



Investigating Turkish EFL teachers' mindsets regarding their teaching competence

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ABSTRACT

The mindset of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers plays a significant role in fostering an effective and progressive language teaching process. This study incorporates mindset theory within the context of secondary school EFL education, in Türkiye, aiming to investigate EFL teachers' mindset beliefs regarding their teaching competences and explore the rationale behind their beliefs. To achieve this, an exploratory qualitative research approach was employed, with a purposive sampling method to select 20 in-service Turkish EFL teachers. Data were collected using two semi-structured interviews and a Q-Sorting Activity. Interview 1, conducted before the Q-Sorting Activity, uncovered the teachers' professional profiles and beliefs about their own teaching, thus tailoring Interview 2. The Q-Sorting Activity, in which participants ranked 13 statements about teaching competence on a distribution grid ranging from 'cannot be changed' to 'highly changeable', explored teachers' mindset beliefs about their teaching competence. The statements were scored numerically, from 1 to 6, and analyzed for patterns to uncover teachers' shared viewpoints. Interview 2 was then conducted immediately to deepen insights and better understand the reasoning behind the selections made during the Q-Sorting task. The findings demonstrate that EFL teachers' mindsets are predominantly growth-oriented, attributing their beliefs to factors such as teaching experience, effort, and professional development. Simultaneously, they also identified barriers to improvement, including overcrowded classrooms and students' fixed-mindset beliefs. This study underscores the importance of expanding research on the psychology of language teaching.

Keywords

mindset theory,
Q-sorting activity,
teaching competences,
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Introduction

Mindset theory, now the most widely acknowledged term for implicit theories of intelligence, was introduced by Dweck (2006); representing an individual's belief that s/he holds whether intelligence and other properties are constant or developable. There exist two types of mindsets: a growth mindset that leads to success and a fixed mindset, leading to failure, which are associated and described as *a world from two perspectives* (Dweck, 2006). According to the theory, individuals differ in terms of the way they view their intelligence (King, 2016). While some people believe that intelligence or personality is regarded as fixed, other people think that those attributes can be shaped or developed over time (Dweck & Yeager, 2019).

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Although early mindset studies emphasized intelligence as fixed or growth, it is now commonly accepted that all academic disciplines have key traits that can stimulate growth or fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2016). Lou and Noels (2019) also stated that most individuals do not exclusively adhere to either growth mindsets or fixed mindsets. Instead, most people tend to possess a combination of both beliefs, influenced by the knowledge and cultural assumptions they receive, which may support each theory in varying domains. It can be asserted that although mindsets are commonly perceived as intrinsic to an individual, people may have both growth and fixed mindsets at different times depending on situations. Depending on specific abilities most people often possess a mix of fixed and growth mindsets. People may hold different mindset types in various fields, believing that certain abilities are fixed but others can be improved with efforts over time (Dweck, 2014; Mercer & Ryan, 2010). For example, while an individual has a growth mindset about intelligence, they might also have a fixed mindset about artistic ability, believing that it is something people are born with or without (Dweck, 2017).

Mindset theory has become a popular framework for understanding how beliefs about intelligence and abilities can impact learning and achievement in education. While a growth mindset is thought to increase motivation and resilience in case of failure in general, a fixed mindset is thought to decrease motivation and performance (Carr & Dweck, 2011). Teachers' mindsets are the assumptions and expectations people have for themselves and others that guide teaching practices and relationships with learners, their parents, and colleagues (Goldstein et al., 2012). So, their mindsets affect their pedagogical thinking and practice in teaching. Haukås and Mercer (2022) suggest that recognizing teachers' mindsets is significant for coping with challenges and being willing to engage in professional development. Their mindsets also tend to provide clues about their personalities and perspectives.

Moreover, a growth mindset enables teachers to see their job as a never-ending learning experience, creating a dedication to ongoing learning. EFL teachers with a growth mindset are better suited to adapt to changes in the educational landscape, whether they are in curricular standards, teaching methods, or how to make use of new technologies (Dweck, 2006). According to Hattie (2012), mindset beliefs foster resilience in teachers, allowing them to view problems as chances for personal and professional growth rather than overwhelming challenges. Significantly, this influence extends beyond teacher-student interaction; it provides a positive learning atmosphere in which students are allowed to take risks, make errors, and learn from them. Having growth or fixed mindset beliefs also plays a crucial role in helping individuals interpret and respond to setbacks encountered in language classrooms (Lou & Noels, 2016).

