




12-3-2017

# Pre-Service Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of Research Skills: A Qualitative Study

Eda Elmas  
[edaelmas@aydin.edu.tr](mailto:edaelmas@aydin.edu.tr)

Selami Aydin  
*Istanbul Medeniyet University, Istanbul, Turkey, [selami.aydin@medeniyet.edu.tr](mailto:selami.aydin@medeniyet.edu.tr)*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), and the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#)

### Recommended APA Citation

Elmas, E., & Aydin, S. (2017). Pre-Service Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of Research Skills: A Qualitative Study. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(12), 3088-3101. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss12/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



**Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate**  
*Indulge in Culture*  
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits  
**LEARN MORE**

NSU  
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

## Pre-Service Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of Research Skills: A Qualitative Study

### Abstract

While research skills seem significant for effective and successful foreign language teaching and learning, few studies focused on how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers perceive research skills in the EFL teaching and learning processes. Research also lacks how EFL teachers perceive research skills and to what extent they are aware of the role, teacher as researcher. Thus, this study aims to explore pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of research skills for a deeper understanding of how their perceptions of research skills affect or contribute to the teaching and learning processes. The sample group in the study consisted of 44 pre-service EFL teachers studying at a state university. A background questionnaire, diaries, reflections and interviews were the tools to collect qualitative data. Results showed that research activities develop pre-service EFL teachers' content knowledge, research skills and target language proficiency, while they perceive several problems during the process. The study suggests that research skills should be a must course in pre- and in-service teacher education programs.

### Keywords

English as a Foreign Language, Teachers, Perceptions, Research Skills, Qualitative Research

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

## Pre-Service Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of Research Skills: A Qualitative Study

Eda Elmas and Selami Aydin  
Istanbul Medipol University, Turkey  
Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey

---

*While research skills seem significant for effective and successful foreign language teaching and learning, few studies focused on how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers perceive research skills in the EFL teaching and learning processes. Research also lacks how EFL teachers perceive research skills and to what extent they are aware of the role, teacher as researcher. Thus, this study aims to explore pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of research skills for a deeper understanding of how their perceptions of research skills affect or contribute to the teaching and learning processes. The sample group in the study consisted of 44 pre-service EFL teachers studying at a state university. A background questionnaire, diaries, reflections and interviews were the tools to collect qualitative data. Results showed that research activities develop pre-service EFL teachers' content knowledge, research skills and target language proficiency, while they perceive several problems during the process. The study suggests that research skills should be a must course in pre- and in-service teacher education programs. Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, Teachers, Perceptions, Research Skills, Qualitative Research*

---

### Introduction

As the teacher is one of the most considerable variables on the EFL teaching and learning processes, it is evident that their roles in the mentioned processes directly and considerably relates to on the learner's achievements, motivation levels, affective states, perceptions of and attitudes towards foreign language learning. Thus, in the context of foreign language teaching, the teacher has several roles. Among those roles, as Harmer (2001) underlines, *teacher as facilitator* aims to facilitate the students' progress in some way or other. Second, *teacher as controller*, teachers control the teaching and learning continuum in each way to make the acquisition of the target language efficient. Third, the *teacher as organizer* comes as a need to prevent indecisive atmosphere and create an accomplished acquisition. In other words, organizing feedback draws and enlightens the way of the learning process. Clarifying the way of teaching and activities can be done with the organizer role, which makes it a vital role in the teaching and learning. As the fourth role, *teacher as assessor* gives the reinforcement to the learners and steer them into the right level. From time to time, learners may feel suspended during some activities and cannot find the way to proceed. In such cases, the teacher plays the fifth role, *teacher as prompter*. This role requires being *teacher as participant* during any activity or a learning process. No matter the situation, the seventh role *teacher as resource* is a must and a need in the language classroom, as it related to guiding learners to search for information. In some cases, *teacher as prompter* and *resource* role of the teacher combines and creates another role, *teacher as tutor*. In this personal contact, the learner has a real chance to be supported; thus, the general class atmosphere is greatly enhanced (Harmer, 2001). The last role, *teacher as observer*, gives an accurate idea of the progress of the learners and takes a chance to the teacher on evaluating the materials used in the classroom.

To conclude, it is evident that a language teacher should play different roles in accordance with the learner's needs and expectations. However, it should be underlined that *teacher as researcher* should be another role that the teacher plays, as it is obvious that the teachers' research skills may broaden their perspective in the teaching and learning contexts.

