

## What if an English philologist becomes a teacher? A case study on foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA)

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### Abstract

This study aims to find out the factors affecting ELL (English Language and Literature) senior students' foreign language teaching anxiety and reducing-strategies. The participants were ELL senior students (n=50) who were enrolled in the pedagogical formation certificate program at a state university in Turkey. Additionally, mentors of the study group (n=9) contributed to the research comparatively. The ELL seniors' teaching experience lasted 10 weeks and they grasped most of the teaching skills as their mentors suggested. Nevertheless, one of the phenomena was the dead hand of something which is called *anxiety*. In this study, the researcher referred to ELL senior students as *prospective teachers*. The instruments involve prospective teachers' diaries, micro-teaching videos, and open-ended interview questions. In the data collection process, the researcher has employed 'content analysis' to determine the categories and calculate the number of instances into the determining categories (Silverman, 2000). Then, each category was named according to the repeated units of speech. Both the prospective teachers and their mentors were asked to describe the anxiety-provoking factors and coping strategies. The results revealed that both prospective teachers and their mentors share some of the common beliefs on FLTA (Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety). That is, both of them put forward that lack of experience is a factor that causes anxiety. Apart from this, mentors associated foreign language teaching anxiety with personality traits and academic inefficacy. According to the findings of the study, the prospective teachers' foreign language teaching anxiety is presented under 5 headings as follows; classroom management, public speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, being observed by the students, and lack of experience.

**Keywords:** ELLs, prospective teachers, pedagogical formation, foreign language teaching anxiety

## Ya bir filolog İngilizce öğretmeni olursa? Yabancı dil öğretimi kaygısına ilişkin bir vaka incelemesi

### Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde pedagojik formasyon sertifika programına kayıtlı olan İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı (ELL) son sınıf öğrencilerinin öğretim kaygısını etkileyen faktörleri ve kaygıyı azaltma stratejilerini arařtırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, pedagojik formasyon programından sorumlu olan 9 uygulama öğretmeni çalışmaya katkıda bulunmuştur. Çalışma grubunun öğretim deneyimi 10 hafta sürmüştür ve uygulama öğretmenlerinin görüşlerine göre adaylar, bir çok öğretim becerisini kazanmıştır. Diğer taraftan, kaygı, öğretim sürecini olumsuz etkileyen bir durum olarak tanımlanmıştır. Bu çalışmada, arařtırmacı İngiliz dili ve edebiyatı son

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sınıf öğrencilerini aday öğretmenler olarak adlandırmıştır. Araştırmada kullanılan araçlar; öğretmen adaylarının günlükleri, mikro öğretim videoları ve açık uçlu mülakat sorularıdır. Veri toplama sürecinde, araştırmacı kategorileri belirlemek ve belirleyici kategorilere örnek sayısını hesaplamak için 'içerik analizi' uygulamıştır (Silverman, 2000). Daha sonra, her kategori tekrarlanan konuşma birimlerine göre adlandırılmıştır. Hem aday öğretmenlerden hem de uygulama öğretmenlerinden kaygı uyandıran faktörleri ve başa çıkma stratejilerini tanımlamaları istenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, hem aday öğretmenlerin hem de uygulama öğretmenlerinin yabancı dil öğretimi kaygısına ilişkin ortak inanışlara sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Buna göre, her iki grup da deneyim eksikliğinin kaygıya neden olan bir faktör olduğunu ileri sürmüştür. Bunun dışında, uygulama öğretmenleri yabancı dil öğretimi kaygısını, kişilik özellikleri ve yetersiz akademik başarı ile ilişkilendirmiştir. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, öğretmen adaylarının yabancı dil öğretimi kaygısı; sınıf yönetimi, toplum içinde konuşma kaygısı, olumsuz değerlendirilme korkusu, öğrenciler tarafından gözlemlenme ve deneyim eksikliği olmak üzere 5 başlık altında sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İngiliz dili ve edebiyatı öğrencileri, aday öğretmenler, pedagojik formasyon, yabancı dil öğretimi kaygısı

## 1. Introduction

“Anxiety” is considered to be one of the affective factors that most pervasively blocks the language learning process (Krashen, 1989; Young, 1991; Oxford 1999; Dörnyei, 2005; Çubukçu, 2007; Hişmanoğlu, 2013). It has been stated that language anxiety involves the “worry, and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 27). Krashen (1989) argues that a low level of anxiety facilitates foreign and second language learning. The personality type is also considered to be a variable of anxiety, such as introverts and extroverts have different optimal arousal levels (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 199).

