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The Making of a Language Teacher: Dispositional Tendencies and Reflections of Turkish EFL Pre-Service Teachers

Abstract

This study explores the teaching dispositions of pre-service EFL teachers and examines how these dispositions vary according to selected demographic factors. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, the research first collected quantitative data from 169 pre-service teachers studying in English language teaching departments at two state universities, and then conducted semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into their perceptions. The Teacher Disposition Index was used in the quantitative phase, and non-parametric analyses were performed to interpret the results. Findings revealed that participants generally hold strong perceptions of their professional competence, communication skills, and commitment to continuous professional development. Female participants scored significantly higher on the professionalism-related dimension, and fourth-year students demonstrated greater awareness of professional dispositions compared to first-year students. Qualitative results supported these findings, showing that participants associated teaching disposition with both pedagogical expectations and personal qualities such as empathy, fairness, and ethical awareness. Overall, the study highlights the significance of developing positive teaching dispositions within pre-service teacher education programs to enhance future teachers' professional readiness and classroom effectiveness.

Keywords: *Teaching disposition, EFL teachers, pre-service teacher education*

Introduction

Improving the quality of formal education in schools has consistently been a core concern for educators, researchers, teacher trainers, and policymakers around the world. This emphasis on educational quality naturally draws attention to the quality of teachers, whose roles and competencies have long been examined and redefined in response to ever evolving societal needs and expectations. As Kosnik et al. (2016) extensively discuss, teacher education reform initiatives have become widespread globally. For example, in Chile, Miller (2015, cited in Kosnik et al., 2016) expressed concern over students' poor performance on international and national assessments. In the United States, Wiseman (2012, cited in Kosnik et al., 2016) highlighted persistent achievement gaps, inadequate preparation for modern careers, and the pressing need to accommodate diverse learner needs in a technologically advanced society. Similarly, Australia launched reform processes in 2007 with the goal of clarifying objectives for teacher education programs (O'Meara, 2011, p. 426; cited in Kosnik et al., 2016), and India introduced the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education in 2009, which emphasized inclusivity, gender sensitivity, community knowledge, and the integration of ICT into education (NCATE, 2009, as cited in Kosnik et al., 2016). These initiatives reflect a global consensus on the necessity for comprehensive teacher education reform. Türkiye, too, has joined this pursuit, implementing innovations aimed at increasing teacher effectiveness.

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Initially, efforts to improve teacher quality focused primarily on teachers' content knowledge and instructional skills (Voss et al, 2011; Rockoff et al., 2011). Early studies concentrated on these domains as central indicators of teacher effectiveness (Freeman, 2007; Sadler et al., 2013). Over time, new dimensions such as pedagogical knowledge, field experience (Shulman, 1987), and technological competence (Higgins & Moseley, 2001) were incorporated into evaluations of teacher quality. More recently, the focus has shifted toward personality traits, attitudes, and particularly, teaching dispositions (Wasicsko, 2002; Johnston et al., 2011; Dover et al., 2015). As Dover (2013) emphasized, teachers profoundly influence students' mental, emotional, and social development.

Teachers' interactions and the relationships they establish with students have a significant impact on students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. Consequently, the concept of teaching disposition—which shapes these relationships—has gained critical importance. As noted by Serdyukov and Ferguson (2011), dispositions reflect both current teaching behaviors and future tendencies. Some studies support the idea that dispositions, like pedagogical knowledge, can be developed during teacher training (Singh & Stoloff, 2007; Ritchhart, 2001), whereas others argue that dispositions are relatively stable, hard to change, or require long periods of development (Oja & Reiman, 2007; Wasicsko, 2007).

Given the growing recognition of dispositions as essential components of effective teaching, and the limited research within the English language teaching context in Türkiye, there is a clear need to explore the teaching dispositions of pre-service EFL teachers. Understanding their perceptions of disposition and the factors that may influence their development throughout teacher education programs is essential for building well-rounded, reflective, and ethically grounded language educators. Based on this rationale, the current study aims to examine in depth the teaching dispositions of pre-service English language teachers.

Literature Review

Teacher education programs globally aim to produce qualified professionals who can provide quality education in safe and inclusive environments. To achieve this, teacher educators are increasingly considering not only candidates' knowledge and instructional skills but also their professional dispositions. Historically, the term "teaching disposition" traces back to John Dewey (1922), who called them "habits of mind" and emphasized their foundational role in intelligent behavior (cited in Freeman, 2007). Despite varied definitions over time, there remains a lack of consensus on the term's meaning (O'Neill et al., 2014; McGraw et al., 2016). Numerous studies have addressed the concept of teaching disposition, offering varied definitions since then (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Ritchhart, 2001; Wasicsko, 2002; Rivkin et al., 2005; Thornton, 2006; Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2016). Wasicsko (2002) defined disposition as equally important as pedagogical knowledge and skill in becoming an effective teacher. He explained dispositions as the views, impressions, and assumptions that drive behavior and suggested they are innate to the individual. Later, Wasicsko et al. (2004) categorized dispositions into three dimensions: observable behaviors, personal characteristics (e.g., open-mindedness, enthusiasm), and internal

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perceptions (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, values). Schussler, et al. (2010) also stressed the importance of teachers understanding when and how to apply their knowledge and skills appropriately.