Another significant aspect is that this study viewed teaching competence as a multifaceted concept encompassing didactic, pedagogical, personality/social and linguistic competences (European Commission, 2013). These competences are fundamental for effective teaching and are closely linked to teachers' beliefs about their professional growth and potential for improvement. The categories are defined below.

1. *Didactic competence* is the ability of teachers to plan and transfer information to students in effective ways. For instance, designing effective lessons, understanding language patterns, and giving constructive feedback.
2. *Pedagogical competence* is the ability of teachers to establish an appropriate learning environment in which they can understand the needs of students, encourage them through their learning process, and manage classrooms effectively.
3. *Personality and social competences* are the abilities of teachers to control emotions, demonstrate self-confidence and enthusiasm, and establish and maintain positive relationships.
4. *Linguistic competence* is the ability of teachers to use language accurately and effectively by being proficient in the language and understanding its structure and use.

The concept of mindset has been a topic of interest in various fields such as psychology, sociology, science and education. It is relatively new to the field of education, where it is becoming increasingly recognized in the context of language education (Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017, 2019; Mercer & Ryan, 2010). Despite the increasing interest in mindset within the field of education, there is an imbalance in the existing studies (Haukås & Mercer, 2022). When compared, there has been relatively less research regarding teachers' mindsets than learners' mindsets (Irie et al., 2018). Teachers' mindsets could affect their classroom teaching practices and influence their students' learning (DeLuca et al., 2019). The problem is that the importance of how teachers' mindsets affect language education might have been ignored. So far, EFL teachers' mindsets within the Turkish context have been studied by a few researchers in different domains, such as self-efficacy (Ergen, 2019) and technology self-efficacy beliefs (Yılmaz, 2020), epistemological beliefs (Sıvacı, 2023), mindsets and demographic variables (Oldaç & Aydın, 2023). It is stated that there is a necessity for more domain-specific study to better understand mindsets and language teaching and learning relations (Lou & Noels, 2016).

Teachers' mindsets concerning their teaching competences can be considered one factor influencing their enthusiasm to engage in their professional development (Dweck, 2014). There is dearth of research that investigates teachers' mindsets on teaching competences (Haukås & Mercer, 2022; Irie et al., 2018). EFL teachers' mindsets respecting their teaching competences have not been explored in a Turkish context. For this reason, how EFL teachers' mindsets affect language education is worth investigating. In line with this, understanding and elucidating the mindsets of EFL teachers is significant for a successful process and progress in language education. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring Turkish in-service EFL teachers' mindsets about their teaching competence. It also aims to uncover the justifications behind the teachers' specific mindset beliefs.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What mindsets do Turkish EFL teachers hold about their teaching competences?
- 2) In what ways do Turkish EFL teachers justify their specific mindset beliefs about teaching competences?

Methodology

Research Design

This study is principally designated to investigate in-service EFL teachers' mindsets with specific reference to their teaching competences. To address the research domain, the exploratory qualitative research design was adopted to explore and clarify EFL teachers' mindsets and determine the aspects that affect their mindset beliefs on teaching competences. The overview of the research design is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Research design of the study

Research Questions	Sampling Technique	Research Tools	Analysis Tools
RQ1: What mindsets do Turkish EFL teachers hold about their teaching competences?	Purposive Sampling	Q-Sorting Activity	Descriptive Statistic
	20 EFL Teachers	Interview 1	Content Analysis
RQ2: In what ways do Turkish in-service EFL teachers justify their specific mindsets beliefs about teaching competences?	Purposive Sampling	Interview 2	Content Analysis
	20 EFL Teachers		