Most studies have been conducted to understand anxiety in terms of students that contributes to our understanding of anxiety in language learning and performance (Ohata, 2005). However, anxiety from the teachers’ point of view also needs to be examined. Since some studies reveal that non-native teachers of English no matter how the advanced level of speakers they are, experience foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 1996, Yoon, 2012, Hişmanoğlu, 2013). Furthermore, Horwitz et al. (1986) assert that anxiety reactions of teachers have the same bases with inexperienced language learners.

Some of the researchers (Sparks and Ganschow, 2001) attributed foreign language anxiety to the first language deficits by supporting the idea that language anxiety is a result of the poor performance of foreign language learning. Besides; Sparks et al. (1997) in their study found that students with strong native language skills have lower levels of anxiety. However, this idea has been rejected by some of the researchers (Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre, 1995) asserting that even highly proficient language learners experience various degrees of anxiety.

Teachers and researchers are often able to understand language anxiety referring to the general anxiety scales. However, this practice is not recommended because researchers view language anxiety as a specific phenomenon that better assesses directly (Oxford, 1999, p. 66). In this respect, language anxiety scale and qualitative researchers, are dominantly used assessments for anxiety.

## 2. Method

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the sources of anxiety experienced by prospective teachers?
2. What kind of strategies do prospective teachers use to overcome their anxiety?

### 2.1. Research Design

The data includes diaries kept by 50 prospective teachers throughout their teaching practicum. Besides, micro-teaching videos and “open-ended interview questions were used for triangulation. In the data collection process, the researcher has employed content analysis in which the researcher establishes a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category” (Silverman, 2000, p. 128). The data was analyzed and divided into descriptive phrases. Then, these phrases were clustered into categories after the calculation process. Each category was named according to the repeated units of speech.

Both prospective teachers and their mentors were asked to describe the reasons for anxiety-provoking factors and solutions. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 experienced mentors who have been teaching English more than 10 years and the prospective teachers (n=50). The interviews were recorded on audiotapes and then transcribed.

### 2.2. Data collection

The participants of this study were informed to keep diaries during the teaching practicum. At the end of the 10th week, they submitted their reports to the researcher. The researcher divided these reports into communication units. Besides, a semi-structured interview and micro-teaching video were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher.

### 2.3. Sample

The purposive sampling was used to select the subjects of 50 prospective teachers of English as they have similar characteristics that enable us to gain information about the problematic discourse. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), purposive sampling can be employed in qualitative studies when it is relatively easy for researchers to reach groups, settings, and individuals.

In respect to this, the participants were the number of 50 prospective teachers who graduated from the departments of English Language and Literature and all of whom were female and applied for ‘The Pedagogical Formation Program’ at a state university in Turkey. Additionally, 9 mentors who were responsible for the practicum program contributed to the study by answering the open-ended research questions.

The graduates of English Language and Literature receive the title of *philologist*. Those who want to become an English teacher should get the certificate of pedagogical formation. The pedagogical formation certificate is provided in undergraduate programs of faculties of education. Then, these candidates may be appointed as a *teacher* (YÖK, 2007).

The pedagogical formation program in Turkey includes compulsory courses as follows: “Introduction to Education, Developmental Psychology, Curriculum Development and Teaching, Measurement and Evaluation, Classroom Management, Learning Teaching Theories and Approaches, Guidance, Special Teaching Methods, Instructional Technologies and Material Design, Teaching Practice” (Tural & Kabadayı, 2014, p. 2, YÖK, 2007).

#### 2.4. Data analysis

The data rely on multiple sources of evidence (Silverman, 2000, p. 98) including; content analysis, semi-structured interviews, additionally, the investigator triangulation method was employed to examine the same phenomenon by different evaluators. In this study, the mentor, supervisor, and prospective teachers reported in the same case alternatively.

