

The Contribution of the Teaching Skills Courses and General Knowledge Courses of the Teacher Trainee Programme in the ELT Department of Uludag University

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Abstract: The current study assessed the ongoing English Language Teacher Trainee Programme at Uludag University from the teacher trainees' point of view. The study aimed to reveal if the teaching skills courses and the general knowledge courses contribute to their goals. Participants were 30 first to fourth year students in the English Language Teaching Programme at Uludag University. Data were conducted by the help of a questionnaire that included three criteria: (1) the importance of the lessons in the learning experience, (2) the contribution of the lessons in the career, (3) the usefulness of the lessons in the personal development. Results revealed that the programme to a great extent doesn't meet the teacher trainees' needs and interests. The indicators pointed out that the students need to feel that the programme is important for their professional training, and also they should see that the programme helps them in achieving their goals and is a source of good practical information.

Keywords: teacher training, programme evaluation, pedagogical courses, Turkish language education.

Introduction

Throughout the years of education some general knowledge courses are given in addition to teaching skills courses in the ELT departments in Turkey, but do we really need them or are our students able to get any benefit from these courses is a serious question to ask. We might see the matter from a top-down perspective and foresee that students are given just the right and certain knowledge, and thus, they must benefit from all of the courses. However, we should research this issue from a bottom-up perspective in order to help our teacher trainees to get appropriate benefit and to set themselves on the right track to achieve their lifelong goals.

Kiely (2009) claimed that language programme evaluation has evolved from focused studies of teaching methods inspired by language learning theories to a curriculum management enterprise with a focus on quality assurance and enhancement. So, language programmes can mainly focus on how to enhance teaching skills, which is the essential aim. But also, we should take into account the specific branch/field of the students and general knowledge courses as they are the stimulating force of the teacher trainees. The educational programme, which is a selection of the pedagogical and other courses, can play an essential role in the development of the teaching skills, depending on the sources the trainees are fed with, or the perspective that the programme creators take, even when asking opinions of those who will take the courses. So, which aspect (pedagogical or general knowledge) in education should be given more attention, or are both important and should be equally supplied?

Several types of evaluation have been offered and used in the literature as the needs show up such as goal-based evaluation, or a process-based. But when the courses are selected standoffishly, it does not matter how you evaluate the goals or the process. In the present study all programme evaluation types, models, and techniques will not be employed, because the content of this study is the contribution of the courses to the teaching skills and general knowledge. Therefore, the literature view will focus essentially on language programmes and the contribution of courses to the ELT learners.

Literature Review

Some previous studies examined the efficiency of the courses and the contributions of the courses and lecturers to evaluate the programme of language teaching and teacher training in Turkey. The teaching skills courses had the most appreciation from the trainees' point of view as they left behind the general knowledge courses. Also, it was sustained that both programmes and the conditions of the departments could not succeed in providing a precise student rest. Moreover, trainees advocated better techniques and organizations (Uzun, 2016a). In addition, rather than working on programme definition, some studies focused on material selection and the

contributions of the materials to the lesson, and to the learning process. It was discovered that material selection was an inattentively-done process that did not reflect the convenience and individuality. It was asserted with a capital letter that picking up materials was a must objective (Angell, DuBravac & Gonglewski, 2008). As for the words about materials and material use, some studies expressed that there should be much wider use of corpora within the teacher trainee programmes. In the study about the evaluation of the effectiveness of corpora, it was believed that the corpora would allow teachers to access rich resources, gears and techniques of corpus analysis in a variety of language and linguistics courses (Lenko-Szymanska, 2014).

Heading back to evaluations of programmes, Uzun (2016b) described that the courses on the educational programmes should give permission to creativity, practice and socialisation. He also expressed that the courses are to be arranged and revised in a way that do not let memorisation but more production and innovation. Furthermore, he suggested that the content of the courses in the programmes should be motivated with the ongoing technological developments and they should be up-to-date. In the ESL field, some researchers considered complexities and issues in the evaluation of the teacher trainee programmes. Turkan and Buzick (2014) reported that many educators try to do their best to teach contents in understandable and accessible ways. In terms of teachers' performance, a profound learning depends on arranging good learning setups, creating opportunities for better comprehension, and evaluating the quality of the content that the learners are going to encounter.

