

## A Study on Possible Selves of Turkish Pre-Service EFL Teachers

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### Abstract

There is no doubt that teaching profession requires passing through a long and challenging path where student teachers/teacher candidates undergo a variety of processes, phases and transformations. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) point out that examining new teacher identity can be considered as an important step to develop more effective teacher training programmes and identity development of a teacher is related to understanding the notion of 'self'. This study investigates the possible selves of pre-service EFL teachers in relation to the concept of developing new teacher identity. Aim of the study is to measure possible selves of new teachers that they expect to become and/or fear becoming in the near future. In order to achieve this goal, 'New Teacher Possible Selves Questionnaire' (Hamman, Wang & Burley, 2013; Dalioglu & Adigüzel, 2015) was used to measure EFL teacher candidates' expected and feared teacher possible-selves. A six-point Likert type scale of questionnaire on possible selves was applied to 149 pre-service EFL teachers from two universities. Results indicate that EFL teacher candidates have positive expectations and no certain fears for their first year of teaching, especially female teacher candidates who have higher scores than males in terms of expected possible-selves.

*Keywords:* New teacher identity, Pre-service EFL teachers, Possible-selves theory

**Cite as:** Babanoğlu, M. P. (2017). A Study on Possible Selves of Turkish Pre-Service EFL Teachers. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (4). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no4.3>

## Introduction

In relation to the idea of being lifelong ever-growing and ongoing, teacher identity is defined as a process in which teachers constantly re-interpret their experiences (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2004). Examining new teacher identity can be considered as an important step to develop more effective teacher training programmes and identity development of a teacher is related to understanding the notion of 'self' (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). **Possible selves theory** (Markus & Nurius, 1986) provides an established psychological framework that is well suited for studying identity development among new teachers. It is a way of understanding teacher identity, teacher agency and teacher responses to the press of educational reforms. Dimensions and categories in self relevant future oriented self concepts may influence the present to future. Identity development for teachers involves an understanding of the self concept which is an important component of teacher development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In addition, Hamacheck (1999) states that self knowledge is a key to a teacher's successful practice. Hamman et al. (2010) explain possible selves theory and its relation to teacher identity development as:

Possible-selves theory seems to be a particularly good fit for examining the developing teacher identities of the newest teachers- student teachers engaged in their final teaching practicum, and newly graduated teachers during their first year of teaching. Both groups consist of individuals at varying points during the important phase of transition from student to teacher, and as such, possible-selves theory provides a theoretical framework for examining future-oriented, identity relevant, goal-directed thinking in the present, and the salience of that thinking for regulating behaviour to reach a future state (p.1349)

Prospective EFL teachers have field specific challenges on either instructional or the language to be thought in the future. Challenging nature of language teaching which may be a problematic issue for non-native English teachers. Tüm and Kunt (2013) point out that EFL teacher students may have foreign language anxiety and this may have adverse effects on application of grammar rules and the execution of speaking skills. In respect of EFL teacher candidates, Ortaçtepe (2015) emphasizes that:

The issue of teacher identity plays a major role in describing the many identities adopted by these non-native speaker teachers, who need to juggle at least 3 identities—L2 user, L2 learner, and L2 teacher—along with various socio cultural and political identities that are established in various institutional and interpersonal contexts (p.97)

There are also instructional challenges EFL teacher candidates may face, for instance Yazan (2016) states that although pre-service teacher education programs introduce them to theoretical aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign language along with teaching methodologies, they have to engage in further learning activities in the workplace when they start their classroom practice as novice teachers. To develop new teacher identity is crucial for prospective EFL teachers' as for field-specific challenges by means of examining their possible self conceptions in respect of their expectations and fears about their first year of their career in teaching. On the other hand, there is a gap in the literature of new/prospective EFL teachers and their self-knowledge/possible selves about their future profession. With this motivation, this study attempts to investigate the possible-selves of pre-service EFL teachers in relation to the concept of new

teacher identity and possible selves theory. Aim of the study is to measure possible selves about what new EFL teachers expect to become and fear becoming in the near future. In order to reach this goal, research questions are posed as following:

1. What are the possible selves of pre-service EFL teachers in respect of expectations and fears for their first year of teaching?
2. Are there any statistical differences in university type (private/state) and gender between pre-service EFL teachers in respect of possible selves of expectations and fears for their first year in teaching?