Two dominant theoretical frameworks inform our understanding of disposition. The perceptual psychology view suggests that dispositions are stable traits developed early in life, similar to personality characteristics, and are unlikely to change over time (Wasicsko, 2007). In this model, selection of teacher candidates becomes crucial. By contrast, the constructivist developmental approach emphasizes dispositions as products of cognitive growth and social interaction (Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Costa & Kallick, 2014; Bair, 2017). This view holds that as individuals mature and engages with their environment, they develop dispositions over time (Oja & Reiman, 2007; McGraw & McDonough, 2019). According to this approach, dispositions involve interpretation, reasoning, and reflective action. Both models reflect valid but contrasting assumptions. While the perceptual view treats dispositions as relatively fixed traits, the constructivist model views them as evolving, influenced by developmental processes and experiences (Ritchhart, 2001).

A wide body of literature has attempted to identify the dispositional traits that contribute to effective teaching (Hillman et al., 2006; Notar et al., 2009; Shiveley & Misco, 2010; Newton et al., 2010). Diez (2006) proposed several guiding principles for assessing dispositions, including the need for observable behaviors, longitudinal assessment, reflective processes, and transparent criteria. Common traits across studies include cooperation, cultural sensitivity, empathy, professionalism, flexibility, and commitment to lifelong learning. Some studies specifically explored how teachers and pre-service teachers perceive dispositions (Freeman, 2007; Varol, 2017), while others examined the influence of demographic variables such as gender (Ehrich et al., 2020), age, and year of study (Rivkin et al., 2005).

Researchers have framed dispositions as multidimensional constructs involving affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. Ritchhart (2001) described them as mental inclinations that affect modes of thinking. Thornton (2006) referred to dispositions as "habits of mind," suggesting they integrate affective and cognitive qualities. RosVoseles and Moss (2007) highlighted their voluntary, conscious nature. Dispositions, therefore, not only govern how educators think and feel but also how they consistently behave in educational settings.

As mentioned in the paragraphs above, there are different approaches to teaching disposition in the literature, and there is no consensus on its definition. However, studies consistently indicate a positive correlation between the teaching dispositions of teachers and students' academic achievement (Hanushek et al., 1999; Rockoff, 2004; Rivkin et al., 2005; Aaronson et al., 2007). In addition, few studies were conducted to investigate the perceptions of teachers and pre-service teachers towards teaching dispositions (Freeman, 2007; Varol, 2017) and the impacts of certain individual characteristics such as gender (Ehrich et al., 2020), age, and grade level (Rivkin et al., 2005) on these dispositions. The present study is grounded in the constructivist-developmental view of teacher dispositions. According to this perspective, dispositions are not fixed personal traits but rather qualities that evolve through experience, reflection, and social interaction during teacher education. Teacher candidates gradually construct professional attitudes and beliefs while engaging with theoretical knowledge, classroom practices, and feedback from

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mentors and peers. Within this process, they learn to interpret teaching situations, make informed pedagogical decisions, and internalize values that guide their professional behavior. This approach contrasts with the perceptual psychology view, which assumes that dispositions are stable characteristics formed early in life and resistant to change. In the constructivist-developmental model adopted in this study, dispositions are regarded as dynamic and context-sensitive components of professional growth. They can be nurtured and reshaped through meaningful learning experiences, reflective thinking, and participation in authentic teaching contexts. By following this framework, the study aims to explore how pre-service EFL teachers in Türkiye develop their understanding of teaching disposition throughout their training. It also investigates how individual and program-related factors influence this development, highlighting the interactive nature of personal and professional learning in teacher education.

Finally, researchers of both quantitative and qualitative studies reviewed in the literature have suggested further inquiry into the teaching dispositions of pre-service and in-service teachers alike. Hence, this study investigates the perceived teaching dispositions of pre-service EFL teachers, a possible change—if any—in the development of these dispositions during their years in the faculty of education, and the effects of selected demographic variables. In addition to exploring the overall perceptions of teaching disposition, this study also considers the possible influence of certain demographic variables—specifically age, gender, and academic year. These variables were selected because previous research has often emphasized their potential relationship with teachers' professional traits and dispositions. Gender differences, for example, have been associated with variations in professional attitudes and teaching-related behaviors, while academic year has been linked to the accumulation of pedagogical experience and reflective awareness gained through coursework and practicum training. Examining these factors together provides a more comprehensive understanding of how personal characteristics and educational experiences may interact in shaping the dispositions of pre-service EFL teachers. Specifically, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive their teaching dispositions, and in what ways do these perceptions differ by age, gender, and academic year?
2. What perspectives do pre-service EFL teachers hold regarding teaching disposition?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed method design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching disposition. As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), mixed methods research is a philosophical and methodological approach that involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating both forms of data throughout the research process. Specifically, the study followed the explanatory sequential design, wherein quantitative data are collected and analyzed first, and qualitative data are then gathered to explain or expand upon the initial findings (Creswell, 2015). In the quantitative phase, analysis revealed that teaching disposition is a multifaceted concept and

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that student teachers had relatively high levels of awareness. This led the researchers to seek further insight into how participants made sense of their experiences. As a result, the second phase adopted a qualitative phenomenographic approach. Phenomenography focuses on the qualitatively different ways individuals perceive, conceptualize, and experience a phenomenon (Bowden, 2005; Stolz, 2020). As Kettunen and Tynjälä (2018) explain, the focus of phenomenographic research is not the phenomenon itself, but rather how individuals experience it. So, phenomenography was chosen as the qualitative approach in the second phase of the study because it allows researchers to explore the qualitatively different ways in which individuals understand and experience a phenomenon. This approach was appropriate for the present research, as the aim was not to measure teaching disposition but to capture how pre-service EFL teachers interpret and describe it in their own words. By focusing on the variation in participants' conceptions, phenomenography provides a richer and more holistic picture of their professional understanding. It also fits the constructivist-developmental framework of the study, which assumes that dispositions are formed and reshaped through reflection and experience during teacher education. In this sense, phenomenography offered the best means to uncover how teacher candidates conceptualize disposition as part of their evolving professional identity.

