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The Attitudes of Pre-service Teachers towards EFL Writing

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Abstract

The results of the previous studies indicate that no consensus exists on either the attitudes towards EFL writing or the factors that affect these attitudes. In addition, the studies mainly focused on the attitudes of language learners, rather than teachers. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards writing in English as a foreign language and the relationship between their attitudes and certain variables. A background questionnaire and a scale intending to measure the attitudes were administered to a sample group of 162 pre-service teachers of English. The collected data were used to provide a descriptive and correlational analysis. The results of the study indicated that pre-service teachers mainly have positive attitudes towards writing in English as a foreign language. Furthermore, it was found that age, gender, educational background and language proficiency significantly correlate with some statements in the scale.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, writing, attitudes, pre-service teachers

Özet

Önceki çalışmaların sonuçları, hem yabancı dil olarak İngilizce yazmaya yönelik tutumlar hem de bu tutumları etkileyen faktörler konusunda bir uzlaşma olmadığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, çalışmalar çoğunlukla öğretmenlerden çok öğrenciler üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Bu nedenle, mevcut çalışma, öğretmen adaylarının yabancı dil olarak

İngilizce yazmaya yönelik tutumlarını ve bu tutumlar ile bazı değişkenler arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bir arka plan anketi ile tutumları ölçmeyi amaçlayan bir ölçek, 162 kişiden oluşan örneklem grubunu uygulanmıştır. Toplanan veri, betimsel ve ilgileşimsel olarak çözümlenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, aday öğretmenlerin İngilizce yazmaya karşı olumlu tutum sergilediklerini göstermiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, yaş, cinsiyet, eğitim geçmişi ve dil yeterliliğinin ölçekteki bazı maddelerle anlamlı bir biçimde ilişkili oldukları bulunmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, yazma, tutum, aday öğretmen

1. Introduction

According to Magnan (1985), foreign language learners write to practice grammatical forms and structures, vocabulary and spelling, to use their information, and express their ideas, feelings and attitudes. In other words, writing has certain pedagogical purposes such as reinforcement, training, imitation, communication, fluency and learning (Raimes, 1987). As a result, as Scarcella and Oxford (1995) state, writing in a foreign language helps learners to improve their grammatical, strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences in target language. However, it is difficult to argue that these competences can be properly acquired by Turkish EFL learners since writing instruction is neglected during the language learning process at primary and secondary schools, except for those schools with intensive language programs. In addition, exam-oriented classes and grammar- and reading-based textbooks are two other factors that may cause negative attitudes towards writing in English among learners as well as teachers. Finally, one of the main factors that may affect students' writing skills is the attitudes of teachers towards writing in English. Thus, it could be concluded that one way to improve learners' writing skills and their possible negative attitudes towards writing in English is to obtain data on the attitudes of teachers of English as a foreign language. For this reason, the present study focuses on the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards writing in English as a foreign language.

English teacher training system in Turkey consists of two main stages: secondary and higher education. During secondary education, students are guided to various programs such as Language, Science, Social Sciences and Mathematics after completing their first year in secondary education. After graduating from high school

programs, language learners are selected and placed in different departments such as English Language Teaching, English Language and Literature, Linguistics, English and American Language and Culture, and Translation and Interpreting Studies in accordance with their preferences and their scores in the Foreign Language Examination, an official and central examination for selection and placement of students in the mentioned departments. The examination is a multiple choice test that consists of reading comprehension and grammar items. Dramatically and critically enough, it does not include any items that assess listening, speaking and writing skills. For this reason, in order to prepare for the examination, students studying at language programs of high schools ignore productive and communicative skills, only focusing on reading skills and grammar. What is significant here is that pre-service teachers may develop negative attitudes towards writing in English during their teacher training process and professional lives due to their exam-centered language learning process at high schools. Thus, it may be considered that it will be necessary to investigate their attitudes towards writing in English.

Writing classes are taught three hours a week during the first year in English Language Teaching programs. However, writing skills are presented integratively with reading skills in the program. In other words, the content of the course aims at the presentation of authentic and academic texts, development of reading sub-skills that require higher teaching skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation, acquisition of academic and professional writing skills, and presentation of academic texts such as compositions, essays and reports (Higher Education Council, 2008). However, a three-hour course that is integrated with the reading course is not enough to improve learners' and pre-service teachers' grammatical, strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences in target language. In addition, if pre-service teachers are to teach writing in English at primary and secondary schools throughout their professional lives, it is clear that their attitudes towards writing in English constitute a significant factor that may affect their teaching processes as well as their levels of knowledge.