### Previous Studies

Possible selves' theory (Markus a& Nurius, 1986) is a relatively salient topic in respect of teacher identity and teacher development in fact it is seen as a good way to examine developing teacher identities especially for teachers on the bottom rung. In this way, Hamman et.al. (2010) conducted a study on possible selves of student teachers and in-service teachers in four dimensions as interpersonal relationships, classroom management, instruction and professionalism and found a difference between student and beginning in-service teachers. They concluded that possible-selves theory provides a manner where emotions and identity may be relate to goals and aspirations for the future such as hopes and fears which can be constructed in the present by strategies to achieve or avoid them. Hamman et.al. (2013) carried out another study on possible selves with student teachers and their results indicated that data fit well the models of new teacher expected and feared possible selves. Gonzales-Bravo (2015) examined possible selves theory with teacher candidates and the results supported the utilitarian, investigative and evaluative qualities of the theory and also the collection and analysis of candidates' hopes, fears, and process strategies are helpful teacher education practice and to shape professional identity development. In Turkey context, Tavşanlı and Saraç (2016) examined primary school teacher candidates' possible selves and reported some significant differences in terms of gender and regional factors. Out of possible selves direction, Shoyer and Leshem (2016) investigated teacher candidates' hopes and fears about their future career as teacher and found that teacher candidates expressed more 'hopes' than 'fears', and also their hopes and fears correspond with qualities of 'good teacher' and effective teaching.

### Methodology

#### Participants

Participants of the study consist of pre-service EFL teachers (N=149) studying their fourth years at EFL teaching departments of faculties of education of a state and a private university in Turkey. During data collection procedure, participants were undergoing a period of practicum for English lessons at state schools.

Participants' demographic features are presented in Table 1. :

Table 1. *Demographic features of participants*

Demographic variable	Groups	n	%
Gender	Female	118	79,2

	Male	31	20,8
Age	20-21 years	49	32,9
	22-23 years	75	50,3
	24 +years	25	16,8
University type	State	90	60,4
	Private	59	39,6

One hundred and forty nine EFL teacher candidates participated to the study and 79,2% of them are females and 20,8% are males. As aging, 32,9% of participants are at between 20-21 years, 50,3% are at between 22-23 and 16,8% of them are over 24 years old. As university type, 60,4% of participants study at state university and 39,6% are at a private university.

### **Data Collection Tool**

As data collection tool, a questionnaire developed by Hamman et al. (2013) titled ‘New Teacher Possible Selves Questionnaire’ was utilized for that EFL teacher candidates were asked to complete. The questionnaire, of which reliability and validity analyses were made by Tatlı Dalioglu & Adigüzel (2015), consists of eighteen items within two main conceptual parts:

- Expectations : nine items on two topics: professionalism and learning to teach as in sample below:

Part 1. Realistically in my first year I ..... (strongly expect, expect, partially expect, partially unexpect, unexpect, strongly unexpect)

1. to learn something from experienced colleagues
2. to make good connections with parents
3. to learn new teaching strategies
4. to be successful in my profession
5. to be fair and consistent to students
6. to benefit from the guidance of experienced colleagues
7. to develop classroom management skills
8. to be prepared and planned
9. to help students develop positive attitudes

Items 1-2-3-6 Learning to teach

Items 4-5-7-8-9 Professionalism

- Fears: nine items on three topics: insufficient classroom management, non-creative teaching and being a careless teacher as in the sample below:

Part 2. Realistically in my first year I ..... (definitely afraid, afraid, partially afraid, partially unafraid, unafraid , strongly unafraid)

1. that I cannot make a good classroom management plan
2. that I cannot be successful in teaching the context of my lesson
3. that I lose the control of the classroom
4. of being a careless teacher
5. that I cannot be a positive role model for my students
6. of being an insufficient teacher who keeps the students busy to fill the lesson time
7. of being a boring teacher
8. of being unfair to students
9. of teaching the subjects in a boring way

Items 1-2-3 Insufficient classroom management

Items 4-5-8 Being an uncaring teacher

Items 6-7-9 Being an uncreative teacher

### Data analysis

In the study, in order to measure the results of questionnaires filled by EFL teacher candidates, SPSS 15 programme was used in respect of statistical interpretation. Independent samples t- test was applied for group comparison (gender, university type) and Pearson correlation was utilized for comparing expected and feared new teachers possibilities.

### Result and Discussion

In the first phase, the general descriptive statistics of questionnaire items about EFL student teachers' possible selves were measured to see general tendency of expectation and fears which are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of new teacher possible-selves scale and sub-dimensions

Scale and sub-dimensions	M	sd	Skewnes s
Professionalism	5.50	0.70	-0.44*
Learning to teach	5.01	0.89	-0.29*
<b>EXPECTED NEW TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE</b>	5.28	0.72	-0.74*
Uncreative teaching	2.50	1.55	0.89
Insufficient classroom management	3.16	1.32	0.24
Being an uncaring teacher	2.38	1.39	0.97
<b>FEARED NEW TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE</b>	2.68	1.24	0.80