Research Setting

Teacher education in Türkiye, including foreign language teacher education, has been overseen by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) since 1982. Over the decades, the system has undergone significant revisions aimed at improving quality and relevance. The latest curriculum for English Language Teaching, implemented in 2018, is structured around three key areas: Professional Knowledge, General Culture, and Content Knowledge. With reforms introduced in 2020, faculties of education have gained greater autonomy in shaping their curricula, moving away from a centralized model. Admission to ELT programs is based on results from a national university entrance examination. The curriculum includes a combination of compulsory and elective courses designed to equip teacher candidates with both pedagogical and content-area knowledge. In their final year, students engage in practicum experiences, working alongside cooperating teachers in public schools. This six-hour weekly school-based training aims to foster essential skills, behaviors, and professional dispositions.

Participants

Participants were selected through convenience sampling, a non-probability method that prioritizes ease of access and availability (Punch, 2009; Fraenkel et al., 2012). Initially, the study involved 204 pre-service EFL teachers from two public universities—one in eastern Türkiye and the other in the west. After excluding incomplete responses, the final sample comprised 169 participants. Their ages ranged from 18 to 46 ($M = 21.38$, $SD = 2.96$), with nearly 80% falling between 18 and 25 years old. The gender distribution was 78.7% female ($n = 133$) and 21.3% male ($n = 36$), which aligns with national trends showing a higher proportion of female students in faculties of education. Regarding academic standing, 17.6% of the participants were first-year students, 14.6% second-year, 21.9% third-year, and 13.6% were in their final year. For the

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qualitative phase, purposive sampling was employed based on Fraenkel et al.'s (2012) recommendation that researchers use informed judgment to select participants aligned with the research purpose. For the qualitative phase of the study, eight final-year students (seven females and one male) who had already participated in the quantitative phase were selected due to their familiarity with the topic and their readiness to reflect on their teaching disposition. Since phenomenographic studies emphasize participants' experiences rather than the objective phenomenon, students with direct exposure to the concept were prioritized (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2009). Final-year students were particularly suitable as they were approaching the end of their training and had accumulated considerable teaching-related experience. In line with the nature of qualitative research, participants' real names have been anonymized and replaced with codes to ensure confidentiality. Selected demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and grade level, are presented in the table below to provide contextual background for the qualitative findings (Table 1).

Table 1:

Codes and Demographic Profiles of Qualitative Study Participants

Codes	PT1	PT2	PT3	PT4	PT5	PT6	PT7	PT8
Gender	Fem	Fem	Fem	Fem	Fem	Male	Fem	Fem
Age	21	21	26	24	22	22	23	23
Grade	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

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Research Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using a demographic information form and the Teacher Disposition Index (TDI), originally developed by Schulte et al. (2004) and adapted into Turkish by Türkmen (2009). The instrument consists of 45 items categorized into two dimensions: student-centered dispositions (25 items) and professionalism and curriculum-centered dispositions (20 items). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Previous studies by Schulte et al. (2004) and Türkmen (2009) reported high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.95. In the present study, reliability coefficients were also high: 0.98 for the student-centered dimension and 0.93 for the professionalism and curriculum-centered dimension. The Teacher Disposition Index (TDI) consists of two primary sub-dimensions that reflect essential components of effective teaching. The first dimension, student-centered dispositions, encompasses traits such as empathy, active listening, respect for individual differences, and a strong belief in each student's potential to learn and succeed. This dimension highlights the relational and affective qualities expected from teachers in fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. The second dimension, professionalism- and curriculum-centered dispositions, includes attributes such as ethical conduct, commitment to lifelong learning, collaboration with colleagues, and adherence to pedagogical standards. Together, these dimensions aim to holistically capture the dispositional tendencies that contribute to effective and reflective teaching practices (Schulte et al., 2004).

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Although alternative instruments have been developed (e.g., Wasicsko, 2000; West et al., 2020), the TDI was selected due to its strong reliability and comprehensive coverage.

In the qualitative phase of the study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to explore participants' conceptualizations of teaching disposition and their self-perceived alignment with the profession. After the development of interview questions, expert feedback was obtained from ELT faculty members. Based on their suggestions and a pilot application with three pre-service teachers, two questions were removed, and the sequencing was revised. The interview protocol included four open-ended questions aiming to elicit pre-service teachers' personal definitions of teaching disposition, their views on the professional qualities that effective teachers possess (e.g., student- vs. content-orientation), and their self-assessment as future English language teachers. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on their motivation for choosing the teaching profession and to identify the aspects of teaching they found most compatible with their personality and skills, drawing on their prior school-based experiences and classroom observations. These questions were crafted to allow for rich, reflective responses and to provide insight into participants' dispositional tendencies in relation to their emerging professional identities. Inter-rater reliability, calculated following Miles and Huberman's (1994) procedure, was found to be 90%, affirming the trustworthiness of the qualitative instrument. Furthermore, to enhance the trustworthiness of the data, member checking was conducted with selected participants who reviewed and validated the thematic interpretations of their responses. Additionally, to minimize researcher bias, both researchers maintained reflective notes throughout the analysis process and engaged in regular peer debriefing sessions to critically examine assumptions and interpretations.

