaching young learners.

The review of available literature revealed that regardless of the target language, teaching a foreign language to young learners needs dedicated teachers who have experience and knowledge on the general principles of early childhood education, specifically when they are teaching a foreign language. To mention some of the outstanding epistemological beliefs in teaching a foreign language to young learners, foreign language teachers of young learners should know the theoretical and practical differences between young and adult learners, they

should have age-appropriate methodology skills to teach a foreign language to young learners, and they should have sufficient experience to adopt the materials and teaching environments concerning the young learners' social, physical, developmental, and cognitive domains. The review of available literature also revealed that the studies dealing with TTFYL did not focus on pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs on the issue. Thus, through focusing on a highly new issue in the field, the present study intends to examine pre-service Turkish language teachers' beliefs on teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners. Regarding this primary aim, the present study sought answer to the following research question.

- What are pre-service Turkish language teachers' epistemological beliefs on teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners?

Besides, succeeding follow-up questions were also posed to scrutinize pre-service Turkish language teachers' epistemological beliefs on TTFYL in-depth.

- Does the scope of teaching Turkish as a foreign language education satisfy pre-service Turkish language teachers?
- Does education on teaching Turkish as a foreign language satisfy pre-service Turkish language teachers' expectations in terms of teaching a foreign language to young learners?
- What are the perceptions of pre-service Turkish language teachers on age-appropriate methodology differences in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
- What are the perceptions of pre-service Turkish language teachers on the priority of teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners?
- What are the pre-service Turkish language teachers' expectations concerning teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners?

Method

The present study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological research design to examine pre-service Turkish language teachers' epistemological beliefs on teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners. Phenomenology as a qualitative research design is used to explore a specific

"phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation" (Lester, 1999) that is not explored in depth for detailed knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a research methodology, phenomenology is employed to examine the views on the experiences of individuals through the analysis of their language as spoken or written (Brinkmann &Kvale, 2008). In a similar vein, the hermeneutic phenomenological research is the interpretation of text or language by an observer and can be used as a methodology or as an enhancement of phenomenology (Webb & Pollard 2006). As for Fuster (2019; 222) the hermeneutic phenomenological research is "oriented to the description and interpretation of the fundamental structures of the lived experience, and to the recognition of the meaning of the pedagogical value of this experience". Thus, using a written interview, the present study intended to describe the meaning of a phenomenon –teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners- for pre-service Turkish language teachers who have experienced the phenomenon through their teaching practices during their undergraduate education.

Participants

The study group of the present study consisted of 66 pre-service Turkish language teachers who are selected through convenience sampling technique. The participants are senior pre-service teachers in the Turkish language teacher education program of a state university in the western Mediterranean region of Turkey. They all took a TTFL course for a semester and fulfilled the course requirements. To ensure the anonymity of the participants as well as to clarify the gathered data, each participant in the study group is labeled with alphanumeric codes that demonstrate their genders, though gender was not a variable in the present study.

Data Gathering Tool

The data of the present study was gathered through a written interview form developed by the researchers. As the data gathering instrument development procedure, first, a literature review was performed to determine the proper questions. Then to quantify the accuracy and trustworthiness of the open-ended questions, two experts' opinions were

requested. Finally, the form was piloted with five senior pre-service Turkish language teachers who are out of the scope of the present study. The final interview form consisted of 3 questions inquiring about the participants' demographics and seven open-ended questions inquiring about participants' epistemological beliefs on TTFYL. The open-ended questions in the interview form were consistent with the research questions of the study. Thus, they inquired the epistemological beliefs of potential teachers of Turkish as a foreign language, the scope of teaching Turkish as foreign language education, appraisal of their education on Turkish as a foreign language concerning teaching it to young learners, the necessity for an age-appropriate methodology for the young learners of Turkish as a foreign language, and their recommendations concerning the TTFYL. The data was gathered through an online form accompanied by a Microsoft Teams that can be securely accessed on any web browser and mobile device during the COVID 19 pandemic outbreak at the beginning of 2021.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed through content analysis technique to make valid assumptions by interpreting and coding the written answers to the open-ended questions. Specifically, deductive content analysis is employed since the research questions were influenced by questions in the interview. The researchers attempted to make sense of the data (Morse & Field 1995) and obtain a sense of whole (Burnard 1991) in the content analysis.