Research skills constitute a considerable place in the EFL teaching context due to several reasons. First, research skills are required to improve aspects of teaching the language in the broadest perspective. That is because it is an insight that views teachers as active participants in conducting research to improve their working conditions, support in professional development planning and to revise their curriculum. Second, foreign language teachers seek to develop themselves. Their practice will benefit from students by constant and unthinking repetition, as Harmer (2001) underlines. To achieve this aim, teachers need research skills to facilitate accomplishing the development of successful teaching and learning. In this sense, teachers also transfer their own research skills to learners and make them learn in a more efficiently, which is the third reason for the importance of research skills. The competence of research skills lends assistance to teachers to degrade the individual differences among learners. Furthermore, teachers with research skills are able to make more accurate assessments, as assessment criteria relate to the research steps (Stokking, 2004). However, research lacks how teachers perceive research skills and to what extent they are aware of the role, *teacher as researcher*. Thus, it is strongly necessary to explore their perceptions of research skills and to see how the role of researcher facilitates the foreign language teaching and learning processes. In other words, teachers' perceptions of research skills require a special attention to facilitating foreign language teaching and learning.

There is no doubt that teachers' perceptions are one of the most significant functions that affect the teaching and learning process and progress. Beliefs influence teachers' actions; one of the facets that teachers bring to the teaching-learning process is a view of what education is all about. This belief, whether implicit or explicit, will affect their actions in the classroom (Williams & Burden, 1997). The beliefs they have may become hard to change but their perceptions alter the ones of the learners. In some cases, as learners' perceptions of teacher behaviors do not correspond with teachers' intentions (Williams & Burden, 1997), this conflict has an impact on the teaching process. Teachers' perceptions also affect learning atmosphere and learners' attitudes towards learning. In the case of any conflicts, affective filter may increase and create the non-teaching environment. To avoid this adverse effect, a concord should take place between teachers' perceptions and the teaching process in order to teach effectively. In this sense, how teachers perceive research skills in the teaching context constitutes a significant role in the foreign language-teaching context. In a narrower scope, their perceptions of *teacher as researcher* seem a considerable research issue to have a deeper understanding of how their perceptions of research skills affect or contribute to the teaching process. For this purpose, below, before providing a rationale behind the study, the researchers presented a brief literature of research regarding EFL teachers' perceptions of research skills.

### **Literature Review**

Teachers' and pre-service teachers' perceptions are to be a focal point in educational research in the broadest perspective. To begin with, several reasons cause hardship in examining of teachers' beliefs such as definitional problems, poor conceptualizations and diversified perceptions of beliefs and belief constructions. In a review paper, Pajares (1992) provided a definition of belief, presented the nature of belief structures as outlined by key researchers and offered a synthesis of research on the nature of belief. The purpose was to indicate teachers' beliefs as the focal point of educational inquiry. Pajares (1992) concluded that when they were clearly conceptualized when their key assumptions were examined, when

precise meanings were consistently understood and adhered to and when specific belief constructs were properly assessed and investigated, beliefs can be, as Fenstermacher (1979) stated, the single most important construct in educational research. In another example, Aulls and Ibrahim (2012) analyzed pre-service teachers' perceptions of effective post-secondary instruction. For this purpose, pre-service teachers wrote essays about the description of the effective teacher. After analyzing twenty-one essays, they stated that effective inquiry instruction was more related to different teacher and learner roles.

Research that mainly focuses on professional development of language teachers, teaching atmosphere and the teacher cognition shows that despite the awareness of research's importance in teaching, most of the teachers are a lack of its usage. To begin with, Willemse and Boei (2013) aimed to demonstrate teachers' understanding of research. For this purpose, they administered a survey to 508 teachers to reveal their perceptions. The survey included items about teachers' perceived capabilities to perform research and their needs for support. In addition, they interviewed with 10 teacher trainers to elaborate to gain further insight. They concluded that with the aims of research in teacher education, most of the teachers found research useful and effective in the teaching process. On the other hand, for participants, research was a complex and comprehensive process and field. As another example, Borg (2003) reviewed a couple of selected papers which indicate teachers' thoughts, beliefs and knowledge and the relation between the cognitions and teachers' acts in the foreign and second language teaching atmosphere. Within a framework suggested by a general educational research on language teacher cognition was discussed under three main themes classroom practice, cognition and prior language learning experience and teacher education cognition. Borg (2003) concluded that teacher trainers needed to be considering the meaning of research for the principles underlying the design of their programs. At a more detailed level, the reflection was also required on how actual data from the research might be available to trainees and teachers as the basis of teacher education activities. In another study, Borg (2009) examined the frequency of reading and applying research. The participants in the study were 505 teachers of English from 13 countries around the world. The study revealed that teachers possessed the research concept, while they had a trace of reading and conducting research due to several reasons and limitations. Overall, the results of the study suggested a number of attitudinal, conceptual, procedural and institutional barriers to teacher research engagement. Nassaji (2012) focused on the extent of second language research influenced on second language teaching. The purpose was to investigate English language teachers' perceptions of the relationship between second language acquisition research and language teaching. Nassaji (2012) also aimed to measure the usefulness and relevance of second language acquisition research. The researcher administered a questionnaire to a sample group consisting 201 English as a second and foreign language teachers. Results showed that most of the teachers believed that the perception of second language acquisition research was helpful to develop the second language pedagogy. Nassaji (2012) also revealed that the knowledge they gained from teaching experience was more relevant to their teaching practices when compared to the knowledge they gained from research.