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Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, the study received ethical approval from the ethics committee of İnönü University. Data collection was conducted during the spring semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. Participants were informed about the aims of the study and assured of the voluntary nature of their participation. Written consent was obtained before administering the surveys, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The first (quantitative) phase was carried out in the third and fourth weeks of the semester. The second (qualitative) phase took place in the eighth and ninth weeks. Eight volunteer participants visited the researcher's office individually to respond to the semi-structured interview questions in writing. Each session lasted between 20 to 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were entered and analyzed using SPSS software. Since the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated non-normal distribution, non-parametric tests were used. These included descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, Spearman correlation, and Bonferroni post-hoc tests. Qualitative data analysis began with repeated readings of all responses by both researchers. Initial codes were generated independently, then compared and refined collaboratively. As Creswell (2015) notes, coding involves segmenting and labeling parts of the text to develop meaningful categories. Verbatim statements from participants were used as the basis for coding, ensuring

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authenticity and consistency. Final themes were organized according to the research questions and presented in tables, following the guidelines of Creswell and Plano Clark (2015).

Findings

This section presents the results of the study in alignment with the research questions. The findings are based on both the quantitative and qualitative data collected from pre-service EFL teachers and are reported with corresponding statistical interpretations and reflective insights.

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Their Teaching Dispositions and the Influence of Age, Gender, and Academic Year

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Their Teaching Dispositions

To explore how pre-service EFL teachers perceive their teaching dispositions and whether these perceptions differ by age, gender, and academic year, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted. Initially, the mean scores for both subscales of the Teacher Disposition Index were examined to determine the general profile of the participants. As shown in Table 2, participants reported a higher mean score in the Professionalism and Curriculum-Centered subscale (M = 3.91, SD = 1.19) compared to the Student-Centered subscale (M = 3.64, SD = 1.10). These indicate that pre-service teachers rate themselves highly in areas related to professional awareness, reflection, and curriculum orientation, while still maintaining above-average scores in student-centered dispositions.

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Table 2:

Means for the two aspects of student teachers' teaching dispositions

Groups	N	MEAN	SD
Student-Centered Subscale	169	3,64	1,10
Professionalism and Curriculum Centered Subscale	169	3,91	1,19

Participants' high scores in the professionalism-related subscale reflect self-perceptions regarding professional development, openness to continuous learning, effective communication, and sensitivity to learner characteristics. These findings reflect participants' perceptions related to professionalism-oriented aspects of teaching. The Student-Centered subscale, although slightly lower, still reflects an awareness of the importance of addressing students' developmental needs, individual differences, and maintaining positive student-teacher relationships. These results indicate that participants reported generally positive perceptions of their teaching dispositions. A comparative analysis further revealed that the Professionalism and Curriculum-Centered dimension was more strongly endorsed than the Student-Centered one. This distinction reflects higher endorsement of items related to pedagogical planning, responsiveness to learner diversity, and commitment to continuous professional development. As Schussler et al. (2010) emphasized,

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dispositions involve not only the possession of knowledge but also the awareness of when and how to apply it effectively. The findings thus indicate the idea that pre-service teachers are already engaging with their emerging professional identities.

These results indicate that pre-service teachers reported higher scores in professionalism- and curriculum-related dispositions than in student-centered dispositions. Although the difference between the two subscales was moderate, higher scores were observed in professionalism-related items. The overall high mean scores point to a generally positive sense of professional readiness among participants.

Gender Differences in Teaching Dispositions

To investigate potential gender-based differences in teaching disposition, the Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted. The results, summarized in Table 3, revealed that gender was a statistically significant factor only in the Professionalism and Curriculum-Centered subscale ($U = 2334.5$, $p = 0.005$). Female participants scored significantly higher in this dimension than their male counterparts. No significant difference was found in the Student-Centered subscale ($p = 0.198$). This difference represents a small-to-moderate effect, with female participants obtaining higher mean ranks in this dimension. The practical magnitude of the difference remained limited despite statistical significance.

Table 3:

The Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test on teaching dispositions regarding gender

Subscales of Dispositions	Gender	N	Sum of Ranks	Mean Rank	U	p
Student-Centered Subscale	Male	36	2725.0	75.69	2059.0	0.198
	Female	133	11640.0	87.52		
Professionalism and Curriculum Centered Subscale	Male	36	2334.5	64.85	1668.5	0.005*
	Female	133	12030.5	90.45		

Grade Level and Dispositional Awareness

The role of academic year was examined using Kruskal-Wallis analysis. The results (Table 4) showed a significant difference only in the Professionalism and Curriculum-Centered subscale ($\chi^2 = 8.967$, $p = 0.030$). Pairwise Comparisons (see Figure 1) revealed that this difference occurred between first- and fourth-year students, with the latter scoring significantly higher. These results indicate higher scores among fourth-year students compared to first-year students in professionalism-related dispositions, which may be associated with differences in academic experiences across program years.

When interpreting the findings related to grade-level differences, it is important to consider the design of the study. The comparison across first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year pre-service teachers reflects differences between separate groups of participants rather than changes in the same individuals over time. Therefore, the results should be understood as quasi-longitudinal, showing developmental trends among different cohorts at successive stages of teacher education.

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This interpretation allows for cautious inferences about the progression of professional awareness, while acknowledging that longitudinal data would be required to confirm individual growth.

Table 4:
The Results of the Kruskal_Wallis Analysis on teaching dispositions regarding grade level

Demographic	Options	N	Mean Rank	df	X^2	p
Student-Centered Subscale						
Grade Level	1 st year	39	75.86	3	2.612	0.455
	2nd year	27	84.11			
	3 rd year	66	85.78			
	4th year	37	93.89			
Professionalism and Curriculum Centered Subscale						
Grade Level	1 st year	39	67.49	3	8.967	**0.030***
	2nd year	27	80.98			
	3 rd year	66	88.82			
	4th year	37	99.58			

However, the findings do not suggest a steady, incremental change across all academic years. The pattern did not reflect a linear increase across grade levels but instead showed differences between specific cohorts. The significant difference was observed between first- and fourth-year students. Pairwise tests showed that fourth-year students scored higher than first-year students, with a moderate effect size. These results reflect differences between earlier and later academic years in professionalism-related dispositions.