### 3. Results

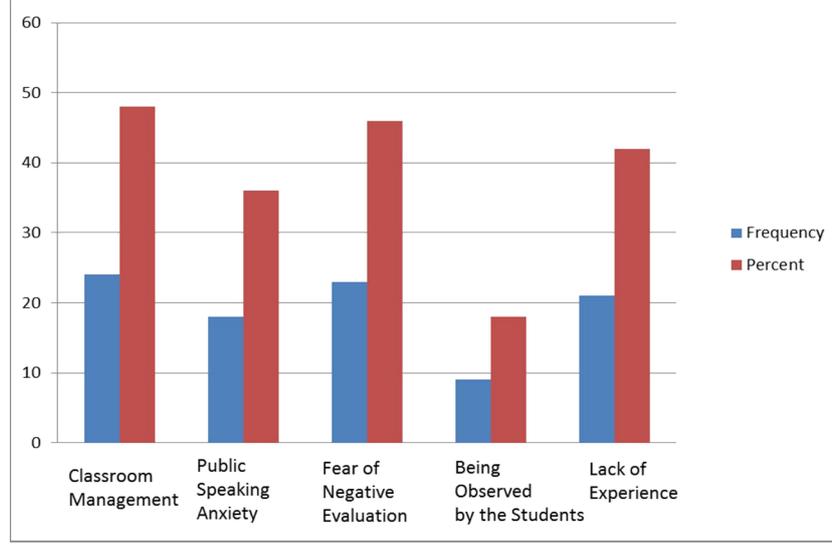
After the analysis of the qualitative data obtained through the participants’ self-evaluation journals, five main categories were defined as the sources of anxiety. These categories can be seen in Table 1.

Categories	F (Number of quotes)	Percent of the categories %
Classroom Management	24	48
Fear of Negative Evaluation by the mentors	23	46
Lack of Experience	21	42
Public Speaking Anxiety	18	36
Being observed by the students	9	18

Table 1.

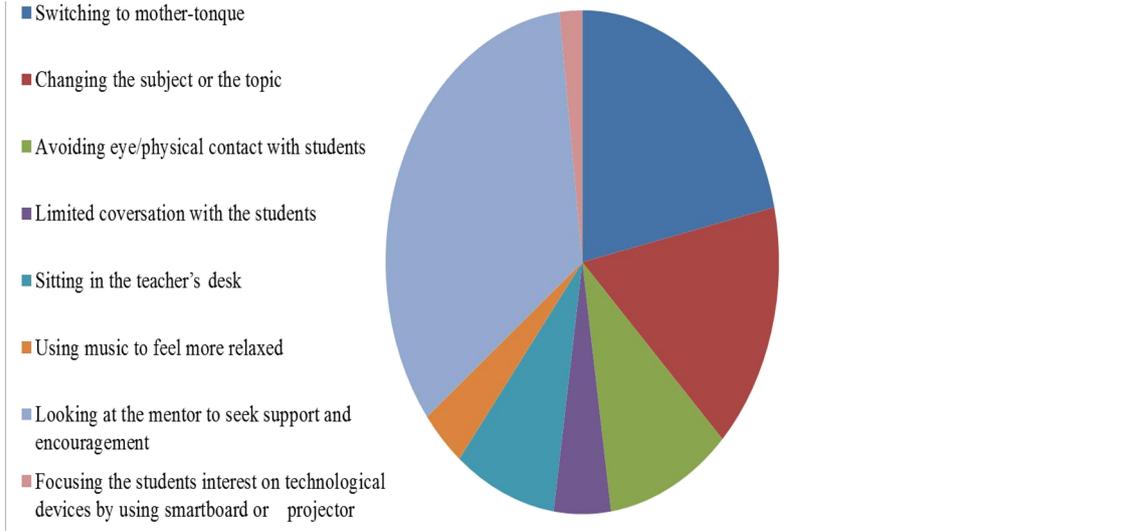
Categories	F (Number of quotes)	Percent of the categories %
Looking at the mentor to seek support and encouragement	36	72
Switching to mother-tongue	23	46
Changing the subject or the topic	17	34
Avoiding eye/physical contact with students	11	22
Sitting in the teacher’s desk	9	18
Limited conversation with the students	5	10
Using music to feel more relaxed	4	8
Focusing the students’ interest in technological devices (using smartboard or projector)	2	4

Table.2. Prospective teachers’ Strategies of Alleviating Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety



Graph 1. The Sources of Prospective Teachers' Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety

Some of the prospective teachers were quite successful in overcoming these difficulties. Here are some of the strategies they used to get rid of the anxiety they were experiencing:



Graph.2. Prospective teachers' Strategies For Alleviating Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety

Among several challenges, the participants of this study identified 'classroom management' as the biggest source of their anxiety. This finding is in line with Merç (2011) and Kim and Kim (2004) in which the group of pre-service teachers of English stated classroom management as one of the reasons for the anxiety-provoking factor. On the other hand, 'being observed by the students' is prescribed as the least cause of anxiety. This issue has been mentioned by the participants during the interview sessions and journals. The participants used various kinds of strategies in order to reduce their anxiety. These strategies are defined as follows; looking at the mentor to seek support and encouragement (n=36), switching to mother-tongue (n= 23), changing the subject or the topic (n= 17), avoiding eye/physical contact with students (11), sitting at the teacher's desk (n=9), limited

conversation with the students (n=5), using music to feel more relaxed (n= 4), focusing the students' interest in technological devices/using smartboard (n=2). The participants' use of strategies which is called as the *techniques for defense mechanism* that blocks anxiety by Freud (1936), reveals that prospective teachers might have conceptualized their mentors as a friend in need.

### 3.1. Classroom management

The analysis of the data reflected that classroom management was the most anxiety factor of all. This finding correlates with some of the studies (Merç, 2011; Rieg et al, 2007; Gan, 2013) in which the researchers identified classroom management as the most frequently mentioned problem by the prospective teachers. In this study the participants indicated their concerns about the issue as follows:

(S1.) "I was worried about being a prospective teacher in a secondary school. I did not know what to do at the beginning of the lesson. This age group was very unfamiliar to me. I felt as if I will faint. I tried not to speak so often. I gave worksheets to the students and kept quiet in the rest of the lesson."

(S2.) "During the lecture, I was very stressful I tried to overcome it by walking around the desks."

(S3.) "Today I faced some problems while teaching the lesson. There was a work in pairs activity in the book. A group of students spoiled the lesson. I got a little bit excited and then I couldn't use the time effectively. The bell had rung before I finished the exercises."

As can be inferred from the extract, time management is also a challenge for the prospective teachers. The inability in maintaining discipline in the class might be another factor in this issue. Prospective teachers need to teach distinct grades of students. However, in this study, the prospective teachers were placed in one specific school in which they were supposed to teach to the same grades of students.

### 3.2. Lack of experience

Sammephet & Wanphet, (2013) in their study found out that lack of experience affects pre-service teachers negatively especially during the first encountering with students in EFL classrooms. They put forward that pre-service teachers' anxiety is in relation to lack of experience. Similarly, in this study, pre-service teachers expressed the notion of being inexperienced a lot.

The participants' background knowledge in pedagogy consisted of theoretical courses they had attended including a couple of weeks of observation. Accordingly, they did not have enough experience in coping with the problems of the courses that they conduct. Within this frame, presenting professional qualifications and skills of the course seems to be a challenge for them. In regard to this, prospective teachers explained:

(S1.) "In my first teaching experience, I could hear the beating of my heart. My voice was thrilling. I didn't know how to keep calm. When the students asked me a question, I panicked even though I knew the right answer. But gradually I relaxed, felt comfortable, and understood that the students were just human beings; they were not creatures."

(S2.) "As I was a little excited, and it was my first experience, and considering that the students do not know me and were not accustomed to my voice and pronunciation, I started the lesson in Turkish. It was a good choice I think."

Most of the prospective teachers have a great interest in technology. They use web-based materials whereas some of them consider themselves computer illiterate. Indeed, this is not a common fact among young teachers but still, have to be considered.

### 3.3. Fear of negative evaluation by the mentors and supervisors

Young (1991), identified instructor and learner interaction among the six general sources of language anxiety. Similarly, in this study, the analysis of the data indicated that the prospective teachers were experiencing a high level of anxiety when they were evaluated by their mentors and supervisors. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined 'fear of negative evaluation' as one of the components of foreign language anxiety. The comments of the participants confirm the findings presented in the literature (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991) namely 'test anxiety' is connected to foreign language anxiety. Accordingly, in this study, the participants felt anxious when they were being graded by their mentors.

(S1.) "I was very anxious about the mentor. I also felt very curious at the same time. But after meeting her I relaxed."

(S2.) "I was worried because my mentor would observe me and knowing that I will be graded by her made me nervous".