Research also focused on the limits of traditional of teaching knowledge in the field of language teaching and language learning and learners' perceptions were significant in language teaching. For instance, in a study, Kubanyiova and Crookes (2016) laid out the proposition that the rapid changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which multilingualism is the norm, presented questions, new challenges and resources regarding the tasks, roles and contributions of language teachers. The study indicated various alternatives that were facilitators for teachers to create opportunities and apply them to learners. Another research conducted by Taqi et al. (2014) was based on four general categories; English language proficiency, educational perception, organizational, communicational, social and emotional skills. After collecting data through a

questionnaire based on Likert's five-point rating distributed to 150 students, they found that learners' perceptions had a great impact on the uniqueness of EFL teachers.

Research demonstrates that teachers' research skills are interrelated to several factors. In this perspective, Drill et al. (2013) aimed to find teachers' methods of gaining access to research. In the study, teachers chosen from both urban and suburban schools were the participants. They concluded that teachers tended to seek it out under very specific circumstances and conditions. In other words, teachers tended to see research as an immediate and pressing concern. In another study, Borg (2010) analyzed the relations between language teachers and research. He found that both the benefits and the challenges were associated with teacher research engagement. The study also concluded that several circumstances that eased teachers' way of engagement in the research process. In other words, the cognition of these circumstances was a significant variable for teachers' professional development. In another study, Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015) examined the relation between English-language teachers and research. They collected experimental materials from 40 primary and high school English language teachers. The findings indicated that there was a relationship between teachers' perceptions and research that seemed essential for professional development. Another study carried out by Hassen (2016) aimed to examine the teachers' professional improvement through action research practice. The study composed of high school, preparatory school and college teachers. Teacher reflection and in-depth reflection were the data sources. Hassen (2016) suggested that the participation helped teachers to alter their perceptions of research and their role as teachers and researcher. Furthermore, teachers felt that action research brought opportunity, especially for female teachers.

In substance, there are some problems while analyzing teachers' perspectives, such as definitional problems, poor conceptualization and diversified perceptions. As Nassaji (2012) underlines, teachers believe that the perception and the use of research plays a great role in foreign language teaching. On the other hand, some teachers do not have the competency or knowledge of its usage. The borderline between research and teachers is traditional knowledge in teaching and learning and in this case, learners' perceptions are important. After all the factors and the output of these factors, it is a consensus that research is a way of improving teaching and learning process and essential for teachers' professional world; however, teachers do not possess sufficient knowledge in this field.

### **Overview of the Study**

The professional world of teachers encompasses many and varied attitudes, behaviors, expectations, actors, possibilities, pressures and constraints (McDonough & McDonough, 2014). To deal with all these procedures, teachers need to integrate research into their world and the classroom. Thus, usage of research skills is the keystone of effective and successful foreign language teaching and learning. With research skills, first, teachers widen their perspectives, then apply it during the teaching process, bring learners in research skills and create a better teaching atmosphere. However, while research skills are important, few studies focused on how EFL teachers perceive research skills in the EFL teaching process, as stated previously. In a narrower scope, as seen in the review of research on the issue, no study focused on Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions of research skills in the Turkish EFL context. To be brief, research lacks how teachers perceive research skills and to what extent they are aware of the role, *teacher as researcher*, while how their perceptions of research skills in the teaching and learning contexts constitute a significance place. Thus, it seems necessary to explore their perceptions of research skills and to see how the role of *teacher as researcher* facilitates the foreign language teaching and learning processes. In other words, EFL teachers' perceptions of *teacher as researcher* seem a considerable research issue to have a deeper understanding of

how their perceptions of research skills affect or contribute to the teaching process. For this purpose, this study asks four research questions:

1. How do EFL pre-service teachers perceive the contributions of research activities to their professional development?
2. What do they think about their performance during research activities?
3. What problems do they encounter during their research activities?
4. What are their perceived strategies to overcome problematic areas during their research activities?