Apart from understanding the issue, the subject of open-ended, free learning environment was accentuated. Surely, it is important to evaluate the content; however, the environment also deserves to be paid a little bit more attention as well. Egbert, Herman and Lee (2015) considered this topic in their research. Their study unveiled that the introduction of field work in particular helped to meet the course aims and maintain more input to English language learners in English as a second language contexts. Nevertheless, flipped instruction flopped because the education

systems were process-based rather than fact-based. This might be due to the conventional way of teaching and learning process.

In addition, the teacher issue should be considered when evaluating the programme. Their numbers, coming from other branches, individual differences, their field knowledge and teaching skills are the issues when evaluating the programme because even if the programme reaches its ultimate top, teachers will be the ones applying it (Dinçer, Takkaç and Akalın, 2010). As aforementioned, the content, environment and teachers define the way you learn and the way you teach. This study will particularly focus on content/course evaluation. Therefore, in order not to get far from what will be investigated, review of the literature will continue with the course evaluation. In another study conducted on program evaluation, the major group of students commented that the teaching skills courses were effective because of the positive attitudes of their teachers. Besides, it was remarked that they could be better teachers if they took the advantage of their own features rather than the given teacher trainee programme. The teacher trainees also believed that if the programme followed the technological developments and worldwide-popular views, they would have more developed teaching skills (Uzun, 2015).

The literature review examined the researches carried out in the field. The scope of the present study covered the following: how the courses of the teacher trainee programme provide beneficial personal development, relevant teaching career information, and special attention to the trainees. Research questions were as follows:

1. What do the teacher trainees think about the contribution of the teaching skills courses and the general knowledge courses?
2. Are the teaching skills courses or the general knowledge courses more important for the teacher trainees?
3. Which group of courses do the teacher trainees believe that are beneficial to their personal development?

Methodology

The current study embraced the quantitative approach that was achieved by the help of a 4-point Likert scale. Therefore, the study focused on the average scores which were obtained from the participants to find out answers to the questions presented in the literature review.

Participants

The participants were 30 first to fourth year students in the English Language Teaching Programme at Uludag University. They were randomly chosen and had some knowledge of all courses even if they (first, second and third year students) had not taken all the courses. The 12 of the participants were male and the 18 of the participants were female. Their age ranged between 18 and 22 (the mean age was 20). Their GPAs (grade point averages) were not requested because the research questions did not question anything about the GPAs of the participants. The L1 (first/native language) of all the participants was Turkish language and they all learned English as a foreign language (EFL). All of the participants stated that they also knew either beginner level German or French. They had come to Uludag University from the different cities of Turkey, but their sociocultural environments' features had similarities to their L2 knowledge.

Instruments

The data were collected by the help of a questionnaire that was prepared by the researcher. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions that aimed at revealing the effects, the contributions and the importance of the items. The questionnaire included the up-to-date courses of the English Language Teacher Trainee Programme (ELTTP) of Uludag University; which were 11 first year courses, 11 second year, 11 third year and 11 fourth year courses. The courses which were given in two or three semesters such as Approaches in ELT, Teaching English to Young Learners, Foreign Language, etc. were given on the same line as Approaches in ELT I-II, Foreign Language I-II-III, etc. The courses were not separated according to semesters but according to years. All the courses in the programme were listed on

the questionnaire and the participants were requested to label the courses according to three criteria: (a) the importance of the lesson in their learning experience, (b) the contribution of the lesson in their career, (c) the contribution of the lesson in their personal development. The participants were asked to give a number from 1 (less) to 4 (more) to each statement on the questionnaire considering these three already referred aspects.

Procedure

The study was conducted by applying the questionnaire to the participants. Before applying, the questionnaire was tested on four different students from different grades in order to assure the validity and reliability issues. As a result of the pilot study, the main instruction of the questionnaire was made clearer and some courses' names were updated.