As the first phase in the hermeneutical phenomenological method, the theoretical framework that guides the research is structured with the aim of avoiding the presence of other theoretical conceptions in the interpretation of experiences of participants. In the second phase, the data were obtained from the experience lived from numerous sources such as personal experience, protocols of pre-service teachers' teaching experience, and written interviews with participants. Additionally, the participants were asked to write short anecdotes about their own experience in TTFYL. In the third phase, the phenomenological reflections of the pre-service teachers in the data were examined through

calculation of frequencies or codification of terms selected in transcriptions, and the thematic units were defined around the central subject matter of the study. The researchers developed a categorization matrix and coded the data according to the pre-defined categories in the deductive content analysis. Thus, the categorization matrix was formed along with the questions in the interview and all the data were examined for the existence of the identified categories (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Finally, each thematic unit was integrated into a central theme that identifies the subject with respect to the expressed experiences of pre-service teachers. In the fourth phase, the individual features of all the themes were integrated into a single description to reach a complete phenomenological description of the pre-service teachers' pedagogical recognitions regarding the TTFYL.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, the analyst triangulation technique was adopted, thus, both researchers coded the data independently and compared their agreement on the coding. Nevertheless, the analyst triangulation is held "not to seek consensus, but to understand multiple ways of seeing the data" (Patton, 1999). Upon obtaining the intercoder consistency, the emerging themes and codes reached through the deductive content analysis were presented in tables in the findings section of the paper.

Ethical Procedures

All the participants voluntarily participated in the study, and the letter of authorization (2021G032) to conduct research was obtained from the institution where the study was conducted.

Findings

The findings based on the deductive content analysis of the data were presented consistent with the main research question and the succeeding follow-up questions. Thus, the answer to the main research question, which inquired the pre-service Turkish language teachers' epistemological beliefs on TTFYL, depends on the answers to the succeeding follow-up questions. Therefore, the present study initially intended to clarify if the participants have any idea about the target audience of the Turkish

as foreign language education. The findings of the analysis are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 The Target Audience of the Turkish as a Foreign Language Education

Target audience	f	%
All foreigners	38	41,7
International students in Turkey	27	29,6
Refugees	8	8,7
Children of foreigners	7	7,7
Turkic people in Turkey	5	5,5
Tourists	4	4,4
Foreign entrepreneurs/business people	2	2,2

As seen in Table 1, the participants defined the target audience of the Turkish as a foreign language education under seven general categories. Many participants (41,7 %) overgeneralize the target audience as all the foreigners. Other opinions about the target audience of the Turkish as a foreign language education were the international students in Turkey (29,6%), refugees (8,7%), children of foreigners (7,7%), Turkic people in Turkey (5,5%), tourists (4,4%) and foreign entrepreneurs or businesspeople (2,2%), respectively. This finding uncovered that only a small number of the participants considered children as the target audience of Turkish as foreign language education.

The second question in the interview inquired the participants' beliefs on the efficiency and qualification of TTFL course. The findings concerning this question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The beliefs concerning the TTFL course

Theme	Codes	f	%
Unsatisfactory	Lack of practice	25	34,7
	Lack of practical theory	10	13,8
	Remote teaching	6	8,3
	Insufficient contents	6	8,3
	Insufficiency of instructors	5	7

Unsatisfactory	Focusing on mother tongue education	4	5,5
	Insufficiencies of the students	2	2,7
	Lack of experience	2	2,7
	Lack of foreign language teaching skills	1	1,3
Satisfactory	Sufficient in general	6	8,3
	Leading to do research	3	4,1
	Provides theoretical knowledge	2	2,7

As for the efficiency of teaching Turkish as a foreign language course, the majority (84,7%) of the participants found their course unsatisfactory for varying reasons. Lack of practice (34,7%) and lack of practical theory (13,8%) were the most recurring deficiency declared by the participants. Additionally, some participants (8,3%) stated some insufficiencies due to remote teaching circumstances that the participants experienced during the coronavirus pandemic breakdown, which was also seen in the responses of the participants as insufficiency in covering the course contents timely (8,3%) or insufficiency of instructors (7%). It is also found that some participants (5,5%) complaint about focusing on mother tongue education and not informing the students on foreign language teaching skills (1,3%) though the course coverage was foreign language teaching.