The first author of this paper has been doing her MA in the Department of English Language and Literature. She also teaches English courses at a private university. She believes that professional improvement of teachers affects learners' success in the target language learning process. The second author of the paper completed his Ph.D. dissertation on the effects of computers on testing writing skills. He has been interested in issues such as foreign language testing, technology in language learning and teaching and affective states. The author also teaches pre-service teacher training courses research skills, academic writing, linguistics and testing. As an experienced researcher, the author noticed that pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of research skills directly relate to their future careers, achievement and motivation. Thus, the authors focused on how pre-service EFL teachers perceive research skills. In other words, the topic of the research seemed significant to the authors, as pre-service teachers' perceptions of research skills are important in their future professional lives. The authors also believe that their perceptions of research skills may have an influence on their attitudes and perceptions regarding their foreign language teaching process and their roles during their teaching process. To conclude, the outcomes of the research are related to the improvement and engagement in pre-service teachers' teaching process and will provide a new role as *teacher as researcher* among foreign language teachers.

### Method

There are several reasons why a qualitative approach is appropriate the method preferred in the study. First, the related literature does not provide a definition for the term *teacher as researcher*. Second, as there is no any research tool to measure teachers' perceptions of *teacher as researcher*, it is necessary to describe the complexity of the research issue in a qualitative research. Third, the current literature does not provide any evidence in terms of understanding the research context and environment, whereas there a necessity to explain links between the role *teacher as researcher* and the research context.

We conducted this research qualitatively and aimed to identify pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of research skills due to several reasons. First, as the research issue is relatively new in the scope of *teacher as researcher*, there is no any descriptive tool for measuring their perceptions. Second, the related literature does not provide data in the Turkish EFL teaching context regarding the research topic. Third, the research issue needs to be investigated comprehensively, as the outcomes may bring a new role to EFL teachers. The researchers first informed the participants before, during and after the study on the aims and outputs of the research. For this purpose, they were informed by the researchers about the role of researchers, significance and purpose of the study and research methodology. Then, the researchers presented a claim for exemptions. The researchers granted an approval sought from Education Faculty of Balikesir University before the study. The researchers informed that the participation in the study was voluntary, that the researchers respected their privacy and that

there was no risk in participation. Finally, after delineating the research ethics, the researchers conducted the study.

### ***Participants***

The sample group of this study consisted of 44 pre-service teachers of English studying at a state university in Turkey. The mean of the participants was 20.6 within the range of 20 and 23. Of the participants, 34 (77.3%) were female, whereas 10 (22.7%) pre-service teachers were male. All of the participants were in second grade of the department and had the course Research Methods through which they studied theoretical issues in research skills and carried out their research projects. As the sample group included all of the students who took the mentioned course, the nature of sample universe seemed appropriate to describe and understand the phenomenon.

### ***Tools***

The study used three tools to collect data. First, a group of pre-service teachers kept diaries about their experiences in the period of time when they performed their research activities. Second, participants in the second group wrote their reflections about their experiences after each activity. Third, the second researcher carried out interviews with the ones in the last group. The researchers administered each of these tools to the participants in different groups. The reason for administering different tools for each group was to compare the data gathered from each group to other groups regarding examining the trustworthiness and validity of the data. It should be also noted that the researchers used diaries, reflections and interviews for collecting data from the participants' perspective, as their personal opinions seemed necessary to obtain qualitative data. In other words, it was not possible to measure the participants' perceptions of research skills in a descriptive or experimental study. As a final note, the researchers used a background questionnaire to collect demographic information about participants' age and gender.

### ***Procedure***

The research used a three-step procedure: Instruction, data collection, and analysis.

#### **Step 1: Instruction**

The instruction process included one-hour lecture and three-hour activity per week, as seen in Table 1. The second researcher lectured on the theoretical background of research methods, where all of the participants, carried out their small-scale research projects with their peers. *Second Language Research Methods* by Seliger and Shohamy (1989) was the course book used. The participants also received feedback from their peers and researchers via Turnitin and revised their papers every week. As given in the table, participants first wrote essays on one of the most important problems they encountered during their teaching and learning experiences. Then, they researched the problem they focused on and wrote another paragraph to formulate their research problems. The participants, then, read five articles that investigated the issues they focused on and analyzed the studies regarding the problem statements, aims, information about methodology sections and main conclusion. After reporting the literature review, they prepared research plans and chose data collection tools. As a note, as all of the studies were designed to be descriptive, the participants used only questionnaires to collect data. The participants reported, summarized and interpreted the results



after data collection and analysis process. At the end of this step, the participants submitted 22 research papers to the researchers.