Data collection

The study was implemented in the middle of the 2015-2016 spring semester. The researcher was an insider for the participants in this study. He was also a student of ELTTP at Uludag University but he was not in a position to influence the participants. They were relaxed in expressing their ideas and thoughts about the courses in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed online to the participants (n = 30). The researcher sent the questionnaire to the participants through social media and e-mail. The participants did not influence each other as they did the questionnaire on their computers individually. The procedure (collecting back the questionnaires) took three days.

Data analyses

The answers of each participant referring to the statements (a) the importance of the lesson in their learning experience, (b) the contribution of the lesson in their career, (c) the contribution of the lesson in their personal development for each course were collected and their mean scores were calculated.

The criteria for evaluating the available results were fixed on a scale of 1 to 4 in a similar way to the questionnaire's scale. The numbers mean: (1) Ineffective, (2) Poor, (3) Good, and (4) Effective. Accordingly, no later than the results, it was decided that any score below 3 would be counted as an insufficient efficiency, but any score between 3 and 4 (for all three criteria) would be counted as enough and efficient.

Results and Discussion

The results that procured from the questionnaire of the current study are shown in the Table 1. Each statement on the questionnaire was shortened on the results table as (1) importance given for *I think that the course below is important to me in my learning process*, (2) contribution to career for *I think that I can make use of the course below in my teaching career*, and (3) contribution to personal development for *I think that the course below is beneficial to me for my personal development*. Only one questionnaire was used by the researcher to collect the data, and the quantitative results are stated below.

Table 1. The mean scores of each course relating to the three statements.

Course names	Mean scores		
	Importance given	Contribution to career	Contribution to personal development
Introduction to Education	2,33	2,44	2,44
Contextual Grammar I-II	2,81	3,18	2,81
Listening and Pronunciation I-II	3,81	3,63	3,63
Oral Communication Skills I-II	3,90	3,72	3,90
Advanced Reading and Vocabulary Acquisition I-II	3,18	2,81	3,18
Advanced Writing I-II	3,09	2,90	3,09
Ataturk's Principles and Revolution History I-II	2,36	2,27	2,63
<i>Turkish I Writing</i>	1,54	1,54	2,00

<i>Turkish II Speaking</i>	1,63	1,72	2,00
Psychology of Education	2,81	2,90	2,81
Computer Skills I-II	2,36	2,54	2,72
Instructional Principles and Methods	3,33	3,16	3,25
English Literature I-II	2,41	2,41	3,08
Linguistics I-II	2,25	1,91	2,16
Public Speech and Oral Expression	2,25	2,41	2,58
Approaches in ELT I-II	3,58	3,41	3,75
Instructional Technologies and Materials Design	3,33	3,25	3,33
ELT Methodology I-II	3,00	3,25	3,33
<i>Language Acquisition</i>	2,00	1,83	1,83
Scientific Research Methods	2,41	1,91	3,08
English to Turkish Translation	3,16	3,16	3,25
<i>History of Turkish Education</i>	1,58	1,5	1,91
Classroom Management	3,72	3,45	3,81
Teaching English to Young Learners I-II	3,81	3,72	3,72
Teaching Language Skills I-II	3,63	3,45	3,45
Foreign Language I-II-III	2,90	2,27	3,63
Poem Analysis	2,54	2,27	2,81
Drama in Language Teaching	3,08	3,25	3,33

Literature and Language Learning I-II	2,54	2,63	2,27
Testing and Evaluation	3,36	3,18	3,36
<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	1,81	1,45	1,81
Turkish to English Translation	2,90	2,90	3,27
Service Applications to Society	3,00	3,09	3,63
School Experience	3,81	3,72	3,90
Guidance	3,45	3,18	3,45
Special Training	3,81	3,72	3,72
Material Analysing and Improvement in Foreign Language Teaching	3,36	3,54	3,45
Pragmatics	2,27	2,09	2,18
Advanced Speaking Skills	3,90	3,72	3,81
Teaching Practice	3,81	3,63	3,81
<i>Turkish Educational System and School Management</i>	2,27	2,09	1,90
Syntax	2,45	2,54	2,63
Testing and Evaluation in Foreign Language Learning	3,27	3,45	3,36
Overall evaluation	not calculated	2,81	3,02

It was not hard to see that some courses such as Oral Communication Skills, Approaches to ELT, ELT Methodology, Classroom Management, Teaching English to Young Learners, Teaching Language Skills, Special Training and School Experience (all the courses which were made bold on the table) were given the highest marks by the participants. All mean scores of these courses were over 3 out of the peak score 4. In addition to this, the three courses, i.e., Teaching English to Young Learners, School

Experience and Teaching Practice reached the climax by leaving behind all of the courses. These results unveiled that the students prefer courses that give a chance to create learning environments, materials, and provide information about how learning should take place, what techniques, approaches teachers can make use of and how teachers treat their different types of learners.