The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their different levels of teaching experience to ensure that they could provide rich data and multifaceted perspectives on the research question. The basic biographical data and pseudonyms of the participants are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience
Participant 1	M	26	1
Participant 2	M	24	2
Participant 3	F	26	3
Participant 4	F	28	3
Participant 5	F	30	5
Participant 6	M	29	5
Participant 7	F	33	8
Participant 8	M	35	9
Participant 9	M	37	10
Participant 10	F	36	10
Participant 11	F	39	10
Participant 12	F	50	22
Participant 13	F	50	25
Participant 14	F	47	25
Participant 15	F	48	26
Participant 16	M	53	28
Participant 17	M	50	28
Participant 18	F	57	33
Participant 19	F	60	33
Participant 20	M	65	40

As shown in Table 2, this study involved 20 EFL teachers who teach English from 5th to 8th grades, aged from 24 to 65, comprising 12 females and eight males. The percentages of the demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The percentages of the demographic characteristics of the participants

	Groups	N	%
Gender	Male	8	40
	Female	12	60
	Total	20	100
Age	20-30	6	30
	31-40	5	25
	41-50	5	25
	51 +	4	20
	Total	20	100
Teaching Experience	1-5	6	30
	6-10	5	25
	11 +	9	45
	Total	20	100

Almost all teachers said they participate in the yearly seminars the Ministry of National Education holds to improve their English teaching skills. They are all familiar with the topic both theoretically and practically.

Data collection and analysis

This study consisted of three data collection stages: in the first stage, a semi-structured interview (hereafter Interview 1) was conducted before administering a Q-Sorting Activity to 20 EFL teachers to reveal their EFL teachers' profiles and beliefs. In the second stage, a Q-Sorting Activity was conducted with the teachers to uncover their mindsets about their teaching competences. The teachers were requested to sort out the statements on the Q-sorting grid. In the last stage, after completing the Q-Sorting Activity, a semi-structured interview (hereafter Interview 2) was conducted with the teachers to reveal their reasons for sorting of the statements in the activity. Table 4 summarizes the data collection tools and procedures.

Table 4. Data collection tools and procedures

Data Collection Tools	Procedure
Interview 1 (before Q-Sorting Activity)	1)Background data
	2) Participants' EFL teacher profiles and their beliefs
	Qualitative data
	Audio Recording
	Transcription
Q-Sorting Activity	Content Analysis
	1)Sorting items about teaching competences
	Quantitative data
Interview 2 (after Q-Sorting Activity)	Descriptive Statistics
	1)Elaboration on each sorting item
	2)Participants' general response to the task
	3) Participants' reflection
	Audio Recording
	Transcription
	Content Analysis

Initially, the participants were asked about demographic information, including age and teaching experiences. Interview 1 was semi-structured to discover the teachers' opinions and beliefs that point out their profiles as English teachers. The participants were explicitly asked to comment on their strengths and weaknesses regarding their teaching. This step ensured that their subsequent interview became more personalized and tailored to their specific roles and experiences.

Afterwards, one of the techniques of Q methodology was used to explore EFL teachers' mindsets about teaching competences. As Irie et al. (2018) express, the Q methodology is an approach that is used to discover and clarify a group of people's subjective points of view in each context. It is a notable method, unlike traditional surveys, as it systematically explores participants' subjectivity, enabling them to prioritise and rank statements that provide a nuanced picture of shared beliefs and distinctive perspectives (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). In line with this, as a technique of Q methodology, the Q-Sorting Activity was administered to the teachers to uncover their specific mindset beliefs. The Q-Sorting Activity in this study comprised 13 statements categorized into four main areas: didactic and pedagogical teaching competence, linguistic competence, and personality and social competence. After the participants were first interviewed, they were asked to categorize the statements considering the extent to which they believe the competences are changeable or not on the grid. In that way, they classified the statements representing their subjective opinions based on their beliefs. Each item in the activity was given ranking values ranging from 1 to 6. When each participant felt that a competence was fixed/not changeable, they put the related statement under '1', once they thought it was highly changeable, they put it under '6'. The other numbers in the activity refer to the extent to which participants felt that competence was changeable. During the activity, the teachers had a chance to change the order of sorting items once they changed their minds, which is another advantage of the sorting activity process. The statements employed in Q-Sorting Activity, which are the most central concerns of teaching competences, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The statements employed in Q-Sorting Activity (Haukås & Mercer, 2022)

Statements
S1. Reflecting on one's own teaching
S2. Being highly proficient in the language
S3. Creating good student-teacher relationships
S4. Understanding individual learner needs
S5. Having an understanding of the details of language and grammar
S6. Having good classroom management skills
S7. Being enthusiastic about one's teaching
S8. Being confident in a classroom
S9. Designing engaging activities
S10. Giving constructive feedback
S11. Helping learners to love the subject
S12. Staying in control of one's emotions
S13. Encouraging learners to speak without fear of making mistakes

The teachers were asked to sort the 13 statements above on the Q- sorting grid based on their judgments about teaching competences. Figure 1 depicts the Q-Sorting Activity grid used in this study.