**Table 1.** Topics and activities

Weeks	Topics	Activities
1	Introducing research	Essay writing on one of the problems encountered during the foreign language learning process
2	Parameters of foreign language research	Developing a paragraph on the problem determined
3	Preparatory stages of research	Developing research question
4	Review of literature	Reading five research papers on the problem
5	Planning research	Reporting the review
6	Qualitative and descriptive research	Preparing a research plan
7	Experimental research	Choosing a data collection tool
8	Data collection procedures	Data collection
9	Data analysis	Data analysis
10	Reporting	Reporting, summarizing and interpreting the results

### Step 2: Data collection

As previously mentioned, diaries, reflections and interviews were used to data collection and triangulate the data regarding trustworthiness and validity. First, the researchers asked the participants to keep diaries about their experiences, problems, solutions and performance from beginning to the end of the process. The participants in the second group wrote their reflections focusing on their performance, problems, strategies to overcome the problems they noticed, and their experiences during the process. Last, the researchers interviewed with the participants in the third group to interrogate their experiences, problems encountered and problem-solving strategies during the process and had recordings and transcriptions. During this process, the answers to the following questions were as follows:

1. What did they learn from their research study?
2. What did they do well during the research activities?
3. How did they feel about their performance?
4. What were the problems they encountered?
5. What were their plans to overcome the problems?

### Step 3: Data analysis

The researchers separately analyzed the data gathered from each source. In this process, they noted and examined, determined and underlined the statements in details in accordance with the fields mentioned above for each of the sources due to several reasons. First, it was necessary to provide insight into participants' perceptions regarding different aspects of the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1978). Second, the use of three sources seemed necessary to explore data for obtaining consistency, validity, trustworthiness and interpretation (Patton, 1999; 2001). As the researchers performed whole process in English, they used no translation or back-translation. Then, the researchers marked similar passages with code labels based on the topics, terms, concepts, ideas, phrases and keywords. In the coding process, the researchers analyzed recordings and passages for giving the similar labels. Then, they gave each of the codes a name to provide an indication of the idea or concept that underpinned the mentioned categories. Last, they numbered topics, terms, concepts, ideas, phrases and keywords found in each source, listed and transferred to three separate concept maps to ensure whether the data from different sources seemed similar, as given below. After the comparison of the statements in each concept map, they reached similar data obtained from different sources.

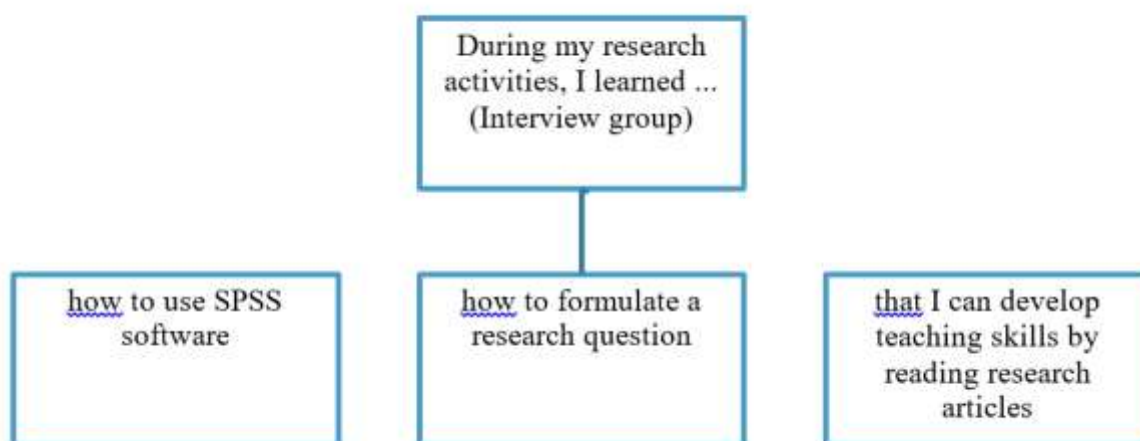


Figure 1. Sample concept map

## Results

Results reached in the study show that teachers gain knowledge on research and scientific papers and improve their learning skills during the research activities. Findings also demonstrate that they evaluate their performance in research activities and find out the elements they are satisfied and unsatisfied with. In addition, they encounter several problematic areas. Yet, findings show that they develop several strategies to overcome those problems. Below, findings demonstrate the contributions of research activities, teachers' perceptions of self-performance, the problems they have within research activities and the strategies they use to overcome the problems.