On the other side; six courses (that were made italic on the table), that is, Turkish I Writing, Turkish II Speaking, Language Acquisition, History of Turkish Education, Entrepreneurship and Turkish Educational System and School Management were given the lowest marks by the participants (all of their scores were below 3 and mostly 2). These courses are not directly related to the teaching skills, even some of them are lectured in Turkish. Besides, they need rote learning and involve theories as well as general knowledge. For these reasons, the participants stated that these courses do not contribute to their career and they are not important for their teaching trainee process.

Additionally, four courses contributed (according to the participants' ratings) only to the participants' personal development rather than the career contribution as seen on the Table 1. These courses were English Literature, Scientific Research Methods, Foreign Language (German or French) and Turkish to English Translation.

The other observation was that the contribution to personal development (3,02) outpaced the contribution to career (2,81) when an overall analysis was done. The students speculated that the programme is not very effective regarding the teaching skills as seen in its mean score being too low, 2,81 out of 4,00. This also revealed that the students had dissatisfaction with regard to the contribution of the courses to their career. Which courses were given more importance by the students was not calculated as it could be observed individually for each course in Table 1. Nevertheless, it was in accordance with other results that were determined related to the contribution of the teaching skills and general knowledge courses.

Conclusion

In brief, the current study carried out an evaluation of the recent teacher trainee programme that was practised at Uludag University in the 2015-2016 educational year. The students of this programme reflected their thoughts and needs. The results indicated that the current programme remained incapable in meeting teacher trainees' academic prospects and their personal developmental interests. It was also important to see that teacher trainees' ideas about some courses on the programme point out that these courses are really ineffective and unworthy, while some of the courses were not seen effective in academic perspective, but in the view of personal development. These situations revealed that the programme ought to be rearranged with needs analysis carried out broadly with the university students in the ELT departments in Turkey.

To achieve a programme that responds to students' needs, goals and wishes, all the courses on the programme ought to be revised with both the students and the academicians. If a new programme is to be created, this ought not to involve directly rote learning, but more practically and most importantly it ought to serve the goal of growing up good teachers.

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Appendix

Please give a number (1 to 4) to each course item by reading the statements on the table and by considering your thoughts, experiences and expectations about courses on the table.

	I think that the course below is important to me in my learning				I think that I can make use of the course below in my teaching				I think that the course below is beneficial to me for my personal			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<i>(1 - low, 4 - high)</i>												
Introduction to Education												
Contextual Grammar I-II												
Listening and Pronunciation I-II												
Oral Communication Skills I-II												
Advanced Reading and Vocabulary												
Advanced Writing I-II												
Ataturk's Principles and Revolution												
Turkish I Written Expression												
Turkish II Oral Expression												
Psychology of Education												
Computer Skills I-II												
Instructional Principles and												
English Literature I-II												
Linguistics I-II												
Public Speech and Oral Expression												

Approaches in ELT I-II												
Instructional Technologies and												
ELT Methodology I-II												
Language Acquisition												
Scientific Research Methods												
English to Turkish Translation												
History of Turkish Education												
Classroom Management												
Teaching English to Young Learners I-II												
Teaching Language Skills I-II												
Foreign Language I-II-III												
Poetry Analysis												
Drama in Language Teaching												
Literature and Language Learning I-												
Testing and Evaluation												
Entrepreneurship												
Turkish to English Translation												
Service Applications to Society												
School Experience												
Guidance												

Special Training												
Material Analysing and Improvement in												
Pragmatics												
Advanced Speaking Skills I-II												
Teaching Practice												
Turkish Education System and School												
Syntax												
Testing and Evaluation in Foreign												
Discourse Analysis												

Thank you for your contribution.