The results of the previous studies that have been chronologically presented below indicate that there is no consensus on the attitudes of EFL learners towards writing. Furthermore, a review of the related literature reveals that there is no consensus either on the nature of the relationship between the attitudes towards writing in English and certain factors such as course content, writing environment, methods, and gender.

In an interim study (Batschelet & Woodson, 1991) that aimed to measure the changes in attitudes towards writing, it was stated that no significant changes were observed in the course of the writing process in non-computer classes, whereas a majority of computer class students expressed positive attitudes towards writing papers on computers. A narrative study (Eastman, 1997) on how the use of journals affected student attitudes towards writing concluded that journals improved attitudes towards writing. On the other hand, the results of a report (Buhrke, Henkels, Klene, & Pfister, 2002) that described a program to improve writing skills the attitudes of elementary students towards writing revealed that students were exposed to inconsistent teaching methods, had a poor attitude towards writing, and lacked sufficient opportunities to practice writing. Another investigation conducted by Anderson, Mallo, Nee & Wear (2003) focused on the improvement of writing skills among elementary school students, the results of which suggest that attitudes towards writing changed through the course of intervention both in positive and negative ways. In a report (Gau, Hermanson, Logar, & Smerek, 2003) describing a program to improve student abilities in and attitudes towards writing through increased writing time and opportunities, the findings show that when students were given routine journal writing opportunities, as well as frequent opportunities to write throughout the content areas, their attitudes towards writing will improve and the amount they write will increase. In their study, Garcia-Sanchez and Caso-Fuertes (2005) aimed to investigate the importance of self-efficacy and attitudes towards writing in writing training and their results showed that there were difficulties in training self-efficacy and attitudes towards writing. However, the findings also indicated that different training programs provided different results in these aspects. The findings of the previous studies indicated no consensus on the effect of gender on the attitudes towards writing in English. For instance, the findings of a study (Tuula, 2006) that aimed to explore male and female students' attitudes towards reading and writing demonstrated that male participants were more reluctant writers than girls and learners' attitudes were more negative toward writing than reading. In addition, Ibrahim's (2006) experimental study examined the effect of using reading for writing approach on the improvement of writing ability among Egyptian EFL learners and their attitudes towards writing. According to the results of the study, gender did not constitute a significant factor in terms of the attitudes towards writing in English. In conclusion,

related literature has shown that there is no consensus on either the attitudes towards EFL writing or the factors that affect these attitudes.

The present study was oriented by three reasons. First, related literature demonstrates that research activities mainly focused on the attitudes towards writing in English among learners rather than teachers. Moreover, the findings obtained from previous research indicate that there is no consensus on the attitudes of EFL learners towards writing. Secondly, no research with sample groups has been carried out in Turkey on the issue. Given that teachers' attitudes may affect learners' beliefs, levels of achievement, and attitudes, there is a need for investigating the subject matter in the context of Turkish learners and teachers' attitudes towards writing. Finally, as previously articulated, it should be examined whether there is a relationship between the attitudes and poor writing instruction due to the exam-oriented language teaching at secondary education and the inadequate curriculum in teacher training programs. In addition, the relationships between the attitudes towards writing in English and certain factors such as age, gender, educational background and language proficiency should be subjected to research. With these concerns in mind, this paper investigates five research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of pre-service English teachers towards EFL writing?
2. Is there a relationship between gender and the attitudes towards writing?
3. Does age affect the attitudes?
4. Is pre-service teachers' educational background a factor that may affect their attitudes towards writing?
5. Do their proficiency levels affect their attitudes?

2. Method

The sample group of the study consists of 162 freshmen taking writing classes in the English Language Teaching Departments at Balikesir University and Ataturk University in Turkey. 48.8% of the participants studied at Balikesir University, while the remaining 51.2% were at Ataturk University. The group of 80 participants included all the students enrolled in the ELT department of Balikesir University, whereas 82 subjects at Ataturk University were randomly selected from a total of 100 students. The mean age of the subjects was 19.4. as for their genders, 72.8% of the participants were female students, while %27.2 of them were male. To determine the level of language

proficiency and achievement of the subjects, their scores in the Foreign Language Examination – an official student selection and placement examination administered once a year – were examined and the mean score was calculated as 353.5.

The data collection instruments consisted of a questionnaire interrogating the participants about their genders, ages, the high schools they graduated from, their scores in the foreign language examination, their faculties, as well as a scale developed by the author. The scale consisted of 14 multiple-choice items that aimed to measure their attitudes towards writing in English as a foreign language. For the sake of establishing validity, the scale included the items concerning the purposes of writing, whether the participants like writing in Turkish and English, feedback from teachers and peers, correction, writing homework, and beliefs on improving their writing. Each question was assessed on a scale ranging from one to four (*strongly agree*=4, *agree*=3, *disagree*=2, *strongly disagree*=1).

