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## An evaluation of competency perceptions of non-native English instructors

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to provide some evidence about the special field competencies of Non-native English instructors in a state university and evaluate these competencies in terms of various variables. In the study, data was collected by “Perception Scale for Turkish Teachers on Special Field Competencies” developed according to the competencies identified by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The scale is a five-item Likert-type scale consisting of 34 items. The population of the study consisted of non-native 32 non-native English instructors at Pamukkale University. The results of the study showed that the general self-perceptions of the instructors is high, however, the departments graduated and the academic level of the instructors may effect the self-perception level.

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### 1. Introduction

In the field of education, it is the very need to exploit the potential learning capacity of students for the sake of the individual and the society. On the way to reaching such an ideal, the basic support comes from teachers. Through the profession of teaching, they invest into the humanity and the future of the world. It is the teachers who are going to be the advocates of quality education. At this point, it is crucial to bring into the light what qualities of teachers especially have the power to influence the learning experiences of learners. This is going to give an insight to teacher education. These qualities and the performance of teachers determine the characteristics of a successful teacher. In this way, it could be possible to train teachers considering teacher competencies. As Westera (2011) states “Naturally the word ‘competence’ is

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attractive for both educators and employers, because it is easily identified with valuable capabilities, qualifications and expertise” and continues with a very crucial question which is “What educator would not strive for ‘competent’ graduates, and what employer would ever refuse such ‘competent’ newcomers?” Recently, this issue of teacher competency has been a matter of considerations for administrators to increase the quality of instruction.

As another point, “Who is effective teacher?” and “What makes a teacher proficient and competent?” are the questions that arise when education occurs in any place. Without doubt, it is believed that, the teacher equipped with effective competencies will improve the learning atmosphere and create a more friendly and successful learning environment. However, teacher competencies are described and defined in different sources with different wording. In all parts of the world teacher is a vital factor in education and teacher competencies are described with different terms in different countries. For example, in Turkey, there are three different teacher competency domains, one of which is competencies defined by Ministry of Education (MOE) under the title of a) general competencies and b) English teaching competencies, the second one is competencies defined by The council of Higher Education which includes a) knowledge of subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge, b) teaching and learning processes, c) observation and evaluation, d) other Professional developments. The third important definition is made by CEF, however, all these competencies are lack of consensus in general.

## 2. Background

### *The definition of competency and its dimensions*

When it comes to discuss on the issue of teacher competency, it should be clearly understood as a term and as a concept. The dictionary meaning of competency (in Merriam- Webster) is given as the physical or mental power to do something, and the synonyms are given as capability and capacity. Competencies are used to define technical details of teaching profession. The competencies performed by teachers are the attributes affecting their performance. In this sense, it constitutes guidance for teachers’ self-development and their classroom actions. Hextall *et al.* 1991: 82 (cited in Burgess, 2000) also gives a definition of competence as in the following:

“a complex and dynamic process which involves exploration, choice, decisions, creative thinking and the making of value judgements. The major elements in this process – evaluation, research and experimentation – are not value added features of teacher quality; they constitute the very basis of competence in teaching – that is, reflectivity.

Hayes (1997) informs us about the Department for Education (DfE) which produced sets of criteria in the form of competence statements. Here in these sets; “the statements are given in the form of sets of criteria, referred to as competences, subdivided under headings which included specific reference to aspects such as subject knowledge, curriculum, teaching strategies and classroom management, assessment and record-keeping, and professional relationships.”

Mulder (2007) also discusses about the definitions of competency and states that:

“Dictionaries give the following meaning for the (English) concept of competence: ‘To a sufficient extent possessing means for livelihood, and the quality or state of being competent. Possessing required or adequate abilities or qualities, being judicially qualified or adequate and having the availability of the capacity to function or develop in a certain way’

Leat (1993) clarify a situation about competence stating that “it is developed through experiential learning cycles and that in this process explicit attention must be given to the development of the learning skills which are integral to experiential learning.”

As mentioned in Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications “Competences are the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions.” For Gupta (2007), “competency is a knowledge, skill, attitude or behavior that enables a person to perform effectively in the employment.” In her article called “Teachers’ Competencies”, Selvi (2010) explains teacher competencies in nine dimensions as:

- field competencies,
- research competencies,
- curriculum competencies,
- lifelong learning competencies,
- social-cultural competencies,
- emotional competencies,
- communication competencies, information and communication,
- technologies competencies (ICT) and
- environmental competencies.