Findings show that research activities have considerable contributions regarding four categories. These categories are (1) gaining knowledge on the content of the research topic, (2) Performing a scientific research, (3) Developing grammar, vocabulary knowledge, writing and reading skills and sub-skills and (4) acquiring learning skills. First, participants seemed that they gained knowledge on the content of research topics they worked on. For instance, they stated that they gained information about affective factors such as learning motivation, foreign language anxiety and self-confidence. They also believed that learned how to teach and learn basic language skills and knowledge areas. The participants also implied that they gained the

awareness of cultural elements, how age, gender and environmental factors affect language learning and the usage of the first language in foreign language classes, as seen in the following excerpt:

I honestly learned that writing a research paper takes a lot of effort. From my study, I learned that motivation really does play a major role when it comes to speaking English and learning a language. ... That even though there are age differences and different maturity levels, older students can have the most struggles compared to someone younger.

Second, research activities contributed to performing a scientific research. In the process of performing, they stated that they learned the steps of a research activity such as formulating a research question, planning and organizing the process, reviewing the literature, classifying variables and designing a research report. For them, data collection and analysis procedures, adapting questionnaire and using computer software for data analysis and plagiarism were other areas that they increased their knowledge and awareness, as one the participants mentioned:

I am not experienced in scientific research. When I saw the plagiarism report, I was really surprised and upset. I learned I must produce instead of paraphrasing the ideas I found in the articles.

Third, the participants stated that they noticed improvement regarding grammar and vocabulary knowledge areas and reading and skills. In a narrower scope, they believed that they developed their sub-skills such as summarizing and interpretation, scientific lexicon, genre development and using an objective language. In addition, they thought that they improved paraphrasing, skimming and scanning skills during their research activities. Moreover, they seemed that they became better at writing from general to specific, extracting information from the tables, making corrections, editing and revising, as seen in the following excerpt:

I have no difficulty in writing. I mainly know paragraph and essay techniques. However, while I was writing the literature review section, I understood that scientific papers should be as much as specific. General ideas don't work in research articles.

Last, the participants stated that they learned how to collaborate and cooperate in a research activity. For them, other skills that they developed were searching, organizing, problem-solving and critical thinking, one pre-service teacher said:

In the papers, I found some ideas that are not consistent with my language learning experience. I asked my advisor whether the ideas about language anxiety are correct or not. Most papers claimed that anxious students were the ones with low language proficiency. But I have many friends who are very good at English and too worried in classrooms.

Results indicate that pre-service teachers' perceptions of their self-performance vary in two ways. In other words, there exist two areas that they are satisfied or unsatisfied. First, they thought that they felt satisfied with cooperation and collaboration with peers while working. They also stated that managing the time, completing all of the tasks, solving problems they faced, their language competence and performance were the aspects they were pleased. They

also implied that they felt satisfied with their computer skills. Last, they stated that they were happy with working collaboratively and giving feedback to their peers. On the other hand, some of the participants felt unsatisfied with their self-performance. For instance, they taught that their language competence and performance was not sufficient for carrying out a research activity, as one of the participants says. They also stated that they had difficulties in managing the time and computer use. Last, they implied that they were not satisfied with their cooperation and cooperating with their peers.

My English is not good. I am insufficient in a lot of areas. I feel that my English is worse than those of my classmates are. However, I was the most hardworking student in our group. I really studied hard and completed my tasks on time. Yet, I still think that I am not good at researching, reading and writing in English.

The findings demonstrate that pre-service teachers encounter problems during research activities. These problems relate to (1) the research process, (2) time, place and persons and (3) language competence and performance. First, they thought that they had difficulties in accessing research papers and statistics software. In addition, they perceived that installation, data entry and process constituted problems. For them, within the research process, arranging and gathering participants for the questionnaire were other problems they encountered, as one of the pre-service teachers says:

The problem area that I faced was not analyzing any questionnaire that is related to my topic. I found the closest questionnaire related to my research paper. However, coming to a realization, the questionnaire did not work. Maybe, it would be better to create my own questionnaire.

The lack of knowledge on topics researched also made this process difficult, whereas they believed that they had problems related to of feedback from peers and advisors. Furthermore, pre-service EFL teachers found statistical procedure complicated and had difficulties in finding appropriate research tools and accessing research articles. In addition, high price for software purchasing was another problem in the process. Second, they stated that they had problems caused by time, place and persons. That is, they thought that heavy workload they possess and time pressure were other problems in their activities. To add, they stated that lack of coordination and collaboration with peers and advisors was one of the serious problems that affected adversely the research process. They also implied that they were concerned about their private problems during the work with group members. Third and last, they had difficulties regarding their negative perceptions of language competence and performance. In other words, they found scientific papers and academic writing complex and complicated, one of the participants stated:

I love reading short stories. There are interesting events and characters in stories. I thought research papers were also easy to read. There were complicated tables, difficult texts and complex methods in the papers. Yet, I prefer reading stories to improve my English.

