

**LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN
TURKEY: THE PERSPECTIVES OF
PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHERS¹**

**Aday İngilizce Öğretmenlerin Bakış Açısından Türkiye’de
Öğretmen Eğitimi**

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Abstract

Language teaching programs include different variables but it is a well-known fact that the role of teacher education is one of the most vital factors in language teaching. It is crucial to carry out sufficient and influential teacher education program so as to teach a language effectively. There are lots of studies on language teacher education both in all over the world and in Turkey, but it is also necessary to know views and expectations of pre-service English teachers. Only by understanding their needs, expectations and views, can effective teacher education programs be presented. Taking this fact into account, the aim of this study is stated as to investigate pre-service EFL teachers’ perceptions on teacher education program they are engaged in. Participants of current study consist of 30 students studying in the last year of English language teacher education program in Turkey. In this qualitative study, the data were obtained from reflective writings of student-teachers and follow up interviews. The participants were asked questions to identify their perceptions of teacher education program, and their expectations about it. In this study, the findings were analyzed qualitatively and discussed in the light of related literature.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers, EFL, teacher education, perception.

Özet

Dil öğretim programı farklı değişkenler içerir fakat dil öğretiminde en önemli faktörlerden birinin öğretmen eğitimi olduğu çok iyi bilinen bir gerçektir. Bir dili etkili bir biçimde öğretebilmek için yeterli ve başarılı bir öğretmen eğitimi programı yürütmek oldukça önemlidir. Hem dünyada hem de Türkiye’de dil öğretmen eğitimi üzerine çok sayıda çalışma bulunmaktadır fakat aday öğretmenlerin görüş ve beklentilerini bilmek de bir o kadar önemlidir. Ancak öğretmen adaylarının bakış açılarını, beklenti ve ihtiyaçlarını anlayarak etkili bir öğretmen eğitimi programı sunulabilir. Bu gerçeği göz önüne alarak bu çalışmanın amacı aday İngilizce öğretmenlerinin içinde buldukları öğretmen eğitimine olan algılarını araştırmak olarak belirlenmiştir. Katılımcılar Türkiye’de İngilizce programında okumakta olan 30 son sınıf öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Bu nitel çalışmada veriler aday öğretmenlerden toplanan yansıtıcı yazma ve hemen akabinde gelen görüşmeler ile elde edilmiştir. Katılımcılara öğretmen eğitim programlarına olan algılarını ve beklentilerini belirlemek için sorular yöneltilmiştir. Çalışmada bulgular nitel olarak analiz edilmiş ve ilgili literatür ışığında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Aday öğretmenler, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, öğretmen eğitimi, algı.

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INTRODUCTION

It is known that new generations will be masterpiece of teachers, so the pivotal role of teachers in education system is known as well. In this sense, the importance of teacher education cannot be denied in training high-quality teachers.

Researchers highlight that teacher education is a powerful indicator for quality of teachers and student achievement (see, Hanushek, 2002; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). According to Allen (2009) teacher education programs should prepare student teachers to their future roles. Keçik & Aydın (2011) also emphasize that these programs have responsibility to educate future teachers who will influence a nation's future and they state that pre-service teachers studying in teacher education programs serves this mission in their practices. In this context, Musset (2010, p.16) expresses the importance of teacher education by stating that it is "the first entry point to the teacher professional career" in which pre-service teachers gain the fundamental academic and professional capabilities they will utilize and expand on as a part of their future career. Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu (2003) express that the achievement of a school educational program, whatever its goal is, depends for the most part on the teacher, who is the key individual in acting it out and they also emphasize that there have been many attempts to improve teacher education program in Turkey. The history of teacher education of Turkey dates back to 1924 when 'Law of Unification of Instruction' in 1924 centralized the Turkish educational system (Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003). Şimşek and Yıldırım (2001) analyze the history of teacher education system in Turkey and reveal that there have been influential restructuring struggles and reform movements in teacher training institutions over the years in order to supply sufficient and high quality teachers for schools of nation.