Selvi (2010) continues to clarify each dimension in a detailed way. Firstly, field competence is related with the subject area that is going to be taught at school by the teacher. Secondly, research competencies require teachers to be up-to-date by carrying out researches in teachers’ fields by working with other colleagues and specialists. Next, curriculum competencies include curriculum development competencies and curriculum implementation competencies involving any skill related to the curriculum such as curriculum design, planning the teaching and testing conditions, selecting and organizing the content etc. Lifelong learning competencies include teachers’ taking the responsibility of their ongoing learning leading them to more professionalism. Emotional Competencies cover teachers’ and students’ values, morals, beliefs, attitudes, anxieties, motivation, empathy and so on. Social-cultural competencies necessitate teachers to have the knowledge of students’ socio-cultural background including local, national and international values, democracy and human rights issues, team and collaborative work with others. Communication competencies of teachers provide them to interact with students and colleagues using oral, body and professional language in their fields. Information and communication Technologies-ICT competencies require teachers to make use of technology for the benefit of education. Environmental Competencies are related to the ecological and environmental safety.

In the report published by Turkish Republic Ministry of National Education on the generic competencies of teachers within the scope of Support to Basic Education Project in 2006, the term “competency” is defined as “having knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform duties of a specific profession”. In addition to this, another term is also explained here, that is, “generic teacher competencies” defined as knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform the teaching profession effectively and efficiently.

In Turkey, the law related to “Qualifications and Selection of Teachers” states that “Qualifications teachers required to possess in terms of general knowledge, subject-specific training and pedagogic training are established by the Ministry of National Education”. Here in this report, generic teacher competencies are explained in a detailed way based on number of scientific studies, with mainly six competencies as:

- Personal and Professional Values-Professional Development
- Knowing the Student
- Learning and Teaching Process
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning and Development
- School-Family and Society Relationships
- Knowledge of Curriculum and Content

In this document, the studies are explained with their results and they were conducted because generic teacher competencies can be used in several areas such as:

- Identifying teacher training policies,
- pre-service teacher training programmes of higher education institutions,
- In-service training of teachers,
- Selection of teachers,
- Evaluation of teacher performances and achievements,
- teachers' self-awareness and career development.

It is possible to find the required competencies for the teachers in one of the most remarkable references in the field of language The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Learning, Teaching, Assessment prepared by the Council of Europe. In the Joint Interim Report by the European council and the European commission on progress towards Education and Training 2010<sup>†</sup>, the common European principles for the teaching quality development are defined as follows: First of all, a teacher must be well qualified on the way to being more professional in terms of subject and pedagogy knowledge, requiring a higher education. Secondly, it is a profession that is replaced within the context of lifelong learning, that is, they need to keep up with the current innovation and the research throughout their entire teaching career. Next, teaching is a mobile profession that necessitates teachers to work in European projects for professional development. Within the country, the meaning of the mobility is the shifts between different levels of education. Also, teachers should be supported based on the partnerships with schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders so that they will have a chance to reflect on their own and others' practice. Finally, in the same report, the key competencies of teachers require teachers to have some abilities such as working with others, working with knowledge, technology and information and working with and in society.

In her qualitative study, Kizilarlan (2011) tried to find out 21 ELT student teachers' competencies in terms of teaching four basic language skills. The competencies that are emphasized in Ministry of National Education have been used as guidance in the procedure of data collection. The methods to collect the data were field notes, interviews and follow-up focus group interviews. The result of this study shows that of the skills, the subjects especially give emphasis to teaching speaking and listening skills. They are more aware of the competencies in these skills, although they are not advance level competent regarding the competencies stated in Ministry of National Education. The findings show that they are not fully competent and there is still need for improvement.

In another study by Cubukcu (2010), the teachers' competence and skills are analyzed with the data collected from 90 volunteer student teachers from third grade in the English language teaching department. The method to collect the data was student journals in which students are required to write reflectively and daily. During the procedure of analysis, four areas are determined in the journals regarding students' comments; these are classroom management concerns, characteristics of successful language teaching, the interaction with students, and teachers' competence. One striking result of this study is that in terms of importance, students think teachers' interaction with them comes first and then comes their competence.

In a case study related to teaching knowledge and competence, Komur (2010) analyzes the fourth-year pre-service teachers' competence perceptions and their experience. In order to collect data he

used Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), the Teacher Competency Scale, and an open-ended questionnaire. The participants were asked to reflect their perceptions on the questionnaire related to their classroom experiences. The findings showed that the competency level of the students were high, on the other hand, the results of this study indicates that the student teachers realised certain difficulties in teaching together with their real classroom experiences.