Results indicate that teachers developed some strategies to overcome the above-mentioned problems. These include strategies that relate to (1) the research process, (2) time, place and persons and (3) language competence and performance. To begin with, they implied that they tried to overcome the lack of knowledge on research topics. To solve this problem, they focused on alternative and familiar topics and did extra reading activities. As another issue related to

time, place and persons was the lack of coordination and collaboration with peers and advisors, they thought that the best way to solve this problem was working individually, as one of the participants mentions:

I'd rather work alone because it was really difficult to organize our tasks with my friends in our group. When I consider the topic I researched, I believe I would have a better performance.

However, some participants preferred to create and to use online groups and video sessions for communication to overcome the problem. Last, as they found a solution to overcome two problems they faced which were complicated rules and complexity of scientific papers, they organized the extra classroom and individual sessions with advisors on the problematic areas, as seen in the excerpt below:

It was nearly impossible to complete the paper without the advisor's help. He spent extra time to process data, preparing tables and texts. For the next one, I need less help.

In summary, results show that according to pre-service EFL teachers' research activities contribute to knowledge of the research content, performing scientific research and developing language skills. Furthermore, teachers evaluate their self-performance and problematic areas related to the research process, the context and language proficiency. The findings also indicate that they develop several strategies to overcome the problems.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Four conclusions reached in the study are as follows. The first conclusion is that research activities contribute to the content knowledge in the scope of research topics such as affective factors including motivation, anxiety and self-confidence, cultural issues, age and gender differences in the foreign language learning process, the four basic skills, first language effects on foreign language learning and environmental factors affecting the learning process. In addition, pre-service EFL teachers, perceive that they develop research skills and knowledge such as research question formulation, planning and organization, contextualization, classifying variables, data collection and analysis, questionnaire and survey adaptation, computer use regarding data analysis and plagiarism and designing research reports. It is also evident that research activities help pre-service teachers develop their vocabulary and grammar knowledge and reading and writing skills. To be more specific, pre-service EFL teachers believe that they develop their sub-skills such as paraphrasing, skimming, scanning, focusing on specific issues, transferring information, making corrections, summarizing and interpreting. In terms of learning skills, research activities help pre-service teachers develop their searching, collaboration, cooperation, problem-solving, organization and critical thinking skills. The second conclusion is that pre-service teachers' perceptions of self-satisfaction with the research activities are mainly positive regarding collaboration, cooperation, problem-solving, computers skills, language competence and performance and time management, while some of the participants complain about their language proficiency, time management, computer skills and working with peers. The third conclusion is that pre-service teachers encounter several problems during their research activities. These problems relate to the lack of information on the topics researched, the lack of collaboration with peers and advisors, complicated statistical procedure and high prices for software purchasing, data collection tools and the administration process and accessing research papers. In addition, pre-service teachers complain about heavy

workload, time pressure and personal problems among group members. The complexity of the scientific papers and academic writing is another problematic area for pre-service EFL teachers. Yet, as the fourth conclusion, they have also several strategies to solve some of the problems listed above. For instance, they tend to find familiar issues to research, reading more, creating online environments to work, working individually and organizing extra sessions with their advisors. In conclusion, it is evident that as research activities considerably contribute to pre-service EFL teachers' linguistic and professional development, research is one of the key issues to create better teaching and learning atmosphere. Thus, in addition to several roles of foreign language teachers, the role of *teacher as researcher* should be seen one of the significant roles to facilitate the foreign language teaching and learning processes.

A summary of the findings of this study is as follow. First, this study reached similar results to the findings obtained by Willemse and Boei (2013) in terms of effectiveness of research. In other words, both studies revealed that research was a complex and comprehensive field for the teachers. On the other hand, although Pajares (1992) found that belief could be the single and most important construct in the educational research process, this study found that there were several other factors affected the research process. The findings of the study were also consistent with the results found by Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015), as they stated that there was a relationship between teachers' perceptions and research that seemed essential for professional development. Moreover, As Borg (2009) pointed to a number of conceptual, procedural, attitudinal and institutional barriers to teacher research engagement, in this study, pre-service teachers had problems related to the research process, namely time, place and persons. In addition, While Nassaji (2012) found that the knowledge that teachers gained from teaching experience was more relevant to their teaching practices than the knowledge they gained from research, the study showed that some of the teachers did not perceive that they have the research competency or knowledge. In other words, the results of the study indicated that teachers were unsatisfied with their language competence and performance during the research process. Last, Borg (2010) indicated that there were several circumstances that ease the way of teacher's engagement in research, whereas the current study concluded that there were some solutions that made it easier for teachers to overcome the problems.