Some of the participants' beliefs are excerpted to elucidate their epistemological beliefs on the unsatisfactory sides of the course in educating pre-service teachers.

I can admit that our course on teaching Turkish as a foreign language was somewhat unsatisfactory. For instance, we covered theoretical issues most and did not have chances to put the theoretical knowledge into practice. The only advantage was learning the theoretical aspects of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, which can also be accomplished through reading the books (M12).

The course was mostly muddled around the theoretical issues. Moreover, I think this course did not get a well-deserved place in the program (M14).
I did not find this course satisfactory enough on my side. What I mean not the course itself but my insufficiencies in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. I have to struggle a lot to compensate my insufficiencies on this issue (M24).
This course was not productive for me due to the obstacles of remote teaching (F30).

On the other hand, a few participants (15,3) believe that TTFL course is efficient enough. While some of them found it sufficient in general (8,3%), some of them (4,1%) considered it sufficient since the course leads them to do research. Additionally, a few participants (2,7%) found it sufficient in terms of providing theoretical background on TTFL.

As for the satisfactory concerns, one of the participants' (F4) opinion worth mentioning here since she found the course content pleasing when compared to that of certificate programs, which superficially provide information in a short time by non-specialist instructors.

In the interviews, the participants were asked their opinions on the gains of their education in terms of TTFYL. The findings based on the content analysis of their beliefs are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 The Gains of Participants in Terms of TTFYL

Theme	Codes	f	%
Unsatisfactory	Insufficient in general	17	34
	Theory oriented	17	34
	Adult oriented	10	20
	Needs practice	5	10
	Needs experience	1	2

As for the gains of participants' education in teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners, the data analysis revealed that all the participants were displeased for ample grounds. For instance, while most of them stated their displeasure without specifying the reason, several of them stated that they had theory-oriented instruction (34%), and some of them stated that they generally got

adult-oriented instruction (20%). Additionally, it is found that few of the participants criticized the lack of practice (10%) and lack of experience (2%) in teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners.

Some of the participants' views in terms of the disadvantageous aspects of their education on TTFYL are exemplified as follows.

None of the activities in our course focused on how to teach young learners. We mostly covered issues concerning teaching Turkish to adult foreign learners. I think teaching children should be the center of teaching a foreign language (M5).

I can say that, throughout the semester, we even did not mention the young learners in teaching Turkish as a foreign language (F37).

Actually, our education on teaching Turkish as a foreign language was good, however, it was mainly theory-oriented, and we did not practice the teaching in a real environment. I think I will put the theory into practice when I start my teaching profession (M13).

Our education on teaching Turkish as a foreign language might be considered as introductory education. The real attainment can be achieved through practice teaching. If we could have chance to practice teaching Turkish to the young learner in real classrooms, we would be more qualified on the issue (M10).

Another question in the interview inquired participants' opinions on the need for age-appropriate methodology knowledge in TTFL. The findings concerning this question are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 The Need for Age-Appropriate Methodology Knowledge in TTFL

Theme	Code	f	%
Required	Cognitive differences	27	29,6
	Learning differences	26	28,5
	Differences in readiness	11	12
	Teaching differences	11	12
	Differences in needs	7	7,7
	Differences in L1 developments	3	3,2
	Motivational differences	2	2,1
Not required	Unnecessary	6	6,5

The analysis of the data revealed that while almost all the participants (93,5%) believe that there is a need for age-appropriate methodology knowledge for numerous reasons, only a few of them (6,5%) believe that they do not need specific training on the age-appropriate methodology for teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The reasons specified for the need for age-appropriate methodology knowledge include cognitive differences (29,6%), learning differences (28,5%), differences in readiness (12%), teaching differences (12%), differences in needs (7,7%), differences in first language developments (3,2%), and motivational differences (2,1%) of adult and young learners.

Some of the participants' beliefs on the need for age-appropriate methodology knowledge in TTFL are presented below.

I believe that age-appropriate methodology knowledge is necessary for teachers because the learning processes and cognitive developments of ten-year-old and twenty-year-old learners are entirely different (M 14).

There are differences between children and adults in terms of thinking styles and perceptions. We know that children have some advantages in learning a foreign language. For example, children are eager to learn new things and process information differently from adults. Therefore, there is a great need for age-appropriate methodology knowledge while teaching Turkish as a foreign language (F18).