1 (cannot be changed)	2	3	4	5	6 (highly changeable)

Figure 1. Q-sorting grid

The teachers were asked to put the statements at the far right when they thought teaching competence could be highly changeable and at the far left when they felt it could not be changed.

Subsequently, Interview 2 was conducted after sorting statements to validate the findings of the Q-Sorting Activity. Each teacher was interviewed to corroborate the ideas and beliefs that surfaced during the Q-Sorting Activity. Interview 2 included three questions about the general response to the activity, each sorting item's evaluation and any plans for professional development. The questions in Interview 2 were tailored to the teachers' responses.

Interviews were conducted in a suitable place and time to eliminate possible problems based on time limitations or anxiety. The interview was audio recorded with the participants' permission beforehand to analyze the data more carefully after the interview. Even though the study used a qualitative and quantitative approach to collect and analyze data, the qualitative approach dominated the data collection process, hence the data analysis process. The data obtained from the Q-Sorting Activity was analyzed through descriptive statistics, where each statement of the Q-Sorting Activity was converted into numerical forms ranging from 1 to 6 to identify patterns of shared viewpoints. Each item was analyzed according to the score ranked by all participants. In that way, the most changeable and least changeable items were identified. Following that, the frequency and mean values of data were provided. At the same time, the data obtained through interviews was analyzed through content analysis. As the study aimed to explore EFL teachers' mindset beliefs, an inductive content analysis was employed, in which codes were generated directly from the teachers' responses to ensure that the findings showed their genuine experiences and interpretations. In this process, all recorded data was transcribed. After familiarization and coding, categories and sub-categories were developed. As a final step, categories were interpreted by the researcher.

Results

EFL teachers' professional profile

As a first step, 20 EFL teachers self-identified themselves as EFL teachers before participating in the Q-Sorting Activity. The most frequently mentioned personality traits were as follows: *confident* (12 citations), *enthusiastic* (10 citations), *guiding* (nine citations), and *competent* (nine citations) while teaching English in classrooms.

The analysis of data showed that they viewed their strengths as *teaching grammar* (six citations), *speaking in English* (five citations), *managing classrooms* (four citations), *encouraging students to join the activities* (three citations), *fostering a positive classroom environment* (one citation) and *understanding students' needs* (one citation). Some relevant opinions from Interview 1 are as follows:

"I believe I am a pretty confident teacher, and I am skilled enough." (P2)

"I enjoy teaching. I am an enthusiastic teacher." (P10)

On the other hand, they expressed their weaknesses as *changing students' perspectives* (five citations), *managing time* (four citations), *applying curriculum* (three citations), *speaking in English* (three citations), *managing classrooms* (two citations), *staying in control of emotions* (one citation) and *incorporating technology into teaching* (one citation).

EFL teachers' mindset beliefs and their justification

Considering the findings in Table 7, the total mean score of all statements is 4,83, demonstrating that 20 Turkish EFL teachers' mindsets about their teaching competences are strongly growth-oriented. However, they tended to have a mixture of fixed and growth perspectives on specific competences. Table 6 illustrates the related findings elicited through the Q-Sorting Activity:

Table 6. Mean Scores for the Changeability of Each Statement in the Sorting Activity