\* After logirithmic conversion ( $-1 * \lg_{10}(7\text{-score})$ )

According to descriptivye statistics, expected new teacher possible selves score ( $5.28 \pm 0.72$ ) and professionalism sub-dimension score ( $5.50 \pm 0.70$ ) are at 'strongly expected' levels and learning to teach sub-dimension score ( $5.01 \pm 0.89$ ) is at 'expected' level (6-1=5/6=0.83; 1-1.83: strongly unexpected, 1.84-2.67: unexpected; 2.68-3.5: partially unexpected; 3.6-4.33: partially expected; 4.34-5.16: expected; 5.17-6.00: strongly expected). That is, EFL teacher candidates' possible selves on expectations for their first year of teaching have high scores. Feared new

teacher possible selves score ( $2.68 \pm 1.24$ ) and insufficient classroom management sub-dimension score ( $3.16 \pm 1.32$ ) are at 'unafraid' level. Uncreative teaching ( $2.50 \pm 1.55$ ) and being an uncaring teacher ( $2.38 \pm 1.39$ ) sub-dimensions scores are at 'partially unafraid' level. Namely, EFL teacher candidates' possible selves scale scores on their fears for their first year of teaching indicate that there is no sign of possibility of certain fears for their future job.

Secondly, for group comparisons in respect of gender and university type (private-state), independent samples t-test was utilized for a possibility of a significant difference. Possible selves of female and male EFL teacher candidates on fears and expectations of gender comparison by t-test is shown in Table 3:

Table 3. *T-test results of expected and feared new teacher possible selves for gender*

Scale and sub-dimensions	Gender	n	M	SS	t	p
Professionalism	F	118	5.53	0.72	1.27	0.206
	M	31	5.41	0.62		
Learning to teach	F	118	5.10	0.83	2.30	<b>0.023</b>
	M	31	4.69	1.03		
<b>EXPECTED STUDENT TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE</b>	F	118	5.34	0.72	1.99	<b>0.048</b>
	M	31	5.09	0.72		
Non-creative teaching	F	118	2.49	1.55	-0.15	0.883
	M	31	2.54	1.59		
Insufficient classroom management	F	118	3.29	1.34	2.32	<b>0.022</b>
	M	31	2.68	1.14		
Being an uncaring teacher	F	118	2.39	1.40	0.21	0.833
	M	31	2.33	1.35		
<b>FEARED STUDENT TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE</b>	F	118	2.72	1.26	0.83	0.406
	M	31	2.52	1.13		

In respect of gender, expected possible-selves scale ( $t=1.99$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and learning to teach sub-dimension ( $t=2.30$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) indicated significant difference whereas there is no significant difference in professionalism sub-dimension ( $p>0.05$ ). Female EFL teacher candidates have higher scores in expected possible-selves ( $5.34 \pm 0.72$ ) and learning to teach sub-dimension ( $5.10 \pm 0.83$ ) than male EFL student teachers ( $5.09 \pm 0.72$  and  $4.69 \pm 1.03$ ). In feared possible-selves scale, there is no significant difference of gender in overall picture, two sub-dimensions as being an uncaring teacher and uncreative teaching ( $p>0.05$ ) revealed no significance whereas in insufficient classroom management sub-dimension of feared possible-selves indicated meaningful difference in favor of female EFL student teachers ( $t=2.32$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) of whom scores are ( $3.29 \pm 1.34$ ) significantly higher than male EFL student teachers ( $2.68 \pm 1.14$ ).

As data of the study gathered from EFL departments of two different university types as state and private, independent samples t-test was used to compare the scores of possible selves of participants in expectations and fears in Table 4:

Table 4. *T-test results of expected and feared new teacher possible selves for university type*

Scale and sub-dimensions	University Type		n	M	SS	t	p
	State	Private					
Professionalism	State	90	5.58	0.46	0.41	0.686	
	Private	59	5.39	0.96			
Learning to teach	State	90	5.06	0.75	0.40	0.689	
	Private	59	4.94	1.06			
<b>EXPECTED STUDENT TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE</b>	State	90	5.35	0.54	0.71	0.479	
	Private	59	5.19	0.94			
Non-creative teaching	State	90	2.61	1.61	1.03	0.303	
	Private	59	2.34	1.45			
Insufficient classroom management	State	90	3.21	1.34	0.53	0.600	
	Private	59	3.09	1.31			
Being an uncaring teacher	State	90	2.52	1.36	1.51	0.133	
	Private	59	2.17	1.41			
<b>FEARED STUDENT TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE</b>	State	90	2.78	1.26	1.18	0.238	
	Private	59	2.53	1.19			

Results indicated that expected possible selves scale and sub-dimensions' scores did not yield a significant difference between state and private university comparison ( $p > 0.05$ ). Similarly, feared new teacher possible selves and sub-dimensions' score also showed no significant difference for university type ( $p > 0.05$ ). That is, there is no meaningful difference between EFL teacher candidates studying at a state university and a private university in respect of expectations and fears in their first year of teaching profession.