I believe that learners who advanced in their first language may learn the foreign language better. Thus, children need a more comprehensive foreign language education since their first language development is not like the adults. Additionally, children need concrete examples instead of abstract things due to cognitive

development differences, whereas it is not a problem for adults. Therefore, we should get age-appropriate methodology knowledge for teaching Turkish as a foreign language (F4).

Children and adults have differing motivations for language learning. This clearly affects their learning. Therefore, we should know how to teach Turkish as a foreign language to children and adults (F8).

The findings concerning participants' epistemological beliefs on the characteristics of age-appropriate methodology differences are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 The Fundamental Aspects of Age-Appropriate Methodology Differences

Themes	Codes	f	%
The difference (should be on …)	Materials	22	23,2
	Learning styles	20	21,1
	Teaching methodology	17	17,9
	Curriculum	14	14,7
	Duration	9	9,5
	Readiness	5	5,3
	Motivation	5	5,3
	Liability differences	2	2,11
No difference	No specific difference	1	1,01

As seen in Table 6, although almost all the participants (98,9%) believe that there should be differences in terms of age-appropriate methodology for various aspects, only one of the participants declared that there should be no difference in terms of age-appropriate methodology. The participants believe that an age-appropriate methodology is needed since the teaching materials used for dissimilar age groups should be different (23,2%); the learning styles are different (21,1%); teaching methodologies should be different (17,9%); the curriculum should be different (14,7%); the duration of the courses should be different (9,5%); the levels of readiness are different (5,3%), the motivations of learners are different (5,3%); and the liabilities of the learners are different (2,11%).

Some of the participants' opinions on the issue are excerpted as follows.

The age differences between children and adults cause a shift in their comprehension; thus, the materials used for both groups should not be the same (M3).

The age differences should be taken into consideration even for the selection of teaching materials. For instance, children enjoy vivid and concrete materials, but you can teach adults with simple materials such as coursebooks (M22).

The attention span of children and adults differs; their expectations and motivation to learn a foreign language might be different; in short, their needs are different. The curriculum for teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners should be prepared regarding these facts. Even the teaching methodologies should differ regarding the ages of learners. For instance, you cannot teach grammar rules to young learners without entertaining activities such as games or singing. We have to give short pauses or change the types of the activities while teaching to young learners; however, we do not have to pay attention to such issues while teaching adults (F2).

The readiness levels, as well as comprehension capacities of learners, might show differences in terms of their ages. Therefore, while teaching Turkish as a foreign language, different teaching methodologies, techniques, and different curriculums should be employed for different age groups (F20).

The data analysis regarding the perceptions of pre-service Turkish language teachers on the priority of TTFYL is summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 The Priority of TTFYL

Theme	Codes	f	%
Emphasized	Emphasized	15	26,8
Uncertain	Uncertain	6	10,7
Not emphasized (due to …)	Lack of institutions	9	16,1

	Lack of academic studies	7	12,5
	General ignorance	7	12,5
	Lack of degree programs	4	7,1
Not emphasized (due to …)	Educational policies	3	5,3
	Adult oriented education	3	5,3
	Lack of mission/job definition	2	3,6

When the data were examined in detail, it was found that although some of the participants believe that the priority is given (26,8%) to some extent, over half of the participants (62,4%) believe that the essential priority is not given to the teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners for several reasons. For instance, some believe that the lack of institutions that specifically teach Turkish as a foreign language to young learners (16,1) is one reason behind the negligibility of teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners. The lack of academic studies (12,5%); the general ignorance of the issue (12,5%); the lack of pre-service teacher education programs in the field (7,1%); the lack of ground educational policies on the issue (5,3%); the routine of adult-oriented instruction (5,3%); and the lack of a job definition in the field are the other aspects that participants considered as the reasons of not emphasizing the TTFYL.

Some of the participants stated their opinions on the priority of TTFYL as follows.

In fact, teaching Turkish as a foreign language is not considered an essential issue. The authorities thought that anyone might be employed to teach it; however, this is a specific field, and the teachers should be educated on this specific field. I think the essential importance is not given to teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners as well. For instance, I did not hear any institution that gave courses specifically to young learners of Turkish as a foreign language F18).

I do not think that the essential care was given to teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners. There is not any example of it in my environment. Moreover, I see certificate programs all around, and those who accomplished a certificate program start teaching Turkish as a foreign language. However, being a teacher in this specific field should be the outcome of comprehensive undergraduate education in education faculties where teaching to young learners is emphasized (M12).