The Role of Age

To examine the relationship between age and teaching disposition, Spearman's correlation analyses were conducted. As shown in Table 5, no statistically significant correlations were found between age and either the Student-Centered ($\rho = 0.023$, $p = 0.765$) or the Professionalism and Curriculum-Centered subscale ($\rho = 0.014$, $p = 0.861$). Although it was initially hypothesized that age might correlate with maturity and thus influence disposition, the results did not support this assumption.

Table 5:
The Results of Spearman's Correlations between subscales of teaching dispositions and age

Subscales of Dispositions	N	Spearman's ρ	ρ
Student-Centered Subscale	169	0.023	0.765
Professionalism and Curriculum Centered Subscale	169	0.014	0.861

While grade level produced a significant effect, age did not, indicating no significant association between age and teaching dispositions in this sample.

Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Understanding and Reflections about Teaching Dispositions

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The qualitative phase of the study sought to uncover participants' deeper perspectives on teaching disposition. Written responses from seven female and one male fourth-year students were analyzed by two of the researchers, and two main themes emerged: pedagogical expectations and personal qualities, as can be seen in Table 6. To generate the themes, some taxonomies mentioned in the literature were used.

Table 6:

Pre-service EFL teachers' reflections about teaching disposition

Research Question	Themes	Codes
Pre-service EFL teachers' reflections on teaching disposition	Pedagogical Expectations	delivering the content effectively, motivating students, professional commitment, professional expertise, and encouraging
	Personal Qualities	a good relationship, sensitivity to diversity, empathy, enthusiasm, fairness, mindfulness, professional ethics, helpful, reliable, open-minded

In the first theme, pedagogical expectations, participants emphasized the importance of effective content delivery, motivating and encouraging learners, demonstrating professional expertise, and maintaining a commitment to teaching. These reflections emphasize the observable action-oriented aspects of teaching. For instance, PT2 stated, "*When students feel hopeless, I want to be the one to lift them up and say 'you can do it'*," highlighting the importance of being encouraging and motivating students. Likewise, PT3 emphasized professional expertise and the need for continual development: "*A teacher should always be improving. You can't teach others if you don't keep learning yourself*."

Participants also expressed a deep sense of professional commitment, as reflected in PT3's response: "*My aim is not only to teach but to help my students develop holistically. I want to be involved in their academic and personal growth*." Their comments reflected participants' emphasis on professional commitment and ongoing development committed to long-term effectiveness. Regarding instructional delivery, PT1 emphasized, "*Teachers must be in constant communication with their students and develop methods that facilitate their learning,*" underscoring the need to design learner-centered, interactive classroom experiences. Additionally, pre-service teachers also underscored the value of employing engaging strategies and promoting active participation. For instance, PT5 emphasized, "If students are not actively participating, they get bored. I always try to include activities where they can talk and move". Similarly, another participant (PT6) noted, "Teachers should not just lecture; they should involve students in discussions and group work to keep their attention". Their expressed desire for ongoing professional development and instructional effectiveness points to a reflective and motivated professional identity.

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The second theme, personal qualities, encompasses the interpersonal and ethical attributes that pre-service teachers view as essential to effective teaching. Participants seem to highlight the need to build rapport with students and foster inclusive, respectful learning environments, beyond pedagogical skills. Their reflections emphasized empathy, ethical awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity. which are considered essential components of effective teaching (Usher, 2002). The emphasis on moral responsibility, diversity sensitivity, and positive social interactions echoes prior studies on affective dimensions of teaching disposition. The codes under this theme — a good relationship, sensitivity to diversity, empathy, enthusiasm, fairness, mindfulness, professional ethics, helpfulness, reliability, and open-mindedness — reflect a teacher profile grounded in emotional intelligence, moral responsibility, and inclusive practice.

Several participants stressed that developing a good relationship with students forms the foundation for successful teaching. As PT5 remarked, "*If you have a good relationship with your students, they trust you more and are willing to learn from you*," while PT7 added, *"I believe building rapport is the first step before any teaching can happen*." Sensitivity to diversity and individual differences also emerged as core values, with PT1 emphasizing, "*Not every student learns in the same way, and as teachers, we should respect and adapt to these differences*," and PT2 stating, "*Cultural differences should be celebrated in the classroom, not ignored*."

Empathy was frequently cited as an essential disposition, with PT3 reflecting, "*When I was a student, my favorite teachers were the ones who understood my feelings. I want to be that kind of teacher*," and PT6 noting, "*Sometimes students just need to feel understood before they can focus on learning.*" Participants also underscored the importance of enthusiasm in teaching; PT8 observed, "*If the teacher is enthusiastic, the class becomes more alive and engaging,*" and PT4 added, "*Students feel your energy — when you love teaching, they feel more motivated.*"

They believed they possessed the attitudes and behaviors associated with effective teachers. Many stated that their decision to pursue teaching was influenced by early role models and that their experiences during teacher education helped refine their understanding of the profession. This suggests that teaching tendencies can be shaped not only by lessons but also by long-standing personal ideals, values, and observations of others, as stated by PT4 in the sentence, "*Even when I played teacher as a child, it always excited me. Now, as a teacher candidate, I truly believe that this profession is very suitable for me*". In summary, participants articulated a teacher profile characterized by competence, ethical conduct, student-centeredness, and commitment to continuous growth.