Statements	Mean	Min.	Max.	SD
Understanding individual learner needs	4.15	3	5	0,74
Being highly proficient in the language	4.35	1	6	1,46
Encouraging learners to speak without fear of making mistakes	4.45	1	6	1,35
Helping learners to love the subject	4.55	2	6	1,35
Being enthusiastic about one's teaching	4.70	3	6	0,92
Creating good student-teacher relationships	4.75	4	6	0,71
Staying in control of one's emotions	4.80	2	6	1,19
Having an understanding of the details of language and grammar	4.95	2	6	1,19
Reflecting on one's own teaching	5.00	4	6	0,79
Designing engaging activities	5.05	3	6	0,99
Giving constructive feedback	5.30	4	6	0,80
Being confident in a classroom	5.40	2	6	1,09
Having good classroom management skills	5.40	3	6	0,88
Total:	4.83	1	6	0,52

Table 6 depicts that the highest mean score is 5.40 which belongs to the competence of *having good classroom management skills* and *being confident in a classroom*. While teachers expressed their opinions, most believed that teaching competences could be developed,

emphasizing the importance of having ‘teaching experiences (35 citations) to improve the skills. To exemplify:

"I believe this is a competence that can be improved with time and experience. For instance, I was an idealistic teacher when I first started teaching. Over time, I have begun to establish a balance, and an authority thanks to the experience I have had in classrooms. " (P2, scores of 6)

"Some teachers struggle with confidence due to a lack of teaching experience. I remember being less confident in my first year of teaching that I possess now. " (P14, scores of 6)

‘Effort’ (10 citations) was cited by most of the teachers who believed that *being highly proficient in the language, helping learners love the subjects, having an understanding of the details of the language and creating good student-teacher relationships* are within one's control through conscious and intentional effort. P13 and P4 and declared:

"We can go beyond our boundaries with effort. There is nothing we cannot learn if we do not give up. So, we can overcome the challenges in the language by giving more efforts I believe that we can develop our proficiency level. " (P13, scores of 6)

"It is a changeable competence; teachers' efforts are of the utmost importance in this regard. Students will respect and communicate with teachers more if they witness their teachers performing the best they can." (P4, scores of 6)

Most teachers clarify that several competences are changeable or changeable to some extent. As Table 6 presents, *understanding individual learner needs, being highly proficient in the language, and encouraging learners to speak without fear of making mistakes* are by and large in Category 4, meaning the teachers believe that these competences are changeable but to a certain degree. The other competences are generally placed in Category 5, where the teachers consider -them reasonably changeable; however, there might be minor limitations or challenges to improving them completely. What stands out in this table is that there is no competence in total under a score of 4, meaning that no competences are perceived as fixed-oriented. Very few participants put the specific competences under Category 3, and five participants placed five competences in Category 2. Only two participants out of 20 put two competences in Category 1, and they stated that those competences could not be developable because of certain factors.

Furthermore, Table 6 shows that teachers perceive *understanding individual learner needs* and *being highly proficient in the language* as relatively more fixed-oriented. In contrast, they perceive *being confident in a classroom* and *having good classroom management skills* as more growth-oriented. Teachers seem to believe that didactic, pedagogical, and personality/social competences are more changeable than linguistic competences.

Even though this study did not prioritize participants’ demographic comparison, it was found that age and experience might intersect with their mindset beliefs. Surprisingly, the findings indicate a positive shift towards a more growth-oriented mindset with increasing age and experience. As more experienced teachers progress in their careers and have valuable classroom experiences, there is a noticeable development in their mindsets regarding teaching competences, unlike novice participant teachers in the first few years of their teaching careers.

A striking justification provided by a young teacher who alluded that competence is completely fixed. To exemplify, P2 reported:

"I do not believe that language knowledge can be entirely improved in this profession. I believe that a particular level is sufficient for teaching English to students. When teachers' competence levels rise, it becomes more challenging to interact with students who have low language proficiency levels. We are not required to be fluent in a foreign language because we are teachers. " (score of 1)

Besides, expert teachers tend to exhibit great openness to 'professional development' (12 citations), viewing challenges as opportunities for their professional growth. P10 declared that:

"Teachers may feel less competent when they notice gaps in their subject knowledge. However, it can be developed. Seeking professional development opportunities boosts confidence. " (scores of 5)

On the other hand, as the teachers explained their mindset orientations, they highlighted a connection between teachers' beliefs about their competences to change and their beliefs about control over those competences.