As a general policy, the young learners of Turkish as a foreign language are ignored in the classrooms. I observed it during my teaching practice in state schools. There were some children of Syrian refugees in the classes, but teachers do not pay specific attention to those children (F25).

Another question that the present study sought to answer was the pre-service Turkish language teachers' expectations and suggestions concerning the future of TTFYL. The findings related to this question are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7 Expectations Concerning TTFYL

Themes	Codes	f	%
	Increasing number of qualified institutions	10	14,1
	Awarding scholarship/ grants/fellowship and funding	2	2,8
	Increasing visionary diplomacy	2	2,8
Governmental expectations	Directing foreigners to learn Turkish	2	2,8
	Making higher education policies on TTFL to young learners	2	2,8
	Making job definition of TTFL teachers	2	2,8

Educational expectations	Developing age-appropriate materials	12	16,9
	Encouraging innovative teaching methodologies	11	15,5
	Organizing cultural activities	7	9,8
	Emphasizing the trainer training	6	8,4
	Motivating hands-on training	5	7
	Developing childhood curriculum	4	5,6
	Providing practice teaching/in-service training	3	4,2
	Encouraging peer teaching activities	3	4,2

As seen in Table 7, the data analysis revealed that governmental (28,4%) and educational (71,6%) expectations and suggestions shone out for the future of TTFYL. As for the initial governmental expectations, participants assume that increasing the number of qualified institutions might be the best way to invest in the future of TTFYL. Similarly, in terms of educational expectations, participants believe that developing age-appropriate material is the initial expectation that might contribute to the future of TTFYL. Other outstanding expectations on the issue were encouraging innovative teaching methodologies, organizing cultural activities, emphasizing the trainer training, motivating hands on training, developing childhood curriculum, providing practice teaching/in-service training, and encouraging peer teaching activities, respectively.

The following excerpts from participant interviews refine their epistemological beliefs on the future of TTFYL.

The government should focus on international educational policies with other countries to foster teaching Turkish as a foreign language as much as creating mutual political or diplomatic relations. Through promotional or cultural activities, the government should publicize the Turkish language so that people might be motivated to learn Turkish worldwide (M16).

The government should promote the higher education institutions to establish academic branches or undergraduate programs for teaching Turkish as a foreign language. These initiations should not only focus on the institutions within the country but should incorporate the higher education institutions in other countries as well. Additionally, the government should organize academic events that gather academicians for the welfare of teaching Turkish as a foreign language or award funding for academic studies on the issue (F2).

As a governmental policy, the policymakers in education should enforce refugees, especially their children, to learn Turkish. The TTFL courses should be available in every city; thus, the government could reach all the refugees who need to learn Turkish. I believe that if the government awards scholarships to these people, they eagerly learn Turkish as a foreign language. I must note that such initiations also require well-educated teachers on TTFYL, which the government mostly neglect (M8).

We are studying for being Turkish language teachers at the university and got some courses on TTFL; however, we could not find opportunities for practice teaching in this specific area. Our university should organize practice teaching activities where we can perform teaching Turkish as a foreign language in a real atmosphere (E10). Turkish language teacher education programs in universities should provide more courses on TTFL. These courses should encompass teaching practice sessions as well. Pre-service teachers need practice in this specific field. Teachers actively working in schools should get in-service training on TTFL, especially on TTFYL, because almost every state school has foreign or refugee students (M5).

The number of institutions on TTFL should be expanded to serve for welfare of TTFL. Moreover, the standards of TTFL should be defined. For instance, who can teach TTFL should be clarified. Having an education on teaching Turkish literature and teaching the Turkish language are different concepts. What is more, teaching Turkish as a foreign language is a very specialized field. Therefore, the government

should pay additional urgency for the education of teachers in this field (F5).

