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# Pre-service teachers' and their instructors' beliefs on the effectiveness of an english language teacher education program

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## Abstract

The present research aims to explore the beliefs of English Language pre-service teachers and their instructors on the effectiveness of an educational programme at a Turkish university within the evaluation framework by Peacock (2009). The participants were 200 senior students and 21 instructors from the ELT Department. Data was collected through two similar form questionnaires based on Peacock (2009), a focus group discussion, and semi-structured interviews with three instructors. The findings indicated that although the pre-service teachers were mostly satisfied with the program; the practice, needs and language proficiency components were reported to be the major concerns. The data from the instructors revealed some similar and differing attitudes towards the program.

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## 1. Introduction

The Educational Program Evaluation has become an important aspect of the educational settings and academe. The importance has also been noticed by language teaching field experts and researchers such as Beretta and Davies (1985), Sullivan (2006), Yang (2009). As Lynch (1990, p.23) puts it: "Evaluation, the systematic attempt to examine what happens in, and as a result of, language programs, typically serves as the basis for judgments and decisions about these programs."

The need for evaluation is without any argument is needed for improvements and catering the search for better practices. However a systematic approach in any evaluation is a prerequisite. Namely, a pioneering study by Beretta and Davies (1985) on the effectiveness of CLT has led to systematization of the evaluation studies in language teaching.

## 2. Literature Review and the Context of the Study

A large number of evaluation studies have been conducted in the field of language teaching programs internationally such as: Dunworth (2008) on the effectiveness of the international English language teaching programs, Yang (2009) on the evaluation of teacher induction practices, Karataş and Fer (2009) on the English language program at a Turkish university. The evaluation studies in Turkey have also gone through changes and the

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number of educational evaluation studies is on the rise. The major focus of this study is the evaluation of the components in English language teacher education programmes. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research in this field and especially for the course and programme evaluations. It has been stated that “There have not been many studies in Turkey that investigated different aspects of these courses within the teacher training programme” Seferoğlu (2006, p.369). However, there are some promising studies that investigated language teacher education from different perspectives. One recent study on the effects of the curriculum and the courses taken in ELT departments by Kunt and Özdemir (2010) indicated that a great majority of pre-service teachers’ beliefs were not affected by their educational and instructional experiences. The study asked the question whether taking all of the methodological courses would make any significant changes in the beliefs and attitudes towards the profession. The results showed that prospective teachers’ engagement in methodology courses seemed to have a little impact on the improvement of their beliefs.

In a study investigating the views of pre-service teachers on literature in the ELT curriculum in Turkey, Arıkan (2005) focused on the experiential knowledge of the participants. Data indicated that the participants were well aware of the importance of literature courses. Seferoğlu's (2006) study was also a detailed study to cater for the understanding of the components of the ELT programs in Turkey and her analysis have shown that the participants were not satisfied with the amount of the time devoted to micro teaching and practice teaching. Another neglected area of program evaluation for the Turkish setting is the field of distant education. One compelling study by Bıyık (2007) investigated the efficiency of a Distance English Language Teacher Training program. The analysis of the study concluded that the program was unable to train a desired number of English teachers because of various reasons. Another study by Ogeyik (2009) evaluated the pre-service teachers’ attitudes on microteaching practices. Her results indicated that a great number of the students were contended with the existing practices. One other study with a larger scope by Tercanlıoğlu (2008) carried out a focus-group study in order provide some insights into the experiences of pre-service ELT students. The study aimed to define departmental concerns and state levels of contention. The findings showed dissatisfactions at various levels.

Peacock (2009) offered a framework for the evaluation of EFL teacher training programs. His framework centered on the concepts of weaknesses and strengths and the amount of success achieved for attaining to the learner needs. He used his framework in a Hong Kong university and collected data from various stake holders by interviews, questionnaires, essays and material analysis. He found some strengths as the support for self-evaluation and pedagogic skills but the program suffered from not attaining to the needs of the local context. He suggested his framework could be used in different contexts. The present study will use this framework for the evaluation purposes. Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) also applied Peacock's (2009) model to the context of English teacher education in a Turkish setting. The whole population of their study consisted of 55 senior student teachers and three university instructors. They collected data from the instructors and students. The study aimed to examine the beliefs of these stakeholders on the ELT program regulated by Higher Education Council (HEC) since 2006-2007 academic year. They used questionnaires and interviews and revealed that there have been similar and different views of instructors and teacher candidates on linguistic and pedagogic competency levels. The present study also uses some elements from Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) study.