(S3.) "I noticed that when I make a mistake my mentor took down notes. Therefore, I made very simple mistakes such as I couldn't pronounce even 'curtain' properly. Instead, I said 'certain'. I am sure that it stems from my anxiety."

(S4.) "Today my mentor preferred to sit at the back of the classroom. I couldn't concentrate on the class. I wish she had been sitting in the front as usual. I looked at my mentor when I felt uneasy."

(S5.) "In the first lesson, I was so nervous that I forgot to ask students to sit down. I could hear my heartbeat. I learned to control my excitement day by day. Today I applied karaoke activity in the class. The song was easy. However, they could not understand the song. I was glad that I was not criticized by the mentor!"

Likewise, Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) in their study found that many of the students recognized the importance of mentor being both supportive and helpful but also constructively critical. In this respect, they suggested that the profiles of mentor abilities and competencies require successful mentoring.

### 3.4. Public speaking anxiety

Oral classroom activities are considered to be stressful for EFL students (Horwitz et al. 1986; Young 1991; MacIntyre, 1995; Liu, 2007; Ohata, 2005; Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012; Gardner, 2010). In this sense, Horwitz et al (1986) argue that communication apprehension is one of the prominent components of language anxiety which includes difficulty in speaking in the classroom and related to shyness. In this sense, the mentor's attitude towards the speaking mistakes and their strategies of giving feedback and correction may affect the oral performance of the prospective teachers.

(S1.) "Today, I realized that I do not speak much. Indeed, my mentor also warned me to speak more. However, I always become breathless and I cannot finish my sentences. I used classical music (Vivaldi's four seasons) to reduce my anxiety. Students liked that idea. It was the first time they have been listening to music during the class hour."

(S2.) "In the beginning, I was not excited but when I started presenting the topic to the class I started to sweat. I directly ran towards the teachers' desk and relaxed."

(S3.) "I spoke quietly at the beginning of the lesson because I was afraid of speaking. I operated the projector and the students watched a documentary until the end of the lesson. I could do nothing more."

### 3.5. Being observed by the students

The participants asserted that students play a significant role in the process of practicum. Positive or negative comments of students on prospective teachers contribute to anxiety. In respect to this, fear of negative evaluation that stems from an individual's concern of being evaluated negatively has been put forward by Horwitz and Young (1991). The following comments illustrate the participants' points of view:

(S1.) "I felt very anxious. I thought the students will not take me seriously, or they will criticize me since they knew that I was only a candidate for being a teacher."

(S2.) "When the students asked questions about the lesson, I couldn't give any explanation. I just did not know how to teach this topic. I felt very hot; I put off my jacket, and I changed the subject."

(S3.) "The students usually watch me. I avoid eye-contact with them because they make me feel anxious."

(S4.) "Students ask me so many questions, they are interested in my private life as well. I should be careful. I do not prefer talking much with the students. They invited me to play volleyball, but I refused it."

In parallel with these statements, Kim and Kim (2004) suggested that student-teachers are concerned about their interaction with the students.

### 3.6. The reflections of mentors on anxiety-provoking factors

In this study, it is thought that it would be beneficial to gather the experienced mentors' beliefs on anxiety. Mentors provided valuable insights into the research questions. Most of them supported the idea that the prospective teachers encounter with anxiety, and it stems from various sources as follows:

(M1.) "There is no doubt that the prospective teachers have a significant number of mistakes, which lowers their academic performance and provokes anxiety".

(M2.) "Their anxiety stems from the limited hours of training and some personality features."

(M3.) "I even detect spelling and basic language mistakes in their reports! Unfortunately, some of the prospective teachers do not use English accurately; their English is a mess."

(M4.) "According to me, anxiety is related to experience. As far as I observed, prospective teachers feel uneasy especially during the class hours just because they have never experienced such an occasion before."

(M5.) "They are supposed to be good at English. However, their weekly reports include a lot of mistakes. It's quite not understandable. They will become a teacher with these deficiencies, it is tragic".

(M6.) "I confess that If I were in their shoe, I would be the same. They are to become a teacher in a very short period, and this requires a lot of skills and energy. Besides, some of them can be considered as poor speakers of English."

(M7.) "I think this is pretty much personal. I am sure that their anxiety will diminish, and they will handle this problem. To me, some of the people are anxious by birth. They are anxious even when they speak their native languages in public. It might be something about their psychology."