For instance, some teachers expressed that specific competences might not be developed, or could be less changeable than the others, justifying their beliefs through 'overcrowded classrooms' (17 citations). They stressed that it is quite difficult to *understand individual learner needs*, which received the lowest mean score of 4.15 in Q-Sorting activity. To exemplify, P3 stated that:

"Engaging with individuals who require extra assistance is challenging in our class of 30 students. Due to the large number of students, we may not always be able to provide them with individualized support when they require it. " (scores of 3)

They also pointed out that their ability to *give constructive feedback* and *provide individualized support* in a crowded class setting is limited. To exemplify, P2 stated that:

"My competence tends to improve; however, because of the large number of students, it is often difficult for me to contact everyone while providing feedback. I am unable to provide suitable feedback to them, or I am unable to provide sufficient feedback. "(P2, scores of 4)

Moreover, the teachers perceived 'students' fixed mindset beliefs (15 citations) as a barrier to *encouraging students to speak freely and helping learners love the subject*. Thus, they believed that teachers' certain competences might not be developed. As participants stated:

"Students are not open to learning. This is due to their fixed mindset belief about speaking in a foreign language. Considering this, I can encourage them to a point, but it will be limited because it will not be at the necessary level. " (P11, scores of 2)

"I believe it cannot be changed. Even if teachers do their best to make students love the subject, some students have fixed mindsets and are not open to changes. " (P10, scores of 2)

Discussion

The findings have shown that the teachers' mindsets are toward growth-oriented and they have a mix of fixed and growth perspectives on specific competences. Even though most teachers believed that competences could be developed, they also mentioned some challenges that impede competence development. These findings supported the concept of mindset orientation instead of a categorical distinction between fixed and growth mindsets as consistent with the relevant literature (Haukås, & Mercer, 2022; Lou & Noels, 2019; Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer 2012).

Furthermore, the data indicate that some teachers rated one teaching competence as a 1 while rating another as 4 or 6, suggesting they hold different mindsets towards different competences. These variations may reflect the specific competences that teachers perceive as fixed, leaning toward fixed, or growth-oriented. As Dweck (2014; 2016) asserted, most people have a mix of fixed and growth mindsets based on individual abilities. It was concluded that having a mix of fixed and growth mindset leads teachers to hold different mindsets about certain teaching competences.

The findings of the study demonstrated that some internal and external factors influenced WFL teachers' mindsets. This finding supports the previous study of Haukås and Mercer (2022) who also explored the locus of control and its relation to teachers' mindsets.

Almost all participants believed that they could develop and improve their teaching competences with experience over time. They mostly cited teaching experiences related to competences such as *having good classroom management skills*, *being confident in a classroom* and *reflecting on one's own teaching* and provided instances of how those competences improved over time. Similarly, in Haukås and Mercer's (2022) study, *having good classroom management skills* was also found as a competence that would be developed through teaching experience. These findings are significant in at least two major respects. Firstly, novice and expert teachers believed that teaching experience would enhance their teaching competences. Secondly, they believed that teaching experience is effective on different competences rather than a single competence. This finding corroborates the findings of the previous study (Haukås & Mercer, 2022; Ryan & Mercer, 2011), which found teaching experience was one of the significant factors in developing competences. It can be concluded that teaching experience is likely to positively influence competences throughout a teacher's career.

In addition, the findings also illustrate that effort could develop competences such as *being highly proficient in the language*, *helping learners love the subjects* and *having an understanding of the details of the language*. This finding is in accord with a recent study (Liu et al., 2023), proposing that teachers who believe in the malleability of their competences dedicate greater efforts and interest to improving their teaching standards, making them more emotional, intellectually, and genetically dedicated to their teaching practices. However, the findings of the study do not support the previous research (Haukås & Mercer, 2022) that has suggested some competences could be acquired without effort with time and experience, based on pre-service teachers' mindset beliefs. It might be because of the differences between in-service and pre-service teachers' mindsets. While pre-service teachers believed that they could

acquire competences without effort (Haukås & Mercer, 2022), in-service teachers participating in this study highlighted the significance of effort to develop certain competences.