All in all, the issue of teacher competencies constitutes an important area for the sake of teaching profession. The evolutionary changes in the educational and technological systems, as well as in the cultural framework of the society necessitate teachers to update themselves as a requirement of the profession. Also as Cubukcu (2010) stated “high teacher competence can lead to positive individual student development.” She also comments that the opposite of the situation can affect students’ attitudes to learning and lower their self-conceptions. Cubukcu continues her comments which is very striking and illuminating in this way “ the more positive students’ attitudes to schooling and teacher competence are, the less likely they are to display aggressive behaviour.”

As a result, by observing teachers’ performance in the classroom, it is possible to assess teacher competencies. Teachers’ all knowledge, skills and attitudes while accomplishing their profession include the signs of what competencies they have or not. This opens the path towards personal development and at the same time self assessment. Realizing the strong and the weak points of one’s own, a teacher creates the chance to enhance his/her abilities and also the education itself.

### *English Teachers Special Field Competencies*

The competencies that teachers should have are mentioned under two headings; a) General Teacher Competencies, b) Special Field Competencies. In special Field Competencies, there are three performance indicators as A1, A2 and A3 (MOE, 2008).

The Ministry of National Education in Turkey has determined the General Competencies and Special-Field Competencies of the Teaching Profession including the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for the development of teachers in their own fields. It is stated that the general and special-field competencies comprises a whole and should be evaluated together. The performance indicators in the Turkish Teaching Special-Field Competencies are defined in three levels being A1, A2 and A3. The A2 performance indicators contain the A1 level; the A3 performance indicators contain the A2 and the A1 levels (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2008).

The A1 Level (Knowledge and Awareness\*): It includes the awareness of the teacher about the education program and the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes about the teaching profession.

The A2 Level (Enrichment\*): In addition to the knowledge and awareness of the teacher in the A1 level, it includes the performance indicators in which the teacher carries out the requirements of the program with the professional experience he/she has during the education period, diversifies the applications of the program, takes into account the interests and the needs of the student.

The A3 Level (Individuation and Cooperative Study\*): It includes the performance indicators requiring the diversification of the applications which is developed by the teacher

### **3. Objective of the study**

The present study focused on the self-perceptions of non-native English instructors about the teacher competencies. The general aim of this study is to find out the special field competencies of English instructors. The specific aims can be defined as; (i) Non-native English instructors’ perceptions about special field competencies, (ii) special field perceptions in A1, A2 and A3 Levels, (iii) special field perceptions according to gender, (iv) Perceptions of competency according to academic level, (v) Perceptions of competency according to department graduated

#### 4. Research Questions

The research questions investigated are;

Question 1. What is the university instructors self-perceptions according to the special field competencies identified by MOE?

Question 2. What is their special field proficiency with regard to A1, A2 and A3 level?

Question 3. Is there any difference in their competencies according to;  
 3.1 gender?  
 3.2 academic level?  
 3.3 department graduated?

#### 5. Methodology

This study tried to find out the special field competencies of non-native English instructors through the questionnaire developed by the researcher. This is a descriptive study. According to Karasar (2008), descriptive studies are the studies in which the researcher tries to find out the situation as it stands and then tries the individuals define in their own situations. In this study, the special area competencies of the non-native English teachers were aimed to find out via the questionnaire developed according to the special field competencies defined by Ministry of Education in consistent with university concept. 34 out of 165 competencies identified by MOE were used in the questionnaire.

##### Participants

The participants of this study are 34 non-native English instructors at a state university school of foreign languages. They had different teaching experiences from just 1 year to 18 years.

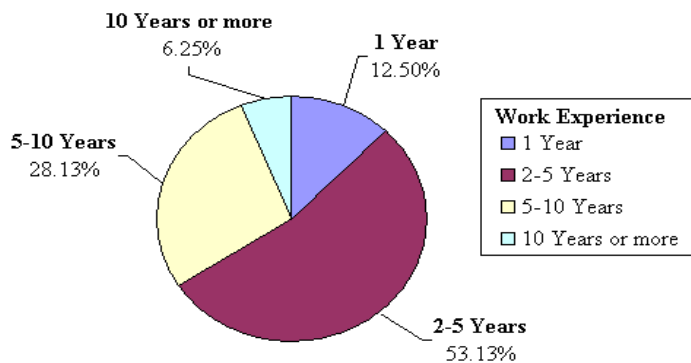


Figure 1. The working experience of the instructors

Table 1. The departments the instructors graduated from

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Trans.Interpretation	4	12,5
	ELT (English Language Teaching)	13	40,6
	ELL (English Language Literature)	15	46,9
	Total	32	100,0

### Instrument

Data were collected through questionnaire developed by the researcher according to special field competencies identified by Ministry of Education. Some items stated by MOE, were modified, integrated or excluded in the questionnaire to adapt to the university education concept. The items were developed consistent with the special field indicators identified by MOE. The questionnaire includes two parts, the first part has 5 personal questions aiming to find out demographic information, and the second part has 34 items about special field competencies in Likert style.