Fairness was considered a non-negotiable professional standard. PT5 remarked, "*Being fair is essential; students can sense favoritism, and it hurts their motivation*," while PT1 underscored, "*No matter what, every student should feel equally respected and valued*." Mindfulness — being aware of the classroom atmosphere and responding appropriately — was also valued, as PT2 noted, "*You have to be aware of what is going on in the class and adjust accordingly.*"

Finally, professional ethics were seen as integral to teachers' credibility, with PT6 asserting, "*Teachers should always act professionally and ethically, both inside and outside the classroom*." Helpfulness was described as going beyond instructional duties, as PT7 noted, "*If a student needs help, I try to be there, even if it is not directly related to the lesson.*" Reliability,

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closely tied to trust, was emphasized by PT8, who remarked, "*Students should know they can rely on you to keep your promises and be there for them.*" Finally, open-mindedness was linked to professional growth; PT4 reflected, "Being open to different perspectives makes you a better teacher."

They described the kind of teacher that students would want to learn from, colleagues would want to work with, and administrators would value. This aspirational self-perception reflects both internal motivation and external socialization, and participants described teaching dispositions as multifaceted and shaped by various experiences.

Discussion

The "Student-Centered" subscale mainly involves the items that focus on teacher competencies that will provide a learning environment that considers students' developmental levels and individual differences in many ways, develop appropriate teaching strategies, and ensure optimum learning by establishing good relations with students. Pre-service teachers scored above the average in the "Student-Centered" subscale, although not as high as the other subscale - "Professionalism and Curriculum Centered"-. Nevertheless, these satisfactory scores from both subscales show that, from Schulte's point of view, pre-service teachers consider themselves quite suitable for the teaching profession (Schulte et al., 2004; Freeman, 2007).

When comparing the two dimensions, it was observed that the average scores of the students in the "Professionalism and Curriculum Centered" subscale were higher. This subscale primarily focuses on professional awareness and being reflective as a teacher, with items related to professional development, effective communication with students, and considerations for learner characteristics. The high scores in this subscale indicate that pre-service teachers have a strong perception of their professional competencies and a willingness to engage in continuous professional development, which is encouraging for the success of the program. Similarly, Schussler and others point out that dispositions require the use of both knowledge, as well as the awareness to know the appropriate time and manner to apply certain knowledge and skills (Schussler, et al., 2010; Wasicsko, 2002).

Gender issues yielded controversial results in the literature in terms of teaching dispositions. Although most studies (Su, et al., 2009) indicated strong evidence that teaching dispositions differ in favor of females, few studies revealed a significant difference between the two genders (Schulte et al., 2004). Furthermore, as suggested by Su et al. (2009), variations in gendered personality influence the career choice of individuals. Similarly, after conducting a study with a wide sample of pre-service teacher educators, Shoaib, et al. (2016) concluded that females tended to have more professionalism in teaching than their male counterparts. Ehrich et al. (2020) contributed to this finding with a study conducted with pre-service teachers by revealing that male pre-service teachers explicitly had fewer dispositional traits in teaching. Females seem to believe that teaching English as a profession is a good choice for them (Rivkin et al., 2005). Within this context, the findings suggest that female pre-service teachers may be more likely to internalize

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professionalism-related aspects of teaching identity, which may influence both their career orientation and engagement with professional expectations.

The observed differences across grade levels provide important insights into how teaching dispositions may vary at different stages of teacher education. Although the present study employed a cross-sectional design and therefore does not allow causal or developmental conclusions, the higher scores observed among fourth-year pre-service teachers may reflect differences in academic and professional experiences accumulated throughout the program. In the Turkish ELT curriculum, early years typically emphasize theoretical coursework, whereas later stages increasingly incorporate practicum experiences and opportunities for reflective engagement. Such differences in program structure may contribute to variations in how professionalism-related dispositions are perceived and endorsed by teacher candidates.

These findings can also be considered in light of differing perspectives on the development of teaching dispositions. While some scholars argue that dispositions are formed early and remain relatively stable (Wasicsko, 2007), others suggest that significant experiences and reflective processes during teacher education may influence dispositional change (Mumford, 2001). Rather than indicating a linear developmental progression, the results point to potential shifts occurring at particular transition points within teacher education, especially during the final year when practical teaching experiences become more prominent. This interpretation should be approached cautiously; however, it highlights the possible role of pedagogical coursework and practicum engagement in shaping professional orientations beyond chronological age alone.

These findings require careful interpretation within the broader debate on the nature and development of teaching dispositions. However, Wenzlaff (1998) noted that teacher dispositions and their definitions are inconsistent in the literature. As mentioned in the chapter above, some studies accept disposition as personal characteristics such as habits of mind, temperament, and personality. Researchers adopting this perspective do not assume that dispositions change over time depending on years spent in teacher education. In line with the incremental approach, this finding supports this theory only to some extent as it does not indicate a gradual change in teacher candidates' dispositions throughout the years at the faculty. However, it still does reveal that dispositions are akin to change, as suggested by Mumford (2001) since a noticeable difference was observed between the dispositions of the first and the fourth graders (Oja & Reiman, 2007; McGraw & McDonough, 2019). Nevertheless, Wasicsko (2007) claims that the dispositions do not seem to be open to direct change from or by the environment, and they can rapidly change by frequent exposure to significant life events, not by simply education on methodology as conducted by teacher education programs. Similarly, the study conducted with pre-service teachers by Bercaw et al. (2012) indicated that pre-service teachers believe they are given opportunities to develop teaching disposition in the field and the coursework (Johnson & Reiman, 2007).