The context of the present research was a public state university in the Western part of Turkey. With a total enrollment number around 43 thousand students, it is one of the biggest institutions in Turkey. The study was carried out in the English language teaching department. Currently over 1300 students are enrolled in the ELT program. The education in public and private universities is regulated by a Higher Education Council (HEC) and the universities comply with these regulations. During the recent years many changes have been applied to various faculties and the education programs in accordance with the changes in the world. The recent curriculum, which has been employed since 2006-2007 academic year, offers many courses in which student teachers can get the opportunity of employing microteaching activities.” The current ELT program regulated by HEC in 2006-2007

academic year, requires students to complete a total of 58 courses that have been divided into 3 main categories as: ELT field courses; General Knowledge courses and Educational courses. These courses are offered in 8 semesters.

In regard to the existing situation in the field, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1-Which components of the language teacher education program in the department were regarded as effective or ineffective according to the fourth year pre-service teachers?

2- Which components of the language teacher education program in the department were regarded as effective or ineffective according to the lecturers in the department?

### **3. Methods and Design**

The present study used both positivistic and naturalistic approach designs in data collection and analysis. Triangulation was achieved through combining quantitative as well as qualitative research methodologies. The data collection for the current study was achieved through the use of Peacock's (2009) evaluation model for language teaching departments and Coşkun and Daloğlu's (2010) framework for evaluation in a Turkish setting. The data was collected through 4 different means. First data collection instrument was Peacock's (2009) slightly adapted student 22 item questionnaire asking students a range of questions about their experiences, perceptions and beliefs about their education. This items in the questionnaire centered on the following issues: linkage between courses, avoidance of overlapping information, adequate training in English, teaching skills, and for the local context, up-to-datedness, and reflectivity and so on (for a detailed list of items see Appendix 1). The second was the same questionnaire re-worded for the use with lecturers; the third one was a focus group discussion for the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the fourth and the last one was a semi-structured interview with lecturers by using the 15 major questions asked by Peacock (2009, p.262-63) regarded as the fundamentals of an ELT program and the evaluation.

The participants were 200 fourth year students (152 females and 48 males) and the lecturers at the English Language Teaching department. When the questionnaires were administered, students were informed about the rationale of the study. During the administration of the questionnaires students were invited to a focus group study for discussing the issues about the ELT program. One week later 15 volunteer students gathered together in a designated classroom. Their consent was taken about the use of video and audio recording. Besides, the slightly adopted lecturer questionnaire was filled in by 18 (11 females and 7 males) lecturers. Neither Peacock (2009) nor Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) used the questionnaire in this way. In addition, three other lecturers (2 females and 1 male) were interviewed by the use of semi-structured interview questions. These three lecturers were not in the group of lecturers who filled in the questionnaire.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

The results of the student and lecturer questionnaires revealed very similar beliefs about the effective and ineffective components of the existing program. The highest percentages on agreement continuum were achieved at teaching how to teach English, using and adapting foreign language teaching materials, preparation to teach English, training in teaching skills and the up-to-datedness of the program. When these high percentages are compared with the previous research, it is seen that just like Peacock (2009) and Coşkun & Daloğlu (2010) the component of teaching how to teach English received the highest percentage of agreement. Another component that is namely using and adapting foreign language materials has been agreed with very high percentages in the present study and Coşkun & Daloğlu's (2010) study. Although this component received high percentages of agreement in Peacock's (2009) study, the percentages were relatively lower than the present study. It was also found out that in both of the current evaluation studies and in this present research, the trainees were very well aware of the up-to-datedness of the programs.

When the percentages for the ineffective components of the program were analyzed, it was revealed that the program did not succeed to avoid overlapping information among courses according to both the trainees and lecturers as the references piled up in uncertainties and disagreements. This was also the same case in Peacock

(2009) and Coşkun & Daloğlu (2010). Unfortunately, a level of dissatisfaction was found in one third of the trainee population in the adequate training in English component of the program. The same failure was also observed in the Hong Kong case in Peacock (2009) with a slightly higher percentage. However the same issue was not observed in the Turkish case in Coşkun & Daloğlu (2010).