## 6. Results

In the study, to find out the non-native English instructors' special field competencies, SPSS 16.0 was used to analyze descriptive statistical techniques (standart deviation and mean), t test and variant analysis. Pilot study was not applied but two experts from examined, modified and excluded some parts of the questionnaire.

Table 2: Non-native English Instructors Perceptions About Special Field Competencies (N=32)

Proficiency	X	ss
Planning and Applying	4.17	0.393
Developing Language Skills	4.26	0.398
Language Testing	4.12	0.461
Professional Development	4.09	0.521

As seen in Table 2, the proficiency level on competencies vary between 4.9 and 4.26. While the highest special field competency is "Developing Language Skills", the lowest one is "Testing".

Table 3: Special Field Perceptions in A1, A2 and A3 Levels (N=32)

Proficiency	X	ss
A1 Level	4.26	0.372
A2 Level	4.19	0.399
A3 Level	4.07	0.442



According to Table 3, the proficiency level of Non-native English instructors in A1, A2 and A3 level is high. On the other hand, there is a decrease in A3 level perception when compared with the other levels.

Table 4: Special Field Perceptions According to Gender (N=32)

Gender	n	X
Male	6	4.19
Female	26	4.14

According to Table 4, while the proficiency level of male instructors is 4.19, female instructors' is 4.12. When t-test applied, this difference is not meaningful.

Table 5. Perceptions of Competency According To Academic Level (N=32)

Academic Level	n	X	Ss
BA	24	4.11	0.447
M.A	5	4.18	0.375
Ph. D	3	4.20	0.393

According to Table 5, as the academic level rises, the perception of competency rises, too. While the perception average is 4.11 for BA graduates, this number rises to 4.18 for M.A graduates, and finally 4.20 for Ph.D students or completed.

Table 6. Perceptions of Competency According To Department Graduated (N=32)

Department Graduated	X	ss
Translation and Interpretation	4.07	0.442
English Language and Literature	4.17	0.393
English Language Teaching	4.23	0.391

According to Table 6, as the department changes, the perceptions about competency changes, too. While the perception of competency for the instructors graduated from is 4.07, this level is 4.17 for the instructors graduated from English Language and Literature, and 4.23 for the instructors graduated from English Language Teaching Departments. The result of this change may show that ELT graduates are more aware of the special field competencies because they are exposed to teacher competencies and pedagogical implications more than the other departments.

## 7. Discussion

In this study, special field competencies of English instructors were identified via questionnaire in type of five scale (Likert). The questionnaire consists of 34 items. According to the results of the study, the average perception level of the instructors is between 4.09 and 4.26. While the highest self-perception is



Developing language Skills (4.26), the lowest area is Professional development (4.09). In planning and organization, the level is 4.17, and for evaluation, it is 4.12. When these results are taken into consideration, it can be seen that the special field perception of the instructors is high in general.

According to the results of the study, Special field perceptions of the instructors for A1 Level is 4.26, 4.19 for A2 Level and 4.07 for A3 Level. It shows that as the level increases, the self-perception level of the instructors decreases.

In this study, whether the self-perception changes according to gender was another focus, but the results showed that a meaningful difference could not be found according to the gender.

Another implication of the study was the differences between the instructors' perceptions according to their academic level. The results show that the highest self-perception in special field area is for the instructors who have a Ph. D. degree.

Another implication of the study is that, there is a meaningful difference in self-perception of the instructors for special field competencies between the departments instructors graduated. It would be meaningful for further studies.

### **Conclusions and suggestions for further research**

The study showed a positive perception about the special field teacher competencies. As the results of the study shows, it can be concluded that the instructors have strong and positive competencies in their fields. As an implication, the institutions and teacher trainers can take into consideration the results to improve teaching staff quality. The study focused on a small group in one of the universities in Turkey, so the results cannot be generalized. Further research may be needed to find out differences between location and institutions.

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