On the other hand, the results may be interpreted with a different lens with reference to the courses through teacher education programs. With the last regulations and updated studies, EFL teacher education programs mostly focus on linguistics and language competence of the students, whereas their primary concern is on the theoretical basis methodology of language teaching and practice teaching courses. This approach might explain the difference created by the first and

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fourth-year students. Hence, this study will likely contribute to the explanation of the controversial points in the literature on disposition.

Age has been seen as important in terms of teaching disposition, and its effect has been investigated in different ways by researchers (Giovanelli, 2003; Shulman, 1987). As a result of this research, the fact that no relationship was found between age and teaching disposition was quite surprising for researchers. Because as a result of the study, the differentiation of the students' grade levels in terms of teaching disposition and the significant difference between the first and fourth grades, in particular, made the researchers think that teaching disposition is related to the maturation process of the students at first. However, the fact that the grade levels of the students make a significant difference while age does not appear as an influential variable was found to be important in the study in that it underlines the importance of the education received by the students throughout the faculty on teaching disposition. This pattern further suggests that educational experiences within teacher education programs may play a more influential role than chronological age in shaping professional orientations, reinforcing previous findings that education-related experiences contribute more strongly to the development of professional dispositions than age-related factors (Ersözlü & Çaycı, 2016; Buldu & Erden, 2023).

When it comes to the perspectives of the pre-service EFL teachers about teaching disposition, it becomes evident that the theme of ‘pedagogical expectations’ is shaped around two distinct categories of teacher characteristics and behaviors. The first group pertains to instructional knowledge and teaching skills, including delivering content effectively, demonstrating professional commitment, maintaining professionalism, and cultivating expertise. The second group refers to features that will appeal to students' feelings, such as motivating and encouraging. All the behaviors identified under the theme of "pedagogical expectations" in the present study align with what Wasicsko, et al. (2004) define as "observable actions"—concrete and visible manifestations of teachers' professional dispositions in practice. It is pretty clear that the pre-service EFL teachers' reflections revealed a strong emphasis on delivering the content effectively and motivating students. They recognize the importance of using instructional strategies that engage learners and promote active participation. Additionally, their reflections indicate a sense of professional commitment, as they express the desire to continually improve their teaching practice and develop expertise in their field. The pre-service teachers' reflections also highlight the significance of fostering a positive learning environment and encouraging students' academic and personal growth (Ritchhart, 2001; Freeman, 2007).

In terms of “personal qualities”, it is seen that teachers’ relations with students and generally accepted moral and educated human behaviors such as “empathy, enthusiasm, fairness, mindfulness, helpfulness, reliability, open-mindedness take place. In other words, in their reflections, pre-service EFL teachers emphasize the importance of establishing good relationships with their students. Although the concept of teaching disposition was not explicitly included in the official curriculum of the participating universities, many teacher candidates appeared to have encountered similar ideas throughout their coursework and practicum experiences. They referred to qualities such as empathy, fairness, professionalism, and ethical awareness—elements that are often emphasized in pedagogical training, even if not directly labeled as “disposition.” This

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suggests that while the term itself may not have been formally introduced, its underlying principles were implicitly embedded within the teacher education process. Such indirect exposure may have helped participants develop an intuitive understanding of what constitutes a professional and reflective teacher. They acknowledge the value of building rapport, demonstrating empathy, and being sensitive to the diversity of their learners. The pre-service teachers also express enthusiasm for teaching, emphasizing the need to maintain a positive attitude and inspire their students. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of fairness, mindfulness, and professional ethics in their interactions with students. They aspire to be helpful, reliable, and open-minded, demonstrating a commitment to supporting their students' learning process. All these characteristics reported by student teachers are pretty in line with the studies in the literature, and these characteristics and perceptions are called "affective qualities" by Usher (2002). Besides underlying the importance of respecting others and accepting differences in worldview, Usher (2002) also emphasizes the characteristics related to emotional and social intelligence, such as having a sense of independence, believing in the value of individuals, and holding a positive view towards others.

Additionally, pre-service teachers drew a very comprehensive framework for the definition of disposition. In their definitions, in addition to the observable behaviors of the teachers, they used expressions that include the knowledge and skills they believe the teacher should have and the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers towards the environment and students. The table drawn by the pre-service teachers on the subject of disposition is actually a desired one on behalf of education. Observable behaviors and attitudes towards students are remarkable in that teachers are role models for their students. In addition, the teacher profile that emerges in the definition of teaching disposition defined by prospective teachers is very close to the ideal teacher definition of teacher educators; they indicate teachers who have adequate teaching knowledge and skills, motivate and encourage students, respect students' individuality, and are enthusiastic, helpful, reliable and open to innovation. In fact, this is a teacher profile that teachers will want to work with as colleagues, students will enjoy being in their classrooms, and administrators and parents will prefer.

Furthermore, it is known that a classroom environment dominated by respect, empathy, tolerance, and sensitivity will provide a motivating and comfortable learning experience for students. Moreover, a motivating and encouraging teacher who has good relations with the students and delivers the content successfully will undoubtedly enhance the learners' academic success (Dover et al., 2015; Wasicsko, 2002). Hence, the reflections of the behaviors listed under the heading of both pedagogical expectations and personal characteristics in educational environments will generally be positive.