The procedure of the study included the administration of the instruments and statistical analysis. The author administered the questionnaire at the beginning of the fall semester in 2008 before the participants took the writing instruction. Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed using the SPSS software. In the analysis, the reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Model, a model of internal consistency based on the average inter-item correlation. The reliability coefficient of the scale, which was calculated to be 0.61, indicated a moderate level of reliability. As for the statistical analysis of the research questions, the data were examined for two purposes: the numbers, frequencies, means and standard deviations were computed to identify the levels of the attitudes towards writing in English, as well as to examine the homogeneity of the group. The standard deviations demonstrated that the sample group was homogenous. Secondly, t-test and ANOVA were carried out to detect the correlations between the independent variables of gender, age, high school, and the score in foreign language examination and the dependent variable of attitudes towards writing in English.

3. Results

The findings of the study have been categorized in two sections: the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards EFL writing and the relationship between the attitudes and variables. In other words, a descriptive and correlational presentation of the collected

data has been provided. The descriptive data included the numbers, frequencies, means and standard deviations of the statements in the scale, while the correlational data consisted of the findings related to the correlations between attitudes and the variables such as age, gender, educational background and proficiency levels.

The first research question concerned the attitudes of pre-service English teachers towards EFL writing, the findings about which are presented in Table 1. These values indicate that pre-service teachers of English had generally positive attitudes towards EFL writing. The first result is that the subjects thought that writing is an easy task although half of them believed that they were not good at writing in English and that they enjoyed writing in Turkish. Secondly, writing was important for the subjects for three reasons: their occupation, examinations and communication. Thirdly, they displayed high levels of expectations with regard to doing a lot of writing in class and at home. They also had some expectations from their teachers such as corrections in classroom environment, oral and written feedback. Finally, according to the findings, pre-service teachers had positive attitudes towards peer feedback and making revisions. To sum up the findings, it could be concluded that pre-service teachers of English had generally positive attitudes towards EFL writing.

Table 1. Numbers, frequencies, means and standard deviations for the statements

Statements (N=162)	Strongly agree and agree		Strongly disagree and disagree		Mean	Std. Deviation
	N	%	N	%		
I write for communication.	115	71.0	47	29.0	2.8	.80
My purpose to write in English is to teach and help my students in my professional life.	159	98.2	3	1.8	3.6	.55
I need to write much because I have to pass the examinations.	134	82.7	28	17.3	3.2	.85
I like writing in Turkish.	92	56.7	70	43.3	2.3	.96
I am good at writing in English.	79	48.8	83	51.2	2.1	.72
Writing in English is an easy task.	123	79.0	39	21.0	2.9	.79
My teacher should help me when I write in class.	143	88.2	19	11.8	3.3	.70
I need oral feedback from my teacher.	151	93.2	11	6.8	3.4	.63
I need written feedback from my teacher.	151	93.2	11	6.8	3.6	.60
I need feedback from my peers.	133	82.1	29	17.9	3.5	.64
I do my writing homework carefully.	155	95.7	7	4.3	3.6	.60
I correct my mistakes after oral and written feedback.	147	90.8	15	9.2	3.3	.66
I believe that I can learn much in my writing class.	134	82.7	28	17.3	3.0	.67
I believe that I can improve my writing on my own.	124	76.6	38	23.4	2.9	.72

The second research question inquired whether there was a relationship between the ages and attitudes towards writing in English among the pre-service teachers. The values presented in Table 3 indicate that age significantly correlated with only one statement in the scale and the older the students were, the higher expectations they had about doing writing at home. To sum up, it could be concluded that age was not a

significant factor on writing attitudes expect one statement that relates to studying at homes.

Table 2. The relationship between age and attitudes towards writing

Statements	Age	N	Mean	Std. D.	F	Sig.
I believe that I can improve my writing on my own.	18	41	2.7	.77	3.4	.00
	19	58	3.1	.71		
	20	43	3.2	.50		

Three statements in the scale focused on the relationship between gender and attitudes and these concerned tests, revision and correction of papers and teachers' feedback. The findings given in the following table indicate that female pre-service teachers were more worried about the tests, had more positive attitudes towards revisions and teachers' written feedback when compared to males. In other words, it could be argued that females had generally more positive attitudes towards revisions, corrections at home and teacher feedback though they suffered from test anxiety.