Furthermore, the teachers also believed that professional development contributed to shaping their competences to teach better. They mostly cited professional development for the competences, such as *being highly proficient in the language* and *having good classroom management skills*. Most of the teachers regard ‘*professional development*’ as a process through which they can improve their teaching skills. From this point of view, it might be said that teachers with a tendency towards a growth mindset would be interested in professional development. This finding seems to be in line with those of Irie, Ryan, and Mercer (2018) who also found it possible that being in a growth-oriented setting encourages a growth mindset in their work.

On the other hand, some teachers believed that even though they made some effort to develop their competences, they could not change the situations out of their control, and thus the competences could remain fixed-oriented. The findings showed that overcrowded classroom is an issue that the teachers believed their competences related to *understanding individual learner needs* and *giving constructive feedback* cannot be developed. This may result in some students not receiving the necessary support and personalized feedback, negatively affecting the teaching and learning process as emphasized by Marais (2016), who reports that overcrowded classrooms offer a great deal of difficulties for both educators and learners.

Additionally, the teachers believed that they could develop their teaching competences, such as *encouraging learners to speak without fear of making mistakes* and *helping learners to love the subject*, due to the students’ fixed mindsets about EFL learning. Accordingly, if students’ beliefs about language learning were more positive, teachers’ beliefs on certain competences could be more growth-oriented. Cimpian et al. (2007) proposed that teachers can shape students’ beliefs about their own abilities and affect their motivation. However, the findings of this study do not support this idea since some teachers believed they could not change students’ fixed mindsets in terms of learning English. From this point of view, it may be possible to say that since some teachers believe they cannot develop some skills because of their students’ fixed mindsets, they will not try to develop those skills. This finding may be indicative of a sign of teachers’ fixed mindsets.

Limitations

Some limitations exist that could be addressed in future research. Even though Q-Sorting is a valuable method for eliciting attitudes and beliefs, it is often used with small groups. As this study was limited to 20 EFL teachers, future research with larger and more diverse participant groups may offer a broader range of perspectives on mindset beliefs related to EFL teaching competencies. Also, since the mindset itself is evolving and changing over time, the identified mindsets of the teachers may not remain stable. This highlights the need for longitudinal studies or follow-up research to examine how teachers’ mindsets shift over time.

Conclusions

Twenty EFL teachers' mindsets regarding their teaching competence are highly growth-oriented or a blend of fixed and growth perspectives, despite some fixed mindset beliefs on specific competences. The results show that some internal and external locus of control factors influenced teachers' mindset beliefs regarding teaching competences. This suggests that teachers' perceptions of their control over events and outcomes and external influences shape their beliefs about their teaching competences.

Although it was concluded that the teachers' mindsets are growth oriented, more experienced teachers showed greater openness to professional growth than those with less experiences. This suggests that the teachers tend to hold more growth-oriented beliefs as their age and experience increase, which signifies seeking and pursuing continuous learning. Even though most participants indicated they had already received training to improve their teaching and felt competent in their field, they highlighted a need for further professional development. This suggests that having a growth mindset allows teachers to be more enthusiastic to engage in potential opportunities for enriching their teaching competence.

Conversely, one strongly held belief is that a high level of language proficiency is unnecessary for teachers, which reflects a fixed mindset toward linguistic competence. This can raise significant concerns about teachers' language development and continuous professional development, which limit teachers' ability to provide rich input and affect students' language exposure and motivation indirectly.

This study offers valuable insights into teacher education and professional development programs. Since the findings highlight the importance of a growth mindset, there is a need to integrate and implement professional development and further development activities within EFL teacher education programs. Firstly, teacher education curricula need to foster growth mindsets by including reflective practices. Secondly, as teachers' mindset beliefs regarding their teaching competences could be cultivated, policymakers and school administrations should offer mindset-sensitive professional development programs, which are essential for teachers who desire to teach more effectively. Workshops and in-service training programs could be adopted to promote a growth mindset among teachers, as their mindsets are likely to influence their eagerness to engage in ongoing professional growth now and in the future.

For future research, a comparative study can be conducted with EFL teachers who teach different levels to explore their mindsets. Specifically, the mindsets of primary and secondary school EFL teachers can be investigated. On the other hand, a long-term study can be conducted to see the evolution of teachers' mindsets concerning their teaching competences over an extended period.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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