I think foreign children can learn Turkish through practicing it in its real atmosphere. Therefore, we should provide more opportunities for those children that they can spontaneously communicate with Turkish children. If we arrange playgrounds where Turkish and foreign children play together, this will lead to peer learning (F9). The books on TTFL mostly exemplify the standard language patterns and examples. Moreover, most of the books are adult-oriented. They should be re-organized so as to get the intention of young learners. Additionally, the teaching activities in the textbooks should cover real-life circumstances such as dialogues in the market, which help the learners to experience the real usage of language patterns (F13).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings which are presented in the previous section are highly unique since the present study is one of the forerunners and contributive one to the field. For instance, the analysis of the findings revealed that most participants in the present study did not consider children as the target audience of TTFL. This finding is specifically critical and served for formative purposes for establishing the epistemological beliefs of pre-service teachers. That is, most of the participants epistemologically have a misconception that the target audience of teaching Turkish as a foreign language is adults. Therefore, pre-service Turkish language teachers' awareness of the target audience of TTFL should be raised, or their focus should be channeled to young learners as well.

Another finding of the present study revealed that most pre-service Turkish language teachers are not pleased with their education on TTFL for varying reasons. Mostly, they complain about lack of practice and lack of practical theory in their course matters concerning TTFYL. Similarly, the finding of the present study revealed that the pre-service Turkish language teachers found their education dissatisfactory in terms of teaching to young learners since their education was mostly based on theory and adult-oriented instruction. Likewise, the findings also revealed that almost all the participants believe that their undergraduate education should provide them with age-appropriate methodology knowledge for TTFL. As for the epistemological beliefs deduced from this finding, it can be claimed that pre-service Turkish language teachers consider their undergraduate education deficient in terms of educating them to teach young learners adequately. These findings of the present study show similarities with various studies -which focused on teaching English as a foreign language to young learners- such as Özkan and Arıkan (2010), Şad (2010b), Aktaş and İşigüzel (2014), Çakır and Güngör (2017), Güngör and Ramazan (2017) and Ölçü-Dinçer (2020) who found that teachers or pre-service teachers in foreign language teaching field criticize themselves on the deficiencies of their background education on teaching to young learners.

Additionally, it was found that the participants believe that age-appropriate methodology should cover age-appropriate materials and textbooks and specific curriculum that regard cognitive developments and individual differences of young and adult foreign language learners. As for the insufficiencies of textbooks and materials, the findings of the present study show similarities with Yeniay's (2008) study, which found a very popular Turkish as a foreign language textbook was incompatible with the young foreign language learners' language learning characteristics.

As for the perceptions of pre-service Turkish language teachers on the priority of TTFYL, it was found that over half of the participants believe that the essential priority is not given to TTFYL. This finding shows similarities with the findings of Hafız's (2015) study, which signaled that TTFYL requires expert teachers who know learning styles and developmental stages of young learners.

The findings of the present study revealed that pre-service Turkish language teachers have numerous governmental and educational expectations about the future of TTFYL. However, most of their expectations were related to education rather than governmental expectations. As for governmental expectations, participants assume that increasing the number of qualified institutions as well as educating field-specific and qualified teachers might be the value-added initiations for the future of TTFYL.

In terms of educational expectations, participants believe that besides organizing trainer training and in-service training for the current teachers, developing a young learner friendly curriculum that enables more teaching practice activities for pre-service education will contribute to the well-being of teaching Turkish as a foreign language to young learners in future.

In conclusion, it should born in mind that teaching Turkish as a foreign language is a specific field that needs special attention of both government and academicians. The teacher education on TTFL should be encouraged by the policymakers and higher education institutions in contemplation of an advanced future for the field. Moreover, the stakeholders should give importance to TTFL to young learners, and the primary target of the field should be young learners. Thus, a wide range of actions, including developing age-appropriate materials, age-appropriate teaching methods, as well as educating teachers equipped with teaching skills on teaching young learners, should be planned instantaneously.

As for a final suggestion, the researchers in the field should focus on Turkish as a foreign language to young learners since forthcoming empirical studies will surely contribute to the deserted literature on this field.

References

Agulló, Gloria Luque. "Overcoming Age-related Differences." *ELT Journal,* vol. 60, no. 4, 2006, pp. 365-373.

Bendixen, Lisa D., and Deanna C. Rule. "An Integrative Approach to Personal Epistemology: A Guiding Model." *Educational Psychologist,* vol. 39, no. 1, 2004, pp. 69-80.

Brinkmann, Svend, and Steinar Kvale. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage Publications, 2008.

Brownlee, Joanne, et al. "Core Beliefs about Knowing and Peripheral Beliefs About Learning: Developing an Holistic Conceptualisation of Epistemological Beliefs." *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology,* vol. 2, 2002, pp. 1-16.