Table 3. The relationship between gender and attitudes towards writing

Statements	Gender	N	Mean	Std. D.	F	Sig.
I need to write much because I have to pass the examinations.	Male	44	3.1	.71	6.50	.01
	Female	118	3.6	.55		
I do my writing homework carefully.	Male	44	3.4	.75	12.46	.00
	Female	118	3.6	.52		
I need written feedback from my teacher.	Male	44	2.6	.99	12.62	.00
	Female	118	2.9	.99		

The fourth research question examined in the study was whether there was a correlation between the educational backgrounds and attitudes towards writing in EFL among the pre-service teachers. As the findings in Table 4 show, interestingly enough, the participants graduating from super high schools had more positive attitudes towards writing considering the possibility of being English teachers than the subjects graduating from Anatolian high schools, which aim to train teachers at secondary education. Moreover, the pre-service teachers who studied at super high schools had more positive attitudes about writing activities in the classroom and at home than those

who graduated from Anatolian high schools. Hence, it could be noted that educational background of pre-service teachers significantly correlated with the attitudes towards writing with regard to teaching profession and writing activities in the classroom and at home.

Table 4. The relationship between educational background and attitudes towards writing

Statements	High School	N	Mean	Std. D.	F	Sig.
My purpose to write in English is to teach and help my students in my professional life.	Anatolian	69	3.5	.58	4.81	.03
	Super	93	3.7	.51		
I believe that I can learn much in my writing class.	Anatolian	69	2.9	.77	5.05	.03
	Super	93	3.1	.56		
I believe that I can improve my writing on my own.	Anatolian	69	2.8	.83	11.03	.00
	Super	93	3.0	.61		

Another subject of investigation was whether there was a correlation between language proficiencies of pre-service teachers and their attitudes towards writing in English. The findings presented in Table 5 demonstrate that proficiency levels of the participants significantly correlated with their beliefs about writing in class and at home, teachers' oral feedback, and the issues concerning revision and correction of papers. Firstly, less proficient pre-service teachers had more positive attitudes towards writing activities in classroom environment and at home, as well as their teachers' oral feedback on their writing papers than the more proficient ones did. Secondly, the less proficient pre-service teachers also stated that they were more careful about writing homework and their teachers' corrections. To sum up the findings, as their proficiency levels increased, the amount of homework they did decreased, their beliefs about improving their writing weakened, and their level of correcting their mistakes decline.

Table 5. The relationship between proficiency levels and attitudes towards writing

Statements	Range	N	Mean	Std. D.	F	Sig.
I believe that I can learn much in my writing class.	325 - 335	76	3.3	.64	9.25	.00
	336 - 346	63	2.8	.59		
	347 - 357	13	2.6	.65		
	358 - 368	10	2.7	.67		
I believe that I can improve my writing on my own.	325 - 335	76	3.3	.58	16.01	.00
	336 - 346	63	2.7	.61		
	347 - 357	13	2.5	.77		
	358 - 368	10	2.3	.94		
I need oral feedback from my teacher.	325 - 335	76	3.6	.57	5.67	.00
	336 - 346	63	3.2	.55		
	347 - 357	13	3.1	.76		
	358 - 368	10	3.1	.87		
I do my writing homework carefully.	325 - 335	76	3.8	.43	12.97	.00
	336 - 346	63	3.4	.58		
	347 - 357	13	2.9	.86		
	358 - 368	10	3.6	.51		
I correct my mistakes after oral and written feedback.	325 - 335	76	3.6	.61	8.50	.00
	336 - 346	63	3.2	.60		
	347 - 357	13	2.9	.80		
	358 - 368	10	3.1	.31		

In conclusion, the results indicated that pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language generally had positive attitudes towards EFL writing. However, according to the correlational data, age, gender, educational background and language proficiency were among the variables that affected their attitudes towards writing in English. On the other hand, it should be stated that the variables examined in the study significantly correlated with only some of the items in the scale.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

This study aims to investigate the attitudes among pre-service teachers towards writing in English as a foreign language and the relationship between their attitudes and certain variables since related literature mostly focused on learners' attitudes. The

results of the previous studies indicate that there no consensus on either the attitudes towards EFL writing or the factors that affect the attitudes. The sample group of the study consisted of 162 pre-service teachers of English from two universities. In order to collect data, a background questionnaire and a scale were used to measure student attitudes. The collected data were used to provide a descriptive and correlational analysis to address the research questions.