(M8.) "I'm on the idea that they never feel anxious if they are well-organized for the lecture. The most anxious are the ones who never focus on the training and cannot conduct activities properly."

(M9.) "I'm not sure if they are anxious or non-assertive. Most of the prospective teachers don't feel confident in most of the cases. Anxiety may be the reason for lack of confidence."

Some of the remarks of mentors on anxiety correspond with the prospective teachers on two bases namely; the anxiety stems from both the lack of experience and public fear of speaking which may be interpreted as a personal trait.

#### 4. Discussion

The researches on foreign language teaching anxiety (Merç, 2004; Ohata, 2005; Rieg et al 2007; Parker, 2011; Riasati, 2011; Merç, 2011; Yoon, 2012; Hiřmanođlu, 2013; Gan, 2013; Sammephet& Wanphet, 2013; Aydın, 2016; İpek, 2016; Öztürk, 2016; Can, 2018) focus on the sources and effects of anxiety in language teaching situations experienced by ELT in-service students or teachers. On the other hand, some researchers examined foreign language teaching anxiety through the eyes of ELLs (Mirici & Çađlar, 2017; Köksal & Genç, 2019; Drakulić, 2020) who are studying in the departments of English language and literature.

When we examine the educational background of the participants, it may be concluded that they have never been exposed to language teaching training before. However, they have delivered many narrative speeches in literature courses which may be considered as readiness for *presenting* part of a lesson. Besides, ELL has some common courses with ELT departments such as contextual grammar, reading, writing, translation, and discourse analysis. Nowadays, some of the ELL departments are eager to include basic teaching skills in their curriculum.

In this study, all of the prospective teachers had majored in the department of English Language and Literature. Therefore, they have a good number of reasons to be anxious as they're in the initial phase of their teaching practices. Besides, the studies show that even ELT students who have a great amount of time of teaching practice, when compared with ELLs, both at school and in practicum, are in trouble with FLTA as well (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). Therefore, it may be concluded that the duration may not be a sole predictor of anxiety. It may also be interpreted as a psychological phenomenon which is described by Freud (1936) in his personality theory.

In this study the mentors put forward that the anxiety might stem from personality type. Similarly, Dörnyei (2005) claimed that introverts and extroverts have different levels of anxiety. The mentors also associated anxiety with poor performance. This finding corresponds with the study of Sparks & Ganschow (2001) who claimed that anxiety is a result of poor performance.

#### 5. Conclusion

According to the findings of various studies, anxiety is described as psychological oppression that affects the performance of both foreign language learners (Riasati, 2011) and teachers (Horwitz, 1996). Accordingly, this study has also confirmed that anxiety has a negative impact on prospective teachers. The findings of the study suggest that anxiety stems from different kinds of sources as well. Besides, the strategies used by the prospective teachers are identified and examined. The mentors perceived prospective teachers as having weak foreign language academic skills and attributed this to anxiety. Besides, they clustered prospective teachers' anxiety in different headings such as; lack of experience, limited hours of training, personality, lack of assertiveness. The participants of the study also self-reported; being inexperienced and limited hours of training as a source of anxiety. It is thought that the outcomes of this study will contribute to the findings of other studies on teachers' anxiety. Furthermore, new categories might be added to causes and overcoming strategies of anxiety as well. It is hoped that the findings of this study can provide useful information both for the future teachers and the experienced ones. Besides, this study might help design anxiety-free practicum and pedagogic formation programs.

## 6. Recommendation

In order to train effective teachers, all of the adverse impacts should be studied and cleared up. In respect to this, the present study focused on prospective teachers' foreign language teaching anxiety and ways of handling it. The exploration of sources of anxiety might help university advisors, cooperating teachers, and education designers in guiding prospective teachers in the process of practicum. Besides, observing the teaching, some steps should be taken to get rid of the non-progressing parts of teacher education. For example, in the current practicum practice, prospective teachers who were graduated from the department of English Language and Literature stated that they learn how to teach English in a short period of time. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the pedagogic formation curriculum covers more training hours. The cooperating teachers should help the prospective teachers to adopt the teaching environment, students, and class materials. Additionally, it should be noted that most of the ELL students prefer to get a certificate of pedagogical formation. Therefore, ELL departments may provide elective courses for those who are planning to become an English teacher in the future.

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