Brownlee, Joanne, et al. "Changing Epistemological Beliefs in Pre-service Teaching Education Students." *Teaching in Higher Education,* vol. 6, no. 2, 2001, pp. 247-268.

Burnard, Philip. "A Method of Analysing Interview Transcripts in Qualitative Research." *Nurse Education Today,* vol. 11, no. 6, 1991, pp. 461-466.

Caner, Mustafa, et al. "Teachers' Beliefs on Foreign Language Teaching Practices in Early Phases of Primary Education: A Case Study." *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry,* vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, pp. 62-76.

Chai, Ching Sing. "Teachers' Epistemic Beliefs and their Pedagogical Beliefs: A Qualitative Case Study among Singaporean Teachers in the Context of ICT-supported Reforms." *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2010, pp. 128-139.

Chan, Kwok-Wai, and Robert G. Elliott. "Relational Analysis of Personal Epistemology and Conceptions about Teaching and Learning." *Teaching and Teacher Education,* vol. 20, no. 8, 2004, pp. 817-831.

Cheng, May M., et al. "Pre-service Teacher Education Students' Epistemological Beliefs and their Conceptions of Teaching." *Teaching and Teacher Education,* vol. 25, no. 2, 2009, pp. 319-327.

Creswell, John W., and Cherly N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage Publications, 2016.

Çakır, Abdulvahit, and Müzeyyen Nazlı Güngör. "Pre-service Teachers' Evaluations of Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners in terms of 21st Century Teacher Qualifications." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,* vol. 13, no. 1, 2017, pp. 244-259.

Deryakulu, Deniz. "Epistemolojik İnançlar." *Eğitimde Bireysel Farklılıklar*, edited by Y. Kuzgun, and D. Deryakulu, Nobel Yayınevi, 2014.

Ellis, Gail, et al. *The Primary English Teacher's Guide*. Penguin Publications, 2002.

Enever, Janet. *ELLiE: Early Language Learning in Europe*. British Council, 2011.

Fuster, Doris Elida. "Qualitative Research:

Hermeneutical Phenomenological Method." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2019, pp. 201-229.

Hafız, Hatice Dilek. *8-12 yaş aralığındaki çocuklara yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretimi*, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2015.

Harmer, Jerey. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Pearson Longman Limited, 2007.

Hofer, Barbara K. "Personal Epistemology and Culture." Knowing, Knowledge and Beliefs: Epistemic Studies across Diverse Cultures, edited by M.S. Khine, Springer, 2008.

Hofer, Barbara K. "Personal Epistemology Research: Implications for Learning and Teaching." *Educational Psychology Review,* vol. 13, 2001, pp. 353-383.

İşigüzel, Bahar, and Tahsin Aktaş. "Examining the Self- Efficacy Belief Level in Early Foreign Language Teaching of Foreign Language Teachers." *International Journal of Languages Education and Teaching*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2014, pp. 25-39.

Kırmızıgül, Aslı Saylan, and Oktay Bektas. "Investigation of Pre-service Teachers' Epistemological Beliefs." Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences, vol. 14, no. 1, 2019, pp. 146-157.

Kurt, Emine. *Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe öğretimi*. Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2019.

Lee, Ki Hwan. "Age Differences in Second Language Acquisition: An Educational Perspective." *The Korean Language in America,* vol. 1, 1995, pp. 281-291.

Lester, Stan. *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research*. Stan Lester Developments, 1999.

Linse, Caroline T. *Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners*. McGraw-Hill, 2005.

Matsuoka, Rieko, and Ian Smith. "Age Effects in Second Language Acquisition: Overview." *The Journal of Nursing Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2008, pp. 33-40.

Moralı, Gürkan. "Total Physical Response Method in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language to Children and Designing A1 Level Activity." *SDU International Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020, pp. 16-25.

Morse, Janice M., and Peggy Anne Field. *Qualitative Research Methods for Health Professionals*. Sage Publications, 1995.

Muñoz, Carmen. "Age-related Differences in Foreign Language Learning. Revisiting the Empirical Evidence." *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2008, pp. 197-220.

Dinçer, Zeynep Ölçü. "Pre-service English Teachers' Motivation for Teaching Different Grade Levels." *Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi,* vol. 54, 2020, pp. 133-155.