Some practical recommendations regarding the conclusions found in the study are as follows. First of all, given that research activities contribute to the content knowledge regarding the foreign language learning teaching and learning context, research skills should be a must course in pre- and in-service teacher education programs. This is because the current BA program, designed by the Higher Education Council in Turkey, includes only a general course isolated from the foreign language teaching and learning contexts. As pre-service teachers develop their research skills and knowledge during their research activities, the mentioned course should be specific regarding the second and foreign research contexts. Furthermore, the mentioned course is necessary for developing their reading, writing, problem-solving and computer skills, vocabulary and grammar knowledge and collaborative learning. The second recommendation is that research advisors should work with pre-service teachers in a close collaboration, as they have difficulties in gaining information about research topics, data collection and statistical procedure. In addition, university administration should solve logistical problems including the difficulties in purchasing software and accessing research papers. Last, advisors should guide pre-service teachers regarding reading strategies, time management and collaboration. For this purpose, they should provide extra classroom and individual sessions in both traditional and online environments.

The study has several limitations. First, the participants in the study were 44 pre-service EFL teachers at a state university in Turkey. The scope of the study was also confined to the qualitative data obtained from diaries, reflection papers and interviews. The data reflected the Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of the contributions of the research skills to their

linguistic and professional developments, the problems they encountered during the research activities and their strategies to solve the problems. Further research focusing on the in-service teachers' perceptions of research skills and the factors affecting perceptions is necessary. In addition, descriptive and experimental research is necessary to contextualize how factors have influences on their perceptions and what the relationship between their perceptions and demographics, internal and external factors is.

### References

- Anwaruddin, S. M., & Pervin, N. (2015). English-language teachers' engagement with research: Findings from Bangladesh. *Professional Development in Education, 41*(1), 21-39.
- Aulls, M. W., & Ibrahim, A. (2012). Pre-service teachers' perceptions of effective inquiry instruction: Are effective instruction and effective inquiry instruction essentially the same? *Instructional Science, 40*(1), 119-139.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching, 36*(2), 81-109.
- Borg, S. (2009). English language teachers' conceptions of research. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(3), 358-388.
- Borg, S. (2010). Language teacher research engagement. *Language Teaching, 43*(4), 391-429.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *Sociological methods*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Drill, K., Miller, S., & Behrstock-Sherratt, E. (2013). Teachers' perspectives on educational research. *Brock Education: A Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 23*(1), 3-17.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Addison-Wesley.
- Hassen, R. (2016). Female teachers' professional development through action research practice. *Journal of Education and Practice, 7*(22), 6-18.
- Kubanyiova, M., & Crookes, G. (2016). Re-envisioning the roles, tasks, and contributions of language teachers in the multilingual era of language education research and practice. *Modern Language Journal, 100*(1), 117-132.
- McDonough, J., & McDonough, S. (2014). *Research methods for English language teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Nassaji, H. (2012). The relationship between SLA research and language pedagogy: Teachers' perspectives. *Language Teaching Research, 16*(3), 337-365.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(3), 307-333.
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *HSR: Health Services Research, 34*(5), 1189-1208.
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Seliger, H. W., & Shohamy, E. G. (1989). *Second language research methods*. Oxford, UK: University Press.
- Stokking, K., Van Der Schaaf, M., Jaspers, J., Erkens, G. (2004). Teachers' assessment of students' research skills. *British Educational Research Journal, 30*(1), 93-116.
- Taqi, H. A., Al-Nouh, N. A., & Akbar, S. (2014). The perspectives of students in the college of basic education on the characteristics of effective English language teachers. *English Language Teaching, 7*(3), 121-133.
- Willemse, T. M., & Boei, F. (2013). Teacher educators' research practices: An explorative study of teacher educators' perceptions on research. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy, 39*(4), 354-369.

Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

### Author Note

Eda Elmas is a lecturer in English Preparatory School at Istanbul Medipol University, Turkey. She holds MA degree in English Language and Literature. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [edaelmas1@gmail.com](mailto:edaelmas1@gmail.com).

Selami Aydin, the corresponding author, is an associate professor at the Department of English Language Teaching at Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey. His research has been mainly in EFL writing, language testing, affective factors and technology in EFL learning and teaching. His articles appeared in national and international journals. Aydin teaches ELT courses for pre-service English teachers. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: [selami.aydin@medeniyet.edu.tr](mailto:selami.aydin@medeniyet.edu.tr).

Copyright 2017: Eda Elmas, Selami Aydin, and Nova Southeastern University.

### Article Citation

Elmas, E., & Aydin, S. (2017). Pre-service foreign language teachers' perceptions of research skills: A qualitative study. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(12), 3088-3101. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss12/1>

---