Five main results were obtained from the study, the first of which is that pre-service teachers generally have positive attitudes towards writing in English as a foreign language. That is to say, for pre-service teachers of English, writing is an easy task though they state that they are not good at writing. In addition, they enjoy writing for purposes of communication, their future occupations and examinations. They also enjoy writing in English while they are busy with writing in the classroom and at home. Finally, pre-service teachers have positive attitudes with regard to peer and teacher feedback, revision and correction. From these findings, it could be concluded that pre-service teachers of English generally had positive attitudes towards EFL writing. Secondly, age is not a significant factor in terms of the attitudes towards writing, except for their beliefs that they can improve their writing on their own. In other words, the older students had higher expectations about doing writing at home than the younger ones. Thirdly, female pre-service teachers are more worried about the tests administered, while they have more positive attitudes towards revisions and teachers' written feedback when compared to males. Next, it was found that the participants who graduated from super high schools have more positive attitudes towards writing considering the possibility of being English teachers and writing activities in the classroom and at home than those who graduated from Anatolian high schools, which aim to train teachers at secondary education. Finally, the findings demonstrate that less proficient pre-service teachers had more positive attitudes towards writing activities in classroom environment and at home, their teachers' oral feedback and corrections on their papers.

The discussion of the study results in relation to the findings of previous research can be summarized under two headings. First of all, the results of the present study indicate that pre-service teachers of English generally have positive attitudes towards writing in English, while the results of a report (Buhrke et al, 2002) showed that learners had poor attitudes towards writing, and Garcia-Sanchez and Caso-Fuertes

(2005) found that there were difficulties in attitudes towards writing. Secondly, it was found in the present study that female pre-service teachers were more worried about the tests and had more positive attitudes towards revisions and teachers' written feedback than males, whereas Tuula (2006) noted that male participants were more reluctant writers than girls, and Ibrahim (2006) found that gender was not a significant factor in terms of the attitudes towards writing in English. As a result, the findings of the study differ from the results of the previous studies in two aspects: First, the participants have positive attitudes towards writing. Second, female participants have more positive attitudes towards revisions and teachers' written feedback. However, it should be noted that the sample group of the study consists of pre-service teachers of English, while the previous studies dealt with language learners.

Given that pre-service teachers of English have positive attitudes towards writing and that certain variables significantly correlate with their attitudes, some recommendations for practical purposes can be made. As mentioned before, writing instruction at the levels of secondary and higher education in Turkey is inadequate for two reasons: preparation for a grammar- and reading-based examination to attend university and the limited hours of writing classes taught in the teacher training process. High levels of positive attitudes towards writing among the pre-service teachers of English is a significant finding to remedy these two problems: First, items related to writing skills should be reflected to the content of Foreign Language Examination, which aims to select and place students in language programs at higher education institutions. Secondly, the content of the writing classes offered during the teacher training process should be extended in terms of hours used for writing instruction. Another recommendation concerning the relationship between attitudes and age is that younger learners need to be motivated more by instructors on writing activities at home. Next, test anxiety, which is more commonly experienced among female pre-service teachers than males, should be reduced. In other words, instead of placing the emphasis on examinations, the level of awareness among students should be increased by teaching them that writing activities will have beneficial effects on their communicative skills and future professional lives. As another significant difference in terms of gender is that male pre-service teachers are less interested in revisions and corrections than females are, partners chosen for peer feedback should be mixed, instead of being selected from same gender. In the light of the finding that pre-service teachers who

graduated from super high schools have more positive attitudes towards writing with regard to the possibility of being English teachers than those who graduated from Anatolian high schools, which aim to train teachers at secondary education, it could be recommended that students at teacher training schools at secondary level should be more positively directed towards teaching profession. Furthermore, it could be noted that the language teaching programs offered at secondary level teacher training schools should be revised in terms of the expectations about writing activities in classes and at homes. Finally, as the correlation between language proficiency and writing attitudes demonstrates that less proficient pre-service teachers have more positive attitudes towards writing activities in classroom environment and at homes, as well as towards their teachers' oral feedback on their writing papers, and that they are more careful about writing homework and their teachers' corrections, it is believed teacher trainers should evaluate the positive attitudes of less proficient learners about more effective teaching of writing. On the other hand, teacher trainers should use more effective feedback strategies for more proficient pre-service teachers. However, it should be noted that the evaluation of the language proficiency of pre-service teachers in the sample group was limited to their grammar knowledge and reading skills, as the scores of Foreign Language Examination, testing grammar knowledge and reading skills were used as a criterion to assess language proficiency.

As a note on the limitations of the research, the subjects of the study were limited to 162 pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language in the ELT Departments at Balıkesir University and Ataturk University. Furthermore, the scope of the study was confined to the data collected using the scale developed by the author, and some selected subject variables. Given that the study examines the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards writing in English and the relationship between the attitudes and certain variables, age, gender, educational background and language proficiency, further studies should focus on some other variables such as writing instruction, ability, aptitude, materials, writing methodology and teachers.

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