It is widely known fact that English language has growing impact in Turkish education context because of its multidimensional aspect and lingua-franca role in international area. Karahan (2007) states that although English is neither a national nor an official language in Turkey, it is the most widely taught foreign language at all the phases of educational framework. With the recent changes, English language teaching starts at 2th grade as a compulsory course in Turkey' national education (MoNE, 2012). At that point, English language teacher education programs come to mind to train effective teachers. According to Day (1991), education of foreign language teacher is a development which is quite recent as compared to teacher education in other areas. Education faculties of universities that are under the Governance of the constitutional state body, Higher Education Council (HEC) educate English language teachers (ELTs). This teaching program generally lasts five years (1 year intensive English preparatory and 4 years of training so as to become a teacher.). Students from other faculties such as arts and science studying English/American language and literature or English philology can also become English teachers via pedagogic formation certificate (Tercanhoğlu, 2004; Aydoğan & Çilsal, 2007). Ekmekçi (1992) highlights that the most crucial elements of a teacher education program are school experience and practice teaching and also state 'there seems to be unanimous agreement on the inclusion of ESL methods into teacher education programs' (p.1). Seferoğlu (2006) mentions the restricting process of pre-service English teacher education program put into practice in the academic year of 1998-1999 with the recent educational changes and she points out that according to renewed education program that was based on teaching methodology and teacher practice, new courses were included to curriculum such as Approaches to ELT, ELT Methodology, Teaching English to Young Learners, School Experience and Practice Teaching. Before renewed education curriculum in 1998, Enginarlar (1996) emphasizes

the complains of prospective teachers on limited teaching practice, being stuck to only one school setting, only one teacher and one level of proficiency to observe. Yavuz & Topkaya (2013) express that the second biggest restructuring in English language teaching have been done at 2006, and as a result of it some new modifications have been done for the curriculum.

The aim of this English Language Teaching Education Program is to prepare qualified teachers who will meet demands of nation. As a result, school experience and teaching practice courses that provide opportunity for pre-service teachers to observe and experience the knowledge they have learned take important place in the curriculum. There are different studies on school experience and teaching practice in Turkey. Şaşmaz-Ören, Sevinç, & Erdoğan' study (2009) suggests that there is a relationship between the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward school experience and the reason why they want to be a teacher and their thought on their professional growth. In his study, Davran (2006) asserts that there are different variables that affect teaching practice in acquiring teacher qualifications such as gender, department, and the time when the practice teaching is carried out. Özmen (2008) analyses that pre-service teachers see school experience as a major contribution for their professional growth. Emphasising on the advantages of school experience and practice teaching, Hergüner, Arslan & Dündar (2002) also mention that school experience is a helpful way for pre-service teachers to shape their future experiences of teaching. On the other hand, there are some researches which highlight the negative views on these courses. For example, Gömleksiz, Mercin, Bulut, & Atan (2006) remark that pre-service teachers complain about inadequateness of instructors in implementing and evaluating practice teaching as well as the negative views of instructors on these courses. In a similar way, Büyükgöze-Kavas & Bugay (2009) state that pre-service teachers find the school experience and practice teaching hours as limited and they are not satisfactory on inadequate materials and the amount of practice teaching. According to Ünal (2008), school experience has not been implemented sufficiently because of the reasons resulting from partner school and education system.

It can be clearly seen that there are different studies on teacher education. In this study, it is aimed to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions on school experience and practice teaching courses in teacher education program they are engaged in.

METHOD

Participants

The present study is carried out with 30 senior year students from the spring term of 2015 studying English Language Teaching program at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. All the participants have been taking both school experience and practice teaching courses.

Instrumentation

In order to analyze student perceptions over the courses of school experience and teaching practice, written questions are asked to find out about their reflections and following this reflective writing, a follow-up interview is carried out with them to have a deeper insight about their expectations from these courses. Participants wrote their thoughts on these courses freely and the research questions were asked as guiding questions in the interviews. It is asked to participants to give the detailed answers as much as the possible to depict a clear frame on their perceptions and expectations.