The training offered for the local context in the existing program was also a major issue. Only one third of the whole population agreed with this component; whereas one third was uncertain and the remaining trainee population was not satisfied with this training. Peacock (2009) depicted almost an identical picture for this component of the programme. On the contrary 60 % of the Turkish population in Coskun & Daloglu (2010) study were on agree and strongly agree continuum of the effectiveness of training for the local context. The results from the focus group illustrated the strengths of the programme as: the success of some courses in combining theory to practice, the expertise of some of the lecturers in adjusting their teaching to trainees' level of understanding, the good linkage between courses. On the other hand; the discussion indicated the weaknesses of the programme as: the lack of clearly stated aims for the courses, the over use of student presentations, the decrease in trainees' proficiency level caused by the shortage of proficiency courses and the lack of the possibilities for using teaching language skills. The semi-structured interviews with three lecturers by the use of the 15 major questions addressed by Peacock (2009, p.262-63) and later used by Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010, p. 28) on the other hand, showed that the lecturers fail to give a clear account of the aims because of the limited information on the centralized program definitions and neither of them were deeply informed about the programme philosophy.

## 5. Conclusion

As Beretta (1992, p.20) state "The evaluation of language education will be an increasingly serious, professional concern, to the benefit of everyone involved in language education." In order to reach to more stakeholders of the program data was collected both from students and their instructors. Two of the instructors in the study are also department chair person and the deputy chair person. Therefore to some extent the study reaches the administrative people as well. The data gathered from four different data collection techniques have provided a rich body of information both from the students' and teacher candidates' perspective.

The findings suggest that to a certain extent there is a satisfaction level for the candidates however the need for more practice, the need for needs analysis and students' language proficiency development are still neglected issues by the program. The findings from instructor questionnaires and interviews might be re-examined and the instructors who were occasionally dissatisfied with the components of the program should be interviewed for their opinions and should be observed for the precautions they take.

The present study also has limitations. A thick description of the programme aims, materials and curricular specifications has not been provided clearly. The missing statistical analysis of the questionnaire findings might have revealed significant correlations. In addition to this, classroom observations could have been carried out to see the extent of the match between the students' perceptions and their real practices that take place in classrooms.

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### Appendix 1:

Item	Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		S*	L**	S	L	S	L	S	L	S	L
1	Linkage between courses	3,5	0	48	38,89	23	27,78	21,5	33,33	4	0
2	Overlapping information between courses	2,5	0	34	11,11	43	38,89	18,5	50	2	0
3	Adequate training in English	5	5,56	34,5	27,78	27,5	33,33	27	33,33	6	0
4	Adequate training in teaching skills	10	11,11	49	50	22,5	22,22	15	16,67	3,5	0
5	Adequate training for the local context	6	0	31,5	33,33	29	22,22	26	33,33	7,5	11,11
6	Up-to-datedness	11	5,56	50,5	66,67	28,5	16,67	8	5,56	2	5,56
7	Encouragement for reflection on past experiences as a language learner	6	0	45,5	38,89	26	38,89	18	22,22	4,5	0
8	Encouragement for being a reflective teacher	17	0	53,5	44,44	16	44,44	11	11,11	2,5	0
9	Promoting Flexibility	14	0	49,5	50	24,5	27,78	8,5	22,22	3,5	0
10	Balancing teacher and student centeredness	10,5	0	45,5	44,44	24,5	50	12,5	5,56	7	0
11	Teaching how to teach English	16	5,56	62	77,78	15,5	11,11	4	5,56	2,5	0
12	Teaching self evaluation	19	5,56	52,5	50	18	16,67	8,5	27,78	2	0
13	Classroom management	11,5	11,11	52,5	72,22	19,5	16,67	12,5	0	4	0
14	Using foreign language teaching materials	19,5	38,89	65	50	10	11,11	4	0	1,5	0
15	Adapting foreign language teaching materials	20,5	22,22	59,5	50	14,5	22,22	4	5,56	1,5	0
16	Increasing powers of self evaluation	18,5	5,56	42,5	44,44	28	22,22	10	27,78	1	0
17	Foreign language testing and evaluation skills	8	5,56	45	66,67	30,5	27,78	13	0	3,5	0
18	Relevancy to the needs	2	11,11	39	44,44	35,5	33,33	19	11,11	4,5	0
19	Balance between teaching and management skills	7,5	16,67	39	38,89	34	27,78	15	16,67	4,5	0
20	Preparation to teach English	13	11,11	53	72,22	23,5	11,11	7,5	5,56	3	0
21	Meeting the needs	2,5	5,56	31,5	33,33	40	44,44	22	16,67	4	0
22	Readiness to teach English.	13,5	11,11	39	33,33	30	50	12,5	5,56	5	0

\* S: Pre-service Students

\*\* L: Lecturers