Interestingly, student teachers stated that they themselves have these behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions that they express within the scope of teacher dispositions. It is seen that they define a teacher stance that can be called an ideal or role model, and they have adopted this disposition. The participants' answers to the fourth question largely support this impression. As a final question, the students were asked whether teaching was a suitable profession for them. All participants stated that they absolutely believed the teaching was suitable for them. Most of them

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stated that teaching had been their dream profession since childhood. The fact that teacher candidates are so determined and stable to prefer teaching as a profession may have been influential in their adoption of teaching dispositions. They most likely shaped their teaching disposition through the years they spent on the faculty and the experiences they gained in practice schools. However, the fact that they are incredibly ready and willing to acquire a teaching disposition may also be a result of their determination to become teachers. They also come to the faculty with their past experiences about the teaching environment, which include clues about effective and desired teaching dispositions and various types of teachers' behaviors and characteristics.

Moreover, it is impossible to think they are not under the influence of these experiences. On the contrary, they are inspired by these experiences when creating and shaping their own teaching dispositions. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they formed their own teacher tendencies by imitating the positive teacher behaviors they experienced in the past, changing the negative ones, and blending them with the attainments they acquired at the teacher training program (Wasicsko et al., 2004). In addition, the influence of their ideals, perceptions, values, and beliefs in this formation process should not be forgotten.

Conclusion

This study investigated the teaching dispositions of pre-service EFL teachers and examined how these dispositions varied according to gender, age, and academic year. The results revealed that teacher candidates generally displayed strong professional awareness and positive attitudes toward teaching. Female participants scored higher in professionalism-related areas, while senior students demonstrated greater awareness of professional responsibility than those in the early years of study. These findings suggest that differences observed across academic years may be associated with variations in training and practicum experiences rather than age alone.

Participants also highlighted several factors that contributed to their development as future teachers. Many of them referred to former instructors and mentors as important sources of influence in shaping their views about teaching, reflecting how role models can inform the development of teaching disposition. However, this influence emerged from participants' reflections rather than from direct measurement, and therefore should be interpreted as an observed tendency rather than a tested relationship.

The discussion of student learning outcomes in this paper refers to previous research showing that teachers' professional dispositions might contribute to learner engagement and classroom environment. Although such relationships were not directly assessed in this study, our findings align with that perspective in that participants' reflections also emphasized commitment to creating supportive learning settings.

In summary, these results emphasize that teaching disposition may be understood not only as a fixed personal attribute but also as a developmental component of teacher professionalism that can be strengthened through meaningful learning opportunities. Teacher education programs that

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promote reflection, mentoring, and ethical awareness might help candidates internalize values that support their long-term professional growth and responsiveness to learners' needs.

This study, while offering valuable insights into pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions, has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The research relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability and participants' subjective interpretations of teaching disposition rather than directly observed teaching behavior. In addition, the study employed a cross-sectional design comparing students from different academic years, which provides developmental indications but does not track the same individuals over time; therefore, developmental or causal interpretations should be approached cautiously.

Furthermore, the qualitative phase included a relatively small number of participants, allowing for in-depth exploration of perceptions but limiting the transferability of the findings to broader contexts. The gender distribution of the sample, reflecting the natural composition of the program, may also have influenced the interpretation of gender-related differences. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs, include participants from multiple institutional contexts, and incorporate observational or performance-based measures to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teaching dispositions develop throughout teacher education.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations approved by the institutional research ethics committee. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and accessible only to the research team. However, anonymized datasets may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to research ethics approval.

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Author Contributions

Gülten Genç (corresponding author) conceived and designed the study, supervised the research process, and contributed to data analysis and the writing and revision of the manuscript. Dinçay Köksal contributed to the design of the instruments, data collection, data analysis, and the writing and editing of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethical Approval Statement

The present study was reviewed and approved by the İnönü University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee, Türkiye. Ethical approval was granted on 8 February 2024 under Approval No. 1 (Decision No. 1). All research procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the approving committee, the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments, as well as relevant institutional guidelines and national regulations. The ethical approval covered the full scope of the study, including participant recruitment, data collection, and the handling of research data. No part of the study was initiated before formal ethical approval had been obtained.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection on 12 February 2024. Before participation, all individuals were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the voluntary basis of participation. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative

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consequences. Participants were also informed that their responses would be used solely for academic research purposes and reported in an anonymized form. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information was collected or included in the manuscript or supplementary materials. The study involved non-interventional research procedures and no vulnerable populations were included.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Funding Declaration

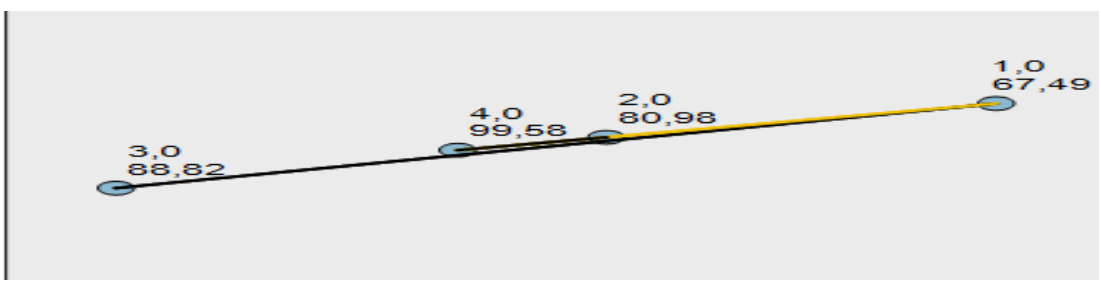
This research received no external funding.

Figure Legends

Figure 1. Pairwise comparisons of teaching disposition scores across grade levels. The x-axis represents grade level (1–4), and the y-axis represents mean disposition scores. Fourth-year students scored higher than first-year students, indicating a moderate effect size.

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Figure 1: Pairwise Comparisons for grade levels



Note: X-axis = Grade level (1–4); Y-axis = Mean disposition score