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Do pre-service English teachers think that school experience and practice teaching courses prepare them for their teaching career? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- 2) What are pre-service English teachers' expectations from these courses?
- 3) What are the shortcomings of the courses according to pre-service English teachers' viewpoint?

Research Design

To conduct this case study, qualitative research design is used. As Dörnyei (2007, p. 38) states that, "qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' point of view of the situation being studied". Data gathered via reflective writings and interviews are analyzed by using content analysis technique from qualitative research design. The findings are categorized by taking the research aims into consideration.

FINDINGS

To depict a clear frame on the topic, the findings are presented in the 3 common themes. To show the pre-service teachers' comments in a detailed way, direct quotations are utilized.

Thoughts of pre-service English teachers on whether school experience and practice teaching courses prepare them for their teaching career.

Positive Comments

Twenty-two of the participants (73.3%) agree that these courses prepare them for their future career. They highlight the importance of these courses in teaching training education program.

"I agree that these courses prepare me for my future teaching career. No one can deny the importance of school experience and practice teaching courses because, it is the first time we feel ourselves as a real teacher."

"These courses prepare us to our profession by giving some responsibilities such as preparing a lesson plan."

They see these courses as a contribution to their professional growth. Pre-service teachers point out that they learn new strategies about teaching thanks to these courses.

"I have learned using simpler language to teach the topic clearly in my teaching practice. These courses have contributed me in terms of learning how to behave for my profession."

"These courses take place in a real classroom so we encounter different situations such as student misbehavior. In this case, we have to create solutions to cope with them spontaneously. I have learned some strategies thanks to these courses."

Participants report that practicing in a real classroom atmosphere is a different experience for them. They also infer that learning about teaching practice should be done in real classroom environment.

“I have seen that I had almost no idea about teaching until I presented it in a real classroom.”

“Only listening or speaking about teaching does not resemble to actual teaching in a class. This interaction is very different experience that makes me feel as a teacher.”

They point out that these courses give them different perspective about education system. When their comments are analyzed, it is clearly seen that students are more conscious about teaching profession in educational system now.

“Before taking these courses, I heard criticism on educational system from other people but now I have also ideas about how to develop the systems’ deficient sides.”

“I have learned the importance of teacher in an education system. These courses give me more deep perspective on this profession. Now I think that teacher is the key factor in the system.”

Negative Comments

As well as positive comments’ student-teachers also make some negative ones. Eight of the participants (26.6%) think that these courses are insufficient preparing them for their future career. Their interpretations show us that pre-service teachers aren’t satisfied with these courses’ implementation.

“I cannot say that these courses prepare us. How can it be effective to present only two times in a real classroom?”

“From the beginning of my university life, I have only learned theory but I have no idea how to behave in a real classroom. I cannot turn my knowledge into practice so these courses do not prepare me.”

Students express that they are not respected in school environment so they do not feel as a teacher. It is understood from their expressions that they want to be seen as a teacher.

“Although students know that we are the candidates of teacher, they don’t respect us so I don’t feel myself as a teacher of that class.”

“Neither mentor teacher nor students see us as teacher. When I tried to teach something, one of students said that ‘Our teacher doesn’t teach like this way’ so I was disappointed in my first teaching practice.”

They state that practicing only one or two times isn’t beneficial for their academic growth. It is expressed that students need more teaching practice to gain experience.

“Can I gain experience by only one presentation in a real classroom?”

“To benefit from these courses, we should do much more practicing. Otherwise they cannot contribute us in anyway.”

Expectations of pre-service English teachers from these courses:

The findings below are classified as the most frequently expectations (42.2%) to the least one (22.3%).

They expect to learn how to conduct a lesson effectively. Their aim is stated as to learn teaching as influential as possible.

“These courses should teach us classroom management. I should learn to deal with problems that I may encounter during my future lessons.”