Pearson correlation was applied to measure the relationship between expected and feared new teacher possible selves' scores each other which is presented in Table 5:

Table 5. *Pearson correlation analysis of relationship between expected and feared possible selves scores*

Scale and sub-dimensions	2	3	4	5	6	7
1-Professionalism <sup>1</sup>	0.68**	0.87**	0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01
2-Learning to teach <sup>1</sup>		0.94**	0.03	0.04	-0.02	0.02
<b>3- EXPECTED STUDENT TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE<sup>1</sup></b>			0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.01
4- Non-creative teaching				0.56**	0.79**	0.91**
5- Insufficient classroom management					0.54**	0.79**
6- Being an uncaring teacher						0.90**

## 7- FEARED STUDENT TEACHER POSSIBLE SELVES SCALE

\*  $p < 0.005$     \*\*  $p < 0.01$     <sup>1</sup>Converted normal scores were used

Professionalism and learning to teach sub-dimensions of expected possible selves scores and sub-dimensions of feared new teacher possible selves scores did not reveal a significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ). In total, there is no significance in the relationship between expected and feared possible selves scores in general ( $p > 0.05$ ) as predicted which means there seems no superiority of either expectations or fears possible selves scales when compared to each other.

### Conclusion

According to Hamman et.al. (2010), possible selves theory has a place in teacher identity development as it may link identity to broader issues for teacher development. In respect of EFL teacher development, as EFL teaching itself is a challenging field because of contextual and instructional rigors, it may be extra important for EFL teacher candidates to develop a 'language' teacher identity and be aware of possible selves for their future career. With this motivation, in the present study, expected and feared possible selves of EFL teacher candidates were examined and accordingly, the research questions are tried to be explained as follows:

1. What are the possible selves of prospective EFL teachers in respect of expectations and fears for their first year of teaching?

EFL teacher candidates have high expectations for their future profession, especially in professionalism sub-dimension which includes ideals such as to be successful in teaching profession, to be fair and consistent to students, to be prepared and planned and to be helpful to students developing positive attitudes. EFL student teachers seem that they do not have certain fears for their first year in the teaching career.

2. Are there any statistical differences in university type (private/state) and gender between prospective EFL teachers in respect of possible selves of expectations and fears for their first year in teaching?

There are gender differences to some extent (as in Tavşanlı & Saraç, 2016); female student teachers seem to have higher scores in expected possible-selves than male student teachers for their first year of teaching. There is no significance in overall picture of feared possible-selves scale between female and male EFL teacher candidates except that females have higher scores than males only in insufficient classroom management sub-dimension in feared possible-selves. Similarly, no meaningful difference detected between state and private university EFL student teachers in possible selves.

Many authors in several studies claim that females are better at language arts and have higher competencies, curiosity and enjoyment and more motivated than males. For instance, Asassfeh (2015) studied prospective EFL teachers in many aspects and found gender differences

in favor of females in motivation toward EFL learning and communication. Jobs such as teaching and nursing in Turkey are still considered as a female-dominated occupation and mostly preferred by female students. Üstüner et.al. (2009) investigated prospective teachers' attitude toward teaching profession and found that female student teachers have more positive attitudes towards their profession and concluded that compared to past, the profession of teaching is gradually becoming a profession for females every passing day. This can also be a socio-cultural fact of female student teachers' being more hopeful and confident in their future job. They seem more coherent for EFL field specific challenges and more '**self-awared**' in teacher identity development.

As for pedagogical implications, EFL student teacher may be supported for their first year of teaching especially in learning to teach sub-dimension ideals, which were favored by participants (although not statistical) below the average when compared to professionalism sub-dimension. For instance, some learning to teach ideals like 'to learn and to benefit something from experienced colleagues', 'make good connections with parents', 'to learn new teaching strategies' can be fruitful and useful for teacher candidates in their first year of teaching if they have awareness of the significance of these ideals. As for gender difference for expectations of current study, it can be suggested that male EFL teacher candidates might be supported for their future profession to develop new teacher identity.

The present study has limitations in respect of number of participants and institutions. In addition, the current research includes a one-sided questionnaire that does not provide open-ended questions or comments for teacher candidates about their future profession.

In the future studies, the number of participants can be enhanced in order to obtain more generalizable results. Different institutions in different regions can be involved into the future research. In addition, data collection tool (possible selves questionnaire) can be developed by open-ended questions and comments in order to find out teacher candidates' different thoughts about their selves and their profession.

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