Özkan, Hasan and Arda Arıkan. "To What Extent does English Language Teacher Education Curriculum prepare Prospective Teachers for Teaching Young Learners?." *International Conference on New Trends in Education and their Implications*, 2010, pp. 18-23,

Pajares, M. Frank. "Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning up a Messy Construct." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 62, no. 3, 1992, pp. 307-332.

Patton, M.Q. "Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis." *Health Services Research*, vol. 34, 1999, pp. 1189-1208.

Peterman, Francine. "Implications of Psychological Research on Student Learning and College Teaching for Teacher Education." Handbook of Research on Teacher Education, edited by W.R. Houston, Macmillan, 1993.

Pinter, Annamaria. *Children Learning Second Languages*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Schommer-Aikins, Marlene. "Explaining the Epistemological Belief System: Introducing the Embedded Systemic Model and Coordinated Research Approach." *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2004, pp. 19-29.

Shin, Joan Kang. "Ten Helpful Ideas for Teaching English to Young Learners." *English Teaching Forum,* vol. 44, no. 2, 2006, pp. 2-13.

Şad, Süleyman. "Theory–practice Dichotomy: Prospective Teachers' Evaluations about Teaching English to Young Learners." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,*

vol. 6, no. 2, 2010, pp. 22-53.

Şad, Süleyman. "Sınıf Öğretmeni Adaylarının Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Öğretimi Konusundaki Yeterlilik Algılarının ve İsteklilik Düzeylerinin İncelenmesi." *9. Ulusal Sınıf Öğretmenliği Eğitimi Sempozyumu*, 2010, pp. 1023-1028.

Webb, Phyl, and Carol Pollard. "Demystifying a Hermeneutic Approach to IS Research." Australasian Journal of Information Systems, vol. 13, no. 2, 2006, pp. 31-48.

Yeniay, Zeynep Duygu. *Erken Yaşta Öğrenenler Için Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğretiminde Içerik Odaklılık*. İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2008.

to Help Students analyze Published Articles in Basic Medical Sciences." *The American Journal of Physiology*, vol. 268, 1995.

Richardson, Annette, and Debbie Carrick-Sen. "Writing for Publication made easy for Nurses: An Evaluation." *British Journal of Nursing*, vol. 20, no. 12, 2011, pp. 756-759.

Ross, J. "Student Life-Student to Newly Qualified Nurse: Make a Checklist." *Nursing Standard (Royal College of Nursing (Great Britain): 1987)*, vol. 31, 2017.

Pospelova, Tatiana. "The Influence of Self-editing on Micro Skills Development in Academic Writing in English as a Second Language." *Journal of Language and Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, pp. 30-38.

Terry, Louise M., et al. "The Effect of Fluency in English on the Continuing Professional Development of Nurses Educated Overseas." *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, vol. 44, 2013, pp. 137-144.

Tiruneh, Ephriem. "The Impacts Peer Correction versus Teacher Correction on Students' Writing Performance." *Ethiopian Renaissance Journal of Social Sciences and the Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020, pp. 81-92.

Sangeetha, Valentina. "Inculcating Self-Editing Skills for Enhancing Writing Skills of the EFL Students." *International Journal of Instruction*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2020, pp. 509-522.

Saver, Cynthia. *Anatomy of Writing for Publication for Nurses*. Sigma Theta Tau International, 2017.

Simpson, Elaine, and Mary Courtney. "Critical Thinking in Nursing Education: Literature Review." *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2002, pp. 89-98.

Satake, Yoshiho. "How Error Types Affect the Accuracy of L2 Error Correction with Corpus Use." *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 50, 2020.

Sunahase, Takeru, et al. "Probabilistic Modeling of Peer Correction and Peer Assessment." *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Educational Data Mining*, 2019, pp. 426-431.

Prabasiwi, Evita Ardy, and Warsono. "Employing Self and Peer Editing Techniques to Teach Writing Recount Texts for Students with High and Low Motivation." *English Education Journal*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2017, pp. 220-226.

Yamato, Tie, et al. "The TIDieR Checklist will Benefit the Physical Therapy Profession." *Brazilian Journal of Physical Therapy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2016, pp. 191-193.

Author Details

Mustafa Caner, *Akdeniz University, Turkey, **Email ID**: mcaner@akdeniz.edu.tr*

Berker Kurt, *Akdeniz University, Turkey, **Email ID**: berkerakdeniz@gmail.com*