“I expect to prepare effective lesson plans and use clear language for explaining a topic or giving directions.”

They want to develop a different point of view on teaching profession. Comments show that these course shape students’ perceptions about this profession.

“I have seen this profession from the perspective of students until now on but I want to gain professional sight to shape my future experiences as a teacher candidate.”

“I want to learn responsibilities and rights of teachers from now on to apply in my profession.”

They hope that there should be an interaction between mentor and pre-service teachers. This relationship affects students’ understanding of teaching.

“If there was collaboration with my mentor teacher, I could learn how to assess students apart from sit-down exams.”

“I prefer that mentor teachers share their experiences with us in terms of being us a good model.”

Shortcomings of the courses:

Three main shortcomings of these courses are stated by twenty eight student-teachers and two of the participants can not share their thoughts on this part. The results are presented from the most frequently stated to least one below.

Thirteen of the pre-service teachers find hours of these courses as limited (43%). Their thoughts show that they need much more times for teaching practice.

“We cannot gain any experience only by conducting a few hours lesson.”

“Time is very limited for our improvement. I want to turn my knowledge into practice but it is not possible to implement it in these restricted hours.”

Ten of the participants consider that mentoring is insufficient at schools (33.3%). They want to get in touch with their mentor teachers.

“I expected that my mentor teacher should have been more helpful but she was uninterested. I wanted to ask some questions but she didn’t guide me in anyway.”

“My mentor teacher didn’t encourage me in my teaching practice. I learned nothing from him because he didn’t share his thoughts with me.”

Five participants comment that these courses should be taken from the beginning of teaching training program (16.6). They stress that they want to gain experience earlier.

“I think that we should take these courses earlier. We should learn teaching in real classrooms instead of so much theoretical knowledge.”

“If I had taken these courses from the beginning of my university life, I would have been more experienced and well-informed about my profession now.”

CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

The findings of current study are summarized under the title of three main themes based on the data collected from participants as mentioned above.

To conclude, many of the participants believe that school experience and practice teaching courses prepare them for teaching profession by stressing that these courses allow pre-service teachers to experience different teaching practices. As some studies show that school experience is a course which helps students comprehend teaching profession better as well as framing their further experience (Hergüner, Aslan and Dündar, 2002). Participants also highlight that they gain professional point of view on education system in the way that Sariçoban (2008) points out. In other respects, it is stated that they gain practicing in a real classroom atmosphere is important point for students’ development. Despite positive comments, some of the participants find these courses insufficient to prepare them for their future career. Limited practicing, not to be respected by students and the way these courses are carried out are among the complains stated by student-teachers. Like as found in this study, different researches also indicate that pre-service teachers see practice teaching hours as limited and they are unsatisfied with the implementations of these courses (Büyükgöze-Kavas and Bugay, 2009; Gömleksiz, Bulut, Mercin and Atan, 2006).

The expectations of participants tell us that they want to learn teaching profession as much as possible via these courses such as teaching effectively and being aware of teachers’ responsibilities and rights. It is also highlighted that the collaboration with mentor teachers are weak and participants prefer to establish a mutual relation with their mentor teachers.

When the comments are evaluated, it is seen that the shortcomings of courses mostly consist of limited course hours. It is suggested that these hours should be increased. As stated in expectation part, mentoring is found insufficient. As Baştürk (2008) highlights that interaction between mentor teachers and students is low. Although Ünlüöven and Boylu (2007) recommend that those courses should be gained in the second semester of third year, students think that these courses should begin from the beginning of university life.

IMPLICATIONS

Taking into account students' expectations and their comments on shortcomings of practice teaching and school experience courses, some improvements should be done in these courses. For instance, limited hours can be increased and some arrangements can be done in implementation of courses. To ensure the collaboration with mentor teachers, in-service training can be applied to them.

SUGGESTIONS

What kind of revisions and changes should be done to improve these courses may be a topic for further studies. This study also can be integrated to different courses to learn other pre-service teachers' perceptions on the courses of practice teaching and school experience.

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